REVIEW
RIZAL'S VALEDICTORY POEM: "THE GLORY OF PHILIPPINE POETRY IN SPANISH"

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MANY LITERARY CRITICS CONSIDER Bro. Jose *Dimasalang* Rizal's last poetical composition, which was originally untitled, as "the glory of Philippine poetry in Spanish" because it is such a significant and invaluable work of art or "a lasting expression in words of the meaning of life" that it has been translated into different Philippine languages as well as into many foreign tongues, such as English, German, French, Russian, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Swedish, Hindustani, Arabic, Indonesian, and so forth. (Alzona, pp. 152-154).

Composed of 14 stanzas, each of which consists of five alexandrine or 14-syllable verses, which are graceful and dignified, as well as devoid of bitterness, the poem is Rizal's *ultimo adios* or valediction to Filipinas, his "*patria adorada*" (adored country), whom he describes as "*region del sol querida*" (region loved by the sun); to his parents, brother and sisters, to whom he refers as "*trozos del alma mia*" (trunks of my soul); to his childhood friends in the "*perdido hogar*" (lost hearth or home), referring to Calamba, Laguna; to Josephine Bracken, whom he describes as "*dulce extranjera, mi amiga, mi alegria*" (sweet stranger, my friend, my joy); and to all other persons dear to him.

Some literary critics opine that Rizal used the martial rhythm in his valedictory poem because when he was composing it on the eve of his execution, he must have imagined himself marching early the next morning from Fort Santiago to Bagumbayan field, accompanied by civil guards and Jesuit priests.

Others point out that the poem invariably provides the reader (and listener) with both intellectual and emotional pleasure, as may be gleaned from the fact that when he recited it before his students in the University of Salamanca, the famous Spanish philosopher and writer Miguel de Unamuno became so emotional that he could not repress his tears, and

that most, if not all, of the students who heard him recite it were moved to tears likewise. (Department of Education, p. xv).

All of the literary critics agree that Rizal's *ultimo adios* has internal consistency; that is, its content and form jibe very well with each other. His thesis or controlling idea is "*Bayan muna, bago pamilya, bago sarili*" or "*Tayo muna, bago kami, bago tayo.*" To drive home this all-important point, he devotes 13 stanzas to bidding farewell to Filipinas, and only one stanza to saying goodbye to members of his family and other persons dear to him. Besides, throughout the whole poem, he makes effective use of apostrophe and other poetic devices or figures of speech. Moreover, he expertly employs the perfect rhyme -- a device that obtains when starting with the stressed or accented syllable, all the letters are the same, as in *querida, vida,* and *florida, eden* and *bien; delirio, lirio and martirio, pesar and hogar; and* so forth.

Let us take a closer look at the poem.

In stanza I, Rizal expresses his vision or dream for Filipinas by comparing her to a "*perla del mar de Oriente*" (pearl of the sea of the Orient). Through this metaphor, he strongly suggests that he envisioned his native land to be transformed by her own people into an invaluable, enviable place where would reign the principles of *pagkakaisa, pakikisama, pagkabayani, pagsasarili,* and *pakikipagkapwa-tao* – principles of the Filipino national tradition which he enshrined in the objectives of La Liga Filipina (The Philippine League), the organization he established as the foundation of the Filipino nation, which he in turn predicted to emerge in the not-distant future. But he knew very well that his vision or dream was far from realization because at that time Filipinas was still *"nuestro perdido eden"* (our lost eden). Here he alludes to his adored lands as a paradise which the ancient Filipinos lost to the Spanish colonialists, who violated the provisions of the Treaty of Tordesillas, according to which Portugal, and not Spain, had the authority to colonize and Christianize the Philippine islands.

To help redeem his beloved Filipinas from the Spanish interlopers, Rizal is ready to gladly give his "triste, mustia vida" (sad, withered life) to her. Even if his life were more brilliant, more fresh, more flowery, he would also give it to her; he would give it for her welfare and happiness. Here he emphasizes his readiness to die in order that Filipinas may live by effectively employing climax (i.e., the arrangement of a series of words, phrases or clauses in an ascending order of importance) in the form of three consecutive comparatives (*mas brillante, mas fresca, mas florida),* and repetition (*Tambien por ti la diera, la diera por tu bien)*.

In stanza 2, Rizal points out that Filipinos may use different ways or means of manifesting their love for Filipinas. The revolutionaries, for instance, exhibit their *pagkabayani* or heroism by engaging themselves in a delirious fight against the enemy in the open fields of battle. They are ready and willing to give their lives to make Filipinas healthy and happy. Whether they suffer defeat (as symbolized by cypress) or emerge victorious (as symbolized by laurel), they are *bayani* or heroes. The reformists, on the other hand, use peaceful means for attaining Filipinas' welfare and happiness (as symbolized by lily). Many of these patriotic Filipinos are cruelly martyred in the scaffold because they adamantly adhere to the righteous and just causes they advocate. Others are incarcerated, tortured, exiled, or even executed by musketry or the *garrote*. They too are *bayani* or heroes.

