

Classic Poetry Series

Andres Bello
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Andres Bello(29 November 1781 – 15 October 1865)

Andrés de Jesús María y José Bello López was a Venezuelan humanist, poet, lawmaker, philosopher, educator and philologist, whose political and literary works constitute an important part of Spanish American culture. Bello is featured on the old 2,000 Venezuelan bolívar and the 20,000 Chilean peso notes. There is also a decoration, the Venezuelan Order of Andrés Bello.

Life and Works

One of the foremost intellectual figures during the Spanish-American wars of independence and the subsequent formation of Latin American nations, Bello produced works in a variety of genres, including literature, philosophy, political writings, and civil law. An editor, teacher, politician, and formulator of a Latin American grammar, Bello is credited with giving life to the “americanismo” movement and inspiring Latin Americans to celebrate their independence and freedom in the wake of Spanish colonialism. A leading advocate of Spanish language and culture, Bello helped to empower Latin Americans both intellectually and politically and played an important role in the development of post-colonial Latin America.

Biographical Information

Bello was born November 29, 1781, in Caracas, Venezuela, which only four years earlier had been declared the capital of Venezuela. The eldest of eight children, he descended from a prestigious line of artists, painters, and musicians. Bello's mother, Ana Antonia López, was the daughter of Venezuela's leading sculptor, painter, and artist of the eighteenth century, Juan Pedro López. Bello's father, Bartolomé Bello y Bello, was a notable musician with a degree in civil law. As a youth Bello studied Latin and immersed himself in classicism, translating into Castilian the fifth book of <a href="

In 1810 Bello travelled to England with Bolívar, who was sent as a political envoy from Venezuela. While the stay was a brief one for Bolívar, who soon returned to Venezuela to continue the fight for independence, Bello remained in London. Political instability in Venezuela made the next ten years difficult for Bello, who was left without the financial support of his country and had to provide for himself. While in London he married Mary Ann Boyland in 1814, who died seven years later. In 1824 he married Isabel Antonia Dunn. During this time he served in various capacities as a political representative for South American countries, including Venezuela, Colombia, and Chile. He also continued his literary pursuits,

editing and contributing to several Spanish language literary journals. Along with Juan Garcia del Rio, Bello published *Biblioteca Americana* in 1823 and *El Repertorio Americano* in 1826, two influential journals that also featured Bello's work, which included poetry, scientific investigations, philosophy, translations, and literary criticism. Throughout his time in London, which was characterized by his study, writing, and diplomatic duties, Bello longed to return to South America. In 1829, he and his family left London for Chile, where he was named the undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior. His skill and experience as an editor was again put to work in the publication of the newspaper *El Araucano* for which he was principal editor from 1830 to 1853. He continued to be very active in government, serving as a senator of the Republic from 1837 to 1855. He was instrumental in founding the University of Chile in 1842. Two of his most significant works during this time were his 1847 *Gramática de la lengua castellana destinada al uso de los americanos*, a formal grammar of Castilian for use by Americans Latin, and his 1852 *Código civil chileno*, or *The Chilean Civil Code*, which was ratified by the Chilean Congress in 1855. His diplomatic skills were again called upon in 1865, when he served as an arbiter between Ecuador and the United States. His long and esteemed political and literary career came to a close October 15, 1865, when he died at the age of 84 in Santiago, Chile, after a prolonged illness.

Major Works

Bello's work has been compiled into two large collections and between his poetry, essays, philosophy, grammar, legislation, and criticism, there is much for Bello scholars to consider. Among the unifying themes in all of his work are his philosophy of *americanismo*, or celebrating and enlightening Latin American peoples, his concern for a unified grammar, his belief in the regulation of social life to ward against the dissolution of city life amid unchecked vice, and his literary interest in combining both Classic and Romantic schools of thought. His poem "Alocución a la Poesía, en que se introducen las alanzas de los pueblos é individuos americanos, que más se han distinguido en la Guerra de la independencia. (Fragmento de un poema inédito, titulado 'América')" ("Discourse to Poetry, which presents the glories of the peoples and individuals of America who have most distinguished themselves in the war of independence. [Fragment of an unpublished poem entitled 'America']") is a strong example of his concern with validating and celebrating the Latin American, or *americanismo* experience. He published the first 447 lines of the poem in the first issue of the journal *Biblioteca Americana* in July 1823, and the remaining 387 lines in the second (and final) volume of that same journal. This poem can be considered in two sections divided by style; a Georgic section and an Epic section. In the Georgic lines, the poet invites the Goddess of Poetry to the new world, enticing her with

