

# The Nature of Rizal's Farewell Poem



Rizal estudió Filosofía y Letras en Madrid por los mismos años en que estudiaba yo en la misma Facultad. ... En aquellos claustros de la Universidad Central debimos de cruzarnos: el tagalo que soñaba en sus Filipinas, y yo el vizcaino que soñaba en mi Vasconia: Románticos ambos.

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En lengua española . . . cantó su último y tiernísimo adiós a su patria, y este canto durará cuanto la lengua española durare.

— Miguel de Unamuno

On the 29th of December 1896, the day before he was to be shot, Jose Rizal was allowed to receive visitors in his prison cell. Among those who came were his mother and his sister Trinidad, nicknamed Trining. On this last day Rizal gave away to relatives his remaining possessions: a book to one, a watch to another, a wicker chair to a third. To Trining he gave a *lamparilla*, a tiny spirit-lamp: one of those cheap tin contraptions consisting simply of a wick and an alcohol-well which had been emptied and wiped dry. This he gave to Trining, expressing regret that he could not give her a better gift.

The visit of course had to be made in the presence of guards who could understand both Tagalog and Spanish; but in giving the lamp to his sister, Rizal murmured softly in English (a language which the guards could not understand) "There is something inside."<sup>1</sup>

Rizal was shot the following morning and was buried in an anonymous grave. Sometime after that, Trining bethought her of the tiny lamp. Her brother had said that there was something inside: obviously it was something which he considered of sufficient value to smuggle out of prison. Trining and her sister Maria examined the

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<sup>1</sup>This account of the early history of Rizal's manuscript follows that in the introduction of Jaime C. de Veyra's critical edition of the poem: *El Ultimo Adios de Rizal, estudio critico-expositivo* (Manila 1946). The incident of the lamp is attested to in a sworn statement by Trinidad Rizal. See below.

lamp, and eventually, with the aid of a hairpin, they were able to extract from it a piece of paper which had been tightly pressed into a small pellet. When spread out it was a single sheet of paper on which was written a poem in Spanish. It was a fair copy in their brother's hand, but it bore no title and no signature. It simply began with the words, "Adiós, Patria adorada" and ended with, "Morir es descansar."

The women of course could not keep the matter to themselves, and the manuscript was shown to other members of the family, including Rizal's widow, Josephine Bracken, who was alluded to in the poem. It was also shown to other friends, some of whom made copies. Today we can copy anything in seconds by pressing a button in a photocopier; in the old days they had to copy things out in long hand, and in this particular case they had to do it in secret and in haste — which accounts for the variant readings which subsequently appeared in the early printed editions.<sup>2</sup>

It was fortunate that they had made copies, because the original manuscript promptly disappeared. No one was quite certain what had happened to it. Someone in Manila may have stored it away for safekeeping, or (it was supposed) the widow may have taken it with her when she left the Philippines for Hong Kong. In any case, a copy of the poem turned up in the Crown Colony in early January 1897, a few weeks after Rizal's execution. It came to the hands of the Filipino expatriate, Jose Ma. Basa, who showed it to another Filipino then staying in Kowloon, Mariano Ponce, a personal friend of Rizal's. Ponce had it printed for distribution among friends. The cost could not have been great; for it was printed on a single galley sheet. Ponce gave the poem a title: *Mi último pensamiento*.<sup>3</sup>

It was probably one of those printed sheets that found its way to Madrid, for in July of that same year the poem appeared in the periodical *Germinal*. Thus, the first two printings of the Spanish text of Rizal's *Adiós* were made abroad during the year 1897, while the Philippine Revolution was still in progress in Cavite and Biak-na-bato.

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<sup>2</sup>The early printing history of Rizal's *Adiós* is given by Wenceslao E. Retana in no. 140 of his *Bibliografía rizalina*, appended to his biography of the hero: *Vida y escritos del Dr. Jose Rizal* (Madrid 1907). De Veyra follows Retana closely.

