Cultural Logic: Marxist Theory & Practice
Volume 23 (2019), pp. 1-15

History, Class Consciousness, Imperialism: Re-visiting Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*

E. San Juan, Jr.
University of the Philippines

When *America is in the Heart* (AIH) appeared in 1946, the Philippines was about to receive formal independence from the United States after four harrowing years of Japanese devastation. Filipinos thanked the troops of General Douglas McArthur for their "Liberation." Bulosan's book was praised less for its avowed democratic sentiments than for its affirmation of the sacrifices made in Bataan and Corregidor memorialized so eloquently. It was a poignant reconciling moment. Victory against Japan seemed to wipe out the history of the U.S. bloody pacification of the islands from 1899 to 1913—the first chapter recounts Bulosan's farewell to his brother Leon, a veteran of the carnage in Europe. His brother fought thousands of miles away from Binalonan, Pangasinan, where Bulosan was born on November 2,1911.

Two years later, the Filipino-American War ended on June 11, 1913 when General Pershing's troops slaughtered about ten thousand Moros in the Bud Bagsak massacre (Tan). Add this toll to about a million killed earlier, we arrive at the final fruit of President McKinley's "Benevolent Assimilation" policy justifying the colonial conquest. The selective school system and Taft's "Filipinization" program gave rise to an entrenched bureaucratic class with close ties to the feudal landlords and compradors that colluded with American administrators up to the Commonwealth period (1935-1945). When the Filipino oligarchs accepted the onerous conditions of formal independence in July 1946, Stanley Karnow remarked that "they submitted voluntarily to their own exploitation," dreaming of becoming "a favored and exemplary party within a Pax Americana" (330).

Bulosan's advent into the world was thus counterpointed with such paradoxes, ironies, aporias. His character-formation was self-contradictory, internally riven with dissension and compromise. It reflected the quandaries of the times. Historian Jaime Veneracion noted that "while the Americans supposedly introduced land reform, the effect was the intensification of the tenancy problem" (63). Throughout U.S. colonial rule, turbulence reigned in the pacified countryside up to the Cold War epoch. One charismatic folk-hero, Felipe Salvador, was hanged for leading a massive peasant rebellion against landlords and the U.S. colonial regime. Between his birth and departure for the U.S. in 1930, Bulosan was cognizant of the unceasing revolts of impoverished farmers in the Colorums of Luzon, Negros, Leyte, Samar, Panay and Surigao (Constantino; Sturtevant). In Part I of this memoir (particularly Ch. 8), he describes the Tayug uprising of 1931 which he didn't personally witness. It was led by Pedro Calosa, a veteran of union organizing in Hawaii, arrested for mobilizing multiethnic strikes and summarily deported back to the Philippines.

Transversal Border-Crossing

How did Filipinos suddenly appear in Hawaii? After three decades of imperial tutelage, the country was transformed into a classic colonial dependency providing raw materials and cheap labor. From 1907 to 1926, more than 100,000 Filipinos were recruited by the Hawaiian sugar plantations. Driven by poverty and feudal oppression in their native land, Filipinos began traveling to the metropole to pursue "the dream of success" depicted so seductively in the mass-circulated textbooks and newspapers that Bulosan and his generation memorized. Neither citizens nor aliens, they moved around as

"wards" or "nationals, neither immigrants nor foreigners, not eligible for citizenship though carrying U.S. passports, As Carey McWilliams correctly labelled them, "they were neither fish nor fowl" (x)—an ambiguous realm which Bulosan and his compatriots inhabited. It was the analogue to W.E. B. Du-Bois condition of "double consciousness"(11), a sense of psychic bifurcation that explains the ruptures, tensions, and ambivalence pervading this memoir.

In this precarious vulnerable zone, Bulosan found himself struggling to survive with his cohort in 1931 upon arrival in Seattle. They became easy victims of exploitation by labor contractors, agri-business operatives, gamblers, racist vigilantes, and state laws (prohibiting their marriage with whites) from Hawaii and California to Alaska. They also, however, nurtured a rich and complex culture of re-sistance. His friendship with an experienced labor organizer, Chris Mensalvas, involved him in the Congress of Industrial Organizations which organized cannery and farm workers. As editor of *The New Tide* in 1934, Bulosan became acquainted with progressive authors such as Richard Wright, William Saroyan, John Fante, and Sanora Babb. When he was confined at the Los Angeles General Hospital for tuberculosis and kidney problems, it was Sanora and her sister Babb who virtually educated him to write. They helped him discover through books "all my world of intellectual possibilities—and a grand dream of bettering society for the working man" (San Juan, "Bulosan" 255). While convalescing, he composed the stories satirizing feudal despotism and patriarchal authority later gathered in the best-selling *The Laughter of My Father* (1944, hereafter *Laughter*) and the poems found in the rehearsal for *AIH: Chorus for America* (1942), *Letter from America* (1942), and *The Voice of Bataan* (1943).

Carnivalesque Interlude

We observed earlier that Bulosan's adolescent years were inspired by the survival craft of a large poor peasant family barely subsisting on small plots. In the letters collected in The Sound of Fall-ing Light (1960), as well as in *Laughter,* Bulosan appraise the earthy cunning spirit of his father trying to outwit landlords, merchant-usurers, and petty bureaucrats to eke out a living for his clan. Above all, he celebrated the exuberant resourcefulness of his mother, that "dynamic little peasant woman" who nurtured his open, adventurous genial spirit. Her figure is sublimated in the brave samaritanic women in *AIH*. By transference she is reincarnated in the loyal female companions who, while complex char-acters in themselves, exemplify the 'Other" eclipsed visage of a racist/chauvinist hostile America.

