HISTORY AND ROMANTICISM IN PEDRO MIR'S NOVEL,

CUANDO AMABAN LAS TIERRAS COMUNERAS

It is curious and noteworth that Pedro Mir is best known for his poetry by his Dominican compatriots and is beginning to win long overdue recognition abroad as the foremost poet of the Dominican Republic. In fact, his poetic production has never exceeded a pamphlet-like volume, while his scholarly publications in the fields of history and esthetics and his prose fiction greatly outweigh his poetry, in mass at least. The widespread characterization of Mir as primarily a poet is even more remarkable if we reflect on his decision not to write any more verse.[1]

At least two reasons can be suggested for the public's persistent identification of Mir as poet. The more evident is probably the epic quality of his serious verse. The Dominican Republic, like many of her sister Spanish American states, still struggles with the challenges of formulating a national identity and plotting a national destiny. Centuries of foreign domination by Spain, Haiti, and the United Stated have cut deep wounds into the national pride of the country and have allegedly crippled the natural development of Dominican culture. Therefore, despite the frequently evoked past glories of La Española, Europe's first American colony, modern Dominicans seem almost desperate to reestablish national glory in the present. Mir's poems help to satisfy that need.

Beyond their popularity attributable to their nationalist contents, Mir's epic poems have merited the praise of critics; this praise constitutes the second hypothesis for Mir's fame as poet. Critics credit him with successfully marrying politics to poetry, a feat that has made Mir's poetic vocation a model for Latin American artists.[2]

---

[1] Jaime Labastida "Introducción" a *Viaje a la muchedumbre* de Pedro Mir (Siglo veintiuno Editores, México City, 1972), p. xiv.

[2] Many Latin American critics generally accept the relevance of politics to poetry and lament the frequent inability of good artist to be truly *engagé* in their work. Mir seems to satisfy both the esthetic and the social criteria.

Literary historians identify Mir as a member of the "Independientes", a group of modern Dominican poets who, according to Manuel Rueda and Lupo Hernández Rueda, have fulfilled the aspirations of the earlier group called "La poesía sorprendida". The younger poets "realizan la simbiosis de poesía social y de preciosismo verbal, sino un mundo ordenado por realidades precisas..." (Víctor Fernández Fragoso, "De la noche a la muchedumbre: los cantos épicos de Pedro Mir", unpublised thesis, University of Conecticut, 1977, p. 3).

Professor Fernández Fragoso, to whom I am indebted for sharing with me his manuscript, records the testimonies of several other critics to illustrate the widely accepted evaluation of Mir's double achievement poet and zealot. José Alcántara Almánzar praises him for superseding the political rhetoric that stragles many committed poets: "...lejos de peligrar en ese arenaje movedizo de lo sectario y temporal, su fecunda imaginación queda al servicio de los más grandes ideales". Fernández Spencer agrees when he writes that, "Lírica y política se complementan en esta obra... el poeta no lanza panfletos ni cartelones ni discursos combativos; canta simplemente, y de su canto brota todo el anhelo de justicia que su alma contiene". (*ibid.*)

The following essay is no attempt to contest Mir's merit as a poet. Rather, it will focus on his latest and longest imaginative work: a novel entitled *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras,* published in 1978. I believe that the introductory remarks about Mir's poetry are appropriate, however, because they suggest the challenges and difficulties which he has confronted and continues to confront whether writing verse or prose. The fundamental problems to which I refer are inadvertantly revealed by the critical acclaim of Mir's poetry referred to above. Manuel Rueda's celebration of a poet who can combine "la poesía social" and "el preciosismo verbal" is founded on the assumption that political art and art for art's sake are indeed reconcilable. Some of Mir's readers remain unconvinced, however, especially since the politics he expouses is nominally Marxist.[3] In fact, Mir's metaphoric transformation of reality into art often owes more to Romantic preciosity than to dialectical materialism.

Mir evidently wants to write a historial novel that progresses dialectically, as he believes history does. To that end, he organizes characters and events in a spiralling allegory of Dominican history that repeats itself with changes. Personal relationships and political formations reflect one another at the same time as they are mutually influential. But Mir's consistently Romantic content holds the spiral back. The underlying themes of the novel force the reader into an ideal, eternal stasis that cannot be made to move upward. The tension between the recurrent Romantic themes of the novel and its dialectical structure which cannot accomodate those themes, constitutes the fundamental weakness of the work. Despite Mir's keen wit and sophistication, form and content remain disjointed throughout his novel.

Fiction as History

Before these observations can be persuasive, it is important to establish the seriousness of Mir's effort to write fiction that embodies history, for if his criteria were purely esthetic in the narrow sense, a criticism of his historical accuracy would be irrelevant. His fundamental notions about history are: (1) that it repeats itself with changes, and (2) that much of the future can be foretold because it will undoubtedly repeat the past to a great degree. Changes remain unknow until they occur.

The spiral movement of history is explained by Professor Quique Villamán in a lecture that serves as an "Introducción tardía" midway through the novel. He credits Vico with formulating the idea that history repeats itself in cycles. Villamán adds that the theory if now modified to include development, so that Vico's cycle are transformed through dialectics into a spiral. (186) Each event, therefore, participates in its own time, in the past as an echo, and in the future as a foreshadowing. Said hyperbolically, each event represents all time, eternity. The

[3] Mir's self-identification as a Marxist is clearly indicated in Professor Fernández Fragoso's dissertation where he supplies some necessary biographical data for our understanding of Mir's epic poetry. It's central purpose is: "la denuncia de la explotación de la clase trabajadora y el anuncio o profesía de la caída de los imperios capitalistas ...y la adhesión al pensamiento del materialismo dialéctico." (*op. cit.* p. 17) cf. *Apertura de la estética* p. 13 where he (Mir) claims primacy of dialectic materialism in art.

facile conversion of time into stasis causes the reader some uneasiness about Mir's intention to write history; either he wants to show development or he chooses to contemplate eternity, but both cannot be done at the same time.

Mir's primary illustration of the simultaneously limited and eternal nature of time is the 40-second period that seems to be eternal. The entire first chapter of the book describes the absolute paralysis of Romanita, Mir's female protagonist, as she dangles a package of garbage above a sewer, ready to throw it in as part of her duties as a housekeeper. The daily ritual is arrested for 40 frozen seconds as the narrator exploits the calm to offer long digressions on the paradoxically eternal quality of so short a period. The husband whom Romanita has abandoned experiences his eternal 40 second as he listens to the crescendo and decrescendo of a car in the frustrated hope that it brings back his wife. Bonifacio is paralyzed, like Romanita, and his bodily funtions are systematically curtailed so that he tastes death and eternity. (28-29) The eternal moment is re-evoked toward the end of the novel when Bonifacio despairs for an interminable 40 seconds as he watches his son approach death: "estos malditos 40 segundos contenían más de una eternidad". (229) Time and timelessness are practically interchangeable in the novel: "así como 40 segundos pueden durar una eternidad ocurre también que una eternidad puede discurrir en 40 segundos". (227) The period of 40 seconds becomes a leitmotif of time; it has very precise limitations and yet contains all time. Moreover, and perhaps most important for Mir's novel, the leitmotif, by its very nature, is repeated periodically.

The theme of repetition in history is therefore incorporated in Mir's narrative technique as well as expounded by his fictional Professor Villamán. The most elaborate instance of repetition in the novel is the frame for chapter two which is repeated in chapter thirty, the final chapter of the novel. The second and the last chapters begin and end with almost the identical words. In the first case, Bonifacio's fruitless expectation of his wife's return is prefaced by the audial image of a car growing louder as it approaches; the inicial phrase builds itself into a running start that sustains the narrative throughout the chapter:

> un automóvil
> un automóvil que se aproxima
> un automóvil que se aproxima aceleradamente
> un automóvil que se aproxima aceleradamente y una persona...(23)

The final words imitate the dying sound of the car as it departs:

> un automóvil que se aleja precipitadamente llevándose una ilusión
> un automóvil que se aleja precipitadamente
> un automóvil que se aleja
> un automóvil (32)

Similarly, chapter thirty begins with the crescendo of:

> un automóvil
> un automóvil que se desplaza

> un automóvil que se desplaza acompasadamente
> un automóvil que se desplaza acompasadamente y en la sombra...(318)

The same words are dismantled to mark the end of the novel. (328) The frames for the second and the last chapters are almost identical, but not quite. This is undoubtedly calculated to ilustrate the spiral movement of history, that is, repetition with a change. The fact that the narration ends almost as it had begun clearly suggests that the end is only a provisonal one and that this story, like life, is organized as a series of open-ended repetitions. Mir writes no conclusion to his novel; he directs us back to the beginnning. The "Epílogo precoz" is an indication that no true epilogue is warranted in fiction since it would be absurd in life. Mir explains that excerpts from Antonio Machado's poetry provide appropriate final words to each foregoing chapter because they leave "una sed insaciable de infinito que verdaderamente expresa el ritornelo ecoico de esa repetición incesante de una historia que vuelve y vuelve como un eco del uno al otro confín fin fin". (332) Those suggestive words constitute the non-ending of the novel.

That Mir is clearly intending to write history in *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* is evident in the fact that all the repetitions in the novel are structured by a repeated historical event: the armed intervention of the United States in the Dominican Republic. The first intervention of 1916 presaged the imposition of land reforms for years later which favored American owned sugar plantations and evicted the Dominican peasantry form the paradise of communal lands. As a corollary, Trujillo established his ruthless dictatorship.[4] While most Dominicans rejoiced in 1961 over the tyrant's death, many thoughtful patriots were wary of the ensuing developments because they correctly predicted that another intervention would follow, for the United States would not abandon its interest for the causes of democracy and autonomy.[5]

Mir obliquely records the history of both invasions by narrating the life of Silvestre, the major protagonist of the novel. Mir calls him a "depósito maravilloso de repeticiones de la historia" (282) News of the first invasion jolted Silvestre out of childhood into adolescence: "muchachos devuélvanse que la patria

[4] Franklin J. Franco, *República Dominicana, clases, crisis, y comandos* (Habana, Casa de las Américas, 1966), p. 31.

[5] Chapter twenty-three of Mir's novel records the political speculation of several lawyers after the almost unbelievable news of Trujillo's death has been incontestably confirmed. The young man identified by his aviator eyeglasses reports that his father expressed more fear than relief as a result of the news. One American intervention established the dictatorship; surely another intervention was necessary to end it. (269) That opinion is shared even by the young man's antagonist, who adds the logical determinants of a second intervention.

