

Who Writes Carlos Bulosan?

For Delia Aguilar

Charlie Samuya Veric

ABSTRACT

*The importance of Carlos Bulosan in Filipino and Filipino-American radical history and literature is indisputable. His eminence spans the pacific, and he is known, diversely, as a radical poet, fictionist, novelist, and labor organizer. Author of the canonical *Amerasia* and *Heart of America*, Bulosan is celebrated for chronicling the conditions in America in his time, such as racism and unemployment. In the history of criticism on Bulosan's life and work, however, there is an undeclared general consensus that views Bulosan and his work as coherent permanent texts of radicalism and anti-imperialism. Central to the existence of such a tradition of critical reception are the generations of critics who, in more ways than one, control the discourse on and of Carlos Bulosan. This essay inquires into the sphere of the critical reception that orders, for our time and for the time ahead, the reading and interpretation of Bulosan. What eye and seeing, the essay asks, determine the perception of Bulosan as the angel of radicalism? What is obscured in constructing Bulosan as an immutable figure of the political? What light does the reader conceive when the personal is brought into the open and situated against the political? The essay explores the answers to these questions in Bulosan's loving letters to various friends, strangers, and white American women. The presence of these interrogations, the essay believes, will secure ultimately the continuing importance of Carlos Bulosan to radical literature and history.*

This writing rises from the ruins of sadness.

It is a desolation that grows out of a sense of communion between the sender and receiver of the letter, between the sending and receiving of the coming letter. Indeed the epistle demands an

interpretation and, ultimately, an antiphon. This exercise, then, is what one may call a reply. This, therefore, is this writer's response to Carlos Bulosan¹ that may not be an answer at all to the unbearable questions that Bulosan himself summons. In a missive in 26 September 1947, for example, Bulosan thanks Jose de los Reyes for writing to him. "Letters," Bulosan writes back, "are very important in that they play a significant role in our lives; for one thing we try to develop our ideas in letters, and also confess our sins and virtues in time of great loneliness or happiness" (cited in Feria [ed.], 53).² Bulosan writes that this is his case. Were it not for writing, Bulosan admits, he would "have jumped out...this high window a long time ago" (cited in Feria [ed.], 53). In the following sentences, Bulosan informs de los Reyes of the "thousands of light" appearing from a nearby hill, the heavens cold with the illumination of stars. In the aftermath of this apparition, Bulosan "would pick up fragments of [his] life, [then] face the tribe of man" (cited in Feria [ed.], 53).

Certainly, the writing of a letter is a most personal, therefore private, act. It is done in the silence of contemplation. It is accomplished, always and always, in a moment when the letter writer recovers and reconstitutes, in her mind, the bodies and desires of her readers. When a letter writer writes, she anticipates wakeful eyes that would lay their gaze upon her writing. Indeed, the person who writes overcomes the solitude of her self and aspires to reach another self. Letter writing, therefore, as much as it is personal and private, is also constitutive of a community—a collectivity of readers, readings, readerships, and selves. Thus, the personal is also the collective in writing a missive.

I will gather, then, fragments from what remains of Bulosan's specter in his letters. Collect one must as though gathering together broken pieces of light, as though drawing together shattered fragments of Bulosan's lost and recovered selves. More concretely, this labor attempts to grasp the antipodal ideologies that inform the epistolary texts of Carlos Bulosan. How, for example, does Bulosan relate to questions of race, gender and power in his letters to various lovers, relatives, friends and strangers? What for Bulosan the letter writer is the function of writing? How does one explain Bulosan's differing relationships with America and white American women? What does the act of sufferance signify for Bulosan and for the writ of his suffering? This writer argues that these inquiries springing from Bulosan's letters are crucial in understanding the logic of the

construction and dissemination of Carlos Bulosan as a “nationalist” and “radical” writer. This essay, then, may be taken less as a definitive response than as an interrogation of the posthumously constructed “Carlos Bulosan” that animates the body of his texts and textualities. A reading of readings, therefore, is ultimately what this essay is about. Astoundingly enough, Bulosan anticipates the future of reading in another letter to de los Reyes in 4 February 1948. “Perhaps someday your children will be looking at a big shelf of my own books, fifty of them, and wondering what kind of a guy I was to write so furiously and angrily” (57). Bulosan adds:

“Look,” they would probably say, “just look at this crazy peasant who thought he could lick the world! Now he is dead. Did he love many women? He must have been a queer like Whitman and Hart Crane. Understand he never married. Let’s read his letter, perhaps he revealed himself there” (57).

Note Bulosan’s logic, possessed by the potencies of the world and life and death and love and women and, wondrously, queerness. Contemplate, most notably, that these forces are woven into a writing that reveals—into a letter that announces spaces, truths, sexualities, times, classes, and not least of all, loves. For Bulosan, therefore, the letter and the act of its writing become the privileged sites for the articulation of social and personal forms of agency. It is in the province of the letter, in the act of its secret sharing between readings and readers, where the boundaries that divide the public and the private meet as though tropical monsoons in Bulosan’s forsaken country.

I speak in this work to Bulosan’s words fired by a sadness that inspires, paradoxically, a will to life. Here I read the most hidden corners of Bulosan’s utterances begging for the renewal of the act of reading. I read into and out of his sadness, and in reading it, I read life and living. As Bulosan writes, “it is so cold in life. Now I am so lonely” (14). This loneliness is also Bulosan’s source of writing.

I wrote recently: “I began to hate the inhumanity of our age and the ruthlessness of gigantic chains and combines that strangle men’s lives and throttle social aspirations. I hate all the dark forces that made the world a bitter place. So I plunged my whole existence into the world of intellectual activities and searchings for truth” (29).

Anger resonates with despondency. And one cannot fail to sense how these sentiments become the motor drive and idea for a desire to “write,” therefore, articulate a lived existence shaped by the contingencies of the world and its manifold truths. In Bulosan’s configuration, grasping the world and existence means mastering these categories whence gigantic chains and combines also emanate and abound. There is a placing of place and the worlding of world for Bulosan. In a foreign country, Bulosan clears a space for his other presence and creates a sphere for his difference. And one of the ways by which Bulosan places place and worlds world is through writing, which loneliness moves with tender violence. “Because loneliness in this vast land,” Bulosan notes, “was the vital force that had nourished me intellectually before anyone had heard of me, and it will nourish me again more vitally and positively into a new personality” (35).

