# *My Last Farewell*

By JOSE RIZAL
*(Translated by J. Collas)*

*Farewell, dear Motherland, realm by the sun caressed,*
*Pearl of the Orient sea, our Eden lost!*
*Gladly I'm giving thee this life sad and distressed.*
*Were it brighter, fresher, and with fragrance more blest,*
*Still would I give it thee, for thine own good—at most!*

*On the fields of battle in the frenzy of fight,*
*Others give thee their lives with neither doubt nor heed.*
*The place matters not—cypress, laurel, lily white,*
*Scaffold or plain, combat or the martyr's woeful plight:*
*'Tis all the same when home and country stand need.*

*I'll die when I behold the sky with radiance flushed,*
*Heralding through the gloom of night the break of day.*
*If red dye thou needest to tinge thy dawn still hushed,*
*Pour out my blood at will, let life itself be crushed,*
*And with its crimson gild the rising ray.*

*My dreams when yet a boy—my thoughts were then of thee—*
*My dreams when in the prime of youth—love flitting by—*
*Were to see thee one day, Gem of the Eastern sea,*
*Thine eyes undimmed by tears, thy lovely forehead high,*
*From frown and furrows and from blush entirely free.*

*Dream of my life, my living, all-burning desire,*
*All hail! bids thee the soul that soon shall wing its flight.*
*All hail! how rich 'tis to fall that thou mayst aspire,*
*To die to give thee life, 'neath thy sky to expire,*
*And in thy wondrous land to sleep the endless night.*

*If o'er my grave some day thou shouldst see grow*
*Mid the luxuriant grass a simple, humble flower,*
*Press it to thy lips and kiss my soul so,*
*That I may feel on my brow the cold tomb below,*
*Of thy tenderness, the scent; the warmth, of thy breath's power.*

*Let the moon gaze on me with beams soft and serene;*
*Let the dawn break through with its radiant, fleeting rays;*
*Let the wind wail o'er me in tones mournful and keen;*
*And if upon my cross a bird perched should be seen,*
*Let it warble its song of peace from its quiet place.*

*Let the sun ablaze the raindrops to vapor turn*
*And skyward bear them pure with my protest;*
*Let some friendly heart o'er my untimely end mourn,*
*And when at eve a prayer to heav'n for me is borne,*
*Pray, too, O my Country, that I in God may rest!*

*Pray for those who in utter wretchedness have died,*
*For all those who have suffered pains untold,*
*For our poor mothers who their sorrows out have cried,*
*For orphans; widows, men who on the rack are tried,*
*And for thyself that redemption thou mayst behold.*

*And when night's sable mantle wraps the graveyard round,*
*And only the dead to keep vigil there are free,*
*Break not the silence nor the mystery profound;*
*Perchance thou mayst hear a zither or psaltry sound;*
*'Tis I, dear Motherland, singing my song to thee!*

*And when my grave, by all to oblivion resigned,*
*Has neither cross nor stone to mark its site,*
*Let it be ploughed by man and scattered by the wind,*
*And ere to nothingness my ashes are consigned,*
*As dust upon thy carpet let them all alight!*

*Then 'twill not matter thou forgettest me!*
*Through thy clear space and o'er thy vales I'll sweep!*
*A vibrant, limpid note to thine ear I will be;*
*Fragrance, light, color, song, lament, and plea,*
*Ever repeating the faith that with thee I keep!*

*My country idolized that my heart with anguish crowned,*
*Beloved Philippines, list to my last farewell!*
*I leave thee all, all those to whom by love I'm bound;*
*I go where slaves, hangmen, tyrants are never found,*
*Where faith kills not, where God doth reign and dwell.*

*Farewell, parents, brothers, parts of me wrenched away!*
*Friends of my childhood in the dear home dispossessed!*
*Give thanks that I rest from the tiresome day!*
*Farewell, sweet stranger, friend, who shed joy on my way!*
*Farewell to you, my loved ones; to die is to rest!*

## *Translator's Footnote:*

IN THE Philippines, over a dozen English translations of Dr. Jose Rizal's immortal poem, "Ultimo Adios," have long been accessible to the reading public. A few of them possess such merit that at first blush it seems vain, if not wholly unnecessary, to offer another. But variety is still the spice of life, and literature must have that spice if it is to express and transcribe life faithfully.

At any rate, anyone familiar with the "Ultimo Adios" will not fail to realize upon reading the translations that they lack something vital. He will readily notice, if he is in the mood to rehearse the Spanish text mentally by way of comparison, that a portion of the perfume, as it were, has faded away; that the best English version does not have enough of the exhilarating richness and enduring freshness of the original.

One may express the matter differently. One may say that the reader finds himself in the same position as a music lover who, listening to a melody with which he is thoroughly acquainted, discovers to his disappointment that the player has carelessly omitted several notes. Not only that: the player has given it an interpretation that is a bit fanciful and wayward. Why not retain the spell of beauty, the charm of loveliness, when it

is possible to do so? Occasionally, too, various translators have changed the author's meaning in their apparent eagerness to lend their imagination scope.