> tenía razón al considerar la eventualidad de una nueva intervención militar americana si él tenía presente que el fundamento principal de la de 1916 era la eliminación en nuestro país del sistema arcaico de los terrenos comuneros que frenaban el desarrollo capitalista impulsado por las compañías azucareras con lo cual forzaban a esta sociedad atrasada secularmente a dar un paso de avance cualquiera que fuera el interés que a ellos les movía puesto que el régimen que acaba de desaparecer es un producto de aquella intervención y fue creado para asegurar el destino del sistema agrario moderno no puede en ninguna forma negar la posibilidad de que se produzca una nueva intervención si ese sistema se encuentra amenazado (274)

In other words, the repetition of an intervention would not be in order to introduce capitalism to the island, but to protect capital interests that were established with the first intervention. The echo of the past is not exact; it reflects the changes in the spiral of history.

está en peligro", was the impassioned cry he heard from Villamán's father in his Paul Revere-like ride of warning. (45) That sentence was burned into Silvestre's consciousness when he finally understood its meaning. The "frase lapidaria" is repeated in 1965 with the second invasion. This time, Silvestre hears it from a woman who turns out to be his daughter Urbana. Neither he nor she was aware of the other's existence before the historic phrase was uttered. Urbana was sure that her father had died as a rebel gavillero during the first intervention; and Silvestre never knew that he had engendered a child. Urbana's peasant mother would tell the girl stories of her *gavillero* father, including the one about old Villamán's mad ride. With the second American intervention, Urbana's drive for political involvement, coupled with her relative impotence as a woman, forced her to engage in the struggle by raising the consciousness of young boys, just as old Villamán had raised Silvestre's consciousness fifty years before. However, the repetition is never exact: "la historia aparece invertida porque se trata de una mujer y no de un hombre". Also, Villamán reached his listeners on horseback while Urbana travels by bus; the rebels of the first period were called *gavilleros*, in the second they are called *comandos*. (296)

As a result of their mutual encounter, Silvestre and Urbana decide to travel to the capital and to participate directly in the struggle for liberty. They do not travel alone. Young Bonifacio accompanies them. The boy's escape from home at the end of the novel repeats his mother's flight at the beginning. Again, the repetition is not exact, as the novel progresses in a spiral rather than in a circular structure.[6]

Mir's theme of repetition and open-endedness is embodied in the enigmatic figure of the gypsy who tells Urbana's fortune, or at least tells part of it. Enigma exists for the gypsy as well as for the reader, as if to indicate that no one can master all the secrets of the future. Mir first refers to her in a laconic summary of the novel in chapter three. He suggests that she is somehow responsible of writing at least part of the story. The characters act out their roles on the following pages "de acuerdo con el vaticinio de la gitana" (39). The ploy of imputing authorship to an exotic and clairvoyant being is hardly new in Hispanic literature. Cervantes used it when he alleged that *Don Quijote* was a translation of an Arabic manuscript by Cide Hamete Benengeli. In modern times the pretense has been masterfully employed by García Márquez in *Cien años de soledad*, which ends with our discovery that the gypsy, Melquíades, had pre-written the entire history before anyone lived it.

Mir adjusts this tradition to suit his modest self-estimation as a writer whose knowledge of the future is limited. His gypsy is sensitive and intelligent. She can read Urbana's hand "como si fuera un libro" (258), which, ironically, it really is. But the fortune-teller cannot satisfy Urbana's demand for more clarity and finally

[6] The inevitable recurrence in life presents the artist with an apparently insuperable difficulty in Mir's canon of esthetics because, according to him, "la función primordial del arte (es) la comunicación de lo nuevo". (Pedro Mir, *Apertura a la estética*. Editora de la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, 1974), p. 233.

If history repeats itself endlessly, how is the artist to experience or communicate anything new? First, as Mir points out in his introduction to esthetics, each work of art is the product of surprise, even if it is prompted by familiar circumstance. (*ibid.*) Second, as we learn from his novel, each event or object changes in its relationship to its surroundings in the course of history. Therefore, the artist who focuses on the particularity of history as well as on its general contours will discover the element of novelty which good art should communicate.

admits that "tu estás fuera del alcance de mis ojos" (262). Paradoxically, Mir's modest claims for the gypsy have the effect of increasing his own self-importance as narrator, ("ese viejo que escribe... acerca de ti"), even though both must admit that life is the only absolute authority regarding Urbana's future.

Silvestre is vaguely cognizant of the fact that he and his daughter are characters in a book; but he is quick to add that they may be its authors: "estamos escritos en alguna parte a no ser que nos vayamos escribiendo nosotros mismos para darle algún sentido a nuestro paso por este mundo" (306). His reference to "la historia de nuestras vidas" (309) consequently achieves a dual resonance because it insists on the dual meaning of *historia* as fiction and as history. Silvestre's and Urbana's self-consciousness as products of a pre-written history is foreshadowed in the story of the young Bonifacio. His fate is discussed by what seem to be neighborhood gossips, one of whom expresses concern for the child's future now that his father has re-married. "pues por todos los demonios", the other neighbor answers impatiently, "lo que le espera está escrito en alguna parte quizás en su propia cabeza". (225)

Apparently, for Mir, average people are often as perceptive about the future as are gypsies and novelists. In addition to the fateful remarks of Bonifacio's neighbor, Mir places the most meaningful prophecy about Urbana in the mouth of a peasant woman, not a professional clairvoyant: "yo lo que pienso es que esa criatura ha venido al mundo para algo porque ella no fue pujada sino tirada a la cara de la gente como si fuera una bofetada". (242) While the insight lacks the specificity of the gypsy's fortune telling, it certainly reveals a more profound knowledge of Urbana's character and role in life than could be divined by the palm reader. It seems, then, that Mir does not believe in any absolute prophetic powers. Life must ultimately tell its own story. Even if the knowledge of past experience can lead perceptive observers to general insights regarding the future, no one, neither gypsy nor poet, can entirely determine what has not yet been lived.[7]

Mir's modesty defines his entire posture as narrator of fiction. He is careful to contain his imagination within the confines of historical reality. And, when the dictates of his art seem to conflict with the objective world, Mir insists repeatedly that reality should be primary and that life makes literature, not vice versa. In his conclusion to *La gran hazaña de Límber*, a fable about an ill-fated but heroic dog, Mir had written:

> pero la vida se reserva el derecho de escribir sus propias baladas mitos fábulas narraciones y epopeyas y de componer sus desenlaces a despecho del deseo de los lectores y de las inclinaciones de escritores y juglares.[8]

Here, in his historical novel, *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras*, veracity is

---

[7] Professor Fernández Fragoso makes a similar observation about Mir's poetry. Probability rather than prophecy defines his terms of projection about the future. "Probablemente, porque el cantor no es un 'dios' que puede ver el futuro milagrosamente, sino un ser material cuya ventaja es que ha tomado conciencia de lo que ocurre, lo cual le ha permitido poner las cosas en su sitio y de este orden... inferior lo que ocurrirá inevitablemente.." (*op. cit.* p. 63)

[8] Pedro Mir, *La gran hazaña de Límber y después otoño* (Editora Sargazo, República Dominicana, 1977) p. 39.

an even more fundamental concern for Mir that it was in his fable. He calls the novel "un relato directo y textual" (37) of his country's history; and his respectful affection for Silvestre derives from the fact that he is a "testigo palpitante y activo de la vida histórica de este país". (37) Mir's dedication to a textual rendering of facts is reminiscent of his *El gran incendio,* which is an analysis of history rather than a work of fiction. The similarity attests to Mir's seriousness in his attempt to write history through his novel.[9] For him, the distinction between life and art is maintained only by pedants or irresponsible esthetes. His claim for historical truth in his novel is absolute. He substantiates that claim by establishing the authority of the gypsy and Quique Villamán so that the narrator con refer to them in order to forestall any objections to his treatment of history. The gypsy established her credibility after she admits her limitations and refuses to be paid for her services to Urbana. After that, Mir can claim "absoluta objetividad del presente relato y su total independencia de cualquier convencionalismo..." (39) by asserting that he follows her story to the letter. That assertion, however, preceded Mir's illustration of her honesty by two hundred pages. In other words, his claim for objectivity is clear only on re-reading the text. In fact, many aspects of the work are understood only with a second reading, which Mir seems to take for granted. The spiral movement of history that structures the novel demands that we progress from the end of the narration to its beginning so that it may be read on a higher level.

Villamán is Mir's authority on Dominican history. His "Introducción tardía" is meant to "evitar discusiones superfluas y disipar toda sospecha de fantasía y de caprichosa invención" (177). The teacher and patriot corroborates every detail of the story that proceded his discourse, giving Mir academic approval. Villamán is careful to acknowledge a polarity between fiction and truth; therefore, his sanction of the novel is to be understood as his acceptance of its value as history. In the course of his lecture on Dominican history, Villamán caution an inquisitive listener against simplifying history: "de esa manera crearemos un pasado legendario y mitológico que podría ser muy atractivo pero que nos impedirá conocer a

---

[9] In his study of the effects of the great conflagration, Mir decides to interview the contemporary Licenciado Gonzalo de Valcárcel in order to make his chronicle immediate and provocative to the modern reader. After the interview, Mir defends himself against any possible accusation that he has tampered with history. "...han sido las palabras rigurosamente textuales del Licenciado, tal como aparecen en las *Relaciones históricas de Santo Domingo.* El lector ávido puede acudir a esa fuente". (Pedro Mir, *El gran incendio: los balbuceos americanos del capitalismo mundial,* Santo Domingo: Editora del Caribe, 1970) p. 116.

In this apology for the unorthodox technique of interviewing a long-defunct subject, Mir explains that the results are neither novelistic, nor metaphysical. He argues that both have pretensions of universality while deriving from one subjective mind. Only Cervantes succeeded in overcoming the limitations of fiction "con su adorable binomio Quijote-Sancho... Pero no todo el mundo está en condiciones de cervantear en sus momentos de ocio..." (*ibid.* p. 112) Mir's humility seems excessive. In fact, he did follow Cervantes' lead in *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras.* One similarity has already been noted: both authors pretend to have copied their tales from foreign sources. Mir's gypsy and the Moorish scribe have at least two functions. First, they are calculated to protect Mir and Cervantes respectively against possible political censure; and second, they are presented as incontestable authorities of *historia.* In *Don Quijote* the word *historia* may be equivocal. When Cervantes insists that his book is "la verdadera historia" of the hapless knight errant, the reader may well assume that the reference is not to history at all but to the authentic story of Quijote as opposed to the notorious imitations that circulated. We may also assume, however, that Cervantes intends to collapse the distinction between fiction and history by insisting on their fundamental interdependence. Mir is not at all equivocal; his intention to collapse the distinction is plain.

fondo nuestras esencias contemporáneas... y el curso genuino de la historia a través de sus épocas (184). With all due respect to the professor, his criticism might have been directed against Mir.

In his self-imposed task as historian and writer of "crónicas" (319), Mir modestly admits the limits of his knowledge. His honestly articulated ignorance about the unspoken thoughts or the intimate conversation of his characters is clearly intended to impress on the reader his reluctance to invent even the most minor details. His protestations of ignorance are repeated throughout the novel.[10] Despite these, Mir never resists the temptation to reconstruct what he claims to be the missing pieces of his narrative.