In effect, Bulosan revitalized the resistance culture of the pebeian masses among whom he grew up and matured. In response to the philistine dismissal of his folkloric vignettes as a way of commer-cializing exotic local color, Bulosan urged us to attend more to the allegorical thrust of the fables: "My politico-economic ideas are embedded in all my writings….Laughter is not humor; it is satire; it is in-dictment against an economic system that stifled the growth of the primitive, making him decadent overnight without passing through the various stages of growth and decay" (Feria xxx). Other stories by Bulosan containing "hidden bitterness" and attacking the predatory excesses of the oligarchy and the iniquitous property/power relations in the colony may be found in *The Philippines Is in the Heart* (2017), mostly written before and during World War 2.

One might conclude that Bulosan's return to the homeland began with his departure. His ap-prenticeship as an organic intellectual of the diaspora started with understanding the trials of his family to overcome U.S.-sponsored feudal tyranny. Although *Laughter* and *AIH* substantiated his creative po-tential, unlike Jose Garcia Villa, Bulosan was never really accepted by the Establishment literati. He remained suspect, a subversive pariah author from the "boondocks." His radicalization began with an act of "popular memory" triggered by the circumstances of colonial uprooting and subsequent experi-ences of discrimination and violent ostracism. Before the crisis of global capitalism subsided after Hi-roshima and Nagasaki, Bulosan had already plotted out his project of remapping the U.S. cultural-political landscape with his claim: "I want to interpret the soul of the Filipinos in this country. What

really compelled me to write was to try to understand this country, to find a place in it not only for myself but for my people." "Self" here designates the collective agency of all excluded, subjugated persons. Such a place in the cultural and public consciousness remains contentious and vacant, despite Bulosan's putative canonical statu

Inventory Between the Wars

Unlike the survivors of the internment camps of Manzanar, and the Chinatowns of San Francisco and New York, Bulosan cannot be categorized as a model ethnic actor in today's multicultural shopping mall. He survived years of privation and vigilante persecution in Yakima Valley, Watsonville, etc., drifting in a limbo of indeterminacy, "nationals" without a sovereign nation, a nomadic exile. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, he summed up his group's ordeal: "Yes, I feel like a criminal running away from a crime I did not commit. And the crime is that I am a Filipino in America." The proletarianization of Bulosan's sensibility surpassed the imperatives of nativism, the nostalgic return to a mythical past, or a yearning for a prosperous cosmopolis invented by postmodernist transnationals. Playing his role as "tribune" of multiethnic workers writing for *New Masses, CommonwealthTimes*, and *Saturday Review of Literature*, the ambit of his "conscientization" (to use Paulo Freire's term) shifted to a global horizon with the rise of fascism in Europe and Japan. Several poems he wrote in the late thirties— "Portrait with Cities Falling," "To Laura in Madrid," "Who Saw the Terror," etc. expressed his commitment to the revolutionary ideals of the Spanish Republic. It was easy for Bulosan to make the connection between the reactionary fascism of Franco's Falangists (supported by Filipino landlords/compradors) and the violence of the U.S. state's ideological apparatus of courts, police, prisons. His sympathy was for the victims of the inhuman profit-centered system. His version of a united-front strategy eulogized somewhat melodramatically the glory of Whitmanian democracy embodied in "America," a utopian metaphor of a classless, racism-free society deployed throughout *AIH.*

When the Pacific War broke out, Bulosan focused his attention to another invader more brutal than the Spanish conquistadors and the American troops inflicting "the water cure" and Vietnam-style hamletting: the Japanese occupiers. This served as the germinal site for the theme of "national liberation" emergent in *AIH*, but fully elaborated in *The Cry and the Dedication* (first published in 1977 as *The Power of the People)*. This last work was inspired by Bulosan's friendship with the leftwing vernacular poet Amado V. Hernandez; they cooperated with Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and other progressives to publish Luis Taruc's autobiography, *Born of the People* (1953).

At the peak of McCarthyism and the Cold War in the late forties and fifties, Bulosan was already a blacklisted writer. The recent discovery of FBI files on Bulosan seems anticlimactic, a public display of "dirty linen" (Alquizola and Hirabayashi). His association with Sanora Babb linked him with the Hollywood/Los Angeles circle of fellow-travelers and activists of the Communist Party before the war. As a journalist in Seattle, affiliated with Chris Mensalvas, Ernesto Mangaong and other officials of the International Longshoreman's and Warehouseman's Union (ILWU), Local 37, Bulosan was considered a dangerous subversive and threatened with deportation. But how could the government deport a writer commissioned by President Franklin Roosevelt to celebrate one of the "four freedoms," an artwork exhibited at the Federal Building in San Francisco in 1943?

By the end of the McCarthy witch-hunt in 1954, Bulosan enjoyed a modest if surreptitious prestige. The widely circulated *Laughter* had been translated into over a dozen languages, while *AIH* had been favorably reviewed and cited in Who's Who in America, Current Biography, and other directories of international celebrities. His paean to populist democracy, "Freedom from Want," published in *Saturday Evening Post* (1943), fulfilled one strategic goal of militant artists (such as Bertolt Brecht and Pablo Neruda): capturing the terrain of the ideological mode of production necessary to challenge capitalist hegemony. Bulosan succeeded in infiltrating a provocative message that escaped the censors of

the Cold War Establishment: "But we are not really free unless we use what we produce. So long as the fruit of our labor is denied us, so long will want manifest itself in a world of slaves." At the time he was composing his narrative of Huk guerrillas reconstructing their nation's history as they tried to establish linkage with U.S. partisans, Bulosan articulated his life-long agenda as a response to the question what impelled him to write: "The answer is—my grand dream of equality among men and freedom for all. To give a literate voice to the voiceless one hundred thousand Filipinos in the United States…Above all and ultimately, to translate the desires and aspirations of the whole Filipino people in the Philippines and abroad in terms relevant to contemporary history. Yes, I have taken unto myself this sole responsibility." But it was more a promise than a summing-up. Bulosan died on September 11, 1956, at the height of the Cold War, three years after the end of the Korean War and nine years before the explosion of the Vietnam War.