As mentioned earlier, Rizal effectively employs symbolism, such as *cipres, laurel o lirio.* Besides, he utilizes chiasmus (i.e., parallelism in sentence elements of similar or contrasting ideas, so arranged that the parallel elements of the second part of the structure are in inverted order, as in "Rizal was slow in resolution, in performance quick"). Clearly, *"Cadalso o campo abierto, combate o cruel martirio" (*Scaffold or open field, combat or cruel martyrdom) is chiastic.

"El sitio nada importa" (The place does not matter). No, the place or manner of manifesting one's love for Filipinas is not as important as proper motivation. It does not matter whether Filipinos campaign for reforms or resort to armed struggle against the enemy, or what their respective

stations in life may be. *"Lo mismo es si lo piden la Patria y el hogar"* (It is the same if Country and home ask for it). By mentioning *Patria* (Country) before *hogar* (home or hearth), Rizal drives home the point that Filipinos should strive for the welfare and happiness of their Country before their own or that of their families (or groups); for if the Country is well and happy, they and their families (or groups) will also be well and happy.

In stanza 3, Rizal also stresses the paramount importance of proper timing. He tells Filipinas:

> *I die as I see tints on sky b'gin to show*
> *And at last announce the day, after a gloomy night;*
> *If you need a hue to dye your matutinal glow,*
> *Pour my blood and at the right moment spread it so,*
> *And gild it with a reflection of your nascent light!*

Yes, Rizal is ready to die when he is sure that liberty will dawn on Filipinas after the gloomy night of more than three centuries of Spanish misrule. A staunch advocate of the oxymoronic "Make haste slowly," he is convinced that the proper time for him to give his "sad, withered" life for his beloved country has at long last arrived. But he did not accede to the request of the leaders of the Katipunan that he be the one to lead the Filipino people in their armed uprising against the Spanish colonial government; for, to him, the armed rebellion was ill-timed, and those engaged in the uprising lacked weaponry and expertise in warfare.

In stanzas 4 and 5, Rizal recapitulates his life-long vision or dream, namely, to see Filipinas, his *"patria idolatrada,"* (idolized country) emerge, some day, as "*joya del mar del Oriente"* (gem of the sea of the Orient), which is, actually, an echo of "*perla del mar de Oriente,"* the metaphor he uses in the first stanza. Indeed, since his boyhood, he has ardently and passionately desired to see Filipinas transformed from a sickly and downtrodden Spanish colony to a free, healthy, happy, progressive, and prosperous country.

In stanza 4, Rizal again makes effective use of symbolism and climax. Here he tells Filipinas, *"Secos los negros ojos, alta la tersa frente,/ Sin ceño, sin arrugas, sin manchas de rubor" (*Your dark eyes dry, smooth brow held to a high plane,/ Without frown, without wrinkles and of shame without stain).

According to some literary critics, the phrase *Secos los negros ojos* symbolizes, or stands for, the almost four centuries of Spanish colonial rule in the country. In the first century (*los)*, Filipinas noticed that the colonizers worked for her welfare and happiness and for her people's good. But in the second century of Spanish colonization, she began to see (*ojos)* the abuses of the colonialists. In the third century, because she had suffered so much, her eyes were already dark *(negros)* from too much crying, and her tear glands eventually dried up (secos), so that it was time for her to fight for her freedom. In any case, the critics point out, Filipinas remained a "virgin" because throughout their rule, the Spaniards did not really exploit her natural resources; for this reason, therefore, she should "hold high her smooth brow."

In the last line of the same stanza, Rizal again uses climax in the form of three consecutive prepositional phrases: *sin ceño, sin arrugas, sin manchas de rubor (*without frown, without wrinkles, without stains of blush).

To hasten the realization of his "ardent, passionate desire," he would willingly and readily give his life for her sake. He exclaims:

> *Ah, how sweet 'tis to fall that fullness you may acquire;*
> *To die to give you life, 'neath your skies to expire,*
> *And in your mystic land to sleep through eternity.*

In these lines, Rizal expresses his willingness and readiness to die for Filipinas by effectively employing antithesis (i.e., the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in parallel structures), as well as climax in the form of four consecutive infinitive phrases.

In stanza 6, Rizal makes effective use of imagery by comparing himself to a simple humble flower that has sprouted amidst the thick grass and now blows over his tomb. As such a flower, he asks Filipinas to:

Bring it up to your lips and kiss my soul so,
And under the cold tomb, I may feel on my brow,
Warmth of your breath, a whiff of your tenderness.