In Bulosan’s case, the suffering induced by grief becomes the scene, the space of writing and rewriting. Sadness is the force that propels Bulosan into imagining new forms and modes of existence, new wills to life and power. As Bulosan professes to de los Reyes in 4 May 1949: “I am trying to write every day in the midst of utter misery and starvation. I locked myself in the room, plugged the phone, pulled down the shades, and shut out the whole damned world. I know enough of it to carry me for a lifetime of writing” (68). It appears thus that Bulosan’s way of coping was the act of writing. People closest to Bulosan attest to this truth. Critic Dolores Stephens Feria (1957) makes the following observation. “There was nothing,” remembers Feria, “about which he disciplined himself more rigidly than his writing, which to him was an almost priestly vocation. In fact it was the urge to write which sustained sobriety after one of his periodic and tortuous alcoholic benders” (62). Oscar V. Campomanes and Todd S. Gernes (1992) argue, meanwhile, that writing for Bulosan “is revelation, an expression of kinship and community, a gesture of autobiography, and an act of breaking silence, of bearing witness...” (74). The state of the dismal, then, is the organizing character that enables visions of the possible. And at last, it has come down to Bulosan as such. “We,” Bulosan admits, “who seem to understand that there is a great need to remake the filthy world of thieving men and women are also besieged hourly by monumental inner conflicts which are generated and conditioned by our feeling of utter futility” (31).

It appears thus to Bulosan that the reconstruction of the external world demands the resolutions, if not the interpellations, of inner clashes that inhere in conditions of exilic emptiness. The provisionality of self-dispossession transforms itself into a conjuncture where strategies of re-possession are enacted.

Thus the scene of loss becomes the scene of recovery. In Bulosan's terms, sadness is not debilitating but productively transformative. Sadness flings Bulosan into fits of chaos—into the fluid space of the semiotic—whence he emerges at once to recover the symbolic world upon which he writes his subjectivity that always contains traces of desolation, of isolation. More significantly, melancholia is theorized here as in itself constitutive, as well as transformative, of concrete social practices.

The writing of sadness is potentially unruly in this case. In a letter to P. C. Morante in 15 April 1947, for example, Bulosan writes that sometimes he loses his "historical perspective because of this sentimentality" (45). Interestingly, Bulosan reconstructs the parallel universes of history and sentimentality that are antagonistic yet are also supplementary to each other. For Bulosan, the historical and the sentimental constitute a system of histories, distinct and distinctive. Sentimentality, or more concretely, sadness, supplements as well as informs the trajectories of history and the movements of historical action and mediation in Bulosan's constellation of ways of intervention. When Bulosan writes, grief splits his language and opens possibilities of transformations that desire the sublime totality of sadness' absence. "My making as a writer and poet is not mysterious, nor was I gifted by an unknown power. It was hard work and hard living. Suffering, loneliness, pain, hunger, hate, joy, pity, compassion—all these factors made me a writer," Bulosan writes to Florentino B. Valeros (84).

Writing hence is a social practice that takes into account the vicissitudes of the lived experience of the everyday life. In Bulosan's case, sadness underwrites his everyday existence as a writer. "I write, therefore," Bulosan ultimately declares, "with nostalgia" (12). Certainly, a dialectical politics of sadness is posited here. It is important to note, however, that this dialectic is not aimed at creating a dichotomous structure between world systems and their effects, between sadness as a microcosmic principle and politics as an

encompassing metanarrative. But rather, this dialectic is aimed at rethinking sadness as a form of sufferance that transforms despair into a productive political action, into a productive political act of writing. Thus, such dialectic becomes a slippery and slipping terrain of social relations.

The porousness therefore of these categories—the personal and the political, the micro and the macro, the systemic and the local—calls into question the significance of determining their category-ness. Indeed, the categorical indeterminacy that haunts Bulosan’s texts and their place in a specific historical space and time is the most apposite metaphor for Bulosan himself. Scholars working on Bulosan have often pointed out the elusive temperament that seems to resist even Bulosan’s own framing of his self (Evangelista, 1985; Hau and Anderson, 1998). The most common example is the three dissimilar dates given for his birth. Biographer Susan Potter Evangelista laments, moreover, that there is “no final, comprehensive compilation of [Bulosan’s] writings” (1). In a letter to de los Reyes in 6 May 1949, Bulosan himself admits that he is “a hell of a writer” (69). Bulosan adds that he does not bother to keep his work and says that “[he doesn’t] have a single copy of any of [his] books or the magazines where [his] work appeared; and when [he] need[s] a story to publish, [he has] to recall which of [his] friends have a copy. Some guy in the future will have a hell of a time tracing the manuscripts” (69).

Lost in the labyrinth of his own making, Bulosan lends himself to contradictions that he himself seduces like a condemned Minotaur. One such seduction is the information that Bulosan provides in a letter to Valeros in 8 April 1955. Attached to that letter is a partial bibliography that Bulosan compiled as a favor to Valeros’s wife who was doing her thesis on Bulosan’s writings. In the letter Bulosan says that he “made a personal resolution never to reveal certain facets of [his] life” (84). Curiously, Bulosan denies in that missive any marital union with anyone and warns Valeros of the things written about him. Bulosan says, “I have never been married, and perhaps I will never get married” (85). Whereas seven years earlier, Bulosan writes to de los Reyes in 27 July 1948 informing the latter about his relationship with a certain “M.” Writes Bulosan:

M. is my wife, but I have tried to keep it quiet because of reasons that you are already aware of. And it will be that way... that is, we shall live together in great discretion. *I know you will keep this little*

secret in your heart for a while at least until certain aspects of the problem are cleared. We have surely grown up, haven't we? (67, my emphasis)

Bulosan perfects here the wicked art of conspiracy. Bulosan provides two contradictory and contradicting information to two different people whose closeness to him is, needless to say, equally disparate. Logic tells us, however, that we must consider more carefully the knowledge that Bulosan gives to de los Reyes, his known confidant. Meanwhile, Evangelista seems to support, but not quite, Bulosan's marriage to "M.," known also as Marjorie Patton.

In the late 1940's Bulosan had a close relationship with a woman named Marjorie Patton. Ms. Patton, who was also a writer, used the name Mrs. Bulosan socially and in correspondence with her publisher for several years. Some of Bulosan's old friends have referred to her even very recently as Carlos's wife, although when questioned more closely they say they don't think the two were really married. This was also a politically based association, as Marjorie was active in the Cannery Union for which Bulosan was eventually elected Publicity Director (13).

