

# EMILI MIRA I LÓPEZ

## MIRA TEST

### The eponym

**Mira test.** A graphic expression test that aims to detect what may be called the examined individual's attitudinal formula, in other words, his or her core reactive tendencies, constituting his or her peculiarities of temperament and character<sup>1</sup>. It is also known as myokinetic psychodiagnosis, PMK, MKP, Mira y López myokinetic test and Emili Mira y López expressive graphic test.



Emili Mira i López  
(1896-1964)

## Emili Mira i López (1896-1964)

Emili Mira i López was born on 24 October 1896 in Santiago de Cuba, where his father, Rafael Mira Merino, from Granada, Spain, was stationed as a senior military doctor. In July 1898, when Spain lost the Cuban War of Independence, the family moved to Spain, first to A Coruña, and then, in 1902, to Catalonia, where they definitively settled in Barcelona<sup>1</sup>. Emili Mira grew up, studied, and trained in Barcelona and always considered himself a Catalan.

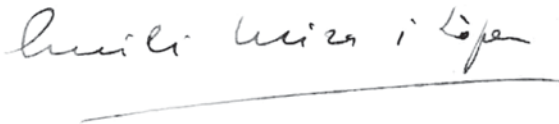
In 1917, at just 20 years old, he graduated in medicine at the *Universitat de Barcelona* with highest honours. He undertook his PhD studies in Madrid in 1922 and in 1923 he was awarded highest honours for his thesis *Las correlaciones somáticas del trabajo mental* (Bodily correlates of human mental activity), published in Barcelona in 1923, the first work in experimental psychology undertaken in Spain<sup>1,2</sup>.

During his undergraduate years (1914-1917), he frequented the laboratory of *Escola de Fisiologia de Barcelona* headed by August Pi-Sunyer, where he was influenced by positivist thought. He employed positivist methods, and this gave him a genetic and evolutionary perspective on organisms and a unitary and functional conception of organisms (the individual's psychophysical unity).

From the start of his professional career, he chose to focus on psychiatry and psychology. He played a significant role in introducing vocational guidance to Catalonia. In 1918, he passed his governmental examinations to obtain an internship at the *Hospital Clínic de Barcelona*. Then in 1919, also by governmental examination, he gained the post of director of the psychology laboratory (this was the year he married Pilar Campins i Garriga, whom he would divorce in 1945 to marry Alice Galland Berthout). Throughout 1920, on a grant from *Ajuntament de Barcelona*

Emili Mira before the beginning of the  
Spanish Civil War, c. 1936

Emili Mira's signature



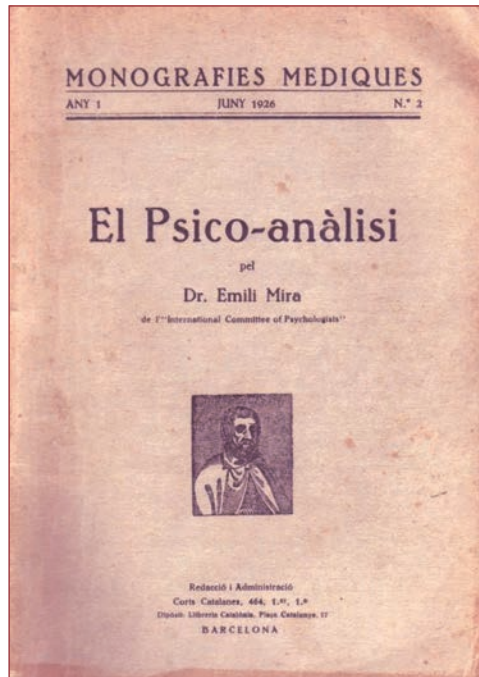
Emili Mira i López



and *Diputació Provincial de Barcelona*, he visited diverse experimental psychology and physiology laboratories in France, Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, and Italy<sup>1,2</sup>.

