

Forum Kritika: Reflections on Carlos Bulosan and
Becoming Filipino

CARLOS BULOSAN ON WRITING: THE ROLE OF LETTERS

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Abstract

Two themes from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's study, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, serve as an inspiration for this rumination on Carlos Bulosan's 1955 letter to Florentino B. Valeros about writing and the responsibilities of the writer. Because Bulosan was an inherently political writer, his correspondence is part-and-parcel of his writing machine, inclusive of his poetry, short stories, novels, and expository essays. In this, Bulosan's case is parallel to that of Kafka. In contradistinction to Kafka, however, Bulosan's letters are not easily categorized in terms of thematics such as those Deleuze and Guattari identify in the cases of Kafka and Proust. Because both his life and his cultural production were forged in the heat of struggles for workers' rights, against racism, and against various manifestations of anti-immigrant, anti-Filipino, and anti-progressive sentiments during his life-time, Bulosan's correspondence demarks a line of flight that is distinctive from the conventions expressed by other authors in their letters.

Keywords

America Is in the Heart as minor literature; Bulosan's letters; Carlos Bulosan; Carlos Bulosan on writing and art; Carlos Bulosan, political writing; politics and writing

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Letters and Minor Literature

The correspondence of authors, from authors or between authors, etc., in traditional majority literatures such as British or American, has customarily been of interest to the reading public and literary scholars.¹ At times, it illuminates the creative text, functioning as a kind of secondary text. Other times, it is only interestingly tangential, and sometimes even prurient. If a famous author's correspondence is published, it is read with interest, sometimes even illuminating the authors' lives, but it is not generally regarded as having the same centrality as the authors' creative texts.

In the canonical tradition of literature, there are no established guidelines that are appropriate or specific in regard to the treatment of correspondence within the genre of minor literature, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari whose argument we shall draw upon in this discussion.² Thus, the same hierarchy that is customarily applied to canonical and traditional literature may mistakenly be applied to the works of authors of minor literature such as Carlos Bulosan, the major subject of this essay.

We argue here that Bulosan's letters are a vital part to the understanding of his writings in their totality, and should not be relegated to an ancillary position. To wit: if the recent discovery of a letter by Edith Wharton can help the reader determine if her heroine, Lily Bart (*House of Mirth*), died of an accidental overdose or committed suicide, this does not make Lily any less a victim to her limited role in her social sphere. Bulosan, on the other hand, is different. With political authors such as Bulosan, the application of traditional tools of analysis can lead to interpretations, comparisons, and conclusions that are quite the opposite of authorial intent, and this has in fact happened with popular reading receptions of Bulosan. Because it is not part of conventional tradition, minor literature does not yet have an established approach for analysis. We concur with Reda Bensmaia, in his foreword to Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka* (1986), that, as with Kafka, reading Bulosan "is determined by the prominence [of] politics," a politics that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is "neither imaginary nor symbolic."

Bulosan, the author, was himself well-read and conversant in most of the traditional literary genres of poetry and fiction, by way of his own self-education as well as his being, as a youth, a product of American education as it existed in the Philippines during his time. Other first generation Filipino American writers, such as N.V.M. Gonzales and Bienvenido Santos fit a little bit more easily into the category that allows conventional literary analytical tools of literature to be used. Having been English professors in their own right, the latter themselves were quite conversant in the more traditional forms of writing and analysis. This is not to say that their writings do not have viable social critique. Indeed they do, but that is a discussion that should be dealt with in another essay. We are not talking about content here, merely form.

In *America Is in the Heart*, Bulosan had broken away from the conventions of most traditional literary forms. Traditional scholars would say that the work is not a novel, defying traditional novelistic form. As a memoir it is more collective than individualistic in terms of its central subject. Most memoirs are woven from the experiences of a single individual, although even that is debatable. And the discussion of how *America Is in the Heart* is not literature per se can go on and on.