Symptomatic Retrieval

Originally acclaimed as a classic testimony of immigrant success when it appeared in 1946, AIH's epilogue gestures toward a popular-front politics against global fascism. Written in the middle of the war, Bulosan's chronicle functions as a testimony to those years of struggle resisting white-supremacist violence. It is essentially a critique of the paradigm of ethnic immigrant success now celebrated by mainstream apologists of assimilation into late capitalist polity. In picaresque mode, it presents a massive documentation of the varieties of racism, exploitation, alienation, and inhumanity suffered by Filipinos in the West Coast and Alaska. It covers the decade beginning with the Depression, the years of hunger and vagabondage, up to the outbreak of World War II. Scenes of abuse, insult, neglect, brutalization, and outright murder of these colonial "wards"—natives of the United States' only direct colony in Asia—are rendered with naturalistic candor spliced with snapshots of their craft of survival and resistance. It is a haunting montage suturing history and autobiography.

Except for Part I (the first 12 chapters), the remaining three parts (from Chapters 13 to 49) of this ethnobiography—a polyphonic orchestration of events from the lives of the author and his generation of compatriots—chart the passage of the youthful narrator through a landscape of privation, terror and violence. The narrator doubles as alternatively protagonist and witness of events that he recounts. His itinerary in the West Coast begins with his victimization by corrupt labor contracts on his arrival in Seattle, his anguished flight from lynch mobs, his first beating by two policemen in Klamath Falls, to his desperate flirtation with Max Smith's cynicism. Such vicissitudes are punctuated in the middle of the book by his testicles being crushed by white vigilantes. A hundred pages after this episode replete with more degrading ordeals, "Allos"—the fictional representative of about thirty thousand Filipinos then residing in California—surprisingly concludes by reaffirming his faith in "America," no longer the arena of suffering but the name for a metaphoric space "sprung from all our hopes and aspirations."

Mapping Contradictions

We are stunned by the stark disjunction between the violent reality and the compensatory frame of the interpretation. How do we reconcile this discrepancy between actuality and thought, between fact (the social wasteland called "United States of America" and the ideal ("America" as the land of equality and the free pursuit of happiness for all)? Is this simply an astute ironical strategy to syncopate colonized narrator with subversive author? Is this Bulosan's subterfuge of multiplying polyvalent readings and celebrating the virtues of what postmodernist critics call "schizoid jouissance" --Roland Barthes's term for the unique pleasure of reading?

One way to approach this seeming aporia, this impasse of divergent views, has become conventional. We can reject the commonsensical thesis that this work belongs to "that inclusive and characteristic Asian American genre of autobiography or personal history (Kim 47) designed to promote assimi-

lation, or easy cooptation into the status quo. Or else, one can retort that AIH invents a new literary genre which functions as antithesis to the mythical quest for Americanization—the whitening of brown-skinned natives. One can urge a focus on sly rhetorical nuances: the address to the "American earth" at the end is cast in the subjunctive mood, sutured in an unfolding process whose future is over-shadowed by Pearl Harbor and the defeats of American & Filipino soldiers in Bataan and Corregidor, Philippines. The last three chapters reiterate the bitterness, frustration, loneliness, confusion, "deep emptiness," and havoc in the lives of Filipinos in the "New World."

The mainstream approach to Bulosan's work is disingenuous, to say the least. Whatever the pressures of the Cold War and marketing imperatives in the time when the book became part of college courses, to construe Bulosan's chronicle of the Filipino struggle to give dignity to their spoiled or damaged lives in the metrople as an advertisement for patriotism, or imperial "nationalism," seems unwarrante, if not invidious. It is surely meant to erase all evidence of its profoundly radical, popular-democratic inspiration. It distorts the narrator's impulse of enhancing solidarity among peoples, regardless of race or creed, by conceiving it simply as a self-serving individualistic attempt of ingratiation.

Identifying Interlocutors

Perhaps the easiest way to correct this mistake is to identify the trope of personification, the wish-fulfilling imaginary underlying the narrative. Who is 'America'? The voice of the main protagonist answers: Eileen Odell "was undeniably the *America* I had wanted to find in those frantic days of fear and flight, in those acute hours of hunger and loneliness. This America was human, good, and real." If Eileen functions as a placeholder or synecdoche for all those who demonstrated trust and compassion for strangers like Bulosan, then the term should not be conflated with the abstract referent "America" or "U.S.A" as a whole. It specifies a concrete locus of humaneness. Overall, the caring figure is a maternal signifier with multiple personifications (including the feminized narrative voice). She represents the singular desire called "America" in the title.

Viewed from another angle, the idiomatic tenor of the title refers to an inward process of acquiring self-awareness. It may be viewed as a mode of internalization, a kind of self-gestation or spiritual parthenogenesis. Note the figurative resonance of such descriptions as he felt "love growing inside him," leading to"a new heroism: a feeling of growing with a huge life." By metonymic semiosis, the trope of containment gestures toward pregnancy and deliverance. Bulosan feels remolded into "a new man" inhabiting a New World.

We confront a symbiosis of inside and outside. Elsewhere, the "heart" image of the title alludes to the "American earth" linkened to "a huge heart unfolding warmly to receive me." And the phrase "America in the hearts of men" attributed to Macario is interpreted by Bulosan to mean "this small yet vast heart of mine…steering toward the stars." Earlier, when he encounters Marian after the most traumatic mutilation of his genitals in San Jose, the narrator-victim marvels at this "white woman who had completely surrendered herself to me" and counsels himself: "The human heart is bigger than the world." Recalling the girl raped in the freight train, who in turn evoked a memory of his sisters in Binalonan, Bulosan could not touch the prostitute Marian even when "her heart was in my heart."heart

Of crucial importance is the equation of "heart" with "one island, the Philippines," expanding the image. Bulosan deploys Robinson Crusoe's predicament as counterpointing metaphor. Literally and figuratively, the "heart" becomes a polysemous vehicle that signifies inclusion or exclusion. It functions as a device to reconcile warrying viewpoints, tendencies, subjectivities. Its figural use serves to categorize the text as belonging to the romance or utopian genre of fiction where time and space ("chronotope," in Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation) are configures in such a way as to realize the vision of an organic community materializing within the confines of an anomic, disintegrated metropolis.