In 1923, he was one of the founders of the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya*, giving free courses to workers at Barcelona's *Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular* (a working people's learning center or atheneum) until 1927.

In 1926, he began to direct the *Institut d'Orientació Professional de Barcelona* which depended on the *Escola del Treball de la Diputació*. In 1928, it came under control of the Spanish government, passing to the Catalan government in 1931, under the name *Institut Psicotècnic de la Generalitat*<sup>1,2</sup>. This institute, then broadening its functions, created an educational psychology section, with the aim, among others, of connecting with the movements for pedagogical renewal (*Escola Nova*) that were arising in Catalonia. Mira, along with the philosopher J. Xirau,



Front cover of the medical monograph *El Psico-anàlisi* (Psychoanalysis) by Emili Mira i López (1926)

edited the *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia* (Journal of Psychology and Pedagogy), where for the first time he employed the neologism *psicopedagogia* (psychopedagogy) in this country. This institute was very active in research and was very influential throughout Europe; however, its research activity was cut short in January 1939.

Mira was one of the pioneers in introducing German psychiatric trends and psychoanalytical theories into Spain. Along these lines, he published *El psico-anàlisi* (Psychoanalysis) in 1926; this medical monograph was republished in 1935<sup>1-3</sup>.

Together with A. Pi-Sunyer, B. Rodríguez Arias, and J. Vilardell, he was the co-director and owner of the Bonavista medical asylum in Sant Just

Desvern (1927)<sup>1,2</sup>, near Barcelona. During that period, he was often invited to give courses and conferences in the United States (1929, 1933)<sup>4</sup>.

He was an outstanding teacher, prompting the teaching body at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* to unanimously elect him to the first chair of psychiatry in 1933, the first psychiatry chair in the history of Spanish universities<sup>1</sup>. Later, he would sit on the tribunal called to constitute the first chair of psychiatry in Madrid. Also in 1933, he was designated professor of the *Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres i Pedagogia* (Faculty of Philosophy, Arts and Pedagogy), where he taught three subjects: child psychology, child psychopathology, and educational psychotechnics.

The same year, together with Alfred Strauss and Jeroni de Moragas, he founded the first clinic for the observation and treatment of childhood behavioural disorders in Spain, *La Sageta*, fitted with the most modern means. The clinic operated until 1936 when it was completely destroyed at the start of the Spanish Civil War.

In 1935, he was appointed director of the women's section at the psychiatric sanatorium in Sant Boi de Llobregat, near Barcelona. During the Spanish Civil War, he was director of the *Institut d'Adaptació Professional de la Dona*, within the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (Government of Catalonia), and in 1938, he was appointed head of psychiatric services for the army of the Spanish Republic by the *Ministerio de Defensa Nacional*<sup>1</sup>. During the war he formed a group of 32 psychiatrists who were distributed over the five existing war fronts. The psychiatric hospital was situated in the rearguard (about 200 km back), while pre-front psychiatric centres, where patients were admitted for a maximum of ten days, were located about 30 km from the front<sup>5</sup>.

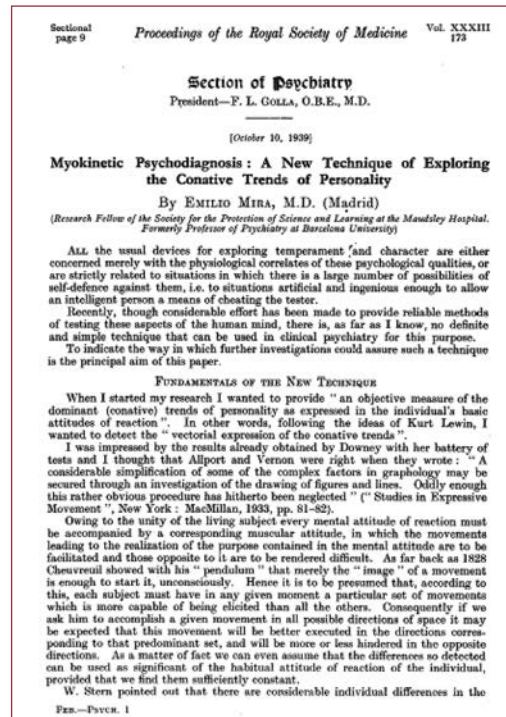
With the Republican defeat in 1939, Mira went into exile for some months in France (his family went first while he remained in Catalonia directing