descriptions of its lush natural beauty and vast potential. The Goddess is then asked if she would rather hear of the heroics of those who valiantly died in the wars for independence from Colonial Spain. The Epic section remains focused on the experience of war and those who fought for an end to colonial tyranny. The poem, often called simply "América," has been considered a declaration of the spiritual and intellectual independence of Latin America, while at the same time relying upon the classical and European conventions of poetry.

Another of Bello's most significant poetic works is his "Agricultura," which again uses Georgic conventions in both theme and tone to represent the transformations in Latin America brought on by the wars for independence. Following the natural and political history of Latin America, it first portrays rich images of the fertility of the torrid zone's climate. The abundance and easy way of life are celebrated, and the land is represented as providing everything the indigenous people need to live healthy lives. Then the Spaniards arrive, and place the indigenous people into servitude, which while restrictive was nevertheless idyllic, because the land still provided for simple and easy living. The poem then demonstrates how European consumption soon overtaxed both the land and the people, and the relationship became one of master and slave. The Church's role in this increasingly oppressive colonial rule is strongly criticized, and the Church is portrayed as instigating tensions between the peasants and the Spanish for its own financial gain. Bello blames the Church for fanning the flames of civil war, and for driving the peasants from their land into vice-ridden cities. The poem exhibits how revolution has destroyed the simple way of life that was presented in the early sections, and shows that Latin Americans can regain control over their lands and their self-determination through agriculture. Although agriculture is a harder life than what existed before the Spanish colonization, the poem argues, it is the only way for Latin Americans to claim freedom for themselves.

Critical Reception

The body of critical inquiry in English into Bello's life and work remains scarce, primarily due to a lack of translations; however, his literary, philosophical, and political accomplishments are thoroughly studied in Spanish-language criticism. There exists several trends in the available English-language scholarship. In separate studies, critics Iván Jaksic and O. Carlos Stoetzer focus on the correlation between Bello's political and social experiences and his literary work. The importance of revolutionary figures and his central part in the definition of independent Latin American culture, especially his influence on the formal grammar of Latin America, are also of great interest to critics. Antonio Cussen discusses the significance of *Bioblioteca Americana* as a Spanish-language

journal and explains its importance to Bello's philosophy of americanismo. Jaksic examines Bello's experience in London, which is characterized by his personal study, diplomatic appointments, and editorial endeavors. The critic finds Bello's commitment to the championing of Latin American culture in all facets of his life abroad.

Rubia (Blonde)

¿Sabes, rubia, qué gracia solicito
cuando de ofrendas cubro los altares?
No ricos muebles, no soberbios lares,
ni una mesa que adule al apetito.

De Aragua a las orillas un distrito
que me tribute fáciles manjares,
do vecino a mis rústicos hogares
entre peñascos corra un arroyito.

Para acogerme en el calor estivo,
que tenga una arboleda también quiero,
do crezca junto al sauce el coco altivo.

¡Felice yo si en este albergue muero;
y al exhalar mi aliento fugitivo,
sello en tus labios el adiós postrero!

Blonde

Do you know, blonde, what favor I solicit
When I cover the altars with offerings?
Not rich furnishings, not superb lands,
Neither a table that flatters the appetite.

At the edge of Aragua I want a parcel
To supply me with simple pleasures,
And close to my rustic home
A brook that runs among the rocks.

To feel good around the summery warmth,
I also want my plot to have a grove,
Where the proud coconut and the willow can grow.

I'll be happy if in this refuge I die;
And, upon exhaling my fugitive breath,
I stamp on your lips my last goodbye!

To The Bio-Bio (Al Biobío)

Blest were he, O Bio-Bio!
Who could dwell forevermore
In a deep grove, cool and shady,
Upon thine enchanted shore!

Just a lowly thatched-roofed cottage
Where thy limpid waters are seen
Pouring their calm flood in silence
Amid foliage fresh and green;

Where, instead of shifting changes
In the fickle things of state,
Wind-stirred oaks and maitens murmur,
And the forest peace is great;

Where the bird amid the branches,
In the early dawning gray,
Sings its untaught, artless music,
Greeting thus the new-born day.