By rights, authors of minor literature can be included in canons that exist, since writings in the historical continuum demonstrate an evolution of style. The stream of consciousness used by authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, for instance, is a breakaway from what literatures preceded it. In the same breath, however, authors like Bulosan stand alone, and not only demonstrate evolution, but a definitive rupture with past narrative conventions. Therefore, minor literature is separate and distinct. The important point here is to acknowledge that for authors like Bulosan and Kafka, their politics is central and integral to the meaning and understanding of their works. (Kafka being the author that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari centralize and deploy in their discussion; here, we apply their analytic to Bulosan.) Furthermore, because these authors' writings stand apart as examples of ruptures in aesthetics, the collection of writings that constitute each of their individual *oeuvres* is also be different in that their letters are incorporated as works that are vital, and not just ancillary.

In countless citations, Deleuze and Guattari's exposition on Franz Kafka (1986) has been lauded for its imaginative evocation of the concept of an oppositional "minor literature." Indeed, Chapter Three, "What Is A Minor Literature?," would seem to have the most obvious application to the *oeuvre* of the great Filipino writer, Carlos Bulosan. A small cottage industry could be built exploring the three necessary features of minor literature in terms of Bulosan's poems, stories, and novels, including the deterritorialization of language, the inherent commitment to politicize cultural production, and what is termed as "collective" as opposed to "individual" levels of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari 16-17). This certainly describes Bulosan and his works.

For us, an equally useful, less obvious, dimension of Deleuze and Guattari has to do with their insistence of the role of letters as an integral dimension of Kafka's work. In Chapter Four, "The Components of Expression," Deleuze and Guattari posit that while the ideal form and content (including the language) of majority literature is territorialized, and thus channeled into a given vector, the trajectory of a minor literature is distinct. In minor literature, "[e]xpression must break forms, encourage ruptures, and new sproutings" (28). This certainly describes *America Is in the Heart*. Moreover, they aver that "[w]hen a form is broken, one must reconstruct the context that will necessarily be part of a rupture in the order of things" (28). In effect, Bulosan's letters are a vital and inseparable part of this reconstruction of context. What is of special use is the fact that, along with the three other components identified, Deleuze and Guattari determine that, although Kafka's

correspondence was never meant for publication let alone public distribution, these particular letters constitute an indispensable dimension of his components of expression (29-34). Taking this affirmation as a signal for the creative literary analysis of minor literature, it strikes us that letters were an equally significant part of Bulosan's life and writing, both in terms of his use of epistolary devices in his novels and short stories, as well as in terms of his personal correspondence. This point remains, even while it is true that the manner in which we cite and draw from Bulosan's letters about the work of a writer differs markedly from the uses of Kafka's correspondence that Deleuze and Guattari delineate.

Bulosan's Letters on Writing

As one peruses Carlos Bulosan's letters, as compiled in Dolores S. Feria's publication, *The Sound of Falling Light*, one gets a sense of the evolution of the artistic sensibility of the great Filipino writer. It is not surprising that there was interest in the thinking processes of such a refreshing and outspoken writer, and that readers would have a curiosity beyond his fiction and poetry. The very existence of Feria's compilation of letters is proof of this. As minor or minority literature speaks to a distinct minority community as well as it generates interest in other minority communities and the majority community as well, the letters would be of fundamental, not just supplemental interest.

Of the letters, which span the years from 1937 to 1956, Feria noted that she selected from the correspondence which was available to her the ones that best allowed her to present a holistic portrait of Bulosan, the person and the artist.³

In her research in the Carlos Bulosan Papers held by the University of Washington Libraries, Marilyn C. Alquizola found and copied a remarkable set of letters that Carlos Bulosan exchanged in 1955 with his colleague in the Philippines, Florentino B. Valeros. Although it is not clear to us if these same letters were available to Feria or not, they certainly seem to be worth quoting at length because they offer a fairly holistic set of autobiographical ruminations on Bulosan's larger artistic vision, including his views about writers and writing, and integrally-related topics such as art, education, the class dynamics of society, and politics. We decided to draw from this correspondence for a number of reasons: it is authenticated as being by Carlos Bulosan; it is readily available for students and scholars to examine independently; it was written to a colleague who had also become a friend, Florentino B. Valeros. Perhaps most significantly, the correspondence contains one of the most complete statements by Bulosan about his perspectives on writing toward the end of his life, given that he would die a premature death less than two years after he had written Valeros.⁴

In order to appreciate the contents of this correspondence, however, it is pertinent to begin with some details delineating the overall context that frames these particular letters.

