

# Pedro Mir, Whose Poems Spoke To Latin Workers, Dies at 87

By ERIC PACE

Pedro Mir, the poet laureate of the Dominican Republic, who gave voice to the emotions of multitudes of working-class Latin Americans, died on Tuesday in Santo Domingo, his country's capital. He was 87.

Mr. Mir, who was often called Don Pedro, wrote in Spanish. He was "without a doubt, the vital voice of Dominican poetry of the 20th century," Ylonka Nacidit-Perdomo, director of the Center for Literary Research of the country's National Library, said after his death.

In 1991 Mr. Mir was awarded an honorary degree by Hunter College in New York with a citation saying, "Critics have called you 'a great political poet' who writes of 'the Latin American proletariat' and 'interprets faithfully the feelings of the people.' Enormous audiences come to hear you read your poetry."

In February of last year, Venezuela's new president, Hugo Chávez Frias, declared in an address to his nation. "Let's give our children and our grandchildren a homeland we do not have today. I will never forget the verse by the Dominican poet Pedro Mir. 'If someone wants to know which is my homeland, he will not have to look for it. He will have to fight for it.' I urge all Venezuelans to fight so that we can have a homeland, a truly democratic Venezuela."

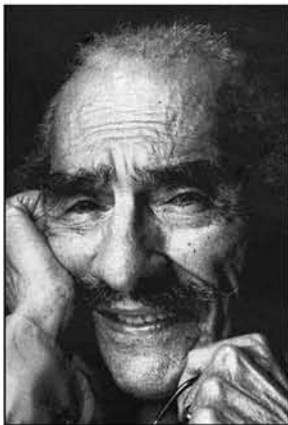
Mr. Mir's book "Countersong to Walt Whitman and Other Poems" (published by Azul in the United States in 1993), a collection of his poetry in bilingual format, with English translations by Jonathan Cohen and Donald D. Walsh, was applauded by Roberto Marquez in The Village Voice Literary Supplement.

"His poetry achieves a rare, exceptionally felicitous marriage of poetry and politics, of individual sensibility and the chronicling of quotidian collective drama, the still unfulfilled promise of Latin America, its landscape, peoples, and societies," Mr. Marquez wrote. He added that Mr. Mir's work "pays tribute to the resilience, unyielding endurance, yearning for release, and periodically stunning audacity of the region's ordinary, slighted citizens."

Among the poems in "Countersong" (first published in Guatemala in 1952) is the resonantly optimistic "Concerto of Hope for the Left Hand," which foresees a time when

*the atmosphere  
trembles with the unbridled  
percussion of  
the underdeveloped  
kettledrum, the universal  
orchestra  
thunders,  
the great concerto of humanity  
shakes  
its insides, the timpani lets out a  
shriek  
the laws of history vibrate beneath  
the feet  
of the double basses while the  
cellos  
of the human heart resound and  
erupt  
deafeningly throughout all the  
confines  
in a rousing solo of hope*

In a quieter vein, Mr. Mir once wrote of his homeland



Associated Press

Pedro Mir

*There is a country in the world  
positioned in the path of the sun  
native to the night  
placed in an unlikely archipelago  
of sugar and of rum*

For more than two decades he was a professor of aesthetics at the National Autonomous University of Santo Domingo, where he also taught creative writing. He also worked as a journalist in his homeland and Cuba.

His best-known poetry books include "Hay un País en el Mundo" ("There Is a Country in the World"), "Amén de Mariposas" ("Amen of Butterflies") and "Viaje a la Muche-

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*From the Dominican  
Republic, verses of  
hope, endurance and  
unfulfilled promise.*

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dumbre" ("Journey to the Masses"). He also wrote fiction, including the novel "Cuando Amaban las Tierras Comuneras." His nonfiction books include "Fundamentals of Art Theory and Criticism" and "Overture to Aesthetics."

He was given the title of National Poet in 1982 and was awarded the Dominican National Prize for Literature, for his life's work, in 1993.

Mr. Mir was born in San Pedro de Macoris, 40 miles from Santo Domingo, to a Puerto Rican mother and a Cuban-born father. By the time he was in his mid-30's, he was well enough known as a writer for his views to stir the wrath of Rafael Trujillo, his country's dictator.

He fled to Cuba in 1947 and spent 15 years in exile there and in Mexico and the Soviet Union (It was in Cuba that he published "Hay un País en el Mundo" in 1949.) He went back to the Dominican Republic after Trujillo was assassinated in 1961. There he became active in the Popular Socialist Party, which no longer exists.

His survivors include his wife, Carmen Masejo, two sons, Luis Pedro and Hugo Fernández, and two daughters, Geraldine and Celeste.