

Poemas y Canciones de mi Madre

Foreword: My mother passed away more than 20 years ago, at age 95. She was ravaged by Alzheimer's during her last years. But she managed to recapture, in her own hand, poems and songs she had known before the disease denied her the ability to communicate. They are mostly Spanish, the language of her parents, with others in English, Tagalog and Zambal. Both my parents spoke Spanish, my father being very fluent, but none of us children do. I managed to bluff my way during a trip to Spain in the fall of 2014. We aren't exactly sure where she learned these poems and songs, perhaps in school, or reading on her own. I had seen them before, written in her distinctive cursive, with large, upright letters. My sister Charito gave me copies during my visit last year. I have transcribed and translated, doing some editing with the original. There are some Spanish words I couldn't find a translation for, at least the way she wrote them. It is not a question of legibility - her writing is fine. Sometimes I substituted words that I thought were more appropriate. Nearing 90 at the time, perhaps her Spanish grammar and spelling were rusty. Neither did she have a title, or mark the pages in succession. I did ask a couple of cousins, too modest to want attribution, for help. Hint: one is a writer and author of many books. The suggestions they made really rounded out the poem. I thank them both. I'm confident my mother would approve our translation. Of course the English doesn't require any translation, other than identify their sources. Very few today would know of these authors or composers. The Zambal poem was translated by my brother-in-law, Pepe. I did not attempt to translate the only Tagalog song my mother sang, called "*Lambingan*," which I would translate as romancing.

Let's start with the Spanish:

Original, edited:

*Naci en Iba
junto la orilla
bajo el sol ardiente tropical
aunque soy india**
prabre? sencilla,
no entro cualquier en mi casa
tengo mi novio
quien me acompaña
todos los días en mi bahay
tiene su casa de caña y nipa
es un cabeza de barangay*

Translation:

*I was born in Iba
beside the shore
under the burning tropical sun
although I am a native,
poor, simple
no one enters my house
I have my suitor
who accompanies me
all the days in my house
he has a house of bamboo and thatch
he is the head of the village*

**When issuing baptismal certificates, the Spanish friars classified the infants as *indio / india* (native Filipinos), *mestizos españoles* (mixed Filipino and Spanish), *chinos* (Chinese) or *mestizos chinos* (mixed Chinese). My mother's parents were classified as *mestizos españoles* in their baptismal certificate.

*Da me un beso de amor
da me ya por favor
en tus manos me abrazo de amor
no llores no, pobre ay de me*

*Give me a kiss of love
please give it to me now
with your hands embrace me with love
don't cry poor me*

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*mi papa tambien me mira
me voy a paliza
me voy a morir*

*my father also looks after me
I am going to get a thrashing
I am going to die*

*Benid? ninas bellas
salid al balcon
alegres cantimos
sol fa mi re do*

*Some beautiful girls
come out to the balcony
singing happily
sol fa mi re do*

*Nina esichera? su nustro? agraciada
da mi un beso mas
de una vez por caridad
porque lo ciento
por alma y tranquilo
da mi una momento
da mi un momento nada mas*

*Listen to our graceful girl
give me one more kiss
one time for kindness
why are you sorry
because I feel soulful and tranquil
give me a moment
give me a moment, nothing more*

*ben, ben, ben, adorada mujer
ben, ben, ben, si pi adorada nos complimerer?
si, si, si, adorada mis brazos
si yo quiera
que yo de pena
voy a morir*

*Come, come, come, beloved woman
come, come, come, beloved together
yes, yes, yes, beloved in my arms
if I want to
that I, from pain
am going to die*

*naci en este mundo
por tu amor mujer
y solo tus miradas mi a lento a mi*

*I was born in this world
for your love woman
and only your glances comfort me*

*Ahora quiero yo esi grato si??
nunca olvidar de ti
en piedad no seas cruel
angel de amor a este corazon
que sufre un gran dolor
por ti angel de amor
si no oye nos estos quejido
que eballo? yo angel de amor
tu eres la autora de mi vida
que por ti perderse*

*Now I want this welcome
I never forget you
in piety do not be cruel
angel of love to this heart
that suffers a great pain
for you angel of love
if you don't hear this whimper
that I angel of love
you are the author of my life
which for you I lose*

The song below, "Preguntale a las Estrellas," was popular in Mexico dating back before WWII. Some sources identify it as a Mexican folk song. However, the name of the lyricist is unknown. Some of the sheet music identifies the composer as an American named Victor Harris. Somehow the song made its way to the Philippines. You can listen to various interpretations on YouTube. The artist I prefer is Rosa Maria Lobo, a

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Spanish singer. The lyrics below are as my mother sang them. They differ somewhat from the published lyrics.