<sup>3</sup>Ponce's account of how he came to publish Rizal's poem in Hong Kong is given by Retana, *loc. cit.*

One of the printed copies from Hong Kong must also have found its way to Singapore, for it was there that the poem was first introduced to the English-speaking world. The Austrian scholar, Ferdinand Blumentritt, had published in German a biographical essay on Rizal; this was translated into English by Howard W. Bray and published in Singapore in January 1898. To it Bray appended his own English translation of Rizal's *Adiós* which he entitled "My Last Thoughts" — a faithful rendering of the Hong Kong title.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, within thirteen months of the poet's death, Rizal's "*Adiós*" had been published in its original Spanish text in Hong Kong and Madrid, and an English translation had appeared in Singapore, before the majority of his countrymen in the Philippines had even guessed that such a poem existed.

### *Philippine Publication*

Its first publication in the Philippines came about in dramatic circumstances. To understand the situation, it is worth noting the dates.

Dewey had destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay on May 1st, 1898. Nineteen days later, Aguinaldo returned from Hong Kong, and the following day announced a resumption of the revolution against Spain. Three weeks later, on June 12th, Philippine Independence was proclaimed at Kawit. Three months after that, on September 15th, the Congress which Aguinaldo had summoned to draft a Constitution met at Malolos amid great rejoicing, tempered with anxiety over the growing American presence.

The anxiety had an objective basis: for on June 30th, eighteen days after Aguinaldo had proclaimed the independence of the Philippines, American troopships had arrived, depositing near Manila a fighting force of 115 officers and 2,386 men. That first landing was followed by eight other expeditions, bringing the total American strength to 55,000. Obviously, an army so large had not been landed on Philippine soil merely to give the American soldiers a holiday.

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<sup>4</sup>Bray's translation of Blumentritt's essay was entitled "A Biography of Dr. Jose Rizal by Ferdinand Blumentritt." The original text had appeared in the International Archives of Ethnology. (Retana, *op. cit.*; DeVeyra, *op. cit.*)

But there was worse to come; on August 13th, the Walled City of Manila, which had been surrounded by Filipino troops at first, and later by the Filipinos on two sides and by the Americans on a third, surrendered, but only to the Americans. The capital of the Archipelago was now in American hands, to the exclusion of the native forces who had helped to bring about its surrender.

To the Filipino intelligentsia, these were ominous signs. There was growing anxiety that the independence proclaimed at Kawit might soon be lost, and that the Filipinos, in shaking off the Spanish yoke, might merely have exchanged it for another.<sup>5</sup>

It was in that atmosphere of elation combined with anxiety that Rizal's poem was first published in the Philippines. Antonio Luna had begun the publication of a newspaper on September 3rd, less than a fortnight before the opening of the Malolos Congress. On September 25th, ten days after the inauguration of that Congress, Luna's newspaper (significantly entitled *La Independencia*) came out with a special issue containing several of Rizal's poems. Among them was the "Adiós." And it was on that occasion that the poem bore for the first time what was to become its definitive title: *Ultimo Adiós*.

Three months later, on 30 December 1898, Filipinos celebrated for the first time what was to become known as "Rizal Day." On that occasion, the second anniversary of Rizal's death, another Filipino newspaper, *La Republica Filipina*, reprinted Rizal's farewell poem, adopting the title that *La Independencia* had given to it three months earlier.

The appearance of this and of other poems of Rizal in such a historical context had an electrifying effect upon the Filipino intelligentsia. It inspired good deal of literary activity among the poets, among them the three who were on Antonio Luna's editorial staff, namely, Cecilio Apostol, Fernando Ma. Guerrero, and Jose Palma. It was the latter who wrote the words to the already existing music of the Philippine National Anthem.

After that twofold appearance in print in late 1898, Rizal's *Ultimo Adios* became common property. It was reprinted many times in

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<sup>5</sup>This thought of exchanging one yoke for another was commonly expressed at the time. For example, Cecilio Apostol ends a sonnet to Rizal with the words: "*oh pueblo, amente ilota!*" (Oh nation, once again enslaved!).