These dissimilar truths about Bulosan seem deliberate. Indeed, we are left with a Bulosan that seems like an intersection of atomistic dualities: the sad and the political, home and exile, history and sentimentality, Philippines and America. Seemingly, Bulosan's presence secretly moves across, among, between, and beyond regimes and truths, beyond himself. For example, Bulosan writes to American Mary E. Allen in 18 December 1953 telling her that at that moment "a ray of light has come into [his] life, and [he] hope[s] it will become brighter when Christmas comes around again" (80). Bulosan tells Allen of his trip to Mexico in 1947, near Lake Chapala, "where [he] rented a little house and slept in the sun or went fishing" (81). Strangely enough, Bulosan drops the question "did you ever get married?" (82). Bulosan says to her: "I never did, and I don't think I ever will. Marriage without a solid all-around structure is bound to crumble" (82). Apparently, Bulosan tells different tales to different people. Each story is exquisite in its own act of telling. It appears therefore that the plural character of the writer we know as "Carlos Bulosan" eternally returns. Intriguingly enough, the plurality that circumscribes Bulosan's iconic construction is repeated even in the works of major

nationalist scholars such as Feria (1960) and E. San Juan Jr. (1995). The most menacing manifestations of such a repetition are the conflicting accounts that Feria and San Juan offer regarding the same document, which is Bulosan's letter to a white American woman named Dorothy Babb. Feria's version can be found in *Sound of Falling Light*, a collection of Bulosan's letters from 1937 to 1955 including one by Matias J. Lagunilla to Mary Allen, and another by Philip L. Paterson to Aurelio Bulosan. According to Feria's documentation, the letter to Babb is dated 22 July 1942. San Juan, meanwhile, dates the same letter 2 July 1942. It is most notable that it is not only the date that is discrepant but also the content of the letter itself. By way of illustration, I provide here Feria's version against which I shall countercheck San Juan's.

Dear D:

I am writing this letter after I finished packing. I wanted to say more than I did this afternoon when we parted, but I had no time to say anything except to skim over irrelevant matters. However, *I will remember this day.*

I am not going this evening, maybe I'll go Saturday evening. A few things have been delayed and I must stay here for several days. I have tried to arrange my affairs before I go because I may not come to Los Angeles again. I have been going around for the last few months in a kind of desperation, but I am all right now.

In spite of everything that has happened to me in America I am not sorry that I was born a Filipino. When I say "Filipino" the sound cuts deep into my being—it hurts. *It will take years to wipe out the sharpness of the word, to erase its notorious connotation in America. And only a great faith in some common goal can give it fullness again.*

All these years you have been prominent in my mind. I think there was not a day that I did not think of you with tenderness. Everything fine and gentle that came into my life since I met you was associated with your gentleness and fine ways. There were times when I cried, knowing that you were gone and lost to me, knowing that I had nobody to talk to with a certain feeling of equality.

I am not young anymore. One of these days you will sit down and recall everything I have said and know that I have been good.

I have thought of you in a wonderful way, so please don't destroy my wonderful memory of you. Whenever I go with my Filipino friends or with my Filipino intellectual acquaintances I speak of you highly and with sincerity. I have nothing against the world now. I don't even hate white America anymore. What is the use hating? I have very little time left in the world and I should like it to be memorable and beautiful.

I can't write anymore now. I think it is useless to write anymore. I hope you are happy. As for myself, I don't care if I am happy or not.

I am proud that I am a Filipino. I used to be angry, to question myself. But now I am proud.

CB (17-8, my emphasis)

What follows is San Juan's version of the same, but not quite the same, letter.

Dear D:

I am writing this letter after I finished packing. I wanted to say more than I did this afternoon when we parted, but I had no time to say anything except to skim over irrelevant matters. However, I will remember *that last moment*.

I am not going this evening, maybe I'll go Saturday evening. A few things have been delayed and I must stay here for several days. I have tried to arrange my affairs before I go because I may not come to Los Angeles again. I have been going around for the last few months in a kind of desperation, but I am all right now.

In spite of everything that has happened to me in America I am not sorry that I was born a Filipino. When I say "Filipino" the sound cuts deep into my being—it hurts.

All these years you have been prominent in my mind. I think there was not a day that I did not think of you with tenderness. Everything fine and gentle that came into my life since I met you was associated with your gentleness and fine ways. There were times when I cried, knowing that you were gone and lost to me, knowing that I had nobody to talk to with a certain feeling of equality.

One of these days you will sit down and recall everything I have said and know that I have been good.

I will never forget you: never. I will never forget what you have given me.

I have thought of you in a wonderful way, so please don't destroy my wonderful memory of you. Whenever I go with my Filipino friends or with my Filipino intellectual acquaintances I speak of you highly and with sincerity.

I have nothing against the world now. I don't even hate white America anymore. What is the use hating?

I think you will understand that I have said everything here. I have very little time left in the world and I should like it to be memorable and beautiful.

I hope you are happy. As for myself, I don't care if I am happy or not.

I am proud that I am a Filipino. I used to be angry, to question myself. But now I am proud.

And so good-bye.

Carlos (208-9, my emphasis)

Feria's version has a total of 30 sentences. Of these, five are missing in San Juan's account: sentences 10 and 11 ("It will take years to wipe out the sharpness of the word, to erase its notorious connotation in America. And only a great faith in some common goal can give it fullness again."); sentence 16 (I am not young anymore.); and sentences 24 and 25 ("I can't write anymore now. I think it is useless to write anymore."). On the other hand, San Juan's account has four sentences not found in Feria's: sentences 16 and 17 ("I will never forget you: never. I will never forget what you have given me."); sentence 23 ("I think you will understand that I have said everything here."); and sentence fragment 30 ("And so good-bye."). What is baffling is that San Juan has a different phrasing of sentence three: "However, I will remember *that last moment*" (209, my emphasis). Whereas Feria's goes, "However, I will remember *this day*" (17, my emphasis). This cannot be a lapse in editing because both scholars based their versions on the same document. Besides, "this day" is infinitely distant from "that last moment," however one looks at them. If we examine the semantic effect of the two contrary phrases, "that last moment" as opposed to "this day" radiates an absolute finality that hints at a radical sundering of the ties that yoke Bulosan and Babb.

