

SPANISH TEAM PRESENTATION



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MIGUEL HERNÁNDEZ. LIFE AND LITERARY WORK

For centuries, Alicante has given relevant names in different fields of literature. **Miguel Hernández** is the poet that we want to remark today. Not only for the high quality of his poetry, which has been universally recognised, but because it is an example of dignity and struggle for freedom in difficult times.

His early life. Miguel Hernández was born in Orihuela on 30/10/1910 and lived as a child in the house that you very recently visited. His family dealt with goat breeding. They owned a goat herd and little Miguel had to take care of it occasionally, although never missing an education in Santo Domingo School, which was close to his home.

His interests. His love for literature led him to take part in different projects with friends that shared the same interests, especially with José Marín, better known by his pen name, Ramón Sijé, also born and raised in Orihuela.

His ambition. But Miguel Hernández knew that he had a special gift for literature and felt that his hometown was too small for his dreams. Therefore, he decided to go to Madrid, the capital of Spain, where he yearned to get in touch with the well-known names of the literary group called La Generación del 27 (referring to 1927). Those were poets like Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti or Vicente Aleixandre. Miguel Hernández used to walk around the capital city dressed as a countryman, which was why he became popular with the nickname “the goatherd poet”.

His achievements. Back in Orihuela, his first poetry book, *Perito en lunas*, which means **An Expert in Moons**, was published. In his poems, he showed his knowledge of the classics and he also showed a certain boldness in the use of language that would open a few doors to him. He made friends with Vicente Aleixandre, Maruja Mallo and Pablo Neruda.

Later he published his second book *El rayo que no cesa* (**The Lightning that Doesn't Stop**) which includes the famous **eulogy to his dear friend Ramón Sijé**, who, alas, died very young. It's a long poem. This is only a small sample:

Yo quiero ser llorando el hortelano

I want to be the weeping gardener

De la tierra que ocupas y estercolas

of the land that you feed as you lie dying

Compañero del alma, tan temprano

My beloved soulmate, at such an early age

Of course, we lose the effect of rhyme in translation, but the words can give you an idea of the deep feeling of mourning for his dear friend.

After publishing his second book, Miguel gained praise from acclaimed poets like Juan Ramón Jiménez and could enter the literary world in Madrid in his own recognisable voice.

But then the **Spanish Civil War** broke and spoilt the natural course of events. Miguel joined the army on the Republican side to defend the democratic government against the coup d'état led by general Franco. The war lasted three years in which Miguel Hernández was very active. He joined the Communist Party and travelled to Moscow. He published two more books of poetry in which he used popular language enthusiastically to encourage the soldiers on the Republican side.

These were **hard times** for different reasons. Miguel married Josefina Manresa and they had a child who died in a few months. This fact, their baby's death, would leave a mark on his literary work. Fortunately, the couple had a second child who survived.

At the end of the civil war, in April 1939, Miguel Hernández, being on the side of the defeated, would be made prisoner in different Spanish jails: Madrid, Palencia, Toledo and, finally Alicante, where he died.

He never gave up his ideals, never agreed with Franco's regime, so it was impossible for his friends to get him out of prison.

Even in prison, he continued to write. There is a famous poem that was inspired by a visit from his wife in which she mentioned that the family had so little money that the only things that they could afford to eat were bread and onions. Then he composed this poem:

Nanas de la cebolla

Lullaby of an Onion

La cebolla es escarcha

An onion is frost

Cerrada y pobre

Enclosed and poor

Escarcha de tus días

Frost of your days

Y de mis noches

And frost of my nights

Hambre y cebolla

Hunger and onion

Hielo negro y escarcha

Dark ice and frost

Grande y redonda.

Large and round.

Tu risa me hace libre,

Your laughter makes me free

Me pone alas.

It gives me wings.

Soledades me quita,

It takes away my loneliness,

Cárcel me arranca.

It uproots my prison.

Boca que vuela,

A mouth that flies away,

Corazón que en tus labios

A heart that makes your lips

Relampaguea.

Glow.

The three main topics in his poetry (**love, life and death**) arose again and support his works in prison, where he had very little writing material and had to make his own notebooks by hand.

His death. On 28 March 1948, at the age of 31, Miguel Hernández died in Alicante prison. His literary work, his poetry in particular, but also his plays were ignored for forty years, just because of his left-wing ideology. However, in recent decades his poems have reached the international acclaim that he deserves.

The life and works of Miguel Hernández set an example of struggle for freedom and love for the human being, of courage in defence of social ideals of equality and democracy. Some of his verses are there to reflect the injustice of armed conflict and the emptiness it brings, as well as the power of words and the power of love above any other aspects of reality.

Tristes guerras

Sad wars

Si no es amor la empresa.

If love is not the target.

Tristes. Tristes.

Sad. Sad.

Tristes armas

Sad weapons

Si no son las palabras.

If they are not words.

Tristes. Tristes.

Sad. Sad.

Tristes hombres

Sad men

Si no mueren de amores.

If they don't die of love.

Tristes. Tristes.

Sad. Sad.

Thanks so much for your attention!