Spanish and in translation, in the Philippines and abroad. For nearly five decades many a literary-musical program in town and barrio would include a recitation of the poem by adult voice or childish treble — in some cases perhaps, without full comprehension of the poem's meaning. But its gist was at least understood; and the influence which this poem has exerted upon the thinking of Filipinos during the next four decades is incalculable. The poem became so identified with the Philippines that an American congressman considered it good form to recite it on the floor of the United States Congress in support of a Philippine bill.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Original Manuscript*

The early editions and translations of the poem had been made from copies (or from copies of copies) because the original manuscript was not available. This explains the textual variations in the various editions. But the authentic text was established once and for all when the original manuscript came to light. It turned up, unexpectedly, in Washington. In 1908 an American "who had travelled to the Orient" presented what he claimed to be the original manuscript of Rizal's poem to the Bureau of Insular Affairs of the United States War Department which had jurisdiction over the Philippines and other "island possessions of the United States." He was willing to sell the document at the price for which he said he had bought it: five hundred U.S. dollars, the equivalent at the time of one thousand Philippine pesos. Informed of the offer, the Philippine Insular Government took out an option, pending verification of its genuineness. This verification was promptly made in Manila. The document was shown to Rizal's sister, Trining, who at once recognized it as the original manuscript which had been smuggled out of Fort Santiago in a spirit-lamp. In a sworn testimony dated 14 October 1908 she recounted the circumstances under which she had originally come into possession of that document. Thus reassured, the Philippine Insular Government

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<sup>6</sup>The congressman was H. A. Cooper, chairman of the committee on Insular Affairs. Cooper was reciting from the translation of the poem appended as an introduction to a novel (entitled *An Eagle in Flight*) adapted from the *Noli me tangere* (New York 1900). De Veyra, *op. cit.*, who also reproduces the text of that translation in Appendix B, pp. 97-98.

purchased the manuscript and entrusted it to the National Library, where it has since been photographed and repeatedly reproduced in facsimile.<sup>7</sup>

So much for the manuscript. Let us now come to the poem itself.

### *The Poem*

The poem consists of fourteen stanzas of five lines each, each line consisting of fourteen syllables. The rhyme-scheme is abaab, complicated and enriched by internal rhymes and assonantial echoes, which is not unusual in Spanish verse.<sup>8</sup>

But the chief merit of this poem does not consist in its external form. It is its internal nature that is remarkable: what does the poem really "say"? And how does the poet "say" it? One clue to this internal nature of the poem is the type of imagery used. The images are drawn almost entirely from the rural landscape: sun, moon, wind, rain, clouds, grass, flower, bird, grave; the earth, the sky, the valleys, the atmosphere, the dawn; etc. In short, this is nature-poetry in the tradition of the European poets (classic and romantic) with whose works Rizal was acquainted; and in the tradition likewise of the native poetry contained in popular songs.

It is possible to dismiss some of this imagery as cliché: for instance, *region del sol: perla del mar* (sunny region; pearl of the ocean) — images mentioned but not exploited and not organically incorporated into the thought-pattern. But much of the nature imagery cannot be so dismissed. Take for instance this piece of poetic whimsey:

Si sobre mi sepulcro vieres brotar un día  
Entre la espesa yerba, sencilla humilde flor,

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<sup>7</sup>De Veyra, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup>For instance, in the opening stanza, the word *querida* rhymes with *vida* and *florida*, but is also echoed by *adorada* and by the *a* sounds in various words (*perla*, *fuera*, *fresca*, *mustia*) and in the twice-repeated *diera*. Similarly, *edén* rhymes with *bien*, and is echoed in *tambien*; there is also assonantial kinship with *región*. Thus:

*Adios, patria adorada, región del sol querida,  
Perla del mar de Oriente, nuestro perdido edén.  
A darte voy alegre la triste mustia vida;  
Y fuera más brillante, más fresco, más florida,  
También por ti la diera, la diera por tu bien.*

Acércala a tus labios y besa al alma mía;  
Y sienta yo en mi frente bajo la tumba fría,  
De tu temura el soplo, de tu hélito el calor.<sup>9</sup>

The poet identifies himself with the flower that grows over his grave. The native land, personified as a woman, is asked to kiss the flower, thereby kissing the poet's soul. The kiss thus planted is warm, and the dead poet, lying in the cold grave, feels the warmth upon his brow. The contrast between the cold grave and the warm breath implies that the native land's kiss restores life to the dead.

