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 the nation's working-class Latin Americans, died on Tuesday in Santo Domingo, his country's capital. He was 87.

Mr. Mir, who was often called Don Chacho, was "without a doubt, the vital voice of Dominican poetry of the 20th century," Yolanka Naćid Perdomo, director of Lafayette Literary Research Center for the National Library, said after his death.

In 1951 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." Numerous audiences come to hear you read your poetry.

In February of last year, Venezuela's new president, Hugo Chávez Frías, declared in an address to his nation, "Let's give our children and our grandchildren a future we have today. I will never forgive the verse by the Dominican poet Pedro Mir. If someone wants to know which is my homeland, he will not find it in Spain. I will fight for it. I urge all Venezuelans to fight so that we can have a homeland, a truly democratic Venezuela." ("Un viento de cambio," published by Anel in the United States in 1985.)

A collection of his poetry in English translation was recently published by Jonathan Cohen and Donald D. Walsh, under the title "Pedro Mir and Other Poets." ("There is a Country in the World," "Amen de Marroposa" and "Viaje a la muchachada.

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

"His poetry achieves a rare, exceptionally felicitous marriage of poetry and politics, of individual sensibility and the chronicling of quotidian life," Mr. Marquez wrote. "It is a profound, unfulfilled promise of Latin America, its landscape, peoples, and societies."

Among the poems in "Counter-song" (first published in Guatemala in 1955) is the optimistically titled "A Man of Hope for the Left Hand," which foresees a time when the atmosphere trembles with the unbridled perception of the underdeveloped hemisphere's universal orchestra, the great concert of humanity. Moments of history vibrate beneath the laws of history, the poems reflect the theme of the double basses while the cello of the human heart resounds and quips deepening throughout all the confines in a rousing solo of hope.

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

dumb" ("Journey to the Masses"). He also wrote fiction, including the novel "Cuando Amaba y No Sabia Como Amar." His poetry books include "Fundamentals of Art Theory and Criticism" and "Overture to Aesthetics.

He was given the title of National Poet in 1983 and was awarded the Dominican National Prize for Literature, his life's work, in 1993.

Mr. Mir was born in San Pedro de Macorís, 40 miles from Santo Domingo, to a Puerto Rican mother and a Cuban-born father. By the time he was in his mid-30s, he was well 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 18 years in exile there and in Mexico and the Soviet Union. It was in Cuba that he published his book "Hay un País en el Mundo." He came back to the Dominican Republic after Trujillo was assassinated in 1961. He became active in the Popular Socialist Party, which no longer exists.

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

There is a country in the world, lost 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," "Amen de Marroposa," and "Viaje a la muchachada.

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