

Obituaries

Pedro Grases (1909–2004)

Born at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century and launched from his homeland in the village of Villafranca del Panadés into Spanish America in 1937, Don Pedro Grases lived a remarkable life as a major figure of Venezuelan letters for at least two generations. Although never far in spirit from his cherished Villafranca in Barcelona, Grases adopted Venezuela—its history and culture—with enthusiasm, energy, and efficacy.

An accomplished university citizen with the requisite degrees, publications, and positions, Grases excelled as a premier developer of and contributor to the historical tradition of his native country. An apparently endless list of projects, activities, institutions, and publications reflect his deft editorial hand, keen sense of the historically significant, and omnivorous enthusiasm for the telling bibliographic or documentary detail. Sometimes as the visible author, often as the ghost contributor to or author of the projects of others, Grases's presence informs hundreds of significant publications that helped build the base of historical and literary scholarship in Venezuela. His *Obras* (Caracas, 1981–2002), published in 21 volumes to date, provide the definitive chronicle of his work as author, editor, and compiler. These volumes include not only monographs, essays, and bibliographies, but also his many frequently unsigned prologues and introductions to major works, and they reflect a lifetime in the service of Venezuela's historical patrimony.

Pedro Grases's work falls into a variety of categories. The center of his intellectual contribution converges with the center of the Venezuelan independence creation myth. The heroes and writers, the statesmen and caudillos, the critical campaigns of the independence and early republican era, and the fundamental bibliography of the first half of the nineteenth century provided his principal intellectual base.

Bibliographer par excellence, Grases tracked definitive editions, compiled specialized and general bibliographies, followed the publication histories of early Venezuelan imprints, and captured the multiple versions of the writings of the country's founding generation, placing them all within their historical context. In the Venezuelan tradition of monumental publications of historical

documents, Don Pedro Grases's capable editorial and bibliographical eye shaped many collected editions of the nation's first generations. It emerges in the reedition of newspapers and official government publications of the early republican era, in the careful identification of definitive editions of seminal works, in the sympathetic biographies of historical figures, and of course, in the exacting and demanding task of editing Bolívar.

Through his long association with the Sociedad Bolivariana and his collaboration with the intensely patriotic Venezuelan Bolivarianist establishment, Grases's engagement with the Bolivarian tradition is extensive and substantial. Although his Bolivarianist contributions appear in many places, his role as technical advisor, with his long-time colleague Manuel Pérez Vila, to the currently definitive edition of Bolívar's writing (26+ vols., *Escritos del Libertador*, Caracas, 1964-) symbolizes this lifetime involvement with the Liberator, an engagement no Venezuelan historian or literary figure can escape.

Trained as a philologist and literary analyst, in his adopted country Grases became primarily an expert developer of Venezuela's early republican historiographical and documentary patrimony. He connected the pieces of his American intellectual persona, including the study of language, literature, and the Venezuelan independence generation, through the era's premier literary giant, Andrés Bello. Although Bello's relocation to Chile in 1829 separated him from Venezuela's first-generation history, Grases applied his customary vigor, enthusiasm, expertise, and creativity to a lifetime engagement with Bello's writings, resulting in the multivolume work begun in 1948 under the auspices of the Casa de Bello and published as Andrés Bello, *Obras completas* (26 vols., Caracas, 1981-86).

The final major category of Grases's lifework reflects his own trajectory through the Venezuelan landscape as a public intellectual. Associated with many of the great and near-great of Venezuelan literature, history, society, politics, and business, Grases found friends and colleagues whose involvement in his projects and support for his initiatives reflected his multiple contributions to their intellectual enterprises and cultural dreams. Many of them needed his expertise and abilities to realize their intellectual aspirations, and others found his collaboration and support essential for their own work. Throughout, Grases maintained a clear understanding of his own obligation to the work of others, to the support of people whose motives for engaging in literary and historical work varied widely. Grases judged people by their willingness to participate with ability and commitment in enterprises of intellectual worth. Generous with friends and supporters, he authored many a reflection on the accomplishments of others for commemorative events, publications, and editions. Generous, too, in his

judgment of his enemies, Grases could always distinguish between intellectual accomplishment and political or personal disagreement, however profound. A complete collection of his testimony to these relationships appears in his *Obras*.

We who lived and learned during the Grases period of Venezuelan letters recognize the debt we acquired as we accepted the orientation, the guidance, and the sometimes picaresque wisdom of Don Pedro. We, like so many of our colleagues, rely on his work, his publications, his bibliographies, and his careful tracking of editions and documents. Above all, we learned to love Venezuela and its past from his passion for his adopted country that lives on through his works.

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