Clearly, as an agapeic lover of Filipinas, to express his ardent desire to be physically united with her, he utilizes such amorous acts as kissing, embracing, and the like. He also makes effective use of contrast once more: "*y sienta yo en mi frente bajo la tumba fria,/ de su ternura el soplo, de tu halito el calor*" (and I will feel on my forehead beneath the cold tomb,/ the blow of your tenderness, the warmth of your breath).

In stanzas 7-10, Rizal effectively employs the order of time; that is, he smoothly moves from a moon-lit night, through the dawn, morning, and afternoon of the next day, to a dark night.

In stanzas 7 and 8, he repeatedly uses the imperative construction, or begins his sentences with *Deja* (Let or allow), and thereby emphasizes his point and makes his images clear. He tells Filipinas:

Let the moon with soft, gentle light me descry,
Let the dawn send forth its fleeting, brilliant light,
In murmurs grave allow the wind to sigh,
And should a bird descend on my cross and alight,
Let the bird intone a song of peace o'er my site.

Let the burning sun the raindrops evaporate
And with my clamor behind return pure to the sky;
Let a friend shed tears over my early demise;
And on quiet afternoons when one prays for me on high,
Pray too, oh, my Motherland that in God may rest I.

In the two stanzas given above, he strongly suggests his ardent desire to be also spiritually united with Filipinas by mentioning her ethereal elements. We should note that the common denominator of the following elements or phrases is air, which is, to the ancient philosophers, symbolic of man's spirit or soul: the moon, with soft, gentle light; the dawn, with its fleeting, brilliant light; the sighing wind, with its murmurs grave; the song of peace intoned by a bird that may alight on the cross of his grave; the burning sun evaporating the raindrops skyward, followed by the poet's clamor or shout, "*Salud!*" – that is, his warm wish that Filipinas at long last become healthy in all aspects); and a friend's prayer for his rest in God.

As pointed out by not a few literary critics, the burning sun that evaporates the raindrops toward the sky is symbolic of Liberty which Rizal and the other reformists had ardently wished to shine over Filipinas and thereby make her sufferings ("teardrops") and those of her people eventually disappear.

At the end of stanza 9, Rizal expresses his belief in the power of prayer by asking Filipinas to pray for his rest in God. This proves that contrary to the claim of its critics and adversaries, Masonry is neither an atheistic fraternity nor a satanic cult. On the contrary, the first lesson it teaches to its initiates is never to enter upon any great or important undertaking without first invoking the blessing of God. Besides, it urges them to discharge their duties to God, by never mentioning His name but with that awe and reverence due from the creature to his Creator; by imploring His aid in all their lawful undertakings; and by looking up to Him in every emergency for comfort and support. Furthermore, Masonry teaches his initiates to regard the Volume of the Sacred Law as the great light of their profession; to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice; and to regulate all their actions by the divine precepts it contains. It recurrently reminds them to reverently study and strictly obey with all their heart the laws which God has given to man in His Holy Word. (Refer to the Centennial Monitor.)

In addition, Masonry teaches his initiates that **the hurt of just one human being is the injury of the whole human race**. In one of the

speeches he delivered in Solidaridad Lodge No. 53 in Madrid, Spain, Rizal emphasized this point: ***"Masons should not rest so long as the word nurtures a tyrant; so long as the night gathers in its echoes the moans of the oppressed, so long as there are*** **slaves**; ***so long as there are oppressors***." (Quoted in Fajardo, p. 88).

Thus, Rizal also requests Filipinas to pray for her hapless people and, of course, for herself. He tells her:

Pray thee for all the hapless who have died;
For all those who unequalled torments have undergone;
For our poor mothers who in bitterness have cried;
For orphans, widows and captives to tortures were shied;
And pray too that you may see your own redemption

In stanza 11, he reverts to expressing his desire to be physically united with his beloved Filipinas, saying:

And when my grave by all is no more remembered,
With neither cross nor stone to mark its place,
Let it be plowed by a man, with spade let it be scattered
And my ashes ere to nothingness are restored,
Let them turn to dust to cover your earthly space.

Yes, the poet wishes that his ashes turn to dust to cover the earthly space of Filipinas, and thereby the two will become inseparably united or physically one! Once more he drives home his point by effectively employing repetition (*Let…*) and climax, again in the form of three imperative constructions, namely : (1) *"Let it (my grave) be plowed by man,"* (2) "*with spade let it be scattered,*" and (3) *"Let them (my ashes) turn to dust to cover your earthly space."*

In stanza 12, Rizal reiterates his ardent desire to be spiritually united with Filipinas. Says he:

Then it doesn't matter that you should forget me;
Your atmosphere, your skies, your vales I'll sweep;
Vibrant and clear note to your ears I shall be;
Aroma, light, hues, murmur, song, moanings deep,
Constantly repeating the essence of the faith I keep.

All the nouns in the same stanza, we should note, have something to do with air, the ancient symbol of man's soul or spirit. Even after his death, Rizal would be spiritually united with Filipinas. He would pervade her ethereal elements, he would intone the song of peace to her, and her people would be imbued with his essential ideas about man as a being made in God's image.

When he was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason, Rizal learned many invaluable lessons, such as the following:

1. The body of man will return to dust, whence it came, while his spirit or soul will return to God, who gave it.

2. Man's spirit or soul is imperishable; it will live when time shall be no more; it is "*the inspiration of that great Divinity whom we adore, and bears the nearest resemblance or affinity to that Supreme Intelligence that pervades all nature, which will never, never, never die.*"

3. A Mason must, therefore, consistently wear the lambskin apron, his badge as a Mason, with credit to himself and honor to the Fraternity in order that he might be prepared to welcome death, not as a grim tyrant, but rather as a kind messenger sent to translate him from this imperfect to that all-perfect, glorious, and celestial Lodge where the Supreme Grand Master of the Universe forever presides. (Also refer to the Centennial Monitor.)

In the penultimate stanza, Rizal reiterates his belief in an afterlife, where God reigns supreme, not the union of church and state nor frailocracy or monastic sovereignty. He tells Filipinas:

> *My idolized Country, for whom I most gravely pine,*
> *Dear Philippines, to my last goodbye, oh, hearken.*
> *Here I leave thee all: my parents, loves of mine.*
> *I'll go where there are no slaves, tyrants or hangmen;*
> *Where faith does not kill; where God alone does reign.*

In this stanza, he directs his *"postrer adios*" (very last farewell) to Filipinas and mentions for the first time his parents and others dear to him; he is entrusting them to Filipinas' care. In the last two lines, he makes use of three consecutive clauses that start with *donde* (where) in order to underscore his pet peeves, namely:

1. His countrymen as a whole, who, mainly because of fear and ignorance, suffered themselves to be the slaves (*esclavos)* of the relatively fewer Spanish colonizers, who oppressed and brutalized them;

2. The opportunistic Filipinos, who were so desirous of getting privileges and concessions from the Spanish ruling classes that they suffered themselves to be used by the latter as executioners (*verdugos)* of the greater masses of their own compatriots;

3. The Spanish oppressors (*opresores)*, who unscrupulously maltreated the Filipinos, whom they derisively called *indios,* as if these hapless beings were not made in the image of God like them; and

4. The abusive and conservative friars, who acted as if they had the monopoly of truth and therefore did not tolerate the beliefs and opinions of others which were contrary to theirs., and who, for their selfish purposes, conveniently used religion or faith *(fe)* as a means of silencing, harassing, and persecuting, and even

exterminating those who had the courage to advocate causes they believed to be just and righteous.

In the last stanza, he finally addresses his family, his childhood friends in Calamba, Josephine Bracken, and other persons dear to him. He tells them to thank God for allowing him at last to rest from the "wearisome day." By referring to his sad, withered life as a *"fatigoso dia,"* he makes effective use of meiosis or positive understatement.

Having said goodbye to Filipinas and to persons dear to him, Rizal punctuates his valedictory poem by echoing a statement of Socrates, one of the greatest Greek philosophers: *"Morir es descansar"* (To die is to rest). His death by musketry the next morning would mark the end of his tiresome and ephemeral pilgrimage on earth and the start of his eternal rest in God.

Postscript

After sunrise in the morning of December 30, 1896, Jose *Dimasalang* Rizal was marched from Fort Santiago to the site of his execution at the Luneta, bound elbow to elbow and flanked by two priests. Past Grand Master Reynold Smith Fajardo provides us with this comment: "*No braver man had faced a firing squad. Unafraid, he expressed the wish to be shot frontally, but the Captain said his orders were to shoot him in the back. Rizal then requested that he be shot in the small of his back, not in the head. To this the Captain agreed. Rizal was then asked if he wished to kneel. He elected to die standing. He also declined to be blindfolded. The attending physician, wondering at Rizal's calmness, asked if he might feel the condemned man's pulse and was surprised to find it normal. A few minutes after 7:00 a.m., the order to fire was given. Rizal shouted, '**Consumatum est'**, and with a supreme effort turned around and fell on the ground, face up. The bullets had spared his head. So ended the life of the man now revered as the foremost hero of his country."* (***The Brethren***, Vol. I, pp. 187-188).

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