Revisiting Embarkation Sites

The utopian theme of imagining a community within the fold of an atomized society counterpoints the violent, even sensationally morbid, realism pervading the text. It also explains the didactic and moralizing sections where the assured authorial vbice seems to compensate for the disorientation of the protagonist and the episodic plot. The climax of Bulosan's project of educating his compatriots about the unifying trajectory of their fragmented lives allows him to understand the "simplicity of their hearts" based on a "common understanding" that America "is still our unfinished dream.' Purged of his narcissistic malaise, he confesses: "I was rediscovering myself in their lives." This counters the Crusoe motif of individualistic struggle for survival dominating the early stages of his self-discovery. It also rejects the social Darwinist idea of the beast or wolf in every person, replacing it with the Moses/mother motif of collective concern. The narrator's private self dissolves into the body of an enlarged "family" whose members are affiliated by purpose or principle. It anticipates that Culosan would later call "the revolution" where ordinary workers would "play our own role n the turbulent drama of history…the one and only common thread that bound us together, white and black and brown, in America."

The theme of fraternity among races (enabled by the fight against a common global enemy, fascism) had been sounded initially in Bulosan's desire "to know [the hoboes in the freight trains] and to be a part of their life." This idea of solidarity serves as the dominant structure of feeling and reference that motivates the obsession with the Spanish Civil War, the key historical conflict of reaction and progress in this period and a touchstone of authentic internationalism. It is sounded in the often-quoted programmatic testament ascribed to Macario in Chapter 25, where the narrator harps on the key metaphor of the old world dying while a new world is struggling to be born; here "America is in the hearts of men that died for freedom….a prophecy of a new society." Framed by Bulosan's cathartic discovery of his capacity to write and his acquisition of a socialist vision of "the war between labor and capital," the apostrophe to the multiracial masses as "America" in the context of the twin process of dying and birth is more fruitfully grasped as part of Bulosan's strategy to re-articulate the discourse of human/national popular rights on the terrain of hegemonic liberalism itself toward a socialist direction. This, of course, incurs risks and liabilities, hence the invocation of "America" presages a recursive doublebind, a troubling paradox, as every reader will experience.

So far the theme of popular-front democracy versus fascism occupies the foreground of a testimony in which Japanese aggression evokes the earlier bloody pacification of the islands by U.S. troops. This is obliquely conveyed by the civil war in the first twelve chapters. This antagonism signaled by the outbreak of World War II may be used to resolve the tension between native idealism and realist mimesis. We may consider this utopian resolution as one mediating the idea of "America" as a classless society and the actuality of racism and exploitation. It is achieved at the expense of extinguishing the historical specificity of what is indigenous or autochtonous, namely, the primal event of colonial subjugation and deracination impelling the act of remembrance.

A dialectic of compensatory fulfillment is offered here when the fact of colonial domination becomes the repressed traumatic object returning to the surface of everyday life. Bulosan himself points out that as exiles "socially strangled in America," rootless, Filipinos find it easier "to integrate ourselves in a universal ideal." This truth is personified by Felix Razon who connects the peasant uprisings in Tayug, Pangasinan, with the Loyalist cause in Spain. This is the thrust of the autobiographical schema of the narrative oriented around the development or education of a young man who matures into an artist, reminiscent of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus. However, unlike the Irish counterpart, the vocation of writer among colonized migrant workers should be considered not so much as a prestigious status—a possibility foiled by circumstances—as a consciously held ethico-political stance geared to comprehend the world through ideas and a broad knowledge of other cultures, transcending locale and origin.

In short, it is a vocation of serving as the tribune of what Frantz Fanon called "the wretched of the earth," people of color around the world.

Pedagogical Mutation

The theme of growing up, together with the initiation into adult reality, is the most commonly emphasized feature of AIH. From the time he learns the facts of landlord exploitation and sexist corruption in Part I to the abuses of labor contractors, repeated trauma of racist violence, and his discovery that it was "a crime to be a Filipino in California," together with the hunger and loneliness of the "alien" in a dehumanizing milieu, the narrator metamphoses into an anti-hero and undergoes a test of character. He succeeds in his initial objective of linking up with his brothers Amado and Macario, thus reconstituting the shattered family. This reunion disrupts the linear plot of the usual immigrant story of labor recruitment. Eventually, the brothers fighting at the end dissolves the mystique of kinship and catalyzes the protagonist's entry into an emergent community whodse festival is suggested in Chapter 46. But this fulfillment of a vow to unite the dispersed family serves to provide the occasion for writing, for the composition of this diasporic text. In effect, the condition of possibility for art is imperial racist violence.

This crucial turn occurs in the exact middle of the book, at the end of Chapter 23. Struggling to communicate to his brother, the protagonist narrates his own life and gains release from the prison of his silence to "tell the world what they've done to me." The passive victim recovers poise and evolves into an actor, a creative agent of his life. This is repeated later in Chapter 41, where he laments his brother's suffering and tries to piece together "the mosaic of our lives." This discovery of the capacity for expression comes after he revolts against his employer at the Opal Café two chapters earlier: "I had struck at the white world, at last; and I felt free." When he meets the socialist lawyer Pascual, Bulosan assumes his role as witness/spokesperson for the union movement. We recall that he helped edit a movement paper, *The New Tide,* and later, *The Philippine Commonwealth Times.* Now he envisions literature as the allegory of his death and rebirth, and his role as collective protagonist, a token of a social type, empowering the genesis of a transformed community of equals.