Allegory and Dialectics

The structure of *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* was described earlier as a dialectical allegory. Mir's novel represents a daring experiment in prose fiction: it adapts a dialectical vision of history to the historical novel in an effort to develop an appropriate structure for fiction that embodies hisjtory. The most evident indication of the allegorical nature of the novel is the series of names Mir chooses for his characters. Silvestre, the erstwhile peasant, personifies the entire dispossessed peasantry through his personal history and his bucolic name. That his friend shares a similar backgound is indicated by the fact that he is not known by the full name of Florentino, but the shortened Flor, a reference to his roots on the land. Silvestre's daughter represents his counterpart and complement in Dominican society. Mir is explicit and expansive on this point. A three-page digression on the relevance of names introduces his observation that "el nombre de Urbana... a simple vista se presenta como esencialmente opuesto al de Silvestre". (295) Silvestre and Urbana represent a series of dynamic oppositions which imply a degree of conflict but without which history could not proceed: country and city, man and woman, parent and child. Romanita and Bonifacio Lindero, the characters of a plot parallel to that of Silvestre, personify two opposing rather than complementary forces. Rafaela Jáquez de Lindero assumes the nickname of Romanita after she flees from La Romana, her native province, to the Capital. To be more exact, she flees from her husband, Lindero, who inherited his name from

[10] After recording Bonifacio's conversation with his runaway wife, Mir comments, "y éstas que pueden haber sido o no exactamente las palabras que pronunció Bonifacio expresan con la mayor exactitud su contenido..." (72) When Silvestre's tired legs manage to catch up with Urbana, Mir reluctantly remarks that "la parte más bella y conmovedora de esta historia...se pierde en las sombras de lo desconocido y de lo inapresable sin que acudan en su ayuda los infinitos recursos de la imaginación..." (297) Several pages later, Mir qualifies his reportage of the affectionate conversation between father and daugher; "y desde luego éstas no serían exactamente las palabras que dejó escuchar Urbana porque no se conserva el registro grabado de su conversación" (301)

If familial intimacy lies beyond the narrator-historian's avid senses, certainly sexual intimacy is an inappropriate subject for his rigorous reportage. Mir tells the tragic tale of Silvestre's and Alalicia's mutual introduction into love that ends abruptly with her death. The passionate conversation he records is necessarily surmised rather than reported. Any other procedure would have violated the boundaries of human decency. "y claro está que ésas no serían exactamente las palabras pronunciadas por ella pues es sumamente improbable que alguien hubiese llevado su curiosidad hasta el límite de la indiscreción" (130). c.f. also *La gran hazaña de Limber*, p. 18.

one of the original despoilers of Dominican communality. Their enmity should not be understood, therefore, in exclusively personal terms.[11]

A case could be made for the symbolic significance of other characters in *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras:* Romanita's doctor who hints at his dissatisfaction with the Trujillo regime; the beautiful but moribund Analicia who, like the communal lands gives herself freely in an act of love that kills her; Doña Susanita, whose preferred Americanized name of Suzy betrays her unpatriotic nature. But except for the central figures identified above, the only other overtly personified character in the novel is América la china, the kind-hearted prostitute who rescues the naive Silvestre from the crassness of her associates. After reviewing the personal misfortunes that forced her defilement and perennial dependence, Silvestre comments thoughtfully that "la verdad... es que a ti no te deberían llamar América la china sino América Latina." (200) When she asks his name, Silvestre hesitates for a moment and then answers that he is Juan Bosch, making a probable reference to Bosch's peasant background while at the same time foreshadowing Silvestre's activities as a revolutionary. The couple develops the allegorical joke, first verbally, then physically. "Silvestre se encontró sumergido en las sombras de una titánica lucha con las turbulencias submarinas del revuelto mundo abismal y salobre de América Latina..." (201) His next struggle will be on the battlefield itself.

The relationships among the personifications in the novel create a plot that operates dialectically between the personal and the political levels, that is, between the subjective and the objective realms. Mir explicitly indicates the innovative structure of his novel, first, by populating his narrative with personifications rather than with eccentric individuals (itself nothing new), and second, by repeatedly insisting on the interdependence between personal and social phenomena. The concept of interdependence is a key one because it differentiates Mir's twentieth century allegory from the traditional examples of the genre in which the narrative and the abstract levels are parallel and refer to each other instead of affecting each other. In other words, Mir's dialectical technique posits that personal relationship based on love, hate, fear, or trust can do affect politics. Inversely, political liberty, terror, independence or dependence have an inevitable effect on personal lives. The philosophical gossips who discuss young Bonifacio's future formulate Mir's theme of interdependence like this:

> la cuestión es que no debe explicarse la vida siguiendo patrones personales y tragedias privadas la cuestión es que toda vida privada está engarzada en la sociedad

[11] en 1920 se estableció un sistema moderno de registro de la propiedad territorial cuyo propósito era precisamente el de asegurar y garantizar el deslinde de la propiedad privada y este sistema comprendía un procedimiento muy burdamente vertebrado que permitía a cualquier aventurero avispado dedicarse a colocar linderos por aquí y linderos por allá ante la pasiva contemplación de unos campesinos acostumbrados secularmente a considerar el deslinde de las tierras como una ocupación ingenua cuando no estúpida y por eso al padre de Bonifacio la gente le endilgó el mote de Lindero que acabó por perpetuarse como un apellido muy respetable (24-25)

If we contrast Bonifacio's heritage with the fact that the eastern province of La Romana offered the longest and most militant resistance to the armed imposition of neo-colonial status, the enmity between Lindero and Romanita becomes evident. He represents the pro-American capitalist movement to dispossess peasant and to establish enourmous sugar plantations on the once communally cultivated land. She represents the traditional form of land tenure and the resitance of foreign intervention.

de la misma manera que la sociedad está engarzada en cada vida privada (235)[12]

Mir accepts the above observation as axiomatic. To illustrate its adaptation in the narrative it should suffice to cite a few examples of the mutual relevance of private and public life in *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras;* to cite them all would entail a reconstruction of the entire novel. The relationship in the Lindero family offer a good case in point. Bonifacio's generally cold and authoritarian treatment first of his wife, then of his son, is a predictable consequence of his socio-economic status: the master of much land and many peasants. His inability to sustain truly human relationship results in the flight of his wife, who joins the work-force of domestics in the Capital, and the escape of the adolescent son, who presumably joins Bosch's supporters in the Civil War of 1965. In other words, the tyranny of private life has ramifications in rebellious politics.

Flor's case illustrates the opposite movement of the dialectic. After his land was usurped because of the American imposed reforms, Flor's vigorous protest and accusations against the government were attributed to his alleged insanity. Mir adds that the allegation was made by the "respectable" citizens of Puerto Plata, implying that Flor's justifiable outrage might have threatened their unethically acquired respectability. Mir agrees that Flor was emotionally unbalanced, but he explains that "su dislocación... no se encontraba en su cabeza sino fuera de ella" (82) in the politics and economics of his country. Flor's anger and ultimate despair are, therefore, caused by external social factors. His personal situation, in turn, influences politics because it causes Silvestre to understand the importance of communal lands and to join the revel *gavilleros.*[13]

[12] Fernández Fragoso makes a similar point, *op. cit.* p. 48. La 'historia' de un individuo es un mero arco...que se inserta en una estructura mayor: la espiral de la historia. Del mismo modo que la experiencia universal se individualiza en un nombre, Pedro Mir, la historia de los pueblos se precisa en una región determinada.

[13] Yet the another example of the personal-political dialectic begins with the death of Romanita's doctor which, Mir tells us, "se configuraba claramente en el marco de la situación política" (125) because of his courage in criticizing Trujillo. His complaints, made in the intimacy of Romanita's home, were answered with deadly efficiency. As a consequence of the death that was dictated by the politics of tyranny, Romanita faints and is rushed to the hospital because of her late stage of pregnancy. Hours after her healthy son is born, Romanita dies of a bloodclot that formed when she heard of her doctor's death. The little orphan is then destined to love an absent mother "porque sólo para amar a sus madres imposibles han sido creados los niños huérfanos" (146). His impossible mother becomes the ideal of "la patria". The young Bonifacio's political commitment is therefore a consequence of his mother's death, a personal tragedy, which in turn is the result of her doctor's murder which is finally the consequence of political tyranny.

In translating patriotic idealism into the metaphor of an orphan's quest for his mother's love, Mir succeeds in extending his allegory beyond the two levels of fiction and politics to include his own personal, factual history. In 1918, when his mother died, Pedro Mir was only five years old. He, liké young Bonifacio, finds solace "en un mundo de imágenes que va creciendo en el silencio". (Fernández Fragoso, p. 7) Silence is an important leitmotif in the novel; it defines the oppressive atmosphere in the orphan's home (166) as well as the crippling terror of Trujillo's reign. Describing the year that Bonifacio was born, 1950, Mir writes that "todo el país estaba sumergido en un sistema de terror indescriptible tan inmensamente generalizado que de él no escapaban las mismas personas que lo habían impuesto". (255) The silence imposed by terror stunded all intellectual development in the country: "el silencio aniquila las voces creadoras de los pueblos y aquí se ha apagado el periodismo el teatro la poesía y la novela y se nos ha dejado la palabra sólo para ensalzar los méritos convencionales del beneficiario de esta situación". (101-102) The orphan's personal experience of silence is repeated in the political silence imposed on the entire nation.

But neither the orphaned Mir nor his fictional counterpart are silenced for long. Their emotional isolation forces them to observe human relationships rather than to particlpate in them. Therefore they develop "una disposición increíble para la meditación más intensa acerca de la condición humana y a veces de la divina". (313) In both cases meditation prepares them for expression in political activity.

The theme of silence as politically oppressive appears in Mir's poems as well as the novel, there he writes, "somos el silencio". *Viaje a la muchedumbre* p. 101.

Mir's dialectic always emphasizes the primacy of action and thus reinforces the political theme of his novel. All the insights in the world amount to mere pedantry without their translation into either a social movement or a personal quest that acquires political resonance. In the particular vocabulary of Mir's opus, the necessary pursuit after an ideal is called "el viaje". Although Mir considers the vogaye necessary for human integrity, his clearest statement regarding the theme appears in his fable about Límber, the dog that travelled hundred of miles, suffered injuries and disregarded dangers in order to be re-united with his indiferent masters.

> de donde se desprende una noble enseñanza pues para poder soportar las durezas de la vida y los sinsabores de nuestra existencia privada es preciso tener una pasión y un objetivo como si nuestro paso por el amor fuera siempre un viaje hacia un punto distante donde nos espera la felicidad suprema según se contempla en el caso de Límber.[14]

With this statement, the voyages of the central characters in *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* clearly reveal their ideological dimension. Romanita's flight to the Capital exemplifies the quest for freedom. Silvestre's trip to Macorís where he joins the *gavilleros* shows a similar pursuit of freedom. Finally, Urbana's itinerant proclamation of the traditional warning, and especially the trip of Urbana, Silvestre and the adolescent Bonifacio to the Capital where Civil War raged, repeat the theme of quest for freedom and dignity. And while the quest is always described in personal terms, its political ramifications are evident. As with all the significant aspect of the novel, the quest operates on the personal level and the political one in a dialectical relationship that makes the levels interdependent.

Romantic Patriotism

The preocupation with history and politics in *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* illustrates the norm in the Latin American novel rather than the exception. Jean Franco goes so far as to say that art is always linked to politics in modern Latin American culture because even "a-political" artists understand and accept their fundamental conservatism.[15] To many writers, the novel has seemed the most appropriate genre for social themes of injustices and for creating a sense of patriotism. Within the general category of the novel, those which focus on the land itselt as the major force in socio-political life are numerous and represent probably the clearest examples of literature as an instrument for developing patriotism. Classic novels of the land like *La parcela* by José López Portillo y Rojas, *El terruño* by Carlos Reyes, *Huasipungo* by Jorge Icaza, and *Doña Bárbara* by Rómulo Gallegos, among others, form a tradition that is decidedly Romantic in conception. a tradition in which Mir's *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras*

[14] Mir, *La gran hazaña de Límber*, pp 32-33.

[15] Jean Franco. The Modern *Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist* (London, Penguin: 1967) p. 11 cf. her *Spanish American Literature* (Cambridge England: 1969) p. 46.

participates. In fact, his concern for historical development and for social equity, which appear to be the fundamental preocupations of the novel, should really be understood as the context for the major theme of the novel. It is neither history nor human subjectivity; for all these are dependent, for Mir, on one fundamental source: the land.

It can be argued that Mir's entire literary career has been the celebration of Dominican soil. His epic poems glorify the land itself rather than a particular national hero, as in most epics, or even clases of heroes. Like Antonio Machado, whose poems are quoted throughout *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras,* Mir often writes his poems about the terrain of his country and only secondarily about its people. Of all the suggestive verse Mir borrows from Machado, none would be as appropriate as those from *Campos de Soria,* all of which are mysteriously excluded from Mir's novel.