It is this awareness of certain defects in the translations now available, coupled with my fondness for the Spanish poem, that has finally impelled me to undertake the admittedly hard although challenging task of making a translation of my own. Innocently enough, my intention is merely to please myself and, possibly, those who, conscious of the perennial beauty of the "Ultimo Adios," would like to see it in English garb without much loss to its form, strength, charm, and essence.

To a competent observer, the most disappointing feature of nearly all the English versions is their distortion of the inspiring vision that cast its enchantment around the poet-martyr before he began inditing his swan song in his dark, suffocating cell at Fort Santiago. This was probably due to an oversight or to a natural preference for the virile type of muse. Thus many translators portray Rizal as holding converse with a man, presumably Juan de la Cruz, when in reality he was communing with the dream of his life, the embodied spirit of his country, his "patria adorada," as he calls her, in the resplendent figure, we may take it, of Maria Clara. The result has been somewhat grotesque. The poetic and impassioned language is not in accord with the decidedly masculine character of the subject presented at the beginning of a number of the translations.

Note that Rizal's language is by turns sweet and tender, rhapsodic and pathetic. It is the language of love, of intense patriotism, of pent-up passion, but without bitterness or resentment. In his invocation, he reveals to his adored for the first time his joys and his sorrows, his dreams and his hopes, his longings and his aspirations. He makes an unusual request in a stanza, the last line of which constitutes perhaps the highest tribute to a Filipino woman's affection. If some day, he pleads, she should spot a simple flower growing amid the grass over his grave, "draw it close to thy lips and kiss my soul." Why the kiss? Because, he answers, he wants to feel on his forehead under the cold tomb the gentle breeze expressive of her tenderness and the warmth of her breath. So fondly and passionately does he love her that even in the dead silence of the night when everybody else is at rest, he would remain awake to sing his song of love to her.

Would Rizal have spoken in such a highly romantic vein if the vision he beheld on the eve of his execution were that of a man, a father, as the word "fatherland" indicates? On this point the Spanish text leaves no room for doubt. The initial line of the apostrophe shows unmistakably that the person he was addressing himself to was a woman, bright with beauty, it may be presumed, and blest with the freshness of the dew and the fragrance of a rose. The only question that might require a solution is whether he had summoned her to the "sessions of sweet silent thought" for the occasion or she had merely burst upon his view like a shaft of light to inspire him to compose his poetic testament, the anguished song of his heart.

As the scene opens, we see Rizal bidding his "dear Filipinas" good-bye. Soft, tender and moving, is his voice. It throbs, rises, and grows lyrical, but one detects an undertone of sadness. For the last time he is leaving her in response to the call of destiny. She has been to him his idol and his muse in all his travels, in everything he has done of pith and moment. Truthfully he could tell her

*"With thee were the dreams of my earliest love;*
*Every thought of my reason was thine;*
*In my last humble prayer to the Spirit above,*
*Thy name shall be mingled with mine."*

Thus he seizes the opportunity to bare his heart and his soul to her. Why should he not let her know there is really nothing in them except love, faith, and adoration, and that she alone has always been the object of his devotion? Such knowledge, he felt, would make her supremely happy.

Gladly, he says in the firm accent of youth, he is shedding his blood for her redemption. Having lived only for her and having dreamt and thought of nobody

else but her, what is more natural than that he should fill her with the touching assurance that were his life "brighter, fresher, and with fragrance more blest," still he would unhesitatingly lay it down for her, for her own good?

To be sure, he does not say, as Charles Derbyshire and a few other translators would lead their readers to believe, "nor count the cost," because a man who is more than ready, more than happy, to die at any moment for his beloved will not demean himself by even alluding to the cost, whatever it be. The very thought is repellent to a noble spirit, and noble Rizal assuredly was. Now does he say, as Byron did when he completed his thirty-sixth milestone, that his "days are in the yellow leaf" and that "the worm, the canker, and the grief" are his alone. For that reason one cannot understand why Derbyshire describes the martyr's life at thirty-five as "faded." If it were faded, how does it happen that in the next verse the same translator calls it bright, fresh, and blest? There seems to be a contradiction here.

For all that, however, the majority of critics concede that Derbyshire's easily qualifies as the best English translation of the "Ultimo Adios," meaning, from the point of view of poetry, and not the bad prose that sometimes passes for the poet's art. It has been accorded the singular distinction of being the officially recognized translation in the Philippines. No doubt, the work is commendable—especially to those who do not understand Spanish well. As a matter of fact I have used it as basis of my translation. It has supplied me, here and there, with a fresh point of departure from which I have endeavored to render Rizal's masterpiece more intelligible to those who read only English. Worthy of note and special commendation is Derbyshire's rhyming scheme which he patterned after Rizal's and which I have followed whenever possible.