the evacuation of the patients in his care). Then he moved with his entire family to London, where he received a grant from Maudsley Hospital, enabling him to continue his research and to devise the test that would bear his name. He gave a number of conferences at different universities in the Americas (in the USA and Cuba) before moving to Argentina in 1940, where he worked as a psychiatrist and taught numerous courses and lectures at different faculties in Buenos Aires and at *Universidad de Rosario*<sup>1</sup>. In 1942, he was the Salmon Lecturer invited by the New York Academy of Medicine and was chosen Scientist of the Year in recognition of his contributions to the development of psychiatry.

In South America, he undertook intensive consulting, teaching, and scientific activity<sup>4</sup>. He was director of *Servicios Psiquiátricos y de Higiene Mental* for the province of Santa Fe, Argentina (1943), founder and director of a vocational guidance institute in Montevideo, Uruguay (1944), and was contracted by the state government of Sao Paulo, Brazil (1945) to deliver training courses for vocational guidance specialists, which led to his being hired as the founding director of the Institute of Vocational Guidance in Rio de Janeiro (1946)<sup>1</sup>. He would occupy this position until his death, combining it with prodigious scientific and teaching activity, since he taught courses at many South American universities and attended numerous congresses on psychology and psychiatry<sup>1,4</sup>.

He was secretary of the *Associação Brasileira de Psicotécnica* (1950) and vice president for the Atlantic region of the *Sociedad Interamericana de Psicología* (1955). He reorganized the Department of Psychology at the *Universidad de Venezuela* (1958). As a UNESCO expert, he taught courses at *Universidad Nacional de La Plata* in Argentina (1960), etc. He died on 16 February 1964 from a heart attack (it was not his first). He had returned to Petrópolis, Brazil, after delivering an intensive course on medical psychology at the Faculty of Medicine at *Universidad Nacional de Cuyo* in Mendoza, Argentina.

First page of *Myokinetic psychodiagnosis: A new technique of exploring the conative trends of personality*



During the years of Franco's dictatorship, Emilio Mira was ignored in Spain and defamed on many occasions because of his Republican past<sup>4,6</sup>. However, in 1972, thanks to the efforts of Joan Obiols, professor of psychiatry at the *Universitat de Barcelona*, the first of many future events to pay homage to him was organized. In 1993, a square in Barcelona was named after him, and the *Universitat de Barcelona* published a book on his life and work. In 1996, the centenary of his birth was celebrated in Madrid and Barcelona, with psychologists' colleges and psychology and medical faculties from both cities participating in several events. A letter of homage was also published in the daily press; it was signed by two hundred public figures, from the world of culture as well as from psychiatric and medical spheres<sup>7</sup>. In 1999, the First Catalan Congress on Mental Health was named

the Emili Mira i López Memorial Congress, and a commemorative plaque was placed at no. 35 Rambla de Catalunya stating that Emilia Mira lived there before going into exile<sup>1</sup>. More recently, the name “Dr Emili Mira i López” has been appended to the *Centres Assistencials del Recinte Torribera* in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, near Barcelona.

He published many articles and books, first in Catalonia, and, after the Spanish Civil War, especially in Brazil and Argentina. A 1992 count<sup>4</sup> recorded a total of 313 works (254 articles or monographs and 59 books; of which, 153 were published between 1916 and 1938 and 160 between 1939 and 1965).