<i>Pregunta a las estrellas</i>	<i>ask the stars and in the evenings</i>
<i>si por las noches me ven llorar</i>	<i>they see me cry</i>
<i>pregunta si no busco</i>	<i>Ask if I do not look for you</i>
<i>para quererte la soledad</i>	<i>to love you in solitude</i>
<i>pregunta al manso rio</i>	<i>ask the gentle river</i>
<i>y el llanto mio lo ven correr</i>	<i>and my tears they see running</i>
<i>pregunta a todo el mundo</i>	<i>ask all the world</i>
<i>si no es profundo mi padecer</i>	<i>if it is to be deep</i>
<i>nunca te olvides</i>	<i>never forget</i>
<i>que yo te quiero</i>	<i>that I love you</i>
<i>aunque me muero</i>	<i>although I'm dying</i>
<i>a mas a ti</i>	<i>for more of you</i>

After the Spanish, my mother had an extensive repertoire of American poems and songs. One was "Peg O' the Ring." Now, I've heard of "Peg O' My Heart," but not the other. Peg O' the Ring: A Maid of Denewood was a book written back in 1915. She would have been 18 at the time, just before she met my dad. The book was followed by a 1916 movie of the same title. But I can't find the source of her lyrics. Every time our mother took to singing or reciting a poem, Charito recorded her words. A favorite "American" song was "You are Always in my Heart," from 1942. I wonder if mama knew that this was originally a Spanish song, "*Siempre en mi Corazon?*" Lyrics for both songs are at the end of the essay.

Mama used to sing to her younger granddaughters, the daughters of my late sister Tita. Here's the lyrics for one of them, entitled "Everybody Rag With Me." This was popular in 1914!

*"What's that sneaky pretty melody?
It just makes me restless as can be.
It goes to my head, my hands, my feet
I'll give anybody in the house my seat
I want to dance, dance, dance,
Dance till I drop.
I can dance till day is dawning
Then I want to dance all morning.
Everybody dance and dance and dance with me."*

But easily the oldest song mama sang was "*Oh! I Should Like to Marry.*" The lyrics she remembered were:

*Oh I should like to marry
If that I can find
Any handsome fellow suited to my mind.
Oh I should like him dashing*

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Oh I should like him gay

A leader of the fashion and dandy of the day.

This is really an oldie. It was first published in The Vauxhall Comic Song-Book, in London. The year was 1847!

A song mama sang to her grandchildren was "Old Black Joe," composed in 1853 by Stephen Foster. Although Foster died before his 40th birthday, he was a prolific composer and songwriter whose works remain popular to this day. Val and I went to hear the Cincinnati Pops orchestra play some of his work earlier this year. Old Black Joe refers to a black manservant, but Mama gave the song a twist, replacing Old Black Joe with Ro - sa - rio! She was actually singing this song well before her health deteriorated.

During one of our trips to visit, Val remembers mama singing something about paper and pins. Val wrote down as much as she could. The song turns out to be an English tune from the 19th century, becoming an American folk song. It became popular in 1956, when it was sang for "Bus Stop," one of Marilyn Monroe's movies.

*I'll give to you a paper of pins,
If that's the way that love begins,
If you will marry,
Marry, marry, marry,
If you'll marry me.*

*I don't want your paper of pins,
If that's the way that love begins,
For I won't marry,
Marry, marry, marry
I won't marry you.*

English poems:

*"When things go wrong, remember then
the happy heart has the strength of ten
forget the sorrow, sing a song
it makes all right when things seem wrong"*

The author is Charles Henry Chesley, an American poet of the 19th century. A lot of Chesley's work appeared, early in the 20th century in a magazine called "The Granite Monthly, a New Hampshire magazine devoted to literature and history." So, the snippet of one of Chesley's poems made it from New Hampshire, the Granite State, all the way to Iba. It is an easy assumption that Chesley's poem or poems (he was a prolific poet) were taught to the children of Iba by an American Thomasite teacher.

Mama could recite verbatim, "After Visiting the Tomb of Napoleon," published by Robert G. Ingersoll in 1902. She probably learned it years later, as she would have been only 5 the year it was published. The full text is in the Appendix.

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Finally, something in Zambal, the language of her home province of Zambales:

<i>Hiko'y anak ni pagong</i>	<i>I am the child of a turtle</i>
<i>Kapitang maniniklong</i>	<i>Expert in trapping</i>
<i>Kapag impal-bangon</i>	<i>When I wake up</i>
<i>Utot ko'y bumani-ong</i>	<i>I break wind and explode</i>
<i>Pot...pot...pot...pot.</i>	<i>Pot...pot...pot...pot.</i>

Sometimes aging plays tricks with our mind. In my mother's case, she received incredible recall. She had been exposed to these works seven decades or more earlier, and probably had not seen them during that span. It may seem amusing, perhaps silly, to someone listening to her at the time. But to me it is a blessing.