A fortuitous change occurs when this theme of the native's development as wordsmith (literally letter-write) is quickly displaced by another subplot. Pascual, the first Filipino identified as a socialist, dies at the end of Part II and the first half of the book culminates in the rhetoric of "We are all America." The apprenticeship with Conrado Torres in the Alaskan cannery, with Julio, Luz, Pascual, Max Smith (whose exploits mirror the duplicity of the system), and particularly with Jose (whose mutilation bears the stigmata of the rebel outlaw) is, of course, a composite of many lives whose function is to indicate what the potential is for multiethnic unity. Partly sublimated in the act of writing, Bulosan's fear of the barbarian and sentimentalist in himself, his anger at social injustice, and his desire for participation in a "dynamic social struggle." are registered in the drama of union activism in Part II.

From Analysis to Synthesis

What any reader would have noticed at this point is a shift in rhetoric and style. The realistic stance of this memoir and its affinities with picaresque naturalism (distinguished by the recurrent scenes of petty crimes, rough language, squalid surroundings, raw violence) are frequently disrupted by lyricized nostalgic recollections of the homeland. By this time, the generic conventions of the memoir, with the drive for chronological verisimilitude and linear plotting, have already been eroded by a strongly emergent comic rhythm of repetition and uncanny resourcefulness. Characters appear and disappear with inexhaustible gusto. Incidents multiply and replicate themselves while the narrator's comments and the dialogue he records are recycled, quoted, and redistributed in a carnivalesque circulation

of energies. Polyphonic voices fill the void of Filipino lives.The crisis of hegemonic representation arrives at this juncture of the narrative.

In Part III, a decisive break occurs. This permanently cancels out the model of the successful immigrant and its place in the "melting pot" archetype of liberal apologists of empire. Bulosan's dreamlike "conspiracy" of making "a better America," a forgetting of himself, is suspended by the collapse of the body—product of the years of hunger, brutality, and anguish. History, the past, materializes in the return of the "child" as invalid, the time of drifting and wandering displaced by the stasis of physical breakdown.

We discover contained within the disfigured bosom of "America' representatives of its other, its negative reflection. The introduction of Marian signals the establishment of dialogue and empathy. She resurrects the "good" side of America ruined by the treachery of Helen and the patriarchal debasement of women. The prostitute Marian, the ambiguous embodiment of commodification and self-sacrificing devotion, resurrects all the other images of maternal care from the peasant matriarch, Estelle, the nameless girl raped in the train, Judith, Chiye, all the way to the most important influences in his life, particularly Alice and Eileen Odell and Dora Travers, followed by other lesser maternal surrogates like Mary Strandon, Harriet Monroe, Jean Doyle, Anna Dozier, Laura Clarendon, and Jean Lawson. The mysterious Mary of Chapter 44, the last fleeting incarnation of American "hospitality" (the term is used as a pun on the author's hospitalization, which converts him into a reading/writing subaltern) assumes iconic significance as "an angel molded into purity by the cleanliness of our thoughts," affording the narrator "a new faith in myself."

In retrospect, Bulosan's illness—his confinement at the Los Angeles Hospital where the notion of a community larger than the male-bonding of Filipino bachelors in gambling and dance halls manifests itself—is not a gratuitous interruption but a functional device. It halts the spatial discontinuity, the alleged "Necessitous mobility" (Wong 133). of the wayward adventure. It ushers the protagonist into a recognition of his new vocation, n   ot so much as the ignored author of *Laughter*—the index of Bulosan's acknowledgment of the folk sources of his art—as the historian/guardian of collective memory. The numerous recognition episodes interspersed throughout comprise the comic refrain that belies the individualistic fatality and environmental determinism limiting his hopes. This comic reconciliation reinforces his covenant with the "associated producers" of the occupied homeland, the peasantry as matrix of an emancipated future.

The fundamental archetype of the comic genre—the alternation of deth and rebirth in "monumental" time—organizes the allegory of a transported native who "died many deaths" in between his exile and imagined return. It is hazardous and unpredictable itinerary. There are two deaths whose contexts prepare us for the excavation of what is buried in the "American" heart. First, the killing by Japanese contractors of the first union cannery president, Dagohoy, after the interlude with Lily and Rosaline, when Bulosan returns to the primal scene of his arrival, concluding that sequence with "I was pursued by my own life." Second, the suicide of Estevan, whose story "Morning in Narvacan" about a peasant town in northern Luzon, catalyzes a profound spiritual mutation: "I began to rediscover my native land, and the cultural roots there that had nourished me, and I felt a great urge to identify myself with the social awakening of my people." Those deaths impregnate the psyche, inducing the self-genesis noted earlier, recovering the repressed in the language of personal confrontations.

United Front Catharsis

AIH may be grasped as the first example of an unprecedented genre in the literary archive, a popular-front allegory (Denning). This form articulates the problems of class, race, nation, and gender in a complex, overdetermined configuration unravelled in its narrative evolution. The stages of Bulosan's awakening follow a pah away from a focus on "workerist" unionizing to concern wih broad social

issues, first through the CPFR (Committee for the Protection of Filipino Right), which confronted the key racist law of antimiscegenation, and second, with the anti-vanguardist “communist” role of tribuneship for the masses (following Lenin’s concept of counterhegemonic alliances across class), Suspecting the orthodox left of habitual blindness to racism, Bulosan claimed to be a “revolutionist.” Against the tribalism and chauvinism of his compatriots, Bulosan counterposed a socialist outlook at home in symbiotic collaboration with diverse, heterogenous cultures.