In an historical aside, Mir notes that land was always the major national concern: "lo más importante que ha habido en este país desde que llegó Colón fue el problema de repartir la tierra entre su gente porque los indios no inventaron la cerca". (287) Mir is making a reference to the rebellion of the earliest Spanish settlers against the Discoverer who resisted their democratic demands.[16] Clearly implied in his assertion that property rights were unknown to the Indians is Mir's nostalgia for a Golden Age. After the Spanish colonists fled the flame of 1605, the Golden Age was reestablished, according to Mir, because private property was virtually abolished.

The actual history of the three centuries to which Mir refers in his title, from 1606 to 1916, is far more complex and not nearly so pleasant as he implies. Slavery is not an institution that is normally associated with communal ownership of land, and yet slavery existed in Santo Domingo until 1801, when it was abolished by Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian army.[17] Mir does not mention the Haitian invasions of 1800 and 1844 nor the bloody War of Restoration in 1865 when Dominicans reclaimed their independence from Spain. His idyllic evocation of the period that preceded the American intervention has no room for a review of battle. But the events that are most conspicuous by their absence are the internal wars which weakened the Republic and made foreign intervention inevitable. In *República Dominicana, clases, crisis y comandos,* Franklin J. Franco writes objectively that, "Entre 1850 y 1900 la proliferación de pequeñas guerras intestinas llegó a un grado tal que el campesino dominicano, 'carne de cañón', rehuía los enrolamientos como el diablo a la cruz".[18] The territory was organized by regional *caudillos* who would command their peasants to fight as easily as they would order them to farm. Mir deals with none of the exploitation suffered by the peasants at the hands of fellow Dominicans.

To Mir's sorrow, the American-sponsored land reforms forced the spiral of

---

[16] The rebellion is the first subject of Mir's study of the first three rebellions in the New World, *Tres leyendas de colores* (Santo Domingo, Editora nacional: 1969).

[17] John Edwin Fagg, *Cuba, Haití, and the Dominican Republic* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1965) p. 145

[18] Franklin J. Franco, *op. cit.* p. 12.

Dominican history out of the communal Eden:[19] "la agrimensura tenía la virtud de convertir en semidioses a unos y de volver locos a otros porque lo que sucedía en el fondo era una transformación completa de la sociedad secular... y de las costumbres históricas del país".[20] The original Lindero and Flor are, respectively, Mir's illustrations of the newly created demi-gods and their crazed victims. Flor's tenacious respect for the traditional system of land tenure derives, we are told, from the vow he made to his dying father. The old man had bequeathed the family plot to his four sons, but insisted that any allotment should be temporary: "deben conservarla quitándole la cerca que le hayan puesto tan pronto como las tierras no estén en uso porque ésa es su patria y la patria debe ser siempre libre". (83) The equation between land and *patria* is clearly articulated here.

The theme is developed through Silvestre, whose respect for Flor derives from his own experience on the land. Towards the end of the novel, when Silvestre has attained a degree of maturity and wisdom that merits his being referred to generically as "el Viejo", he expresses Mir's most profund notions about the importance of the land. El Viejo is pictured at a short distance from a schoolhouse and surrounded by inquisitive adolescents. They avidly ask details about the *gavillero* resistance to the American occupation, but el Viejo consistenly directs their attention to the reason for the rebellion: the usurping of the land.

> mira hijo el problema más grande que tiene la gente aquí y en cualquier parte del mundo yo lo conozco porque yo he ido hasta Venezuela y he dado

---

[19] The very title, *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras*, reveals a nostalgia for the period when, according to Mir, land in the Dominican Republic was practically if not legally owned communally.

In case the nostalgia for lost harmony and abundance is not clear enough a reference to the Golden Age, or Eden's primordial paradise, Mir supplies a more specific allusion. Paradoxically, the Golden Age was ushered into the island by a calamity: "el gran incendio" of 1605-1606, which Mir discusses at length in his history of the fire. Although the fire was intended by the Spanish authorities to raze three rebellious towns, the flames quickly proved more tyrannical than the crown and claimed the entire island as fuel for the most spectacular blaze imaginable. In the general flight from the fire, only the most helpless souls remained reluctantly on the smoking soil. According to the novel's academic authority on Dominican history, Don Quique Villamán, those unfortunate souls soon awoke from their nightmare and discovered a dream,

> que eran los propietarios de todo aquel territorio de donde habían emigrado la propiedad privada y los portadores de ella dejando además un prodigioso ganado para ser disfrutado en común por todos y fue así como nuestros adanes y evas fueron arrojados al Paraiso (182)

Which goes to show that men and women can be thrown into Eden as well as out.

Mir makes another direct allusion to Eden in his *Las raíces dominicanas de la Doctrina Monroe*. Here his reference is more conventional as he draws an analogy between the very first period of Dominican history and man's short residence in Eden (p. 18) Mir is clearly alluding to two different historical periods as well as to the original Eden when he uses the concept to describe the island in pre-Colombian days and in post "incendio" days. In other words, the idea of paradise is not limited to the almost forgotten mythic past, but recurs as history renews itself. For Mir, events repeat themselves with changes so that history can be plotted as a spiral.

[20] He describes the system of land tenure peculiar to the Dominicans from the early seventeenth century to early twentieth century in the following way:

> aunque el derecho de uso se transmitía inclusive por compra y venta la propiedad continuaba indivisa y retornaba al vendedor amparado en unos títulos de quien nadie conocía la existencia real... y está claro que era una situación paradisiaca y le daba a uno y cada uno...la sensación de que era propietario del territorio entero...y aunque en el fondo del agua de la población latía la vaga impresión de que había algo de irregular en el sistema comunero...nadie deseaba la sustitución de este sistema que podía ser malo pero conocido por otro bueno por conocer... y era esto lo que en la intuición de Silvestre se perfilaba como la idea de la patria"(84).

> muchos bandazos y he oído hablar a mucha gente de toda clase hasta los curas y marineros que parecen no tener la menor familiaridad con los bienes terrenales y he podido saber que lo único importante que hay en la bolita del mundo es la tierra porque de eso es que vive la gente y nosotros mismos estamos hechos de la tierra y somos plantas lo único que no tenemos raíces y es porque no se ven porque todo el mundo tiene sus raíces y las tiene muy metidas en su tierra (286)

The sleight of hand in this discourse should not go unnoticed. Mir makes a metaphoric jump from the economic importance of the land -"de eso es que vive la gente"- to its mythical significance -"y nosotros mismos estamos hechos de la tierra"- and finally to its mistical function that is generally associated with Romantic ideology -"todo el mundo tiene sus raíces... muy metidas en su tierra". Thus, the economic importance of the land is virtually subsumed by its spiritual significance.

El Viejo's comments are apparently not sufficiently explicit for Mir's purposes because the venerable patriot and propagandist is made to continue his speech:

> Ya sé que ustedes no pueden comprender eso porque ustedes sólo creen en lo que ven y lo más importante es lo que no se ve y eso de las raíces es lo más importante que tiene la mata y no se ve y tú puedes cortar un árbol y dejarlo a ras de tierra y él vuelve a retoñar porque tiene raíces y las raíces no mueren mientras estén hundidas en la tierra (286)

As if the ideological kinship of Mir's novel were not sufficiently clear from his construction of characters and events, the above declaration unmistakably identifies his conceptual framework as Romantic. In its specific and rather contradictory formulation, Mir's Romanticism seems to derive from both of the opposing strains of the movement, whose proponents are characterized by E. Anderson Imbert as, "los románticos tradicionales, vueltos hacia la Edad Media, la religión, la leyenda y el egotismo", and, "muchos que militaron en un romanticismo social, democrático, progresista, profético, liberal, colectivista, y negaban ser románticos."[21] We might add that the backward-looking Romantics, following Novalis and Chateaubriand, yearned after a feudal non-capitalist world in which the great masses of people were almost literally bound to the soil, while the progressive Romantics in Spanish America generally supported the growth of capitalism and the modern nation-state. (Sarmiento is probably the foremost example.)

The historical moment that Mir experiences and describes is very different from that of Heredia or even of Sarmiento. Latin America is no longer overtly colonized, nor is the spiritual quest for a national identify the primary concern in contemporary literature. Industrialization and urbanization have, in fact, narrowed the socio-economic breech that once sharply distinguised European

[21] E. Anderson Imbert, *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana.* vo. I. (México: 1970) p. 238.

from Spanish American literature;[22] today, writers on this side of the Atlantic can lament man's alienation from nature as bitterly as did the European Romantics. Jean Franco's analysis of Roberto Arlt's *Los siete locos* illustrates a case in point.[23] Mir's historical novel offers another. The idea that human souls are a form of vegetation in that they must have roots to grow is central here, as it was in some aspects of nineteenth-century European Romanticism. Mir repeats the organic metaphor several times, after he introduces it in a description of Silvestre's growing consciousness; that is the flowering of his soul: "las interrogantes se abren como flores de la mañana en el alma de Silvestre... como una joven plántula cuyas raicillas se hunden..." (60)

Although Mir's Romantic notions are evident throughout the work, he identifies them by name only once, when he refers to the communal tilling of the soil as "un sistema romántico." (223) Immediately thereafter, Mir personifies the land as he explains that despite military and political losses, the system, "perdura en la sangre o en el aroma de los bosques o en la circulación de los arroyuelos." The attribution of spiritual capacities to the landscape, sometimes referred to as pantheism, is the other face of the organic metaphor through which nineteenth and twentieth-century Romantics may attempt to overcome what they take to be man's alienation from a progressively de-naturalized world.

On the one hand, then, Mir's passionately anti-modern insistence on the necessary relationship of man, soil, and soul is more reminiscent of German

[22] Jean Franco, *An Introduction to Spanish American Literature* (Cambridge, England: 1969) p. 49. Here she refers specifically to Argentina, but the observation is generally applicable to Latin America.

"The Industrial Revolution in Europe encouraged the European writer to idealise the countryside and the integrated, meaningful life of the peasant. In the Argentine, on the other hand, it was not industry but the vast, threatening pampa with its tribes of savage Indians and half-wild gauchos that constituted the chief danger to the good life."

[23] *Ibid.* pp. 304-305

"These states of alienation are characterist of *urban* man, of man caught in the iron net of capitalist society which has systematized exploitation, robbery and murder. The seven madmen, in their plot to destroy 'this implacable society', employ society's own weapons of murder, prostitution and robbery. ...Arlt was a pioner in a field which few European novelists had entered successfully, and he conveyed a personal and nightmarish vision of a world in which the city itself was the main enemy. His point of view was that of the anarchist who sees a *return to a simpler rural society as the only effective solution. So the Gold-Seeker believes that in the solitude of nature man regains the sense of his own identity*". (italics mine.)

"Volkish" Romanticism[24] than of Spanish American liberal progressivism. On the other hand, his undaunted nationalism, his espousal of economic development and of the efficacy of capitalism -which will later be considered in more detail- would seem to indicate his descent from the anti-Romantic Romantics, to paraphrase Anderson Imbert. It also makes him an almost classic example of the middle class intellectual in Latin American, according to the recent studies of Juan E. Corradi and Hobart Spalding. They take Argentine *Peronismo* and Brazilian *Varguismo* as models of populist movements led by a university-based middle class intelligencia to incorporate urban workers and peasants into a developing bourgeois order.[25] More recent Dominican history seems to illustrate a similar trend.