Or to be precise, not life but warmth and affection: for in the thought-pattern of this poem, the dead are never really dead; they continue to live, to feel, to love. On a dark night when the graveyard is enwrapped in mystery, "only the dead are awake." On such a night, the dead poet might actually serenade his beloved land, as the youthful suitors in Philippine villages are wont to serenade their sweethearts.

Y cuando en noche oscura se envuelva el cementerio,  
Y solos sólo muertos queden velando allí,  
No turbes su reposo, no turbes el misterio;  
Tal vez acordes oigas de cítara o salterio:  
Soy yo, querida Patria, yo que te canto a tí.<sup>10</sup>

It is an eerie image, of course; but there is no mistaking the tone. It is the poem of a person in love. There is tenderness in the whispered alliteration: "Soy, yo querida Patria, yo, que te canto a tí" (It is I, beloved land, I, who am serenading you).

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*<sup>9</sup>If over my grave some day thou seest grow  
In the grassy sod a humble flower,  
Draw it to thy lips and kiss my soul so,  
While I feel on my brow in the cold tomb below  
The touch of thy tenderness, thy breath's warm power.  
(Derbyshire translation)*

*<sup>10</sup>And when in dark night, shrouded obscurely the graveyard lies,  
And only the dead keep vigil the night through,  
Keep holy the peace, keep holy the mystery;  
Strains, perhaps, you will hear of zither or psalter,  
It is I — Oh land I love! — it is I, singing to you.  
(Nick Joaquin translation)*

This affords us a clue to the real nature of this poem. It is more than just a farewell poem in which a person who is about to die says goodbye to his loved ones. It is much more than that. It is a love-poem, a love-song. In this case, the Beloved is the native land personified as a woman.

This personification is not difficult to carry through in Spanish because the word for native land is feminine — *Patria* — which is also a woman's name. It means more than just land. It includes everything connected with one's birth and upbringing: landscape, people, culture, songs, beliefs, values — everything, in short, for which the Horatian patriot is willing to die:

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

This is the basic reason why it is so difficult to translate Rizal's farewell poem into English. Rizal is talking to a woman, *Patria*; but in English he is made to talk to a masculine abstraction, "Fatherland"; there is no poetic equivalence between the two.

It is crucial to the understanding of this poem to recognize that it is a love-poem. Unless this is understood, there is no adequate explanation (beyond mere sentimentality) why the poet should be so glad to die; or why he should be so anxious to become one with the elements. What he is in fact seeking is as close a union as possible with the beloved land. The land is described in endearing terms: *adorada* (adored); *idolatrada* (idolized); *querida* (beloved). She is *ensueño de mi vida* (the object of my dreams); she is *dolor de mis dolores* (the object of my sorrows). For her, he would be glad to die, even if his life were much better, much more valuable than it actually is:

Y fuera más brillante, más fresca, más Florida,  
También por tí la diera, la diera por tu bien.<sup>11</sup>

It is the poet's wish that his death might be of some benefit to his dear land — if in nothing else, at least his red blood might be used as "grain" to deepen the redness of the dawn. "Grain" of course was the dye used in Roman times to empurple the imperial robes, purple being

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<sup>11</sup>*Were my sad life more radiant far than mortal tongue could tell,  
Yet would I give it gladly, joyously for thee,  
(Bray translation)*



(as Newman says in an inspired passage) the color "of empire and of martyrdom." There is therefore nothing startling in the first lines of that beautiful and oft-quoted third stanza:

Yo muero cuando veo que el cielo se colora  
Y al fin anuncia el día tras lóbrego capuz;  
Si grana necesitas para teñir tu aurora,  
Vierte la sangre mía, derrámala en buen hora —

I die (he says) just when I see the sky begin to redden, when the sun is about to emerge from its black tomb. If you should need grain to empurple your dawn, take my blood, pour it copiously —

But here, there is a twist in the thought. The dawning sky is red as long as the sun itself is not yet visible. But the sun is golden, and when it appears it transforms everything into gold. Hence the twist in the last line of the third stanza:

Y dórela un reflejo de tu nadente luz.

(And gild it into a reflection of your rising light.) There are two colors involved: red and gold. The red blood and the red dawn and the reddened earth are all transformed into gold by the rising sun. The blood helps in the transformation. Those who are seeking symbolic interpretations can have a field day with that stanza.