But what I think constitutes the originality of this work is its rendering of what Julia Kristeva calls “woman’s time.” This is virtually the subtext or “political unconscious” informing the anti-generic singularity of the text. Comedy and the symbolic dynamics of the unconscious interact with the realist codes of the narrative to generate this new paradigm. Space limitations forbid elaborating on the enigmatic role of women in this “pilgrimage” of finding a home in inhospitable territory. We recall the uncanny interventions of Marian and Mary (compared to the secular ministry of Eileen and Alice Odell) resuscitating the mother/island homeland, mixed with treacherous and seductive counterparts. With Marian, Bulosan stresses care and affectin; his seach for intimacy and knowledge converges on Eileen, “the god of my youth,” annihilating “all personal motives”; but he is uneasy with Alice Odell’s’ “disturbing sensuousness,” while his portrayal of the erotic experience verges on parody. Is the narrator an androgynous protagonist striving for “manhood” while being emasculated? Can we consider AIH a protofeminist text with its unique interweaving of the nomadic and sedentary lines of action, of flight and confrontation? What is certain is that periodically, patriarchal authority is questioned or suspended by a recurrent maternal signifier: “[T]o know my mother’s name was to know the password into the secrets of the soul, into childhood and pleasant memories,…a guiding star, a talisman, a charm that lights us to manhyood and decency” (*America* 123).

A more intensive semiotic commentary would pursue the trope of prophetic return or homecoming. This would endow the past with meaning and help liberate the family and peasantry from ignorance and poverty, a fantasy Bulosan entertains perhaps to evade the challenge of the urgent situations in his life. One can even speculate on the reasons for his malingering and temporizing attitudes. But what should be given a close symptomatic reading is the structure of the dream that Bulosan records in Chapter 40 which functions as the crucial synecdoche for what is repressed—not only by the text but by the scholarly archive. Mislabelled as “the Filipino communist” strike leader, the narrator flees from the police. Falling asleep on the bus, he dreams of his return to his hometown in Mangusmana, Philippines, where he rejoices at seeing his mother and the whole family eating together. Jolted by “tears of remembrance,” he asks himself how the “tragedy” of his childhood had returned in his sleep “because I had forgotten it.”

What had been erased from memory is his youth, the period of growing up in his natal habitat. This makes up Part I of the book, Chapters 1 to 12). This portrays the resourcefulness, strength, courage, insurgent hopefulness of the peasantry, the laboring folk epitomized by his mother (see Chapters 4-9) which most critics have practically neglected or marginalized, paralleling the erasure of the revolutionary achievements of Andre Bonifacio’s Katipunan and the ill-fated Malolos Republic by the bullets and bombs of McKinley’s”Benevolent Assimilation” stance.

Here I would like to underscore the desideratum of an interpretive framework revolving around women’s time, including the haunting image of the motherland. This view would structure all possible “horizons of expectation,” since what the bulk of this dialogic testimony wants to forget but somehow cannot is in fact the absence, or lacuna, whose manifold traces everywhere constitutes the substance of the memoir: the genocidal subjugation of about 10 million Filipinos in the bloody pacification from 1899 to 1913, with over 1.4 natives killed and a whole culture damaged. The aftermath produced a colonial and later neocolonial system which reinforced the feudal structure called “absentee landlordism,” and drove Bulosan and thousands into permanent exile. Its other name is fascism which involves Span-

ish *falangists* operating in the Philippines, American racist vigilantes in the West Coast and Hawaii, the U.S.-supervised Philippine Constabulary that suppressed the Colorum and Sakdal uprisings, and Japanese aggression—this last evoking what the text avoids naming: the U.S. invasion and occupation of the islands at the turn of the century. This is what the text's archaelogy of repetitions seeks to capture: the time of the peasantry's collective action, the time of mothers and all women who have been victimized by patriarchal law and exchanged without the singular value of their desires acknowledged. What this work attempts to seize is the expropriated lives of women whose manifold value has been measured, calculated, and dispersed into the derelict space of "America" where Filipino male workers—including the witnessing sensibility named "Bulosan" in this book—found themselves symbolically, if not literally, castrated. It was a regime of white-spremacist violence premised on formal democracy and the logic of the free market and commodity-fetishism.

Vindicating Prophetic Hope

World War II was at its turning point when Bulosan's testimony appeared. McArthur's shibboleth of returning and liberating the Philippines had fired up Filipino hopes, inspiring Bulosan's summing-up of the collective experience of his generation. In this context, the purpose of AIH can be reconceived as the reinscription of the inaugural moment of loss (U.S. colonization replicated by the Japanese occupation) in the hegemonic culture by a text that violates generic expectations of migrant success. It foregrounds the earth, the soil, and the maternal psyche/habitus as the ground of meaning and identity. Bulosan's writing practice valorizes both the oppositional and the utopian impulses negated by the dominant ideology of acquisitive individualism. To renew those impulses, what is needed is the elucidation of the process whereby the unity of opposites (for example, individual rationality versus tradition) shifts into the protagonist's trial or agon of revealing duplicities and multiple causalities, together with the task of discriminating what is fraudulent from what is genuine.

Whatever the prejudices of readers, Bulosan engages everyone with an interrogation about one's role in the drama of change and transition. It is distilled in the ethico-political reflection at the end of the book: "Our world was this one, but a new one was being born, We belonged to the old world of confusion; but in this other world—new, bright, promising—we would be unable to meet its demands" (*America* 324). To some extent, the narrative displays the modernist tendency of privileging individual autonomy, imaginative transcendence, and Enlightenment progress. Has the postmodernist taste for pastiche, irony, and cynicals relativism rendered AIH suspect if not inutile? Has the millennial temper of new immigrants (of whatever ethnic origin) obsessed with consumerist ideals become the chief obstacle for a renewal of the social energies that lie dormant in the interstices of Bulosan's text? In the light of recent conceptualist trends to allegorize everyday life, it seems fortuitously appropriate to reconsider Bulosan's species of magical or fantastic realism as a singular mediation. AIH allegorizes the radical transformation of the old social relations into a new one, specifically the change from colonial bondage—the culture of silence gripping "the wretched of the earth"—to freedom via critical analysis of ideas and values embodied in typical characters and situations. This project of decolonization carried out by the witness/testifier of AIH is ultimately the project of becoming Filipino, not a successful immigrant, a task accomplished without the luxury of consolations afforded by traditional aesthetic form.