It is important to note at this point, however, that the collection that Feria edited came out 35 years earlier than San Juan's *Becoming*. In fact, San Juan acknowledges Feria's generosity for "grant[ing] [him] the right to use Bulosan's letters" (xi). If we analyze San Juan's admission, it appears that Feria's account of the letter in dispute is the more magisterial source, second only to the original that remains a simulacrum, hidden among the lost memories of cold imperial archives and libraries. Moreover, all of Bulosan's letters excerpted by San Juan for his collection appear in Feria's. San Juan, however, included 10 letters not published before, therefore, not found in Feria's. These letters are all addressed to "D," also known as Dorothy Babb. To these ten previously unpublished letters, San Juan added the letter in question. The said letter to Babb, furthermore, is the one dated the latest in San Juan's collection. Thus it completes the set of 11 letters to Babb that San Juan collected for *Becoming*.

Even more mind-boggling is the fact that San Juan excerpts the two missing sentences that appear in Feria's version as a separate letter with a date that tallies with Feria's, 22 July 1942.

In spite of everything that has happened to me in America I am not sorry that I was born a Filipino. When I say "Filipino" the sound cuts deep into my being— it hurts. *It will take years to wipe out the sharpness of the word, to erase its notorious connotation in America. And only a great faith in some common goal can give it fullness again* (174, my emphasis).

I am not suggesting here that one of them altered Bulosan's letter to Babb in 22 July 1942. I, however, interrogate the discrepancy in the posthumous documentation of Bulosan. Certainly, it is urgent to look into the incongruity in terms of the creation of "Carlos Bulosan." It is astonishing to realize, however, that the discrepancy informing the posthumous representation of Bulosan is just a repetition of the anomaly that haunts Bulosan's own body of work. Feria narrates: "In 1945 occurred the notorious plagiarism incident which so marred the remainder of his literary career and which virtually blackballed him in the Philippines. An Italian writer filed suit against the *New Yorker* magazine after discovering a striking similarity between a former story he had written and a later one of Bulosan's" (1957, 64). The case, however, did not reach the courts. It was settled amicably. Feria continues:

For years Bulosan had systematically studied the *New Yorker* in order to slant his materials for them. It is entirely probable that he did at one time read the story and it became embedded somewhere in the back of his mind. His amazing photographic memory was one characteristic which always astounded those who knew him. His powers for retention were incredible (64).

Feria is careful to qualify, however, that “it is simply not logical to conclude that [Bulosan] would stoop to deliberate plagiarism” (64). It is interesting that Feria is not categorical about determining Bulosan’s case. Neither confirming nor affirming, Feria leaves her readers to decide for themselves whether or not Bulosan deliberately plagiarized. The story in question is perhaps “The End of the War,” Bulosan’s contribution to the 2 September 1944 issue of the *New Yorker*. Indeed, the specter of inauthenticity haunts Bulosan. One may say that this is the same ghost that threatens the coherence of his image and representation as a writer. Critic and historian Leopoldo Y. Yabes (1952) writes of this haunting. Yabes notes: “[Bulosan’s] critics refer, in ill-concealed joy, to what they choose to call Bulosan’s ‘derivation,’ the euphemistic term for ‘plagiarism’” (139). Yabes’s reference to the sly and secret joy of Bulosan’s detractors pertains to the stories included in *The Laughter of my Father* and to some episodes in *America is in the Heart*. It is these critics’ allegation that these works contain materials from folk stories. Yabes, however, vigorously disputes the accusation. “I have conducted,” Yabes defends, “a serious inquiry into the charge and I have found it without basis in fact. . . . Without borrowing the language of the original stories, [Bulosan] has refurbished them; that is, he has written them from his point of view, and published them under his name” (139). Yabes argues that since folklore is part of a common cultural tradition, any writer can write a story based on a folktale and publish it as his own.

It seems there is no end to this specter of inauthenticity. Without a doubt, the “Bulosan” that we know is in part a product of various nationalist critics’ affectionate predications.³ At this point, grasping the “original,” the “authentic” Bulosan is not as compelling as determining what is achieved by attributing certain pronouncements to him. Here, I will not deal with ascertaining the “real” Bulosan. I suggest that the next best thing to do is to reread the readings of Bulosan inclined toward national, and therefore, nationalist politics. Such acts like regulating Bulosan’s texts in order to create a coherent

representation ineluctably constitute a way of reading, a mode of devising reading formations aimed at bringing into being specific reading responses.

It is good to recall that critics have referred to Bulosan's texts such as *America* and *The Cry and the Dedication* as "committed," "serious," "grim and determined," "nationalist," and "revolutionary." The most fervent articulator of such a reading of Bulosan, without a doubt, is San Juan. In his "Introduction" to a volume of Bulosan's writings published by Temple University Press, San Juan reads into *America* a "profoundly radical, anti-Establishment motivation" (11) and declares that Bulosan sharply exhibits a "radical-democratic, socialist vision" (23). According to San Juan, Bulosan has "acquired a consciousness able to comprehend the world through a historical-materialist optic, a philosophy of revolutionary praxis transcending family, ethnic chauvinism, and nation" (13). Bulosan, via San Juan's orifice, "recover[s] a submerged tradition of indigenous revolutionary culture, the deeply rooted insurgent ethos of workers, peasants, and intellectuals against imperial racism and violence" (17). In an earlier work, *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle* (1972), San Juan declares that Bulosan is "the first Filipino writer in English who . . . spearheaded the vanguard of the revolutionary working-class in its struggle against colonialism and exploitation" (1). No doubt, Bulosan exhibits an undeniable grasp of subversive politics. This fact, however, must not lead us into lionizing Bulosan as an unblemished paragon of radicalism because even his most radical works, upon careful re-reading, contain gaps that betray the lack of any revolutionary avowal. This precisely is the contention of certain critics who challenge San Juan's radicalizing reading of Bulosan. One such critic is Joseph A. Galdon (1973), an American Jesuit based in the Philippines. In his review of one of San Juan's earliest book-length publications on Bulosan, Galdon contends that San Juan "has fallen into the trap of reading his own ideas into Bulosan" (220). "San Juan," Galdon maintains, "has discovered many intriguing nuggets in the Bulosan memorabilia, and has certainly made clear his own commitments, but his literary criticism is neither perceptive nor comprehensive. San Juan has written about himself and his own literary positions, but he has not written very critically about Bulosan" (215). "This," declares Galdon, "is his chief complaint against San Juan—his narrowness and his intellectual presumption" (217). Galdon, however, risks appearing naïve when he dismisses San Juan's work as

propaganda, therefore bad criticism. Needless to say, any work has the potential to propagandize. It is clear, however, that Galdon's overall argument has to do with what he perceives as San Juan's radicalizing interpretation of Bulosan.