### *Enchanted Land*

What seems to be the key phrase of the poem occurs in the fifth stanza:

...ah, que es hermoso caer por darte vuelo;  
Morir por darte vida, morir bajo tu delo,  
Y en tu encantada tierra la eternidad dormir.<sup>12</sup>

*En tu encantada tierra*: to sleep forever (or rather, to remain forever awake) in your enchanted earth. That is the key phrase. In subsequent stanzas, various details are given which are parts of this land's

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<sup>12</sup>*Oh, how sweet it is to fall beneath thy sky,  
To die that thou mayst live, and for thy welfare high,  
In thine enchanted bosom eternally to sleep.*  
(Bray translation)

"enchantment." For instance, "Let the moon shine over me with soft tranquil light"; "let the dawn show forth its fleeting splendor"; "let the sun dry up the rains and bring them back as pure vapor to the sky"; "let the winds murmur gravely"; "if on my cross a bird should alight, let it sing there its hymn of peace"; and so on. These are all qualities of the "enchanted land" in whose bosom he desires to rest forever.<sup>13</sup>

Paradoxically, the poet will only achieve his closest union with the beloved land after his body has been powdered to dust and when his grave has been plowed up. His dust will then form "part of the earth's carpet"; the dust blown by the winds will allow him to roam freely "through your atmosphere, your space, your valleys." Thus disembodied, he will be ever present to his beloved land in many forms: as pure note to the ear; as light and color to the eye; as fragrance to the nostrils; as "murmur, song, sigh":

Entonces nada importa me pongas en olvido.  
 Tu atmósfera, tu espacio, tus valles cruzaré;  
 Vibrante y limpia nota seré para tu oído;  
 Aroma, luz, colores, rumor, canto, gemido;  
 Constante repitiendo la esencia de mi fe.<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting to compare that thought with an analogous idea expressed by a more recent poet. Rizal wrote in Manila in 1896; Pablo

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<sup>13</sup>These concepts are expressed in the following lines:

*Deja a la luna verme con luz tranquila y suave;  
 Deja que el alba envíe su resplandor fugaz;  
 Deja gemir el viento con su murmullo grave;  
 Y si desciende y posa sobre mi cruz un ave,  
 Deja que el ave entone un cántico de paz.*

*Deja que el sol, ardiendo, las lluvias evapore  
 Y al cielo tornen puras con mi clamor en pos;*

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<sup>14</sup>No matter, then, if all forget, still, still shall I be near,  
 Still shall I breathe thy od'rous air, still wander in thy ways,  
 And dwell in space, a thrilling note loud sounding in thine ear;  
 I shall be perfume, light and shade, sound, colour, refrain clear,  
 Telling forever of my faith and singing thy praise.

(Bray translation)

Neruda was writing in Chile in the mid-1930's. Four decades and an entire ocean separated the two poets. They belonged moreover to different poetic traditions: Rizal was a romanticist; Neruda a surrealist in the Latin-American manner. Yet listen to the following fantasy which Neruda indulges in, concerning his dead friend Alberto Rojas:

Entre plumas que asustan, entre noches,  
entre magnolias, entre telegramas,  
entre el viento del Sur y del Oeste marino,  
vienes volando.

Bajo las tumbas, bajo las cenizas,  
bajo los carracoles congelados,  
bajo las ultimas aguas terrestres,  
vienes volando.

Mas allá de la sangre y de los huesos,  
Mas allá del pan, mas allá del vino,  
mas allá del fuego,  
vienes volando.

Sobre tu cementerio sin paredes  
donde los marineros se extravían,  
mientras la lluvia de tu muerte cae,  
vienes volando.

El viento negro de Valparaíso  
abre sus alas de carbon y espuma  
para barrer el cielo donde pasas,  
vienes volando.

Vienes volando solo, solitario,  
solo entre muertos, para siempre solo,  
vienes volando sin sombra, sin nombre,  
sin azucar, sin boca, sin rosales,  
vienes volando.<sup>15</sup>

The techniques are indeed totally different. Yet the ideas are analogous: the disembodied spirit, freed from its mortal trammels, is free to roam everywhere and be present to everything.