The contradiction between a program for re-uniting labor with land and one for capitalist development may be symptomatic of the Dominican Republic's peculiar situation as a defenseless target for overt imperialist aggression and of her economic dependency, a condition shared with Latin America in general. But Mir's opposing propositions of independent labor and capitalist accumulation may also be symptomatic of a petit-bourgeois ideology that remains

---

[24] The reactionary implications of this programs are far too clear, especially from our post-World War II perspective. The mystification of man's bond to the soil was fundamental to Nazism and to fascism in general. It would be unfair, however, to impute consciously reactionary thought to Mir. On the contrary, he is undoubtedly participating in the literary tradition of the left which has paradoxically adopted much of the rhetoric of reactionary writing. Any criticism of Mir's ideology is therefore an implicit criticism of the mystification in literature that purports to be Marxist. And while his novel should not be singled out for censure, it may serve as an illustration of the pitfalls of popular-front art.

In his statement to the Third Communist International in 1935, Georgi Dimitroff established the relevance of nationalist traditions, generally associated with fascist propaganda, for communist literature.

> "Mussolini makes every effort to make capital for himself out of the heroic figure of Garibaldi. The French fascists bring to the fore as their heroine Joan of Arc. The American fascists appeal to the traditions of the American War of Independence, the traditions of Washington and Lincoln. The Bulgarian fascists make use of the national liberation movement of the seventies and its heroes beloved of the people.
>
> Communists who suppose that all this has nothing to do with cause of the working class...voluntarily hand over to the fascist falsifiers all that is valuable in the historical past of the nation, that the fascists may bandoozle the masses."

Georgi Dimitroff. *The United Front* (San Francisco, Proletarian Publishers: 1975), p. 78.

Mir's disturbing if unintentional kinship with the ideology of the far right is unmistakably indicated in the major themes of the novel. The glorification of the soil and its role in man's spiritual nourishment have already been mentioned. Any plot of land, however, will not do. It must be the particular soil to which one's soul is bound through birth and culture. This is Silvestre's meaning when he says that everyone is firmly rooted "en su tierra" rather than "en la tierra."

The same reasoning persuaded many Germans that cosmopolites who live indiscriminantly in one land or another, like Jews and Gypsies, are freaks of nature. Without roots they can have no spiritual values and consequently they constitute a menace to society. The Romantic origins of fascist thought cannot fully be developed within the limitations of this essay. Several important studies on the subject already exist. The most notable is George Mosse's *The Crisis of German Ideology*. Professor Mosse reviews the development of Romanticism in Germany in order to explain the popular support for the twentieth-century "Volkish" cult of irrationality, pantheistic spiritualism and nationalism. It was a movement concerned with reviving "a feeling for the beauty of primeval forces in a modern world", which had diabolically alienated man from his spiritual sustenance in nature. (*The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*. New York: 1964, p. 54)

[25] Juan Eugenio Corradi, "Poliltics of Silence: Discourse, Text and Social Conflict in South America", *The Radical History Review* #18, Fall, 1978 New York, and Hobart Spalding, *Organized Labor in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Urban Workers in Dependent Societies* (New York, 1977).

fundamentally contradictory. Silvestre is, after all, an independent farmer turned capitalist and turned out of his secondary, urban, Eden. He is merchant Adam in search of a lost paradise, and so he resembles the Romantic heroes of the "boom" writers, in the analysis of Hernán Vidal.[26] In fact, Mir's last ditch attempt to recover the liberal, Romantic ideals of the period of capitalist ascendence makes his novel generally compatible with Vidal's schema; his summary of Carlos Fuentes' fiction could be applied to other "boomists", as well as to Mir. Vidal observes that the very construction of Fuentes' literature betrays a "tensión entre la nostalgia de un origen perdido o de una meta final de reposo que a la vez es una reconquista del Paraíso Perdido."[27] In *Cuando amaban las tierra comuneras* we are never sure of Silvestre's direction. Does Mir's Adam want to return to the original Golden Age on the land, or does he want to forget a new Paradise in the urban Eden? El Viejo's speech, quoted above, helps decide the question. "Su tierra" is primary; but Mir attempts to overcome the difficulty of direction by making land refer to nation rather than to a particular plot of soil.

The Romantic heritage that Mir perpetuates late into the twentieth-century is overtly political, and as such contrasts with Jean Franco's characterization of a strain in "boom" literature that makes political statements by dissassociating itself from immediately policital concerns. Her essay, "The Crisis of the Liberal Imagination and the Utopia of Writing"[28] supports and develops a point suggested in Hernan Vidal's study of liberal Romanticism in crisis. Professor Franco makes the esthetic limitation of that crisis abundantly clear. Although such diverse authors as Fuentes, Cortázar, and Sarduy like to consider themselves as revolutionary, at least in an esthetic sense, she points out that the playfulness and the antipathy to praxis that they share are hardly revolutionary at all, but only a reproduction or the current bourgeois culture in pursuit of pleasure. Their utopian and selfreferential art is, in Professor Franco's opinion, "a dangerous kind of modernity"[29] that has joined the enemy because it no longer understands him. Despite the differences between Mir's purposefulness and the estheticism of other Latin American writers today, his Romanticism may be dangeous as well, especially in its pantheism and patriotism. They tend to identify his thought with the *populismo* that Corradi and Spalding criticize in their work.[30] Mir, by the way, was as firm a supporter of Juan Bosch as is indicated in *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras.*

---

[26] Hernán Vidal, *Literatura hispanoamericana e ideología liberal: una problemática sobre la dependencia en torno a la narrativa del "Boom".* (Buenos Aires: 1976)
I am indebted to Professor John Beverly for referring me to this important book and for his useful analysis of Vidal's work in "Ideología y literatura: en torno a un libro de Hernán Vidal" in *Revista Iberoamericana* #102-103, pp. 77-78.

[27] Hernán Vidal, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[28] Jean Franco, "The Crisis of the Liberal Imagination and the Utopia of Writing", *Ideologies and Literature*, (University of Minnesota) vol. I no. 1 Dec. 1976 - Jan. 1977, pp. 6-24.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[30] In an "Editor's Note" to Juan Eugenio Corradi's article, *op. cit.* p. 42 we are given some historical background for the theoretical argument: "Vargas, like Peron of Argentina and Leguia of Peru, presided during the rise of fascism in Europe. Like Peron he adopted much of the language and style of Mussolini and Primo de Rivera, while attempting to develop a power base among previously excluded gropus, principally the urban working classes."

Pantheism and patriotism are inextricably linked in Mir's art. His early and most famous poem, "Hay un país en el mundo" introduces the equation of country with woman in terms that will be repeated in other poems and most recently in his novel.

The land is either virgin or mother, depending on the fecundating intervention of men, a word not to be confused with the generic "humanity".

> Faltan hombres
> para tanta tierra. Es decir faltan hombres
> que desnuden la virgen cordillera y la hagan madre
> después de unas canciones.
> Madre de la hortaliza
> Madre del pan. Madre del lienzo y del techo.
> Madre solícita y nocturna junto al lecho...
> Faltan hombres que arrodillen los árboles y entonces
> los alcen contra el sol y la distancia.
> ...
> Y hombres que se acuesten con la arcilla
> y la dejen parida de paredes...[31]

In the beginning of the novel, Mir describes the land as "siempre maternal". (61) Towards the end he writes, "creo que la madre verdadera y última es la tierra." (310) And his most expansive development of the metaphor occurs around the middle of the narrative, where several pages are given to establishing the analogy between land and woman. His erotic geography proceeds to transform the original analogy into a metaphoric identify.

> toda mujer es una patria en el mismo sentido en que una patria es una mujer y ambas suelen ser amadas por lo que llevan por dentro tanto como por lo que lucen por fuera y así sucede que no pocas veces el amor hacia la tierra que nos ha visto nacer se objetiva topográficamente y dirige nuestra atención hacia sus colinas y sus bosques o hacia sus llanuras y hondonadas o sus cavernas y vallejuelos... como el cutis de nuestra patria (128)

Silvestre, who embodies twentieth-century Dominican history, learns patriotic fervor and sexual lust at the same time. The passions are simultaneous in Mir's narrative because they are two complementary aspects of Silvestre's induction into manhood. (109) His desire for Analicia makes him deaf and blind to the common knowledge that her death is imminent. The girl's weak heart expires imperceptibly with the consumation of their first and only act of love. The story is tragic in personal and political terms; Mir's allegory is probably clearer here than anywhere else in the novel. Silvestre, the Dominican man appropriately rooted in the soil, falls madly in love with Analicia, the personification of the nation: beautiful, sensuous, innocent, but obviously dying. Their mutual love is as absolute as it is doomed. In political terms, the Dominicans have discovered love of country too late. The Republic's unavoidable

---

[31] Mir, *Viaje a la muchedumbre*, p. 7

death leaves them wracked with guilt and tortured by their helplessness, just as Silvestre is distraught by Analicia's death. In both political and personal terms, frustrated love transformed into a devotion to an impossible ideal. With this context in mind, Mir's comment that orphans are created "sólo para seguir a sus madres imposibles" (146) takes on its clearly allegorical meaning. The occupied country is synonymous with a lost mother in Mir's vocabulary, and the orphans are the patriots who convert her into an ideal of independence.

A rather evident dimension of Mir's Romanticism is the theme of *Liebestod* that works both on the fictional and the historical levels of the allegory. The theme is another commonplace of Romantic literature and refers to the allegedly necessary juncture between love and death. In general, the Romantics defined love as desire, that is, the quest for unity with the beloved. If unity were achieved, the quest would end in repose and the lover would therefore forfeit the characteristic that made him creative and truly human. Goethe's Faust, for example, would have lost his soul to Mephistopheles had he admitted at any time that he were sated with experience. How, then, can love be preserved after it is consummated? The answer is apparent in the name of solution: *Liebestod*, through death. The beloved is conveniently converted into an impossible goal which allows the lover to quest forever. The political application of the *Liebestod* theme is, to say the least, problematic. Does Mir condone the Romantic frustration of yearning after a defunct Golben Age? Or does he truly believe that the quest itself will yield results? The latter seems to be the case, because in the provisional ending of his endlessly repetitive novel, Mir puts his three heroes in a car headed for the Capital. We know very little about their politics, except for their Romantic notions about land and absentee mothers. We do know that a civil war is in progress. It seems that for Mir the mere fact that they become involved is enough. The quest itself, or in Mir's terminology the voyage, is primary. If this is Marxism, it is surely a romantic strain.

The concept of patriotism discussed above may be disturbing to a reader who is wary of rightist rhetoric; it is particularly questionable, however, for those who are offended by sexism. Mir's patriotic allegory, like his epic poems, reduces woman to a relatively passive object that reacts docilely to man's activity. It follows that only a man can be a patriot since woman is the "patria" herself. And because patriotism is the only political virtue acknowledged in the novel, women are politically impotent. But Mir's patriotic sexism exceeds his poetic commitment to the land-woman equation. It pervades every aspect of the narrative. The men and the women of the novel are fundamentally different from each other, physically, emotionally, almost culturally. Mir established those differences early in the novel when he explains that sexual differentiation in puberty is social as well as physical: "en los varones ésta es una edad en que empieza a balbucear el interés por los problemas públicos de la misma manera que en las hembras empieza a tomar conciencia el instinto maternal". (47) The only exception is Mir's characterization of Urbana, who is politically almost as daring as a man would be. When the men arm themselves for combat in 1965, Urbana prepares herself with a bus ticket for an itinerant compaign to warm her youthful compatriots that "la patria está en peligro". The youths are, of course,

boys, not girls. Mir finds himself excusing the anomaly of the female activist as soon as he introduce her. He is apparently concerned that his readers will find the presence of a politically active woman to be somehow unnatural and inverosímil. Comparing her with Silvestre, Mir assures us that Urbana contemplated the same "realidad común... desde una perspectiva aunque femenina igualmente sencilla". (37) The apologetic *aunque* is telling. Even if he admits that men and women can be equal, Mir cannot conceive of them as sharing one point of view. He seems to adopt a concept of separate but equal in describing men and women in their traditionnally sex-linked roles.[32]

Urbana, then, remains an unconvincing invention. She is necessary to the allegory as the dialectical complement of Silvestre. Therefore, her being female is an inevitable factor in Mir's spiralling story. But his Romantic and traditional assumptions about women deaden the character before she lives for us. Maybe that is why the gypsy tells her that she is not a person but a "personaje" whose only life is a literary one.