A Transnational Friendship

At the time that Florentino Valeros wrote to Bulosan, he had actually never met Bulosan in person. Given that they had nonetheless collaborated in terms of past publications, in a letter having to do with a request Valeros was making of Bulosan, Valeros decided to provide a brief account of what he, Valeros, had been doing since had resided in the USA between 1929 and 1937. For most of that period, Valeros reported that he was in Wisconsin, working and going to school. By the time he wrote Bulosan in 1955, he was living in Roxas District, Diliman, and Quezon City, Philippines.

When Valeros wrote Bulosan in 1955, he was on leave from the National Teachers College and teaching full-time at the University of the East. There, Valeros worked with a colleague named Maximo Ramos, with whom Valeros had published a number of books including, *Philippine Harvest*, *Philippine Cross-Section*, and *Reading and Writing the Essay*, among others. Thus, by 1955, Valeros and Bulosan had mutual interests, friends and colleagues in common, and also professional/publication ventures under their belt. So, despite the years and geographical distance that separated the two men, a friendship had evolved on this basis via their correspondence, and as expressed in their letters.

Collegial Correspondence

Valeros's 1955 letter of inquiry, in which he asked Bulosan to provide professional and personal information, was thus based on previous correspondence between the two men. In the course of his query of 1955 and in subsequent correspondence, Valeros recounted that he had published some of Bulosan's work in his co-edited anthology, *Philippine Cross-Section*, and had also published Bulosan's essay "Freedom of Want" in the compilation *Reading and Writing the Essay*. In a subsequent letter, dated June 13, 1955, Valeros indicated that he also intended to publish an entire section on Bulosan in a planned book, *Significant Filipino Writers in English* (which apparently was actually never published). So although the two men had never personally met, they had established a bond in the sense that Valeros, as a critic, clearly had a high regard for Bulosan as a writer. In turn, Bulosan would have responded with a clear sense that whatever he wrote was likely to be quoted in Valeros's publication or publications, and in this sense, many of the thoughts expressed in his letters would probably be shared with the general public.

Before the letter of January 13, Valeros had previously written another letter to Bulosan that was dated January 8, 1955. On that occasion Valeros recounted that his wife (unnamed beyond "Mrs. Valeros") was writing her Masters thesis and that she intended to focus on Bulosan's life and work,⁵ Valeros wrote an appeal, asking Bulosan if he would respond to a list of questions. By way of explaining his request, Valeros noted that he had contacted a number of Bulosan's colleagues

in the Philippines, seeking correspondence that Bulosan had written that might shed light on his career. Interestingly, Valeros noted that Leopoldo Y. Yabes, of the University of the Philippines said that he was no longer in possession of any of his correspondence with Bulosan, since all of Bulosan's letters to Yabes had been seized by the Assistant Attorney General. Apparently, in the effort to prosecute labor leader Amado Hernandez for suspected membership in the Communist Party of the Philippines, Martiniano Vivo, the prosecutor, asked that any letters between Hernandez and other suspected leftists—including Valeros and Bulosan—be seized as potential evidence. (This anecdote indicates that more than Yabes's personal letters were seized by the authorities in a McCarthy-style witch-hunt in the Islands, a topic that would be worth looking in to.)

On this basis—i.e., that no other detailed sources on Bulosan were available to him in the Philippines—Valeros listed nine or ten broad questions, mostly revolving around Bulosan's views on a range of different topics including his literary theory; his political and religious beliefs; and his views on education, as well as on various socio-economic issues. Valeros also inquired as to what Bulosan's views were of Filipinos in the USA and in the Philippines, and asked the related question of what Bulosan thought of Filipino writers, particularly their "obligation" to themselves and to the Philippines. Valeros concluded: Write me a letter telling me about yourself—your hopes and aims . . . points that you want your countrymen or readers to know . . . to appreciate you more, if that is possible (Valeros 1955).

Noting that his wife had to file her thesis by March 1955, Valeros requested that they hear back from Bulosan by January of that year, or by no later than the first week of February, so that his wife would be able to meet her deadline.⁶

Bulosan's Plight Circa 1955

To complete the contextual picture regarding the correspondence in question, it is relevant to note that, by 1955, Bulosan was near the end of his short but very productive life.⁷ He was living in Seattle and working for Local 7.⁸ But immediately upon the publication of Local 7's 1952 *Yearbook*, Bulosan fell seriously ill and had to undergo a recovery that took months in Seattle's Firland Sanitarium.

In addition, during the last five to six years of his life, Bulosan was under surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (Alquizola and Hirabayashi "Carlos Bulosan's Final Defiant Acts"). Apparently brought to the FBI's attention in 1950, because an anonymous informant alleged that Bulosan had detailed knowledge of revolutionary developments throughout Asia, the FBI tried for half a decade to find proof that Bulosan had been a bona fide member of the Communist Party USA. It is difficult to determine exactly what the Bureau's motivation was in terms of initiating a comprehensive dossier on Bulosan. During this period, Bulosan was definitely listed on the FBI's "security card index," which would have meant that he would be detained in case of a national emergency. It also seems

likely that the Immigration and Naturalization Service would have tried to deport Bulosan, a Filipino citizen, had the FBI been able to determine and establish that Bulosan, even in the past, had been a member of the CPUSA.

In 1955, less than two years away from a premature death at the age of 45, Bulosan was decidedly ill, having undergone extensive medical procedures and operations that removed both bones and organs. Contrary to the way some critics have portrayed the author, Bulosan demonstrated, by way of his remarkable productivity, that he was not simply a burnt-out and broken alcoholic he has sometimes been depicted as. Although he was a very sick man, and subject to government harassment, Bulosan continued to write. And much to his credit, he continued to support progressive compatriots, including the likes of Amado V. Hernandez and Luis Taruc in the Philippines, and progressive organizations in the USA and in the Philippines alike.