His books include *El Psico-anàlisi* (Psychoanalysis, 1926), *Manual de psicología jurídica* (Manual of legal psychology, 1932), *Manual de psiquiatría* (Manual of psychiatry, 1935), *Problemas psicológicos actuales* (Current psychological problems, 1940), *Psicología evolutiva del niño y del adolescente* (Developmental psychology in children and adolescents, 1941), *Manual de psicoterapia* (Manual of psychotherapy, 1942), *Los fundamentos del psicoanálisis* (The foundations of psychoanalysis, 1943), *Instantáneas psicológicas* (Psychological snapshots, 1943), *Psychiatry in war* (1943, translated into Spanish, *La psiquiatría en la guerra*, the following year), *Higiene mental del mundo de postguerra* (Mental hygiene in the post-war world, 1945), *Manual de orientación profesional* (Professional guidance manual, 1947), *El niño que no aprende* (The child who fails to learn, 1947), *Cuatro gigantes del alma* (Four giants of the soul, 1947), *Psiquiatría básica* (Basic psychiatry, 1948), *Cómo estudiar y cómo aprender* (How to study and how to learn, 1948), *Psicología militar* (Military psychology, 1950), *Le psychodiagnostic miocinétique* (Myokinetic psychodiagnosis, 1951; several editions until 1964), *Psicología experimental* (Experimental psychology, 1955), *Guía de la salud mental* (Mental health guide, 1956), *Compendio de psiquiatría* (Psychiatry compendium, 1958), *Factores psicológicos de la productividad* (Psychological factors in productivity, 1961), *Hacia una vejez joven*



(Towards a young old age, 1961), *As vocações e como descobri-las* (Vocations and how I discovered them, 1963), *Doctrinas psicoanalíticas* (Psychoanalytic doctrines, 1963), and *Psicología de la vida moderna* (The psychology of modern life, 1963). Three more of his books were published posthumously: *Futebol e psicologia* (Football and psychology, 1964), *El pensamiento* (Thought, 1966), and *Manual de psicología general* (General psychology manual, 1969). Together with B. Rodríguez Arias, he founded (1924) and edited the journal *Revista Médica de Barcelona*.

He spoke several languages apart from Catalan and Spanish, including French, English, German, and Portuguese. From a young age he translated numerous works by other authors. For example, in 1924, he translated O. Lipmann's *Psychology for teachers* from the German.

He held many positions in societies and academies in Catalonia, including, amongst others, secretary of the *Acadèmia de Ciències Mèdiques* (1925) and general secretary of the *Acadèmia i Laboratori de Ciències Mèdiques de Catalunya* (1928).

## Mira test

Mira test is a graphic mental reaction test, which aims to detect what may be called the individual's attitudinal formula (what might be labelled his or her "psychic skeleton"), in other words, his or her core reactive tendencies, constituting her or his peculiarities of temperament and character. Through this instrument, Mira aimed to create a test that could not be faked or simulated by the individual being examined. In his own words<sup>1</sup>:

"...placing the subjects in an experimental situation in which they not only cannot perceive the purpose of the test, but one where neither are they capable of controlling their performance or responses, since

this is obtained under natural technical conditions linked to one of the psyche's deepest zones: the myopsyche. [...] Its theoretical foundation is that known as the motor theory of consciousness, according to which any intention or proposed reaction is accompanied by a modification of the postural tone that tends to favour movements aimed at achieving the objective and inhibiting contrary movements”.

The test uses a booklet of six numbered pages with outlines for the subject to trace: lineograms, zigzag lines, staircase and circle, chains, egocifugal parallel lines with vertical shapes, and egocipetal parallel lines with sagittal U shapes. Even though it is a personality test, the subject does not know this. The test, conducted in two sessions, includes problems where the subject must transfer the lines of the printed drawings onto the sheets (which they sometimes cannot see because a screen is placed before their eyes), both with the right hand and with the left or both together, on horizontal and vertical planes. Each of the figures making up the test is related to some aspect of personality. Measurement of the deviations (in millimetres) are compared with coefficient tables, enabling many personality traits, both normal and pathological, to be diagnosed<sup>1</sup>.