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<sup>15</sup>For the translation of Neruda's poem, see Appendix below, at the end of the article.

Yet there is an important difference between Rizal's thought and Neruda's. In Rizal's poem the disembodied spirit becomes intimately united with nature. In Neruda's, there is no union. The spirit remains aloof, alone:

solo, solitario  
solo entre muertos, para siempre solo.

Alone, solitary, alone among the dead, forever alone.

But whether alone or united with nature, the idea that the soul lives on after death represents a totally different concept of death from that expressed by Keats:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy . . .

The difference is in the fact that the poet loses consciousness when he dies:

To thy high requiem become a sod.

In Rizal's poem, the poet does indeed become a sod, but he retains consciousness. Nor is there a question of a pantheistic union with nature where the individual personality is lost and absorbed in the great infinite: in Rizal's poem the closest union is sought but without loss of personal identity. This is in fact (though unobtrusively) a Christian poem, in which the person who is about to die asks for prayers for his soul:

Y en las serenas tardes cuando por mí alguien ore,  
Ora, también, oh Patria, por mi descanso en Dios.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *On evenings clear, when o'er my tomb  
some gentle being prays,  
Pray also thou, O fatherland, for  
my eternal rest.*  
(Bray translation)

He also asks for prayers for others, for all those in misfortune. This is in fact the only political allusion in the poem —

Ora por todos cuantos murieron sin ventura;  
 Por cuantos padecieron tormentos sin igual;  
 Por nuestras pobres madres que gimen su amargura,  
 Por huérfanos y viudas, por presos en tortura,  
 Y ora por ti, que veas tu redención final.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from this and two other lines in the penultimate stanza, there is no mention of the injustice which the poet himself has suffered: he has been exiled, imprisoned, condemned to death. All this was unjust, yet he does not denounce the wrong done him. Merely by indirection a suggestion is made that injustice does exist, that many suffer from it, and that death is a release from oppression.

### *A Noteworthy Achievement*

What Rizal has done is noteworthy. About to be put to death unjustly at an early age — thirty-five — and wishing to leave behind a legacy in writing (which he takes the trouble to smuggle out of prison in a tiny lamp), there were several options open to him. He could write a scathing denunciation of the tyranny under which his country was groaning (something that he had actually done in his essays and novels); or he could write an impassioned defence of his innocence with a plea for justice; or he could assume a teacher's posture and leave behind sage maxims for his followers. He does none of these things. Faced with impending death, he writes a love song. For this reason, although this is a very serious poem, it is neither melancholy nor basically sad. It is suffused with resignation, tenderness, and hope. Death itself is looked upon as a desirable end to toil:

Dad gracias que descanso del fatigoso dia.

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<sup>17</sup>*Pray for all those that hapless have died,  
 For all who have suffered the unmeasur'd pain,  
 For our mothers that bitterly their woes have cried,  
 For widows and orphans, for captives by torture tried;  
 And then for thyself, that redemption thou mayst gain.*  
 (Derbyshire translation)

“Be grateful that I should rest from the toilsome day.” Death brings rest: *morir es descansar*. It also brings justice. It is the gateway into a kingdom where justice will prevail at last; where there is only one ruler — the just and merciful God; where there are no tyrants, no executioners, no slaves;

donde la fue no mata:

where one is not put to death for one’s convictions.

### *An Asian Poem?*

This brings up a question suggested by two sections in a perceptive essay on Rizal written by the well-known Spanish writer, Miguel de Unamuno. In one section he speaks of Rizal “*el español*” and in another section of Rizal “*el tagalo*.”<sup>18</sup>

Unamuno did not know Rizal personally, but their paths may have crossed at the university in Madrid where Rizal was completing his studies while Unamuno was beginning his. Unamuno implies that they were kindred spirits: (‘He was dreaming of his Philippines while I was dreaming of my province of Vizcaya; we were both romanticists.’ Both of them studied under the same professor of Greek literature — Don Lazaro Bardon — who (Unamuno claims) exercised a perceptible influence on Rizal. Not knowing Rizal personally but only from his writings, Unamuno came to two seemingly contradictory conclusions: (1) That Rizal was “profoundly and intimately Spanish.” (2) That he was the epitome of his native Tagalog culture. The word Unamuno used was *simbolo*, which (he said) he was using in its original Greek meaning of “a compendium, a summing up” — in short, an epitome. Unamuno’s opinion raises a psychological question: is it possible for anyone to be “intimately and profoundly Spanish” and at the same time be the embodiment of his native Philippine culture?