In that humble thatched-roof cottage,
Oh, how happy were my lot,
In the peace that nothing troubles,
Envied not and envying not!

This to me in truth were sweeter
Than the Babel wild and loud
Where in chase of a chimera
All are rushing in a crowd;

Where dark treachery and falsehood
Near the quaking altar stay
That the people's favor raises
To the idols of a day.

Sweet repose, most blissful quiet,
Earthly paradise divine!
Has the palm of war or wisdom
Worth which can outrival thine?

Truth I love, not adulation—
Truth all unadorned and plain,
Not the clamorous applauses
That are raised in Fortune's train.

Growing old, for that false treasure
I would cease my soul to fret—
Say 'Farewell to disappointments!
The forgetful I forget.

'Others call excitement pleasure,
Madly seeking fame or pelf;
I in earth's most hidden corner
Wish to live now for myself.'

Al Biobío

¡Quién pudiera, Biobío,
pasar la existencia entera
en un bosque sombrío
de tu encantada ribera!

Una cabaña pajiza,
donde viese tu onda pura,
que callada se desliza
entre frondosa verdura,

donde, en vez del movimiento
de políticos vaivenes,
susurrar oyese el viento,
entre robles y maitenes,

Y escuchase la alborada
que en no aprendida armonía,
canta el ave en la enramada
saludando al nuevo día;

una pajiza cabaña,
en que gozase el reposo
de la paz que nunca engaña,
ni envidiado ni envidioso;

más grata, en verdad, me fuera
que una confusa Babel,
donde en pos de una quimera
corren todos en tropel,

do deslealtad y falsía
cercan el trémulo altar
que a los ídolos de un día
alza el aura popular.

¡Oh feliz, oh dulce calma,
paraíso de la tierra! 30
¿vale más que tú la palma
del saber o de la guerra?

Verdad, no lisonja, quiero;
verdad sencilla, desnuda;
no el aplauso vocinglero,
que a la fortuna saluda;

quiero en mis postreros años
decir a ese bien fingido:
¡Adiós! no más desengaños;
a los que olvidan, olvido.

Otros en loco tumulto
llamen dicha al frenesí;
yo en el rincón más oculto
quiero vivir para mí.

[Pero ¿a dónde en arrebató
impensado me extravió?
Para otro asunto más grato
te invocaba, Biobío.

Por tus verdes campos gira
una amable forastera,
y los aromas respira
que embalsaman tu ribera.

Cerca de ti su mansión

tiene la bella Delfina;
la de noble corazón,
la de gracia peregrina.

Yo la vi, pimpollo hermoso,
que, con su beldad temprana,
tuvo a Santiago orgulloso,
en su primera mañana.

Vila en cerrado vergel
joven planta, que atesora
lozano brillo, y con él
a los vientos enamora.

Vino tormenta sañuda,
corro la que en duro embate
al verde bosque desnuda,
y hermosa arboleda abate.

Casi (¡ay Dios!) su primavera
la vio morir, y agostada
la tuvo la Parca fiera,
y la lloré malograda.

Pero al modo que se eleva,
cuando el huracán se calma,
con vigor y vida nueva,
una destrozada palma,

Volvió mi Delfina así,
a beber el aura pura;
y correr las Gracias vi
a retocar su hermosura.

Hija la he visto amorosa
en la morada paterna,
y luego adorada esposa,
y madre ya, dulce y tierna;

y siempre cabal modelo
de amabilidad serena,
ángel bajado del cielo

a nuestra mansión terrena.

Tal es la beldad que ahora
gozas, orgulloso río,
y la que Mapocho llora
en ajeno poderío.

Que te desveles por ella
te ruego; en diario tributo
ríndele la flor más bella,
y el más sazonado fruto.

Al llevarla el blando ambiente
del jazmín y el azahar,
de su viejo amigo ausente
hazla el nombre recordar.

Pero no con lazo eterno
presumas que la encadenes;
la llama el hogar paterno;
prestado tesoro tienes.

Y harás de la deuda pago,
y volveremos a verla,
y se gozará Santiago
en su enajenada perla.]

Andres Bello