Mira presented his test, also known as myokinetic psychodiagnosis or MKP (*“psychological diagnosis through muscular movements”*), before the Royal Academy of Medicine in London in October 1939 under the title *M.P.D.: A new technique of detecting the conative trends of personality*. In 1940 he published it in a book, *Psicodiagnóstico miokinético* (Myokinetic psychodiagnosis). In the 1940s, this test was disseminated and was widely used in South America (Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil). During the ensuing decade, it was published in other languages and became common in many countries.

Mira test has often been used in the fields of vocational selection, clinical psychology, psychiatry, and education. Among the qualities of its

application is its reliability for discovering the examined individual's aggressiveness (of special interest in the legal sphere)<sup>1</sup>. In recent years, new technologies have enabled the test results to be digitized, greatly facilitating interpretation of the results.

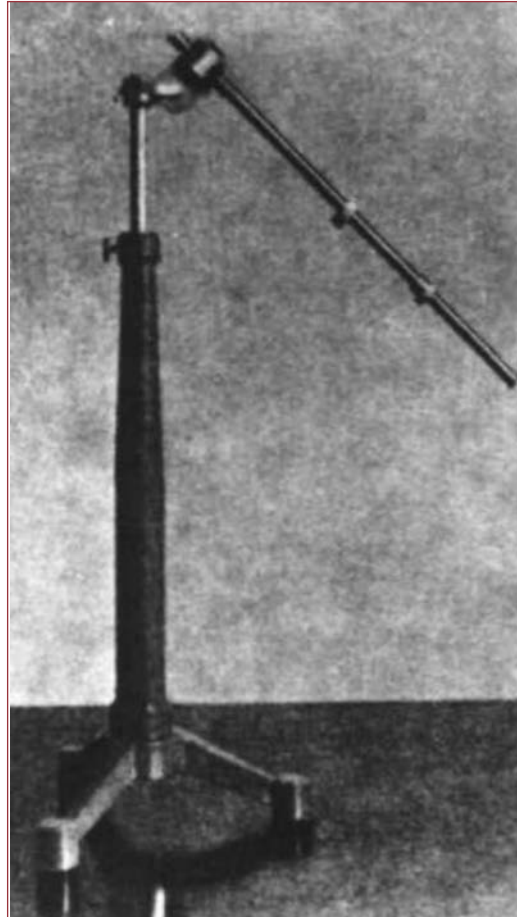
## Other contributions

Emili Mira played an important role in introducing the following fields in Spain: experimental psychology, legal psychology, and the ideas of the German school of psychiatry, and especially psychoanalytic theory<sup>3,8</sup>. Along these lines, during the 1930s, he helped European psychoanalysts fleeing from Nazism settle in Barcelona as political refugees, and he introduced psychoanalytic methods in the psychiatric centres he directed<sup>1</sup>. Mira studied psychoanalysis extensively (reading Freud directly in German) and distinguished three dimensions within it: a method of exploration, a doctrine, and a therapy.

Emili Mira was also, as noted above, responsible for introducing professional guidance into Spain. He conceived of tests, trials, and measuring devices, such as the percepto-tachymeter for selecting vehicle drivers and the axistereometer –a precursor of the myokinetic psychodiagnostic test (Mira test)– used to select aviators for the Spanish Republic<sup>5</sup>. His most significant work in this area is his *Manual de orientación profesional* (Vocational guidance manual), published in Buenos Aires in 1947.