The concept of separate but equal seems to characterize Mir's attitude toward nationalism as well as towards sex relations. He is aware of the conflicting demands made by nationalist and internationalist political movements, but he believes that the two can somehow be harmonized through a spirit of mutual concern and respect. As Fernández Fragoso observes, Mir envisions a peace "que restaure al hombre específico de la América Latina a su territorio específico, en una colectividad armónica que, lejos de negar la individualidad de sus integrantes, la refuerce al nivelarla dentro de la colectividad".[33] Whether or not one believes that this aim is utopian and that national pride tends to promote hierarchies among nations, Mir's attempt to achieve equality and harmony through his art reveals certain contradictions. Probably his most important statement of internationalist, or at least Pan-Latin-American politics is his poem, "Nadie pregunte por la patria de nadie". It is a celebration of brotherhood and, apparently, a rejection of the narrow concerns of nationalism.

> Nadie pregunte por la patria de nadie.
> por encima de nuestras cordilleras y las líneas
> fronterizas, más rejas y alambradas que carácter,
> o diferencia o rumbo del perfil,
> el mismo drama grande,
> el mismo cerco impuro el ojo vigilante.

---

[32] Mir's favorite criterion for contrasting the allegedly inherent characteristics of women with those of men is their relative affinity for family life. Predictably, women have an instinct that binds them to their homes (167;237) All women are experts in the techniques of childbirth (237) They know exactly how to care for their children "sin que nadie lo haya enseñado". (226) Conversely, men lack the "instinto con que la naturaleza ha dotado a la madre para penetrar en las más sutiles modulaciones del alma de su hijo". (173-168)

Mir's early loss of his mother is probably responsible for much of the idealization of maternity here. His sense of loss is painfully clear, even without the biographical datum. But the absolute dichotomization of sexroles in his novel is not entirely excusable. If his thought is based on scientific notions of human biology and psychology, those notions are hardly progressive and certainly they are not the results of a dialectical materialist philosophy.

[33] Fernández Fragoso, p. 97

Veinte patrias para un solo tormento.
Un solo corazón para veinte fatigas nacionales.
Un mismo amor, un mismo beso para nuestras tierras
y un mismo desgarramiento en nuestra carne.
...[34]

The last two lines quoted here reveal one of the difficulties in Mir's poetic ideology. Although he proclaims the indissoluble unity of all people in Hispanic America by refering to "nuestra carne" in the singular, he continues to honor the territorial differences among Latin American by referring to "nuestras tierras" in the plural. The implied regionalism is rather out of tune with the theme of the poem which is repeated in the refrain: "Nadie pregunte por la patria de nadie".

In *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras,* Mir repeatedly emphasizes the distinguishing features of his land and its history: the fact that it was Spain's first colony in America, and that the fire of 1605 marked the end of Spanish domination and the beginning of Dominican autonomy. (151, 178, 270) Even when he admits that the Dominican Republic shares with the rest of Latin America "los mismos rasgos de subdesarrollo y de dependencia" (270), Mir suggests that the transformation of a class society into an egalitarian one will be more natural in his country than in any other because of the peculiarities of its communal tradition.

His pride in that tradition turns to patriotism as he equates communality with the land and the land with his country. Mir credits the American intervention of 1916 with consolidating patriotic sentiments. (47) Four years later, when the occupying forces imposed the infamous land reforms, the Dominican love of country found a militant expression of its outrage. Bands of *gavilleros* resisted the *guerrilleros* of the government for about two years. Aside from the military strength of the American-supported forces, Mir gives a less obvious reason for the defeat of the *gavilleros*. Paradoxically, he suggests that their reason for losing was the same reason they had for fighting: patriotism. Mir's tone is forgiving as he notes that the *gavillero's* relief over the plans for the evacuation of the American forces made them lose sight of the real goal of their struggle: "el comienzo de las gestiones para la construcción de un gobierno provisional que sirviera de premisa para la evacuación de las tropas extranjeras... se volatizaba el fervor patriótico" (22) When the provisional government was established, many *gavilleros* dismantled their bands and made peace with the state. (221) Mir does not criticize their ingenuousness, he accepts their mistakes as lessons learned in the course of history. In any case, he approves of and praises the intentions of the early and misguided patriots. Mir does not attribute their errors to nationalism, even though an objective evaluation would suggest that the rebels lost because they trusted a government of their compatriots more than a foreign government without bothering to determine how their policies differed. On the contrary, Mir blames the failure of the *gavilleros* on the fact that they were not patriotic enough. For him, patriotism is the political virtu par excellence, although he

[34] Mir, *Viaje a la muchedumbre*, p. 24.

admits that it is sometimes "misunderstood". But Mir's effort to clarify the significance of true patriotism are a bit bewildering.[35]

For all his effort to argue that history is responsible for the formation of a national character as well as of the individual personality, Mir's reader is not entirely persuaded. He is more genuine when he professes the opposite and idealistic philosophy - that the dynamics of history are less significant than the essence of language as determinants of culture. Mir makes the statement about the centrality of the Spanish language in the formation of the Dominican

---

[35] In his article, "Acerca de las tentativas históricas de unificación de la isla de Santo Domingo", for example, Mir proposes the extension of Dominican patriotism to include the entire island. He suggests that "los intelectuales progresistas y revolucionarios de ambos países deben concentrar sus ésfuerzos en limar las asperezas que la ignorancia, por una parte, y los intereses más oscuros, por otra, interponen entre estas dos naciones, cuyo destino es paralelo tanto en el sentido histórico como en el de la dirección del futuro". (in *Problemas dominico-haitianos y del Caribe*. Ed. Gérard Pierre-Charles. México: 1973)

This program evinces more optimism than practicality, principally because Mir refuses to acknowledge the problem of racism that continues to breed enmity between the countries. In Mir's opinion, it is absurd to accuse the Dominicans of racism since the vast majority of them are Mulattoes. Therefore, he concludes that they are not racists. (157) cf. also, *Tres leyendas de colores*, p. 196)

Relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic have always been strained. Ever since Haiti won its independence form France, the Dominicans feared the invasion of the "Negro horders", as Fagg refers to the Haitians. In fact, Haiti occupied the Dominican Republic form 1800 to 1844, and represented one of the major reasons for the country's reannexation to Spain.

Fagg comments that Ulises Heureaux, who was proclaimed president in 1882, was a Negro and "he had to overcome the formidable prejudice that Dominicans bore toward persons blacker than themselves". (Fagg, *op. cit.* p. 151) In general, racism has been an undeniable component of the hostility between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Despite the good faith evident in Mir's article, his novel seems to perpetuate rather than to mitigate the traditional hostility between the two countries. In one clear allusion to Haití, Mir notes that the concept of private property was introduced in the Dominicana Republic because of her economic relations with her neighboring country which was capitalist. The communal lands were "fuertemente impregnados por la propiedad privada en razón de los intercambios con la colonia vecina cuando ésta hizo su aparición y alcanzó su desarrollo". (273-74) In the context of Mir's nostalgia for the Golden Age of Dominican communality, the economic influence of Haiti must be seen as an obstruction. In Mir's terms, it marked the beginning of the end. The introduction of capitalism in the Republic made its dependency on more developed capitalist countries inevitable. By suggesting that Haiti is responsible, in part at least, for the demise of Dominican freedom, Mir is hardly helping "limar las asperezas" that divide the countries. His nationalistic vision of history tends to identify the political and economic villains as foreigners and to suggest that conflicts of interest occur among countries rather than among socio-economic classes.

For Mir, the sentiment of national unity obscures class division, especially in the face of foreign oppression: "aunque Silvestre se encontraba en las antípodas de estos sectores distinguidos y con él los más vastos sectores de la porción desposeída de la sociedad el hecho real es que la nación entera se impregnó del sentimiento común de la humillación expresado en el concepto de la patria mancillada y malherida creando una conciencia nacional". (50) Mir chooses not to complicate his analysis by explaining that a significant portion of the Dominican ruling class was heartily in favor of foreign intervention and that certain forces, like Báez and his supporters, attempted to interest the United States in the possibility of annexation of the Dominican Republic.

From the patriotic pronouncement in the novel, it appears that Mir identifies cultural differences as the fundamental cause for the lack of cooperation between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. He is far from explicit on this point. To formulate his notions clearly would be to abandon much of his optimism regarding the possibility for establishing mutual understanding and aid between the republics. In Mir's opinion, culture is synonymous with language. He does not overtly conclude that Haitians will remain alien to Dominicans as long as language continues to separate them; but that conclusion is inherent in the following statement from the novel.

> Yo entiendo que no fue Colón quien nos hizo hispanoamericanos sino la lengua española y con ella la onda espiritual de la cual era portadora y en ella nos hicimos católicos y donjuanes y quijotes y juan de mairenas y unamunos y sobre todo pobres y orgullosos de la pobreza y fue esa lengua española lo único que no destruyó el incendio y lo que permitió que se ordenara una concepción de la supervivencia y un régimen material que permitiera convivir no como fieras sino como seres humanos de la desgracia (273)

national character during an impassioned debate about the heritage of Europe's first outpost in the New World. His endorsement of the position is evident in his comment that the statement satisfied all sides of the argument: "curiosamente los ánimos se apaciguaron". (273)[36]

Mir's analysis of Dominican history is consistent. When left to herself, the nation enjoys prosperity and social equality. The well-being derives directly from the communal cultivation of the land. Private property was unknown before Columbus came and, according to Mir, it vanished from the island when the Spaniards left in 1606. This does not preclude, of course, the fact that private property existed to a limited extent because of the trade with Haiti. Logically, Mir's program for politican and economic recovery is to limit foreign influence and to reestablish the organic unity that traditionally existed between the Dominicans and their land.

The theme of self-reliance and organic development of a socio-economic policy is the core of Quique Villamán's lecture on Dominican history. After he reviews the alternating period of peace and conflict in the country's past, Villamán observes that change is inevitable and that no matter how desirable any institution, it is doomed to be superseded. But change should be organic rather than imposed.