Yet, those who can appreciate the Spanish text will admit upon examination that Derbyshire's version is not very faithful. It takes such poetic liberties that unwittingly the translator is betrayed at times into saying something which is just the opposite of what the hero of Bagumbayan intended to convey. Let me cite an example.

Translating the last line of the seventh stanza, Derbyshire wrote: "Let it trill there its hymn of peace to my ashes" (Deja que el ave entone su cántico de paz). This single verse, in my opinion, suffices to rob Rizal's noble sentiment of much of its sublimity and grandeur. Why should he degrade himself by asking his "idolized Philippines" to let the bird sing to his ashes? A born patriot, he was not concerned in the least about the fate of his ashes. He knew where ultimately and inevitably they would go—to "nothingness." Only he expressed the passing wish, in harmony with his patriotic fervor, that before they reach that final stage of mutation or metamorphosis, they form a part of the dust that settles upon his country's flowery fields and plains, its "carpet."

What the hero really meant was to let the bird warble its song of peace to his beloved Philippines with whom, he avows, he would keep faith despite the changes of time. She it was who needed peace—certainly not his ashes—and she needed peace in order to hasten the dawn of her redemption, her deliverance from foreign yoke, the happy realization of his youthful dream to see her some day radiant with youth and beauty, breathing the air of freedom, her eyes and cheeks "unprofaned by a tear."

It is in translating the third stanza that Derbyshire appears to have transcended what one might call the fair bounds of poetic license. Worse, he has allowed himself to be enmeshed in verbal confusion. As if carried away by the swift and sudden flight of thought, Rizal puts into juxtaposition the dawn, which will witness his death, with the dawn of his country's freedom. For the latter, he offers, with characteristic chivalry, his life-blood if his "beloved Philippines" needs crimson to tinge that dawn's nascent ray.

He uses the pronoun "tu" (your) in speaking of the second dawn (Si grana necesitas para tenir tu aurora) and not the adjective "la" (the) that some self-appointed "correctors" of the original poem have incorrectly inserted in substitution.

This unexpected change in the poet's figure of speech Derbyshire seems to have overlooked and hence his translation of the third line takes a circuitous way: "And if color is lacking my blood thou shalt take." Where, incidentally, is the color lacking? The succeeding verse does not explain. Neither does it explain why the command "my blood thou shalt take" when according to the fourth line, it has already been "pour'd out."

A poem is either good or not good. If it is good and deserves a translation, the work should be done in such a manner as not to spoil the thought of the author. And if it is not good, why take the trouble of translating the composition at all? Why not consign it right away to the waste-basket as an act of mercy as well as of charity? The sooner it is forgotten the better.

There can be no doubt that the "Ultimo Adios" stands out as a unique and an exceptionally good poem. That it has been translated into many foreign languages, including Japanese and Chinese, is a conclusive evidence. In point of fact, it compares favorably with the acknowledged masterpieces of its kind in the world, among which may be mentioned Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard." It rises far superior to Moore's lyric poem, "Pro Patria Mori." which the Irish bard and patriot also addressed to his adored Erin—not fatherland—with the gallant assurance that her star "will shine out when the proudest shall fade." And because Rizal's "Last Farewell" is beautiful in expression and possesses a haunting charm and
lity of thought that will always endear itself to any reader in Spanish, why should it not be translated as closely to the original as the rules of poetic composition permit?

That, precisely, is what I have tried to do. Whether my attempt has been sucessful or not, I leave it to others to judge. I may claim, nevertheless, without appearing immodest, that I have improved in fidelity, if in nothing else, on Derbyshire's version—what with its omissions and excursions of fancy. Let me come to the point. Derbyshire uses, for instance, the vague clause "when life first opened to me" for Rizal's "cuando apenas muchacho adolescente." How can an ordinary reader tell when life first opened to the great Malayan or, for that matter to anybody else, particularly when he remembers that a Columbia University professor has been insisting, apparently with success, that life actually begins at forty, an age to which, unfortunately, Rizal never attained?

Again in the line immediately following Derbyshire translates "Mis sueños cuando joven ya lleno de vigor" to "My dreams when the hopes of youth beat high." Here a similar question suggests itself to the curious reader. When do the hopes of youth beat high and, conversely, when do they beat low? Parenthetically, why call Rizal's protest "tardy"? And why resort to such tautologies as "martyrdom's plight" and "Let the sun draw its vapors up to the sky"?

Such passages and flights may make good poetry, but one may wonder whether they make good sense or whether they contribute to clarity of thought. Far from enlightening or pleasing the reader, they tend to bewilder him, especially if he has no access to the Spanish original to find out what the martyr really meant. Poetry, incidentally, is not all sweet sound and divine frenzy. It is often a message, as Rizal's is, couched in numbers, full of meaning, embalmed in beauty, and hallowed by tears.

All the pitfalls I have indicated I have carefully avoided by strictly adhering to the language of what the poet-martyr calls his "postrer adios" or "last farewell" in the body of his poem. Where that has not been possible because of metric requirements, I have added only what I know tallies with his views or, better still, with his philosophy of life.