He was also a pioneer in psychology and in psychological guidance in sports: already, in 1937, he had published *Influència de la cultura física en la formació ètica de la joventut* (Influence of physical culture on the ethical formation of youth). He considered that psychological guidance was as necessary for choosing a sport as it was for choosing a profession, and argued in favour of the need for a sports counsellor (physician,

Mira axistereometer<sup>5</sup>



psychologist, or physical education technician) so that everyone, according to their biological type and psychological make-up, should practice the sport best suited to his or her traits, though with an eye to achieving integrated, balanced training. Of especial interest were his works on psychology and soccer, in which he proposed the psychotechnical examination of soccer teams, emphasising the missions of the captain and trainer, analysing each type of footballer's specific



Left: Emili Mira  
i López (1949)

Right: Emili Mira  
i López last  
lecture in Mendoza  
(Argentina) in 1963



aptitudes of, and even delving into the psychology of the crowds of spectators in the stadiums<sup>2</sup>.

The Spanish Civil War undoubtedly influenced psychiatry's development in Catalonia. Mira was one of the strongest exponents of psychiatry during the war. Shortly after the war, he recorded his ideas and experience in *Psychiatry in war*<sup>5</sup>. For Mira, psychiatrists, like other physicians, in wartime situations are above all citizens with certain obligations: to relieve suffering, aid the recovery of combatants, keep combatants strength from failing, and offer the command every possible assistance to win the war. In that period, he described a series of nearly 100 cases of a type of malignant anxiety with sometimes fatal outcome (psychorrexis), publishing the results in the *British Medical Journal*<sup>9</sup>. Other aspects that concerned him were the simulation of cases of neurosis among soldiers and the prevention and eradication of alcoholism among combatants (he even made a film on the effects of alcohol on the liver to

show to soldiers at the front to discourage them from drinking). He also studied fear in situations of armed conflict (first published in *Revista de Sanidad de Guerra* in 1938 and then published in English in *The Lancet* the following year)<sup>5</sup>.

Mira defended psychosomatic unity, advocating the biopsychosocial conception of a person, emphasising the importance of the family setting in the development of neuroses. In this sense, he was a pioneer in the use of family therapy in Spain, extolling the need for the entire family unit to undergo the same treatment plan. Later, when he lived in Latin America, he emphasised the importance of the social setting. In his own words (to cite textually from the biography written by his daughter, Montserrat Mira)<sup>1</sup>: “There can be no healthy individual in a sick society”. Mira defined a sick person as “any individual who suffers or causes suffering”. He thought that the goal of medicine should be to suppress suffering, so somatotherapy (therapy of the body) was very important and must be used together with psychotherapy (therapy of the mind) to restore health. In this way, he merged medicine with psychology, considering psychiatry a branch of both disciplines, more concerned with “morbid disruptions of (implicit or explicit) mental activity with the aim of correcting them”<sup>1</sup>. What is more, he advocated what he called holistic or *eubiatic* medicine, medicine to teach humans to live well: health stems from harmony in the functioning of all organs. Thus, the field of medicine encompasses all sciences that might be related to human well-being, and professionals from diverse backgrounds such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, economists, sociologists, and politicians, should have their roles to play.

In his work as the head of psychiatric institutions, he achieved many improvements in psychiatric services at all levels and considered offering open psychiatric services, as well as closed ones. In psychiatry, his most significant written work is his *Tratado de psiquiatría* (Treatise on psychiatry), first published in Barcelona in 1935. It was republished in Buenos Aires in 1942 in two volumes and again in 1955 in four volumes

(also available in Portuguese by then). This treatise was a key reference work for many psychiatrists for decades.

He also insisted on the need for judges to have knowledge of psychology, arguing that it was more important to prevent crime than punish it. Mira believed it was essential to instill a moral conscience in children and that education is fundamental in achieving a better society. He was also a pioneer in this area, publishing a *Manual de psicología jurídica* (Manual of legal psychology) aimed at legal professionals in 1932, where he stressed that legal psychology must aim first to prevent crime and help criminals readapt to society by offering corrective help, not merely punitive sanctions. Prohibited under Franco, the book was republished in Buenos Aires in 1945. Further editions were published until 1975, and it was translated into French, Portuguese, and Italian<sup>1</sup>.

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