Tracking the Labor of the Negative

We return to the self-contradictory, now insistent voice of the narrator as he attempts a final reconciliation of the dynamic oppositions and polarities in his experience. A striving for totality, an integration of all strands in his life, is also an endeavor to universalize its meaning and significance. The final thrust appears "a return to the source," to invoke Amilcar Cabral's concept of revolutionary renewal, a project of recovering a submerged tradition of indigenous revolutionary culture rooted in over

three hundred years of anti colonial struggle against Spain and the United States, as well as against the Japanese invaders. We highlighted earlier the scene of the 1931 Tayug uprising against feudal landlords and the oligarchic bureaucrats, native agents of U.S. colonialism, with allusions to the 1896 insurrection against Spain. The peasant uprising in turn brings to life the 1924 Strike of Filipino workers against the Hawaii plantation owners. This metonymic chain of signifiers is then syncopated with the metaphoric reiteration of principles of solidarity that generate the concrete universal, the art-work of *AIH*.

In his fiction and poetry, Bulosan reinvented the historic conjuncture of class, gender, race and ethnicity that underpin the epochal antagonism between capitalism and the various socialist experiments since the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. In retrospect, the tensions of the Cold War offered an occasion for him to transcend the nationalist program (the Filipino community was then conceived as an "internal colony" (similar to the Latino barrio and the black ghetto) awaiting proletarian redemption. In the process of resolving inherited contradictions, the boundary erected by U.S. Exceptionalism between the exiled Asian writer and his peasant heritage eventually proved a mirage when Bulosan encountered racist exclusion and fascist violence in the empire's heartland. Stories like "The Story of a Letter," "Be American," and "As Long as the Grass Shall Grow" (the title was borrowed from *Black Elk Speaks*) dramatized the truth that Filipinos suffered not only class exploitation but also gender discrimination (anti- miscegenation laws) and national oppression. In this Filipinos shared a predicament common to other migrants from around the world. Given his dialogue with victims and masters, Bulosan may be the first "postcolonial" writer in the postwar U.S. epoch to emphasize the Hegelianesque struggle for recognition. He posited an inscription of the negative power of the "third world" subaltern refunctioning the archive of Western knowledge for his benefit. He sought to undermine it by transforming it from a "liberationist" perspective inspired by Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire,W.E.B. Du Bois, and other activists of color.

Bulosan's self-contradictory situation unravelled in grappling with concrete problems evinced in his letters and essays, among them "My Education," "I am not a laughing man," "Labor and Capital," and his autobiographical statements. *The Cry and Dedication* may be read as a long argument about the right of national self-determination. Bulosan believed that Filipinos cannot exercise that right as long as the country remained a colony of a power that claimed to be "democratic" in policy but in practice imposed class domination and racial exclusion. Overthrowing the capitalist structure of wage-exploitation also means breaking its stranglehold on people of color in the dependencies (the Philippines remains a neocolonial territory), the source of super profits derived from cheap labor (chiefly overseas Filipino domestics) and natural resources.

A decade after Bulosan's death, Filipino workers on the grape farms of California led by Bulosan's younger comrades began the historic strike that led to the founding of the United Farmworkers of America. It was the culmination of pioneering activism initiated during the Depression by the CIO, ILWU, and earlier formations such as the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America whose leaders were hounded by the FBI. Such groundbreaking disruptions vindicated the aspiration of these dispossessed, disinherited Malayan "natives" for equality and justice. They allied themselves with African Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans, etc.—all of them drawing their energies from grass-roots memory of centuries of resistance to colonizers in an epic sage of heroic "soul-making."

Amid the turbulent controversy over immigration today, more than three million Filipinos comprise the largest segment of the Asian-American group coming from one single country. Despite this number, their creative force for social renewal remains unacknowledged. Bulosan endeavored to articulate its presence in his chronicle of multiracial conflicts and individual quests for happiness, insisting on the primacy of cooperative praxis as the mode of reconciling contradictions and gaining emancipa-

tion. While there is no guarantee of immediate victory, the process of struggle itself testified to the transformative potential and power of its participants. A few years before he died, Bulosan reaffirmed his devotion to "the collective interest and welfare of the whole people" in an editorial in the ILWU 1952 Yearbook. He reiterated his conviction nourished throughout the years of hardship and convivial epiphanies transcribed in *AIH*: "Writing was not sufficient… I drew inspiration from my active participation in the workers' movement. The most decisive move that the writer could make was to take his stand with the workers" ("Writer" 31).

Based on his broadly socialist orientation, Bulosan may be the first consciously historical-materialist writer in the U.S. landscape whose roots in anti-imperialist mass protests and antifascist campaigns defy cooptation into the hegemonic liberal canon. Nonetheless, he has been transmogrified into a model multiculturalist icon. As long as the Philippines remains a neocolonial bastion, and the Filipino diaspora (with its colonized mentality) subsists as an oppressed nationality here and elsewhere, Bulosan's texts remain valuable as speculative instruments for unraveling their own self-contradictory genealogies. They can also serve as safeguards in exploring the identity of this "unhappy consciousness" and its complex, often ambiguous maneuvers of self-deception, within the political economy of U.S. imperial hegemony. His works remain exemplary for other people of color claiming their right to be recognized as co-makers of history. What Mark Twain at the turn of the century perceived as "the Philippine temptation"—the scandalous crucible of the American republic subjugating and killing millions who persist in their refusal to be enslaved, a tenacity enduring up to now, to which Bulosan's life-work bears witness—this arena of struggle or. if you like "conversation," may prove decisive in charting the fate of radical democratic transformation of a declining empire as well as its occupied dependencies in this new millennium.