Mario E. Orosa
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Appendix of songs and poems:

"Old Black Joe"

*Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay,
Gone are my friends from the cotton fields away,
Gone from the earth to a better land I know,
I hear their gentle voices calling Old Black Joe.*

Chorus:

*I'm coming, I'm coming, for my head is bending low,
I hear their gentle voices calling Old Black Joe.
Why do I weep, when my heart should feel no pain,
Why do I sigh that my friends come not again?
Grieving for forms now departed long ago.
I hear their gentle voices calling Old Black Joe.*

Chorus:

*Where are the hearts once so happy and so free?
The children so dear that I held upon my knee?
Gone to the shore where my soul has longed to go,
I hear their gentle voices calling Old Black Joe.*

"Peg of the Ring" Lyrics (Date and author unknown):

*I'm in love with the Peg of the Ring
The motion picture queen
And each time I go to the show
I see her on the screen
She has taken my heart away*

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*And I'm looking for the day
When my pretty Peggy I shall see.
On the stage you are a lovely star
I love you for what you really are.
Peg of the Ring you know there's something missing
And it's a ring to you I'll surely bring
And it's you I'll soon be kissing
Peg of the Ring,
Peg of the Ring.*

“After Visiting the Tomb of Napoleon”

A little while ago I stood by the grave of Napoleon, a magnificent tomb of gilt and gold, fit almost for a dead deity, and gazed upon the sarcophagus of black Egyptian marble where rests at last the ashes of the restless man. I leaned over the balustrade and thought about the career of the greatest soldier of the modern world.

I saw him walking upon the banks of the Seine contemplating suicide; I saw him at Toulon; I saw him putting down the mob in the streets of Paris; I saw him at the head of the army of Italy; I saw him crossing the bridge at Lodi with the tricolor in his hand; I saw him in Egypt in the shadows of the pyramids; I saw him conquer the Alps and mingle the eagle of France with the eagles of the crags. I saw him at Marengo, at Ulm and Austerlitz. I saw him in Russia, where the infantry of the snow and the cavalry of the wild blast scattered his legions like winter's withered leaves. I saw him at Leipsic in defeat and disaster, driven by a million bayonets back upon Paris, clutched like a wild beast, banished to Elba. I saw him escape and retake an Empire by the force of his genius. I saw him upon the frightful field of Waterloo, when chance and fate combined to wreck the fortunes of their former king. And I saw him at St. Helena, with his hands crossed behind him, gazing out upon the sad and solemn sea.

I thought of the orphans and widows he had made; of the tears that had been shed for his glory and of the only woman who had ever loved him pushed from his heart by the cold hand of ambition.

And I said I would rather have been a French peasant and worn wooden shoes. I would rather have lived in a hut with a vine growing over the door and the grapes growing purple in the kisses of the autumn sun. I would rather have been that poor peasant with my loving wife by my side, knitting as the day died out of the sky, with my children upon my knee and their arms about me. I would rather have been that man and gone down to the tongueless silence of the dreamless dust than to have been that imperial impersonation of force and murder known as Napoleon the Great.

And so I would ten thousand times.

"Always in my Heart"

*You are always in my heart
Even though you're far away
I can hear the music of
The song of love
I sing with you.*

*You are always in my heart
Even though the skies are gray
I remember that you care
And then and there
The sun breaks through.*

*Just before I go to sleep
There's a rendezvous I keep
And the dream I always dream
Makes me forget
We're far apart.*

*I don't know exactly when dear
But I'm sure we'll meet again dear.
And my darling till we do
You are always in my heart.*

"Siempre en mi Corazon" - Spanish song on which "Always in my Heart" is based. The music was composed by Cuban born Ernesto Lecuona. If that name sounds familiar, he is the composer of the classic, "Malagueña."

*Siempre está en mi corazón
el recuerdo de tu amor
que al igual que tu canción
quitó de mi alma su dolor.*

*Siempre está en mi corazón
la nostalgia de tu ser
ya hora puedo comprender
que dulce ha sido tu perdón.*

*La visión de mi soñar
me hizo ver con emoción
que fue tu alma inspiración
donde aplaqué mi sed de amar.*

*Hoy tan sólo es pero verte
y ya nunca más perderte,*

*mientras tanto que tu amor
siempre está en mi corazón.*

*Yo bien sé que nunca más
en mis brazos estarás
prisionera de un cariño
que fue toda mi ilusión.*

*Porque nunca he de olvidarte
ni dejaré de quererte,
porque como única dueña
estás en mi corazón.*

“Lambingan” - Tagalog love song
*Ay kay tamis hirang
Ng pagsintang tunay
Ang lahat ay buhay
Lalo't ikaw kapiling
Kung sa iyo'y mawalay
Palad ko'y libingan
At kung walang lambingan
Mabuti pa, mabuti pang tayo'y pumanaw*

Chorus:
*Sa piling mo sinta ko
Napapawi ang lungkot
Napaparam nagbabago ang lahat ng himutok
At sa twi kong hahagkan
Ang pisngi mong mabango
Ay tuluyan napaparam ang hirap ko.
Kung tayo'y magkasayaw
Magkayakap sa galak
Ang langit ng bagong buhay ay maliwanag
Sa suyuang matimyas nalilimot ang lumbay
At patuluyang sarap ng matamis na lambingan.*