Setting aside the psychological question in the abstract, what of the *Ultimo Adiós*? It is written in a Western language; its imagery can apply as much to an occidental as to an oriental landscape; it deals with death and with love for one’s native land — themes which are as

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<sup>18</sup>Unamuno’s essay is appended as an epilogue to Retana’s *Vida y escritos del Dr. Jose Rizal*, pp. 475-498.

common to the West as to the East. Is this then an Asian poem? If so, in what way?

Here we are in the realm of personal opinion, and mine carries no weight of authority. But for what it is worth, here it is. What is Asian in Rizal's *Adios* is its very essence, namely its basic attitudes: a personal love for country; a yearning for union with nature; an acceptance of death and misfortune; a refusal to abandon hope in the face of seeming hopelessness; a faith in God's compassion and His justice; a belief in survival after death. Also filial piety: the kind that in moments of grave crisis thinks of all those connected to one by blood or affection:

Adiós, padres, hermanos . . .

Amigos de la infancia . . .

parents, brothers and sisters, childhood friends, all of them very dear (*queridos seres*). He does not forget the woman whom he has married, the "sweet foreigner" whom he is leaving as a widow:

Adios, dulce extranjera, mi amiga, mi alegría.<sup>19</sup>

Such attitudes of course are not exclusively Asian. They are common to all humanity. But the Asian possesses them in high degree and in conjunction. Had Rizal not been an Asian, would he have written a poem such as this? Would not a ringing denunciation of tyranny have been more appropriate?

But to an Asian, denunciations are out of place when facing death. There was indeed a time for denunciations: when writing one's novels; when writing articles for the periodical *La Solidaridad*. Death was no longer the time for that. Death was a time for forgiveness, for acceptance, for thinking of one's loved ones, for prayer, for peace. Therefore a time for a love-song, in keeping with the spirit of the love-songs of one's native land — like the *kundiman* or the *balitao*.

The fact remains, however, that Rizal wrote the *Ultimo Adiós* in Spanish; and on this point, Unamuno may be allowed the last word. He bestows upon the poem the highest praise that a Spaniard can give: "Rizal sang his farewell song in Spanish; and that song will remain alive, as long as the Spanish language itself is living."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Nick Joaquin translates this line thus: "Farewell, sweet foreigner, my darling, my delight."

<sup>20</sup>For the Spanish text of Unamuno's comment, see the epigraph to this article.

## APPENDIX

The lines from Pablo Neruda quoted above are translated as follows by H. R. Hays, *Twelve Spanish American Poets* (Boston 1972):

*Between fearful feathers, between the nights,  
Between the magnolias, between telegrams,  
Between the south wind and the sea wind of the west,  
You come flying.*

*Below tombs, below ashes,  
Below frozen snails,  
Below the deepest terrestrial waters,  
You come flying.*

*Farther than the blood, farther than the bones,  
Farther than bread, farther than wine,  
Farther than fire,  
You come flying.*

*Over your unwall'd cemetery  
Where sailors go astray  
While the rain of your dust falls,  
You come flying.*

*The black wind of Valparaiso  
Spreads its wings of smoke and foam,  
To sweep the sky where you pass,  
You come flying.*

*Alone among the corpses, forever alone,  
You come flying without a shadow, nameless,  
Without sugar, without a mouth, without rosebushes,  
You come flying. ☞*

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The translation of Rizal's *Adiós* quoted here are those by Howard W. Bray (Singapore 1897); Charles Derbyshire (Manila 1912); Nick Joaquin (Manila 1969). While this article was in press, a new translation of Rizal's *Ultimo Adiós* appeared in Cebu, by Ramon Echevarria, published in the journal of the University of San Carlos: *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, VI (Dec, 1978), pp. 205-209.