Meanwhile in Caroline S. Hau and Benedict Anderson's "Introduction" to another posthumously published novel *All the Conspirators*, we see yet another Bulosan who would, perhaps, just perhaps, be shamed to complete insignificance when held against the Bulosan of San Juan's reading. "A cursory reading of *Conspirators*," Hau and Anderson admit, "is bound to disappoint students of Bulosan who expect the kind of committed writing that they have encountered in *America is in the Heart* and [*The*] *Cry and the Dedication*" (xiii). Hau and Anderson propose that *Conspirators* is a short novel that "reads like an unassuming potboiler, replete with inordinate amount of coincidences [and] happenstance" (xv). Weighed down by the "revolutionary," therefore "radical," status of Bulosan's foundational novels, Hau and Anderson try to respond to San Juan's rendering of Bulosan by raising the following question. "How did Bulosan go from writing the paradigmatic Filipino American *Bildungsroman* and, better yet, a classic of Filipino *litterature engagée* to a "commercial" novel about an American tracking down a missing fellow-American in the Philippines?" (xv). It is curious that Hau and Anderson position themselves and their reading, without really saying, as emanating from "new generations of readers" (vii). Proposing their reading as a corrective, Hau and Anderson suggest "not evaluating the novel in light of Bulosan's other novels, but... examining the connections between them" (xv). They argue that *Conspirators* must be read as the photographic negative of Bulosan's "great novel" *Cry* because both "map, respectively, the corrosive and transformative truth of the neocolonial Philippines in all its manifestations, mutations, and possibilities" (xxiv). And here lies the rub. Hau and Anderson promise to reread Bulosan, but in the end, they fail to deliver. What we have, alas, is the rehearsing of the same old reading of Bulosan by purportedly "new generations of readers." Indeed, the canonical reading of Bulosan as a committed writer is the policing machine that silences the singing gaps and fissures in Bulosan's cacophonous corpus of works.

Let me return, at this point, to the disparate documentation of Bulosan's letter to Babb. It seems to me that the letter in its altered

state is the storm that threatens to obliterate the proud house of canonical reading of Bulosan. It must be recalled that the incendiary character of that letter lies in the fact that this message, written in the language of the enemy, is like a lover's missive to the seemingly unobtainable Other. Other because Babb is a white American as opposed to Bulosan who is a self-exiled Filipino native, a person of color. Apparently, the letter signifies the mourning of the native over the loss of the possibility to consummate one-wholeness—unity, and thus, coherence, a condition that the native can realize only by obtaining the Other. Note, for example, the absence of sentences 10 and 11 in San Juan's chronicle. In the preceding sentences, Bulosan tells Babb that in spite of what has happened to him in America, he is not sorry to have been born a Filipino, the sound of which "cuts deep into his being—it hurts" (18). Filipinoness, then, is the epistemic ensign that wounds because the very act of its writing, its marking, "hurts" Bulosan's own configuration of his ontological selfhood. In other words, Filipinoness is the condition of Bulosan's identity that attracts unto itself, unto its lived existence, real possibilities of damage. These conditions no doubt are informed by the vehemence of racial politics endemic to Bulosan's space and time. As the missing sentences in San Juan go: "It will take years to wipe out the sharpness of the word, to erase its notorious connotation in America. And only a great faith in some common goal can give it fullness again" (18). Here, Bulosan imagines the future and anticipates the fulfillment of such an identity in time ahead. This fullness, however, is anchored in a "great faith in some common goal." Remember that Bulosan is addressing Babb, the Other, in his letter. Thus, "commonality" can only be thought of as the erasure of difference peculiar to their relationship. Bulosan, therefore, hints at the perfection of the union between the "I" and the "Other" and, in the end, eradicate the specularly of their difference. The achievement of such a desire, however, looms as a moment of failure because the union itself is beyond fulfillment given the logic of racial politics at the time. The loss of the possible is what Bulosan mourns when he realizes he is losing the unobtainable other in the form of a white American lover. As Bulosan confesses to Babb: "There were times when I cried, knowing that you were gone and lost to me, knowing that I had nobody to talk to with a certain feeling of equality" (18).

Earlier, I discussed the notion of sufferance and its dialectical relation to Bulosan's act of writing, how sufferance is transmogrified

into writing. Such concept, I suggest, is imperative in order to understand the absence of certain pronouncements in San Juan's account. The missing sentences in San Juan go: "I can't write anymore now. I think it is useless to write anymore" (18). What we have here is the reversal of the productive capacity of sufferance, the end of writing. Such an insinuation of a writing nadir becomes even more relevant when contextualized in Bulosan's specific emotive condition at the time. A month before his letter to Babb, Bulosan writes to Feria in May that he is working on a 600-page manuscript (*America is in the Heart*) the deadline of which is 1 June 1942. In the same letter, Bulosan informs Feria that he "get[s] restless and lonely after a day's work" and that the "life of a literary person is awfully lonely" (15). In 22 June 1942, 21 days past the deadline, Bulosan writes to Rodrigo Feria that his "agent is merely waiting for [the] three chapters of [his] autobiography" (17). This novel is Bulosan's foundational text that secures his place in the history of Asian diaspora to the United States. Exactly a month after, in 22 July 1942, Bulosan says, "It is useless to write anymore" (18).

What is interesting though is that romance underwrites the sufferance that originates from a racially forbidden relationship between Bulosan and Babb. More importantly, Bulosan's attempts at writing his identity as an exile and his assertion of it end when he refuses to acknowledge the contradiction of his racial existence in an imperial country. In what can only be described as defeat, Bulosan goes on to affirm his assimilation into America as a Filipino. "I have nothing against the world now," Bulosan writes, "I don't even hate white America anymore... I am proud that I am a Filipino" (18). Interestingly, the avowal of his Filipinoness comes after realizing the impossible totality—the consummate unity—of the native "I" and the foreign "Other" in a country other to the speaking "I." Here is loss and mourning over a white woman-land otherwise known as America. Indeed there is something instructively symptomatic about Bulosan's relations with white American women. This tie, actually, is the disquieting link between Bulosan, a colonial subject-object, and America, a colonial and colonialist entity. Such a conjunction is disturbing because it implicates gender as well as an undeniably gendered problematic that is rarely given rightful attention by nationalist critics of Bulosan.⁴ In San Juan's introduction to *Becoming*, for example, he evades Bulosan's flagrant conflation of America with a female and feminine persona:

Who is "America"? Bulosan replies in his text: Eileen Odell, one of his companions and mentors, "was undeniably the America I had wanted to find in those frantic days of fear and flight, in those hour of acute hunger and loneliness. This America was human, good, and real" (235 [on Bulosan's relations with women, see *Evangelista*]). If "Eileen" and her surrogates function as a synecdoche for all those who demonstrated comradeship to a stranger like Bulosan, then the term should not be conflated with the abstract referent "U.S.A." as a whole. Overall, the caring maternal figure with her multiple personifications (the peasant mother, Marian, the Odell sisters, Mary, and others who serve as icons of mutual recognition) is the singular desire thematized as "America" (11).