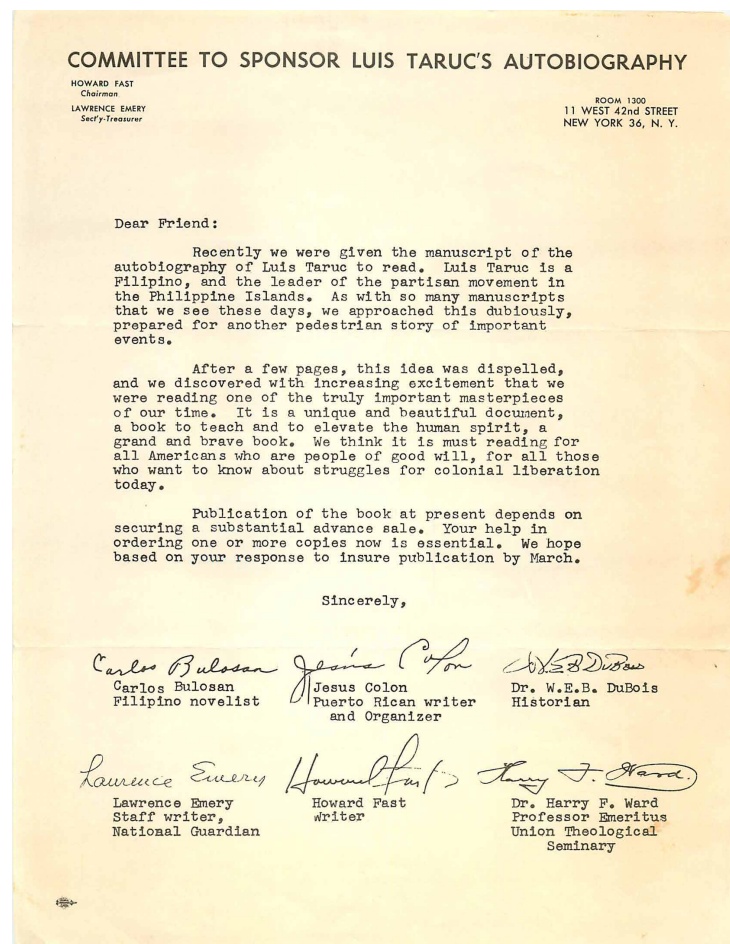


Fig. 1 . Letter from the Committee to Sponsor Luis Taruc's Autobiography.

As partial proof of the latter, we reprint a letter from the Bulosan Papers (undated, but circulated circa 1953), which indicates that Bulosan was one of the notable progressives supporting the publication of Taruc's autobiography that was subsequently published as the International Publishers book, *Born of the People*. Concomitantly, while one of the local agents of the Seattle office of the FBI recommended that Bulosan be removed from the "security card index" when he entered Seattle's Firland Sanitarium, agents subsequently reported that as soon as he was released, in spite of his weakened state, Bulosan reportedly attended a meeting of a suspicious (unnamed) organization that was also being watched by the FBI.

In sum, at the end of his short life, in contrast to what some commentators have opined, Bulosan does not appear to have compromised or waived in terms of his political views and commitments, let alone in terms of his artistic output.

Specifics of the 1955 Letters

On January 6, 1955, Florentino B. Valeros wrote to Carlos Bulosan, but mistakenly sent his letter to his former address in Los Angeles. Noting that his wife had decided to write a Masters thesis, Valeros said it would focus on Bulosan. Having the tentative title, *An Appreciative Study of the Life and Work of Carlos Bulosan*, Valeros asked if Bulosan would share "a few points" about himself so that Mrs. Valeros could amplify on what little information they had access to in the Philippines. Specifically, Valeros wrote:

Please tell me a few things about yourself. For example, date of birth; your literary theory; your political beliefs; your religious beliefs; your beliefs on education; your views of socio-economic problems. (Valeros)
What you think of the Filipinos in America and in the Philippines . . .

After noting his wife's deadline for her thesis, Valeros affectionately ended the letter with their "love and best wishes."

As far as we can determine, the receipt of Valeros's letter was delayed because it had to be forwarded to Bulosan who by then was actually living in Seattle, Washington. As a result, Bulosan began his missive of January 17, 1955, with an account of how he was hired to edit the Yearbook of Local 7 of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), basically explaining that that was why he had moved north from Los Angeles.

Beyond presenting some interesting facts about Local 7 and the US Immigration and Naturalization Service's attempts to deport its leadership, Bulosan also noted that when the *Yearbook* was published, he fell ill yet again and entered a sanitarium for a year, losing his left kidney during his prolonged illness. Jumping to commentary

on why he was involved in the *Yearbook*, Bulosan characterizes himself as a worker, but also a citizen:

Now why would I write about labor unions and their struggles? Because a writer is also a worker... Then again, a writer is also a citizen; and as citizen he must safeguard his civil rights and liberties. Life is a collective work and also a social reality. Therefore the writer must participate with his fellow man in the struggle to protect, to brighten, to fulfill life. Otherwise he has no meaning—a nothing. (Bulosan)

So immediately, Bulosan stands in contrast to conventional authors who do not care to take an explicitly political stance. It is also interestingly that Bulosan makes a clear equation between “writer” and “worker.” Whereas other writers such as the American Edith Wharton and the British Charles Dickens may have engaged in social critique through implicit demonstration by way of killing or marginalizing their characters, Bulosan makes no bones about it, and this is clear in *America Is in the Heart*. Furthermore, in contrast, his protagonist, Allos/Carlos survives in spite of everything that is thrown at him. He does so with the strength of the worker at his core, class struggle as his *modus operandi*, social change as his goal, and brother/sisterhood as his protective canopy. The explicit politics articulated in his response to Valeros’s questions is Bulosan’s framework for writing. This approach also accounts for aspects of Bulosan’s writing style, which at times is indeed strident.

Continuing in this vein, Bulosan conveys to Valeros his philosophy in regard to art:

Now culture being a social product, I firmly believe that any work of art should have a social function – to beautify, to glorify, to dignify man. This assertion has always been true, and it applies to all social systems. But always art is in the hands of the dominant class – which wields it as a power to perpetuate its supremacy and existence. Since any social system is forced to change to another by concrete economic forces, its art changes also to be recharged, reshaped, and revitalized by the new conditions. Thus, if the writer has any significance, he should write about the world in which he lives; interpret his time and envision the future through his knowledge of historical reality. (Bulosan)

What Bulosan articulates here is clearly a blueprint for *America Is in the Heart*. It was no mistake or error generated by the hand of an untrained writer. The form and expression that took shape was a product of difficult “economic forces.” Much like Escher’s Möbius strip, the art “revitalized” was the work it became. No other critic can really explain Bulosan’s writing as well as Bulosan himself. The

author clearly operates at the level of consciousness rather than subconsciously or unconsciously. That is the difference.

With no hesitation, Bulosan continues to enunciate the role of the writer. [...] those are times that demand of the writer to declare his positive stand – his supreme sacrifice – on questions of war or peace, life or death. The writer who sides with and gives voice to democracy and progress is a real writer, because he writes to protect man and restore his dignity. He writes so that this will be a world of mutual cooperation, mutual protection, mutual love; so that darkness, ignorance, brutality, exploitation of man by another, and deceit will be purged from the face of the earth. (Bulosan)

In addition, Bulosan clearly believed that class structures, and the tools of governance that create and enforce class division, should be unmasked and denounced as an integral part of a writer's duties:

A writer should be political also. Governments or states are always in the hands of the ruling classes, and so long as there are states, there are also tyrannies. In a bourgeois state, under capitalism or imperialism, the tyranny is against the working class, against the majority. (Bulosan)

After discussing his views on the origins and functions of religion, Bulosan presents a decidedly materialistic, and class-oriented, view of education that is well worth quoting as well:

And education – what kind? The filth that the culture-mongers teach in the schools? That one race is inferior to another because of the pigmentation of skin? Books that are written by the cultural procurers of the ruling class? We must unlearn what we have learned to prepare ourselves for a genuine education. To know that there is only one race – the race of man; that the unequal progress of peoples is conditioned by economic forces and those who control the same forces. To know that we must entertain all ideas; that we must apply our knowledge not for personal gains, but for general enlightenment and comfort. (Bulosan)

After discussing specific Filipino writers, and topics that they should attend to, Bulosan conjectures that the best of possible futures for the Filipino people lies in solidarity among workers, peasants, professionals, and students. In this vein, he commented to Valeros that:

The strength of the people is unity. They should organize themselves in their various organizations and use legitimate means to achieve their goals. Students should also organize and participate in national affairs. And when the propitious time comes, they should create a national alliance; conditions would teach them how to utilize the grand alliance. And the progressive elements in the alliance, the ones who are on the side of history, would determine the social structure of the Philippines. (Bulosan)

Concluding his letter to Valeros, Bulosan returned to the theme of the writer, with the following autobiographically-derived observation:

The making of a genuine artist or writer is not mysterious. It is not the work of Divine Providence. Social conditions, history, and the people are the factors, behind it. My making as a writer and poet is not mysterious, neither was I gifted by an unknown power. It was hard work and hard living. Suffering, loneliness, pain, hunger, hate, joy happiness, pity, compassion—all of these factors made me a writer. Plus, of course, my tenderness, my affection toward everything that lives. Plus, again, my participation in the people's fight for peace and democracy, coexistence and freedom. (Bulosan)

Here, Bulosan succinctly demystifies the privileged veneration of the artist, the writer, and artistic talent in bourgeois society. Rather than placing the writer on a pedestal of quaintness or quirkiness, he states that writing ability is a result of “hard work” and “hard living,” also of “suffering, loneliness, pain,” and “hunger.” Interestingly, these notions like in direct opposition to such elite societies of the Bloomsbury Group and the Boston Brahmins of British and American Literature. In turning the act of writing on its head, Bulosan chose to write explicitly on purpose.