> todo sistema histórico estaba condenado a desaparecer y ser sustituido por otro más moderno... pienso yo que esos cambios no debieran tener por motor a una intervención extraña sino a la comprensión y el esfuerzo de nosotros mismos y por eso una vez más debemos insistir en que si la naturaleza de los terrenos comuneros hubiera sido conocida a fondo... (185)

Mir's own ideas about how his country should solve its own problems are not clear int the novel. Without describing a program for the reestablishment of communal lands, he does indicate that it would constitute a solution. (185) His more specific notions about politics and economics are developed in his studies of history. *El gran incendio* is especially useful in understanding the historical assumptions in the novel. Throughout Mir's analysis of the causes and effects of the great fire, he shows support for the development of capitalism. This is rather surprising, given his identification if freedom as communality. But Mir is evidently following the line of thought in which each stage of history must develop and decay before a new stage is entered. Therefore, since it marks an advance over feudalism, capitalism must be cultivated until it suffers some sort of historical degenerative disease before socialism can replace it. Since Mir's study is devoted to an analysis of Dominican history during the ascension of capital, his criticism of Spain's anti-capitalist policy should not come as a surprise. And yet, his endorsement of capitalism is too absolute to go unnoticed; he credits it with being the motor force of Latin American liberation and makes no distinction

[36] The choice of Machado and Unamuno as representative of twentieth-century Spanish letters draws our attention again to Mir's romanticism and conservatism, especially in the case of Unamuno. While several of his contemporaries in the Generation of '98 insisted that Spain's only political and economic salvation would be the Europeanization of their country, Unamuno argued for the Hispanization of Europe.

between the notions of burgeois revolution and modern revolutionary movements.[37]

Even after independence was won, capitalism remained as the impetus for economic progress, culture and art. Mir illustrates the benefits of capitalism in the novel with San Pedro de Macorís, a coastal city that happens to be Mir's place of birth. The town began to flourish when the independent farmers of the area decided that it would be more advantageous to grow sugar and sell it to the neightboring mill than to continue to raise cattle for more or less personal consumption. The development of capitalism did not spread from Macorís to the rest of the country, as Mir unhappily notes. In this analysis, America's developed capital interest conflicted with the developing Dominican economy. Mir assumes that without the American intervention, Dominican farmers could have continued to cultivate their land communally and sold their sugar to mills that were responsive to the world market. 1920 marked,

> el principio del fin de aquel festival capitalista que pudo haberse extendido por todo el país si no hubiera sobrevenido *la invención de la agrimensura* como decían los campesinos de la zona norte porque al ser abolido el sistema de los terrenos comuneros y pasar el cultivo libre de las tierras al dominio de las compañías azucareras pronto languidecieron los colonos (191)

Mir's economic reasoning is questionable. First, it is difficult to imagine that capitalist goals can be consistent with a disregard for private property. Mir anticipates the reader's incredulity and assures us repeatedly that the Dominican Republic is in fact peculiar in its social formation. Second, Mir seems to ignore the

---

[37] Capitalism needed America to develop fully, according to Mir. "...el impulso formidable que convirtió ese movimiento en el espasmo más gigantesco de la Humanidad hasta entonces conocida, lo dio el Descubrimiento de América." (*El gran incendio* p. 25) Far from finding capital's boom a destructive phenomenon in the New World, Mir seems to favor it. He contrasts the materialist and pragmatic policies of capitalist countries like Holland, England and France with the fanaticism and reaction that characterized Spain's feudalism. (*ibid.* pp. 74-75) Mir observes, for example, that La Española, as well as the other colonies, could have been prosperous had Spain allowed international trade. But her stubborn refusal to understand the opportunities and the obligations of the world market finally resulted in economic and political suicide. Thus, in the earliest period of Dominican history, Spain and feudalism struggled to maintain their ground against the progressive, that is, the capitalist forces. Those colonists who identified Spain as the obstacle to progress sided with Holland, England or France in an effort to break the feudal hegemony over the island. Their rebelliousness was purged by the great fire that spread much farther than Spain had intended.

The independence movement in Latin America continued to be supported by capitalist goals. "A partir de entonces (Holland's independence from Spain in 1648) Independencia y Capitalismo van a hacer un largo recorrido juntos y un día se encontrarán en el Nuevo Mundo estrechamente abrazados. En realidad, sólo en eso consistió la gran epopeya americana". (*ibid.* p. 40)

fact that incipient capitalism in the Republic plunged the economy so deep into debt that intervention was practically unavoidable.[38]

A Brilliant Failure

Efraín Barradas has called Mir's novel a brilliant failure.[39] That characterization is essentially correct, and I believe that the present study supplies some attempts towards substantiating that observation. In esthetic terms, the fundamental contradiction in the novel is between a dynamic form and a static content. Mir's fascinating attempt to model an imaginative work after a progressive vision of history is thwarted by his consistently Romantic assumptions about the land, women, and nationalism. As a result, the reader constantly finds himself drawn in opposite directions: forward and up in terms of the spiralling structure of the novel, and backwards towards an almost timeless paradise that Mir associates with "las tierras comuneras". These conflicting tendencies cause a tension in the narrative that reveals Mir's uneasiness about Marxist philosophy. It seems that for him, Marxism is a method of thought rather than an ideology. Thus, Mir believes that he can employ Marxist assumptions about the inevitable process of history to organize his version of Dominican history. But Marxist principles cannot be made to fit a Romantic interpretation of history, unless the author's intent is to illustrate that the two are indeed incompatible.

Mir is justifiably modest about his own success in employing dialectical materialism in his studies of history and esthetics. But in self-defense he adds that

[38] Much of the first section of Franklin J. Franco's study is dedicated to this issue. He shows that the debts incurred by the developing, but struggling, merchant class made the Republic prey to the intervention of Holland, England and United States. The latter merely assumed the debt and intervened to protect her investments. But Franco, as well as Mir, seems to believe that the problem with capitalism in the Dominican Republic was that it was too dependent on foreign markets and loans. He implies that capitalism would have been a natural and beneficial development, had the Dominicans been left to their own devices. "El escaso grado de desarrollo de los comerciantes se desvió, en primer lugar, a las trabas impuestas por los latifundistas y en segundo lugar, a la decisiva penetración del capital extranjero". (*op. cit.* p. 24).

In *El gran incendio*, Mir reveals most clearly his faith in a society based on the principles of capitalism. He criticizes the institution of slavery in La Española on the grounds that it could not afford the opportunities for social development and personal mobility that capitalism would have offered:

> La verdad es que quienes debieron trabajar como braceros en el Ingenio eran los propios españoles. Inconcebible en la práctica pero lógico en la concepción del problema. La afluencia de la obra de mano procedente de la propia metrópoli habría aumentado la población, habría fortalecido socialmente las demandas de los empresarios, habría enriquecido la industria con un material humano técnicamente más avanzado y a la postre, estos trabajadores se habrían incorporado a la producción en calidad de empresarios por su propia cuenta siendo sustituidos por nuevas promociones de trabajadores que, en la medida del desarrollo capitalista, escalarían también esas posiciones.
>
> El negro no podía cumplir esa misión. Carecía de salario, carecía de conocimientos técnicos, carecía de libertad política para emanciparse económicamente, así como de capacidad económica para libertarse políticamente y convertirse a su vez en empresario. Además, todo el sistema compulsivo tendía a evitarlo. Llevaba instrito en la piel un certificado de defunción como ser social". (p. 76)

Whatever the dreams of capitalism might have been in the sixteenth century, from our perspective it is clear that not all workers can climb social ladders and achieve the status of capitalist. Moreover, the ratio between laborers and capitalists does not permit us to assume that large numbers of workers have been affected by what Mir considers to be the general mobility inherent in the system.

[39] Efraín Barradas, in a recent book review of Mir's novel, *Sin Nombre* vol. IX. núm. 2, julio-septiembre, 1978, pp. 95-96.

his limitations "en no escasa medida derivan de las condiciones de subdesarrollo" of the Dominican Republic.[40] This justification cannot be taken very seriously. As Mir is undoubtedly aware, many serious Marxists have overcome obstacles presented by underdevelopment in countries where the problem was more acute - in Russia and China, for example. His admission that his approach to dialectical materialism is limited does not work as a friendly expression of modesty or as a disclaimer of the responsibility to write serious history. Mir has expended far too much effort in convincing us of his historical accuracy not to take him seriously. His confession reads more like an expression of bad faith than of humility. After analizing his novel, the reason for Mir's bad faith regarding Marxist principles is fairly evident. He seems to be encouraging the development of capitalism, not the establishment of socialism. Of course, he would probably argue that capitalism has to run its historical course before socialism can be introduced, but his conclusions about the immediate needs of the Dominican Republic may well necessitate the qualification or compromising of any radical thought.

Style

The stylistic charm of *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* compensates for much of the thematic inconsistency in the work and for its consequent weakness as an historical novel. Mir delights the reader on every page with his subtle and humorous mastery of the Spanish language, and his respect for the language is evident throughout.

The Dominican Republic, in general, prides herself as the first Spanish speaking territory in the New World. Far from resisting the cultural hegemony that Spain imposed on all her colonies, many Dominicans continued to identify themselves as heirs of the motherland in a period when most Latin American intellectuals were occupied in forging a national identity that would distinguish them from the Spaniards. There were also strong advocates of cultural and political independence in Santo Domingo, to be sure; but the fact that the Republic was reannexed from 1841-1865 attests to the support Spain enjoyed within the ruling forces of her colony. To borrow the terms of Mir's cultural analysis, that support can be considered as synonymous with the respect for the Spanish language. But Mir would not conclude that only the conservative sectors of Dominican society respect Spain's linguistic legacy. For him, the language is the patrimony of all classes. More correctly, the language itself, in other words the culture, joins the classes in a bond of nationhood. Because Mir believes that class conflict can be resolved through the virtue of patriotism, it is virtually inconceivable for him to posit that each class cultivates its own language. In fact, he illustrates the fundamental unity of Dominican speech despite the peculiarities of various sectors. Mir's succesful combination of *cultismo* and *popularismo* in his prose suggests that he had Cervantes in mind a model stylist as well as social scientist.

The two vocations complement each other in Cervantes more fully than in his

[40] Mir, *Apertura a la estética*, p. 6 (cf. Fernández Fragoso, pp. 5-6)

admiring Dominican heir. But Mir's intention to make language the unifying principle of Dominican society in clearly modeled after Cervantes' achievement in using language to illustrate the polarity in Spanish society. The novelists, however, each begin from different points of departure. Much of Cervantes' realism derives from his assumption that his contemporary society is organized in classes whose interests conflict. His genius is able to embody that conflict in the glorious but impractical speech of Quijote, which often simply cannot communicate with Sancho's pragmatic simplicity. But their class differences and conflicting objectives - as they are embodied in very different registers of an infinitely variable Spanish language - do not preclude mutual influence of master and peasant. In stylistic terms, the language of the court and that of the country borrowed from each other. Cervantes was not inventing this literary dynamic; it had characterized Spanish poetry for a hundred years before he developed the social implications of that mutual influence. Mir, on the other hand, begins with the assumption that his nation finds unity in its patriotic resistance of foreigners. Therefore, he is not obliged to elaborate on the foundation of national cohesiveness either in terms of political goals or in terms of language. He merely illustrates that all sectors of Dominican society share one objective, the liberation of their country.[41] In short, Mir's prose resembles Cervantes' in its combination of linguistic registers to reflect the speech of an entire nation. But Mir's synthesis is never as convincing as his teacher's because he will not acknowledge the social conflict that underlies the variation in style.

From the quotes included in the present study, at least one salient element of Mir's style should be evident: the absence of punctuation. Except for one angry and authoritarian exclamation of "¡salgan de aquí carijo!" (108) (from an old

---

[41] Mir does make one notable exception to this picture of monolithic unity in the character of Bonifacio Lindero. He represents those few unethical peasants who got rich at the expense of their compatriots by expliciting rather than resisting the American intervention. Again, conflict in Dominican society is not perceived in terms of classes; rather, it results from the opposition of patriots and traitors. Bonifacio should therefore not be considered a true Dominican because he has little respect for that distinction.