Without a doubt, San Juan shifts the gender aspect and tries to deflect the potentially sundering equation between Bulosan's ardent love for white women and his idealization of "America." This is understandable. Bulosan's gendered symbolic representation of America, if not contained, is capable of exploding any attempt to historicize Bulosan, in San Juan's terms, as a profoundly radical, anti-Establishment writer. For how can Bulosan be anti-Establishment when the Establishment is America and America is apotheosized as a white woman that he so desires no end, and in turn, makes him endure bouts of vertiginous melancholia? And what can be more telling than Bulosan's own metaphor describing the cities of America as "manswarmed" (38) as though a multitude of men is smothering a body-America indubitably female and feminine? For always, it is Bulosan's mark that he misrecognizes America and womanness as one and inseparable, the same. Bulosan writes for example: "I know you are one of the wonderful women who make men strive all their lives for the decency of the world... And always in my memory of America there will be nothing more significant than what you have done for me. I owe everything to you" (14). It is interesting to note that the roots of Bulosan's misrecognition of America extend into the years of his childhood. One gets a glimpse of this condition in Bulosan's letters to Arthur, one of his nephews. In 8 March 1948, Bulosan (1991) writes of the days of his childhood in the village.⁵ In that letter, Bulosan remembers the "beautiful American doll" (342) given to him as a gift by Arthur's father when he was in the second grade. Bulosan's fascination for America is certainly immense. At one point, Bulosan describes the love for the white woman as

“schizophrenic,” a “distillation of a Pinoy’s feelings for a white woman, beautiful and necessary in many ways, but at the same time cruel and hard in a way that the primitive-minded Pinoy does not understand and refuses to understand” (28-9). Such a persistent refusal to understand the racial dynamic of a white love for an American woman echoes itself in a parable that Bulosan calls American:

I will probably start one of the most important books in my life soon, maybe sometime next week, and will try to work on it seriously and slowly. It concerns racial lies: the relations between Pinoys and white Americans. Here it is, Joe: Suddenly in the night a Filipino houseboy kills a friend and in his attempt to escape from the law he stumbles into his dark room and bumps into the wall. When he wakes up he is confronted by a veiled image in the darkness who reveals to him that he has become *white*. It is true, of course, that he has become a white man. But the image tells him that he will remain a white man so long he will not fall in love with a white woman! And that is the tragedy because he has fallen in love with a white woman. Get that? So long he will not fall in love with a white woman! Then, according to the warning of the white image, he would become a Filipino again, ugly, illiterate, monster-like, and vicious.

This is a parable, of course, an American parable... So this is the great challenge to the protagonist of the novel: to give up the opportunity of being a white man, who is intelligent, moneyed and also handsome, to become an ugly Filipino again in order to follow the tragic course of his heart: his love for the white woman—this is the theme (47).

At first, one gets puzzled that Bulosan deems a novel about racial lies significant to the future of the islands, the Philippines. Upon closer inspection, however, the novel never written (or not yet posthumously discovered?) comes across as the most concrete articulation—therefore, analysis and indictment—of the Philippine-American relations. The Filipino love for America is transposed as love for a white woman. In the case of Bulosan, the land formation we know as America is equated with a white woman, with her white body, to be precise. The Filipino protagonist (ugly, illiterate, monster-like, and vicious) loses his phantasmatic desire to become white (handsome, moneyed, and intelligent) because of his love for a white

woman. Such a situation, replete with contemplation of crossings and erasures, adumbrates the imagining of the body as simultaneously the last frontier and the border upon which identity is written where difference itself sees the specter of its ultimate resolution and annulment. The white woman's body is the territory that diasporic presences attempt to colonize via the heterosexual practice of love and fornication. Thus the colonized male feminizes the colonial female. The heterosexual dynamic obtains in a racially uneven relation even if the colonized male is always already racially constructed as subordinate. In Bulosan's order of things, there is indeed an implosion of the sexual into the political as well as the implosion of America as an idea into America as a female and feminine corporeality. To illustrate, Bulosan writes to Valeros that his "politico-economic ideas are embodied in all [his] writings, but more concretely in [his] poetry" (85). Interestingly Bulosan admits that he has plenty of "very unusual pieces of poetry [that] reflect the agonies of a *Filipino* lover loving a *white* woman in America" (28). Bulosan's relations with women, however, are ambivalent: "I hate the company of women day and night; for a day or a night, it is all right with me. It inspires me. It gives me monumental thoughts. That is the way with me" (28). The place of white American women in Bulosan's life and work is at once life-giving and loath-inspiring. White American women induce in Bulosan the capacity to envision thoughts of the possible, the power to imagine and think through what is beyond the grasp of his racially violated mind, body and spirit. It is not surprising therefore that the most pivotal people in Bulosan's life as a writer are all white women: Harriet Munroe, Susan Potter Evangelista, Dolores Stephens Feria, and most especially, "Dorothy." Indeed the ambivalence of Bulosan's relationship with American white women best informs the discrepancy that threatens his monument as a radical writer.