Works Cited

Alquizola, Marilyn and Lane Hirabayashi. "Carlos Bulosan's Final Defiant Acts: Achievements During the McCarthy Era." *Amerasia Journal* 38.3 (2012): 29-50.

Babb, Sanora. *Sanora Babb Peprs in the Manuscript Collection, Harry Ransom Center. Carlos Bulosan File.* University of Texas, Austin, Texas. Circa 1928-2005.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. T*he Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas P, 1981.

Bulosan, Carlos. *America Is in the Heart*. Seattle and London: Washington UP, 1973.

——. "Autobiography." *Poetry* 47 (February 1936): 267.

——. *On Becoming Filipino,* ed. E. San Juan, Jr. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995.

Cabral, Amilcar. *Return to the Source.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.

Constantino, Renato. *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*. Quezon City: Tala Publishing Services, 1975.

Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front*. London: Verso, 1997.

Du Bois, W.E.B. T*he Souls of Black Folk.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* New York: Grove Press, 1968.

Feria, Dolores, ed. "The Sound of Falling Light: Letters in Exile." *The Diliman Review,*viii, 1-3 (Jan-Sept. 1960): 185-278.

Francisco, Luzviminda. "The Philippine-American War." The Philippines Reader, ed. Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Shalom. Boston: South End Press, pp. 8-19.

Freire, Paulo. *Education for Critical Consciousnes*s. New York: The Seabury Press, 1973.

Goldmann, Lucien. *Essays on Method in the Sociology of Literature*. St Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1980.

Guerrero, Milagros. "The Colorum Uprisings." *Asian Studies* 5 (April 1967): 65-78.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981.

Karnow, Stanley. *In Our Image.* New York: Random House, 1989.

Kristeva, Julia. *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.

McWilliams, Carey. "Introduction" to A*merica Is in the Heart* by Carlos Bulosan. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973, pp. vii-xxiv.

San Juan, E. *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle*. Quezon City: UP Press, 1972.

—-. "Filipinos." In *Encyclopedia of the American Left,* ed. Mari John Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas. New York: Oxford UP, pp. 224-226.

—-. *Balikbayang Sinta: An E. San Juan Reade*r. Quezon City: Ateneo UP, 2008.

—. "An American Witness to the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines." *Amerasia Journal* 40:3 (2014): 55-80.

—. *Carlos Bulosan: Revolutionary Filipino Writer in the United States*. New York: Peter Lang, 2017.

Sturtevant, David. *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines*, 1840-1940. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1976.

Tan, Samuel K. *The Filipino-American War, 1899-1913.* Quezon City: UP Press, 2002.

Taruc, Luis. *Born of the People*. New York: International Publishers, 1953.

Twain, Mark. *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire*, ed. Jim Zwick. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1992.

Veneracion, Jaime. *Agos ng Dugong Kayumanggi*. Quezon City: Education Forum, 1987.

Author

An internationally renowned literary and cultural critic, poet, and activist, E. San Juan, Jr. is emeritus professor of English, Comparative Literature, and Ethnic Studies and former director of the director of the Philippines Cultural Studies Center. His writings focus on the Filipino Diaspora as well as issues of race, social class, subalternity, and the U.S. Empire. His books include: *Racism and Cultural Studies* (Duke), *The Philippine Temptation* (Temple), *Hegemony and Strategies of Transgression* (SUNY Press), and *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (St. Martin's Press/Palgrave).

Since 1997
ISSN 1097-3087

https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/clogic/index

Editors

Rich Gibson
San Diego State University

Martha Gimenez
University of Colorado (retired)

Gregory Meyerson
North Carolina A&T State University

James Neilson
North Carolina A&T State University

Joseph G. Ramsey
University of Massachusetts Boston

E. Wayne Ross
University of British Columbia

David Siar
Winston-Salem State University

Advisory Group

Robert Albritton, *York University, Canada*
Theodore W. Allen, *Brooklyn Public Library (1919-2005)*
Crystal Bartolovich, *Syracuse University*
Rosalyn Baxandall, *State University of New York, Old Westbury*
Vladimir Bilenkin, *North Carolina State University*
Jamie Owen Daniel, *Director of Organizing, UPI Local 4100, IFT/AFT/AFL-CIO*
Anthony Dawahare, *California State University, Northridge*
Greg Dawes, *North Carolina State University*
Teresa L. Ebert, *State University of New York, Albany*
Barbara Foley, *Rutgers University*
Marcial González, *University of California, Berkeley*
Rosemary Hennessy, *State University of New York, Albany*
Mike Hill, State *University of New York, Albany*
Peter Hitchcock, *Graduate Center-City University of New York*
Amitava Kumar, *Vassar College*
Neil Larsen, *University of California, Davis*
John McClendon, *Michigan State University*
Sophia A. McClennen, *Pennsylvania State University*
Andrew Milner, Monash *University, Melbourne*
Warren Montag, *Occidental College*
Bill V. Mullen, *University of Texas, San Antonio*
Richard Ohmann, *Wesleyan University*
Bertell Ollman, *New York University*
Vijay Prashad, *Trinity College*
Russell Reissing, *University of Toledo*
Modhumita Roy, *Tufts University*
E. San Juan, Jr., *Philippines Cultural Study Center*
Sean Sayers, *University of Kent*
Helena Sheehan, *Dublin City University*
David Slavin, *Westfield State College & Emory University*
Paul Smith, *George Mason University*
Alan Spector, *Purdue University Calumet*
Michael Sprinker, *State University of New York, Stony Brook (1950-1999)*
Carol A. Stabile, *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*
Richard Stahler-Sholk, *Eastern Michigan University*
Kenneth Surin, *Duke University*
Jeffrey Williams, *Carnegie Mellon University*
Richard Wolff, *University of Massachusetts, Amherst*
Michael Yates, *University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown*