



Claribel Alegría

Biography

Claribel Alegría is a Nicaraguan-born Salvadoran. She was born on May 12, 1924 in the town of Esteli to her Nicaraguan father and Salvadoran mother. She grew up in the Salvadoran department of Santa Ana, and in 1943, she moved to the United States. Here she attended George Washington University and earned a B.A. in philosophy and letters. Presently she resides in Managua, Nicaragua. Alegría was awarded the Casa de las Americas Prize in Havana, Cuba, in 1978, along with Nicaraguan poet Gioconda Belli. She has published 13 books of poetry, four short novels, and a book of children's stories. Alegría was married to Darwin Flakoll, who was born in 1923 in Wendte, South Dakota. Flakoll, who died in April, 1995, worked as a journalist in Washington, D.C. and Mexico City. He also served as second secretary at the U.S. diplomatic posts in Uruguay and Argentina. In collaboration with her husband, Alegría published a novel, several books of testimony, and a number of anthologies. One of Alegría's greatest influences was the civil war in El Salvador. She has been associated with the Sandinista National Liberation Front, the left-wing guerilla movement that took control of the Nicaraguan government in 1979 after the overthrow of Anastasio Somoza Debayle. "In the middle '70s, lots of people, not only from my country but throughout Latin America, were being murdered or disappeared, including some of my friends," said Alegría. "I felt that I had a niche in my heart for each one of them, and it is because of them I called myself a cemetery."

Alegría's writing reflects the literary movement that occurred in Central America during the mid-1950s and early 1960s, which is known as "la generacion comprometida," or the Committed Generation.



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1924 in Nicaragua
- * Raised in El Salvador
- * First book of poetry was published in 1948

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Biography continued

It was created by the intellectual sectors of the middle and upper classes to achieve social and political justice for their less privileged countrymen. In the 1960's, Alegría's poetry became more direct in its political message as a result of more violent movements in the Central American region. Alegría also writes poetry that speaks to women directly, and urges them to break free from oppressive patriarchy. One critic states, "For Claribel Alegría and Isabel Allende, 'writing represents the last means of exposing governmental, social, and economic injustice.' It is women like them who are giving voice to the victims of state terror. And more importantly, it is writers like them who are giving a voice to women, 'the mutest of the mute,' in their struggles to break free from the yoke of patriarchal oppression; for in their struggle for justice and equality, these women have confronted not just state repression, but also the patriarchal foundations of Latin American societies. And yet, as Agosin argues, it should not be surprising that, as a result of the region's social and political conflicts, 'For some time to come, the Latin American woman will be defining herself [first] in relation to the state and to the oppressed,' and second in relation to her condition as woman" (Alex Taylor del Cid).

Alegría writes from the voice of her soul, the voice that urges her to express herself through her words, which in time may become more powerful than any resistance movement. Some of her most noted works include *The Death of Somoza*, *Woman of the River*, *Flowers from the Volcano*, *Anillo de Silencio*, *Huesped de mi Tiempo*, *Via Unica Raices*, and *Sobrevivo*.

In the book *Sorrow*, written after her husband's death, Alegría explores the grief cycle through poetry. According to one critic, Anna Gonzalez, Alegría begins the book and poem by facing solitude: "Deje de ser nosotros / y de nuevo este yo / con su carga de invierno / y de vacío" ("I cease being us / and am again this I / with its burden of winter / and emptiness" and ends with rebelling against the prospect of having her husband's existence reduced to memory: "no quiero . . . / masticar memorias" ("I don't want to . . . / chew on faded memories"). However, Alegría finds solace and freedom from her grief when she is able to turn her feelings into poetry (Gonzalez 897). Gonzalez also goes on to state that by the end of this collection, Alegría has shown that one can overcome the sadness associated with grief; this is apparent, for example, in her lines "No puede conmigo / la tristeza / la arrastro hacia la vida / y se evapora" ("Sadness / can't cope with me / I lead it toward life / and it evaporates") (ibid.).

Sorrow is a remarkable book which speaks to the heart of grief; it allows one to feel that, even in the darkest hours, there may be light when the hope of the life to come is looked toward.



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