In the light of the discussion above, let me at this point rethink the location of Bulosan in cultural praxis. White American bodies appearing as metaphors for the recuperation of exilic condition and the fulfillment of the sublime recur like a bad dream in Bulosan's corpus. As Bulosan unabashedly declares in a letter to de los Reyes: "There is really a need for a novel covering the ideal friendship, courtship, and marriage of a Pinoy and an American white woman" (71). It is a persistent concern for Bulosan, this trope of assimilation via the narrative of heterosexual relation. This concern, Bulosan tells us, stems from a "common rootlessness and loneliness" (54). America

is the land that exiles Bulosan yet in it, he also finds solace that is apotheosized variously into the seduction of women and whiteness and bodies. Undeniably, such a narrative reeks of cannibalizing tendencies that proceed under sexualized modes of relations. The woman's body as America is a white one—a white blissful expanse—where Bulosan finds the nurturing forces of culture, while, at the same time, sees the woman-land, the feminized America, as a space open to possibilities of masculine recolonization. This logic becomes possible because Bulosan grasps America as a gendered space that he may master and lord over. This heterosexual exploit inevitably results in a reproduction of notions of agency and consciousness. Bulosan writes: “But we must be born again, I guess, to find a place in it. We must reconstruct our thinking and living in order to be of use in its realization” (27). In other words, a refunctioning is postulated in order to realize the Filipinos' assimilation into things American. This, I suggest, is a most virulent exhortation because it essays an unproblematized relation between center and periphery, colonizer and colonized, one that posits the negation of the contradiction that arises in uneven placements of power. Clearly, Bulosan's condition of exile in America is not caused by the whims of fate. His displacement is caused by the systematic colonial project of America that induces movements of bleeding in and out of territories, both material and imaginary. Here, Bulosan unwittingly desires the enemy because he sees in its image the fullness of his rebirth. Intimations of blending into the culture of America can be gleaned from his association with such a place as a writer. “You,” Bulosan writes for example, “must have felt the chaotic trend of writing in this country. *We* have a second-class culture in America, and it is going down fast; so much so that I am afraid it will become a culture of hoodlums and rapists of *human thought*” (42-3, my emphasis). The *We* that Bulosan speaks of here is the false plural *We* of an imperialist center, the same bogus consciousness that contains, and therefore reifies, marginalized presences such as Bulosan's. It is amusing that Bulosan mouths the temptations of imperialist categories such as the great divide between high and low cultures and guiltlessly associates himself with the former. Certainly, Bulosan's lapses into humanist peroration evidence the gaps in his consciousness. As such they dissonantly articulate his complicitous assimilation into imperialist knowledges such as these:

I am battling for the resurrection of a dynamic dream that was once the periscope of my life, for the flowering of a little promising

bud that I had once inside me. This may sound incongruous to many people, and ridiculous to many of our friends, because they do not understand the chemistry of a sensitive mind, the fatalities of an over-sensitive personality, the despair and the hope of a dreamer in a strange country, the loneliness of a man without a country except the domain of the universal intellectual discoveries of man (43).

...

It is always our ideals that come out victorious. And in this lies the last hope of mankind, the heroism of freemen, the dignity of the whole human race, the deathless belief in all of us that humanity came into existence to create something deathless and beautiful on this earth (31).

...

We should have a Department of Peace in the cabinet, instead of a Department of War. Hate, greed, selfishness—these are not human nature... Love, kindness, pity, tolerance, happiness, beauty, truth—these are the *real* human nature from which a galaxy of other relevant virtues spring, take root and flourish in manifold form; in what we call brotherhood or common humanity, as the ideal of honest men in the world.... And gone is love; sweet, dear love is gone (76-7).

Bulosan's essentialist romanticization of universal humanist ideals tends to legitimize and validate the unhappy partnership between colonialism and humanism. As Robert Young (1992) argues, "the formation of ideas of human nature, humanity, and the universal qualities of the human mind as the common good of an ethical civilization occurred at the same time as those particularly violent centuries in the history of the world now known as the era of Western colonialism" (245). Undeniably, Bulosan is in the belly of the beast. But Bulosan cannot seem to imagine the *outside* of America and the external of American colonialism. Even more unfortunate is that Bulosan cannot seem to reckon critically the inherent violence of America's colonial and colonialist history that inevitably inflicts its bestial presence upon his and the Philippines' history. This suspicion is made most evident in Bulosan's letter to Grace Cunningham, telling the latter about his wistful experience upon meeting the dying colonial administrator, Manuel L. Quezon. Note that Bulosan here is writing to an American woman about the state of America's colonial yes-man in exile. In that letter dated 1 August 1944, Bulosan recounts to

Cunningham his confusion upon hearing the news of the President's death: "This morning I heard over the radio that President Manuel L. Quezon died. I was writing the 28th chapter of the story of my life when the shocking news came to me. I could not go on with my writing; the words were too confused" (21). Indeed for Bulosan, the death of the President coincides with a loss. "The story of his life," Bulosan writes, "is the actual history of the Philippines in the last forty-five years; that his rise to fame and power is the counterpart of our country's growth to a highly developed nation. I intimated that the story of his life should be written for the world to see the true picture of the Filipino people around the life of one man" (23). There is a double allegorizing in Bulosan's narrative. First, Bulosan suggests that Quezon's life is allegorical of the "prosperous" years of Philippine history. Second, Bulosan posits that to write about the life of Quezon is to write in order for the "world" to understand the history of the Filipino people. To see Quezon as the archetypal figure of the Filipino people is to obscure the resistance against colonial domination in the Philippines and warrant the rent-seeking as well as clientelist character of Philippine colonial democracy.

Apparently, Bulosan's politics is haunted by schizoid dualities that tend to befuddle his so-called "oppositional" relation to America, therefore, to American colonialism itself. If the Bulosan that critics extract from Bulosan the novelist—one that supposedly articulates oppositional literary practices—is being directly negated by Bulosan the letter sender, who then is Carlos Bulosan? Does Bulosan, like his postmortem texts, await the peace of an ultimate determination?

In this modest contribution to the ever growing and fruitfully discordant scholarships on Bulosan, I have attempted to lay bare the contradictions that, I think, have been painfully evaded by critics in order to constitute posthumously a coherent reading of Bulosan that is anchored in oppositional politics. Lest this labor be misinterpreted as desiring to demolish the Bulosan that we know as "radical," let me elucidate that this is a labor of love sprung from the pangs of Bulosan's melancholy, from the despondency necessitated by his own space and time's distinctive relations of power and powerlessness. Neither do I question here the validity of the radicalizing interpretation of critics like San Juan and Feria whose labors have undeniably created the critical climate that Bulosan so rightfully deserves. There are, however, dissident practices and there are dissident practices. Bulosan may