Although Mir's peasant and intellectuals share the common goal of national liberty, he claims to prefer the simplicity of the peasant's formulation of history and politics. That is why Silvestre is his hero rather than one of the lawyers who debate the implications of Trujillo's death in chapter twenty-three. Mir appreciates the speech of the peasants as well as their uncomplicated clarity of thought. His commentary on the conversation about Urbana's remarkable birth illustrates his approval of the rustic style, even if it betrays a hint of condescension.

y esto fue dicho con las sabrosas deformaciones
que el campesino introduce en la lengua española
sin que lleguen jamás a convertir en dialecto a este
sabroso idioma y antes bien dotándolo de esa sensación
placentera que disfruta el paladar cuando se le
añade un condimento a las sustancias que llegan a él (242)

In other words, peasant's speech contributes charm to the standard languages, not substances, as in the case of Cervantes' Sancho. Despite the ideological limitations of Mir's judgement on the kind of influence rustic speech excercises on urbane Spanish, he has succeeded in wresting some of the charm he imputes to Dominican peasants. His prose includes homey expressions that are usually associated with the unselfconscious style of working people rather than with art. But Cervantes proved the faultiness of that distinction. When Mir introduces Romanita, for example, he uses a *refrán* to qualify his description of her independence from her husband: "valga decir independiente de Bonifacio sin que se deba entender dependiente de otro hombre aunque nadie ha podido decir nunca de esta agua no beberé lo cual resulta siempre saludable..." (18)

Mir includes peculiarities of Dominican popular speech, like the addition of superfluous profixes, as in Villamáns memorable command, "muchachos devuélvanse..."

woman protecting the honor of a younger one),[42] Mir does not stop the flow of his narrative with so much as a comma. *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* is not the first work in which Mir has demonstrated the superfluousness of punctuation in his art. The modulations and the complexities of his poem "Amén de mariposas", the preface to *El gran incendio,* and the entire text of *La gran hazaña de Límber* are achieved without the aid of punctuation. But his novel represents the most daring experiment.[43] It must be read aloud, somehow, to make sense. Mir seems to be illustrating that speech has no need of artificial stops and starts. As a poet, he evidently believes that literature should be read aloud and that the musicality of a language is a component of its meaning.

Mir does not simply eliminate commas and periods arbitrarily from a style that would otherwise resemble conventional prose. He extends his thoughts endlessly by cleverly subordinating one phrase to another and thereby illustrating the relationship of cause and effect at every point of his narrative. Connectives like "cuando", "como si", "de donde", "lo cual", "para que", etc. abound in his marathon sentences. They allow him to digress from the mainstream of the narrative in order to make analogies and observations that, at first sight, have little to do with the story. At least one other writer, whom we can consider to be Dominican in more ways than one, has been accused of stylistic abuses that closely resemble Mir's procedure. I am referring to Bartolomé de Las Casas, defender of the Indians of La Española an historian whose aim was to direct rather than merely to describe the course of history, and who was, I suspect, an inspiration to Pedro Mir. Las Casas' prose style has suffered the criticism of some of his most ardent modern admirers. They forgive rather than appreciate his digressions.[44]

But Mir's prose is proof that he would object to the evaluation of the critics of

---

[42] That exclamation may be a synthesis of the entire thematic content of the novel as Prof. Fernández Fragoso humorously suggested to me.

[43] First, it is the longest of his works. Second, it abandons the paragraph organization which makes the preface to *El gran incendio* easy to read. It eliminates even the separation and numbering of episodes which organized the stories in *La gran hazaña de Límber.* Although the novel is divided into chapters very little division occurs within each chapter unless direct speech is recorded. For example, the entire first chapter is one long sentence.

[44] Lewis Hanke, who prepared the complete text of *Historia de las Indias* for publication in 1951, comments on its unfortunate style:

> ...la narración pasa de un tema a otro, sin orden ni concierto, para confusión del lector, y a las veces, hace extraños rodeos o se detiene por completo para dejar paso a capítulos fuera de propósitos. Sus períodos se prolongan confusamente, a veces a lo largo de páginas enteras, sin división en párrafos, y sin un concepto de la construcción. A las veces, su sintaxis es tan intrincada, que un especialista en Las Casas ha sugerido que quizás éste tradujo literalmente testimonios indios y reflejó sin darse cuenta el estilo de los mismo.

(Lewis Hanke, "Introducción" *Historia de las Indias* by Bartolomé de Las Casas, (México, 1951, pp. lxx-lxxi) Las Casas's style has suffered more than criticism; it has been mutilated at the hands of his well meaning but impatient modern translator, Andrée Collard. Her justification for the liberal re-writing of *Historia de las Indias* is, however, well-founded given the fact that the translation is destined for twentieth-century readers of English.

> I have taken into account the needs of the modern reader and have attemped to make Las Casa's diffuse style more accesible: his long periods have been shortened; his repetitions and the plethora of conjunctions they entail have been eliminated whenever possible.

(Bartolomé de Las Casas, *History of the Indies,* translated and edited by Andrée Collard. Harper and Row, New York: 1971) p. vii.

Las Casas's style. He evidently believes that linguistic complexity is necessary if historical complexity is to be adequately conveyed. An although he undoubtedly understands the preference for short, neat sentences in the twentieth century, Mir intentionally evokes the diffuse and digressive style of *Historia de las Indias*, perhaps with the intention of adjusting modern taste to Las Casas rather than the other way around. In any case, the descriptions that the critics offer of the first historian of La Española could easily be applied to the most recent one.

Mir's non-punctuated pages may serve a purpose that Las Casas never dreamed of. They may be intended as an artistic analogy of the "tierras comuneras", neither Mir's prose nor the Dominican land has need of artificial boundaries. Use should determine the limits of the land. Flor's father had made that very clear: "deben conservarla quitándole la cerca que le hayan puesto tan pronto como las tierras no estén en uso". (82-83) Similarly, speech, that is the use of a language, should mark its rhythm. Even though the novel is technically written in prose, it demands to be read aloud as much as any poem does. And the human voice does, surprisingly, supply all the appropriate pauses and modulations when the text is in use.

As if to illustrate the necessity of converting the visual signifier into a spoken message, Mir invents a cryptic expression that is absolutely unintellegible before it is pronounced: "que hacer hacer K del hacer K" (92) The voice demystifies the written word and converts the phrase, which Silvestre found so perplexing, into the fundamental concern of the novel. "¡Qué hacer acerca de la cerca?", is the title of the second part of the book. Much of the humor, as well, depends on an oral reading of Mir's novel.[45]

One of the entertaining aspects of the work is its abundance of plays on words. It seems that they appear on almost every page to lighten even the most serious concerns of the novelist and the reader. But Mir's lightness of touch in manipulating the Spanish language derives from a profound respect and a scholarly familiarity with its development.[46] Many of the linguistic pranks in

---

[45] For example, he has a long digression on the charming familiarity of the name Rufa, short for Rafaela; the familiarity, however, is reserved for Spanish speaking people.

> rr para frustración y tortura de ciertos extranjeros en cuyo idioma no existe como el inglés o el chino y que tiende a evocar situaciones duras como la palabra *reto* o *roca* y *rudo ruido* y *riesgo* verdaderamente rompió las cristalerías de sus divagaciones con el ríspido arrastre de la ráfaga
> Rufa (70)

That last expression seems calculated to tax even the most Hispanic palate. The joke is reversed after 250 pages of narrative when Mir refers to "el nombre inefable de Riverside Drive". He takes "inéfable" literally to mean impossible to pronounce - for a Spanish speaker, that is.

[46] Mir's seriousness about the history of words is probably more evident in his non-fictional works where humor is not a primary objective. *In Apertura a la estética*, for example, he reviews the establishment of the discipline by Baumgarten, who carefully composed the word "aesthetica" from the roots for the senses and ascience. His choice of the "ca" over the "gia" ending reveals to Mir that Baumgarten intended the science to be a practical one, like "matemática" or "química" rather than a descriptive one, like "teología" or "biología". (p. 26) in the same book, Mir explains that the Romans imposed a distinction between speech and thought "oratio" and "ratio", that never existed in the greek "logos". (pp. 116-17) Etymologies help Mir decipher the data of history as well. In *El gran incendio* he traces the word "intérlope" to its Dutch root "looper" meaning runner and notes that in fact Holland engaged in clandestine commerce with the Northern towns of La Española before Spain purged that incursion with fire. (p. 84) The most significant etymology that Mir offers in this book is the paradoxical identification of "negotium" with work, since it was taken to mean the negation of leisure, "negotium". (p. 36) The entire Protestant ethic is thus encapsuled in one word.

Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras are based on an etymological relationship between seemingly disparate words and therefore add more to the text than an irresistible chuckle. They reveal a relationship that would otherwise have gone unperceived and thus increase our fascination with the Spanish language as a vehicle for increasing subtlety of thought.[47]

The irony and humor in Mir's novel never detract from its seriousness. Unlike the novelists of European Modernism, Mir does not use irony to dismiss ideology. He recognizes the irony of his country's history; modern Dominicans cannot avoid that recognition, as the trappings of democratic process often fall away to reveal the brute force of the regime in power. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson gave the Dominicans a very costly lesson in irony. While their protest over the intervention were seconded by international outrage, the American government coerced the OEA into creating the "Inter-American Peace Force" composed of the troops that already occupied the island. While many Dominicans are old enough to remember the second intervention, few remember the first. Mir describes it as one enormous joke. It was so funny that Flor literally died laughing. (81) The Americans had imposed land reform ostensibly to grant peasants legal possession of the land; and Flor was duely promised his 320 *tareas*. He got eight and found the irony too much to bear. Mir's hero, Silvestre, does not draw the conclusion that protest is useless just because Flor's protest was ignored. Instead he joins the *gavilleros* in an armed protest against the invading forces and their Dominican henchmen. Mir never compromises the unifying theme of his novel which is also its *raison d'etre:* love of the land. That theme is evident in the very fitting title Mir gave his novel.

Doris Sommer
Livington College
Rutgers University

---

[47] For example, Mir writes that one of the possible catastrophes that could have provoked old Villamán's frenzied ride was "una inundación que va a liquidar el ganado" (44) Here Mir returns the word "liquidar" to its original meaning to produce an image of cattle melting into the flood. When describing the fire in chapter four, Mir observes that "las llamas se hicieron suficientemente vigorosas como para darle sentido a sus llamamientos a la tranquilidad". (54) His description of Flor's mental health is especially charming; although many conveniently considered him crazy, Silvestre was perfectly sure that Flor "estaba en sus perfectos y pluscuamperfectos cabales" Mir centainly does not intend "pluscuamperfecto" here to refer to Flor's past perfect sanity, but to his more than perfect intelligence. Even though the joke is not original with Mir, he uses it masterfully.

In case the significance of Silvestre's name is not sufficiently clear to the reader, Mir offers a rather superfluous explanation: at the turning point of "su existencia silvestre Silvestre" was forced to begin the life of a capitalist. Urbana's name is highlighted by a play on words so subtle that it goes unperceived in the first reading of the novel. Mir tells us that she lives in New York, that "urbe soberbia" (37), long before he tells us her name. Apparently, knowing that she lives in the greatest urban center of the hemisphere is sufficient. The name Urbana is important to the reader before she reaches the big city; afterwards her name is superfluous.

At one point, at least, Mir alerts us to the multiple meaning of his words in a digression about the sugar train that separated the young Bonifacio from his worried father: "por fin concluyó ese extraño viacrucis que no debe tomarse literalmente poque aquí no significa via de la cruz sino cruce de la vía". (230) The disclaimer is not entirely justified, because the father suffered as he helplessly waited for one hundred cars to pass before he saw the child alive. His agony unavoidably evokes Christ's passion as soon as Mir mentions the possibility that "viacrucis" might be mistaken for "via de la cruz". Mir adds that meaning while he playfully seems to take it away.