have composed one of the most damning novels against imperialism. But where in Bulosan's letters to white American women can we locate his radical practice? Needless to say the personal is political. In Bulosan's case, however, the practices of the personal have a profound potential to become profoundly anti-political. Certainly Bulosan's immense power stems from the great contradictions that inhere in his own practice of writing. This essay shows that Bulosan seems to lend himself perfectly well to radical politics as easily as he holds himself out to the dangers of misapprehending the enemy. Such is the remarkably instructive dialectic in Bulosan that we risk losing altogether when his personal practices are willfully silenced in order to articulate the political in him. I suggest, then, that Bulosan's own discrepancy in his own political stances is a refraction of the world system's intrinsic contradictions. "Consider now," as Feria notes, "the unalterable fact of Carlos Bulosan: the child-man thrust into a world of strangers at sixteen, his sensitivity hammered cruelly by the hunger and violence of the depression world of America during the nineteen thirties; his body broken by disease, his spirit bruised by uncertainty and isolation; his orphaned intellect clutching at the straws tossed to him, yet producing his first book at twenty-five; and finally dying an expatriate death at forty-one... The fact that it was possible to accomplish what he did within his limitations is sufficient" (65). In the end, Bulosan's case maps out cognitively as well as materially the possibilities and limitations of enacting local resistances against systemic orders. Bulosan, then, serves as a powerful reminder regarding the necessity of refunctioning and rethinking oppositional strategies. Here, I have made use of his epistolary documents that exhibit the interface between the violence of a system and the modes of coping of an individual who, in his own loving practices, sees visions of horizontal comradeship.

Allow me then to end this essay as if I were writing a letter. I begin with an image in mind, a community of readers and readerships. And I end signing my name—loving letter after loving letter—and anticipate the coming of future answers, the unfolding of other responses from other letters, from other lives, from other lands—here and, yes, elsewhere.

ENDNOTES

¹Carlos Bulosan, born in 2 November 1911 in the village of Mangusmana, Binalonan in the Philippines, was rediscovered in the 1970's both in the Philippines and the United States as a committed writer whose life and writing were shaped by his involvement in labor organizing and in the Filipino immigrant community in the United States. He arrived in Seattle, Washington in 1931. Best known for his proto-autobiographical novel *America is in the Heart*, Bulosan also wrote short stories which appeared in American serials such as *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. The war years saw the publication of his poetry collections *Letter from America* and *The Voice of Bataan*. He died in 11 September 1956 but came to live again in the literature syllabi of Philippine and American universities.

²Indeed, the letter is supreme in Bulosan's universe of meaning and meaning making. In fact, the act of letter writing sits comfortably in his body of works. As mentioned, one of his poetry collections bears the title *Letter from America*. Not surprisingly, and delightfully so, a number of his poems are entitled "Letter in Exile," "Letter from America: I," "Letter from America: II," "Letter to Josephine," and "Letter to Fred, My Nephew." For these poems, see Susan Evangelista, *Carlos Bulosan and His Poetry* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila UP, 1985). Most interestingly, one short story of Bulosan is entitled "The Story of a Letter." The story, originally published in *New Masses* in 1946, is reprinted in a volume edited by E. San Juan, Jr., *On Becoming Filipino* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995). All these poems and story are like the word disconsolate, or, as Pablo Neruda wrote, Melancholy. They cast back sadness, as though an old, fat, laughing woman's likeness on a dismembered mirror. "The Story of a Letter," for instance, is about a missive from America written in English that Berto sends to his father back in the Philippines. This letter—created out of the language of the enemy—coming forth from the beautiful belly of the beast—propels Berto's younger brother to see America in order to find an older brother and, eventually, to learn the language of his brother's letter. The story ends in a reading of the letter:

"Dear Father:

America is a great country. Tall buildings. Wide good land. The people walking. But I feel sad. I am writing you this hour of my sentimental.

Your son—Berto." (65)

At the time, Bulosan writes the story of a letter, in that *hour of his sentimental*. What remains before us after the violence of reading, therefore, is the Writing of

the hour of sentimental. The reading of the letter, therefore, also proclaims the unfolding of the writer's sentimental hour that is inscribed in a foreign language made familiar and revealed to the readers by translation. An analysis, however, of the poems as well as the story, deserves a more careful reading elsewhere. But it is interesting indeed to observe that a kind of nostalgia out of an exiled state of being informs the voices that resonate in the poems and story cited above.

³Perhaps, one may also interrogate the kind of discourse that emanates from an edited body of work. Meaning, question the way new discursive configurations ensue when a particular text is altered by a specific editor with a specific project and ideological trajectory in mind—a semantic formation emerging from the retailored text that may strategically contradict the provisional “substance” of the original. To illustrate, I will provide a sample of Bulosan's letter that appears altered in San Juan's *Becoming*. By saying altered, I refer to Feria's account of the letter as the comparative case against which San Juan's account becomes discrepant. In a letter to Dorothy Babb in 21 March 1953, San Juan begins his version with the second sentence in Feria that goes: “Human life could truly be a paradise, in many respects, if the money spent for destruction were used for the elimination of disease, schools propagating tolerance, factories for necessary consumer goods, and research centers, clinics, hospitals, maternity wards, etc.” (181). In Feria, however, the first sentence, after which San Juan starts, goes: “Your note came and I was happy to hear from you, but sorry you are still suffering from the old illnesses” (76). The context here is that Bulosan is writing to a beloved American White woman Babb. This important idea, however, is lost in San Juan's version of the letter. Thus, readers will read San Juan's version as a critique and rejection of America's colonialist war mongering. Intriguingly, San Juan's version ends with Feria's third paragraph: “There is consolation in poetry, and also inspiration. But not in cynicism” [in Feria's version, the “P” of “poetry” is capitalized] (182). After which San Juan cuts up substantial portions and connects sentences that are, given their contexts, incoherent. But given their totally different form and content, they become consistent, in concert with San Juan's own logic. If one examines Feria's account, one realizes that the parts that San Juan leaves out are the incriminating statements complete with intimations of acceptance in America. After the first sentence of San Juan's version the following is obliterated: “Our technological achievement in America was so sudden and rapid that we had no time to create a sort of mythology as the basis of our cultural fund” (77). Notice Bulosan's “our,” this plural term that embraces both Bulosan and Babb as heirs to American history. For other discrepancies too many to enumerate here, see San Juan and Feria, especially pages 173-84 of *Becoming*.

⁴Evangelista, Bulosan's biographer, devotes two pages to a discussion of Bulosan's relations with women. In her account, Evangelista only narrates the

American women deemed to have been Bulosan's close friends and/or lovers. Unfortunately, Evangelista does not delve into the ramifications of such uneven relationship. Most deplorable is Evangelista's conclusion of her short discussion of Bulosan's affairs with an inventory of Bulosan's male American friends.

⁵The letter to Arthur Bulosan is one of the two letters posthumously discovered by Campomanes and Gernes. The texts were first published in *Melus* and subsequently reprinted in *Philippine Studies*. This essay uses the version found in *Philippine Studies*.

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