Carlos Bulosan's Defiant Acts of Writing

It is interesting to juxtapose Bulosan's thoughts, as of 1955, as expressed to Florentino B. Valeros, given that we also have a collection of his letters, anthologized by Dolores S. Feria, and specifically, the publication of two letters that Bulosan wrote to his young nephews in 1948 that also address in part the broad mission of the writer (Campomanes and Gernes).

Here it is probably worth commenting that we can have some confidence in the letters because, in the 1948 case, as Campomanes and Gernes reveal, Bulosan is advising his young nephews. In his 1955 letters, in terms of his relationship with Valeros, the latter was a university professor and critic who had published Bulosan's writing before and was promising to publish an entire section on Bulosan

in his planned book on Filipino writers who wrote in English. Bulosan was writing to a colleague who he believed understood and respected his work as a writer, and whose exegesis was likely to add to Bulosan's fame as an author.

As an approximate method, then, one might inquire, among other things, as to whether or not there are discrepancies between Bulosan's statements about writers and writing, given the seven years that separate these two sets of correspondence, as well as his audiences, so-to-speak: his nephews on the one hand, as versus a professorial colleague Florentino Valeros. What is notable is that there does not seem to be much difference in Bulosan's view of the writer's priorities, and how and why a writer should go about generating literary work, when one compares these two sets of letters. From the beginning of his life to the end, it seems that Bulosan was committed among to a singular political vision: "The Philippines is not free. I want to see a free Philippines—a Philippines of the workers and peasants. . ." (Bulosan) And from the crafting of *America Is in the Heart*, to his labors on the posthumously published novel *The Cry and the Dedication*, Bulosan posited the essential unity of Filipino liberation: i.e., that the possibility of liberation for Filipinos in the United States was inseparable from the liberation of Filipinos the Philippines, and vice versa. The fates of the Filipinos and the Filipino American in the two countries were inexorably tied together by the promulgation of colonial rule: first by Spain, then by Japan, and then colonial and neo-colonial domination by the United States.

In the end, this exercise allows us to reconfirm Feria's basic and fundamental insight—an insight that resonates in the analyses offered by subsequent scholars. Given that Bulosan was a sensitive, multi-layered and complex artist, his letters express his willingness to explore both his aspirations as well how he conceptualized his craft. His letters thus offer us special insight into the person, the artist, and his method. In this sense, it seems well worth continuing to seek out Bulosan's correspondence for the light it sheds on this great writer and "man of the people," especially vis-à-vis the Pinoys who journeyed to the United States to contribute their lives and labor during the age of U.S. empire.

Unlike the literature of creative imagination that had as its audience more privileged and leisurely classes, starting around the eighteenth century, writers of minor literature speak for working and struggling classes. In deterritorializing English, such authors wrest language from those who have owned it. In an un-mimetic and revolutionary act, these writers have turned the literature of creative imagination on its head. They are not always using the master's tools against the masters, but are certainly always engaged in artistic production well outside of the official canon. For minor writers of creative imagination, the act of writing and reading holds edification and education over a pleasure that is gloriously useless. Bulosan's own words in this regard bear repeating: Life is a collective work and also a social reality. Therefore the writer must participate with his fellow man in

the struggle to protect, to brighten, to fulfill life. Otherwise he has no meaning—a nothing (Bulosan).

Clearly, Bulosan's poems, short stories, plays, and novels, all of which are manifestations of minor literature, should also include his correspondence, which is a vital and important part of his "collective assemblage of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 16-17). What impresses us is that, since his rediscovery during the heady times of the Asian American movement, Bulosan has been acclaimed by successive cohorts of Filipino, Filipino American, and pan-Asian activists (cf. Cabusao, "Toward a Renewal"). This indeed worthy of continuing attention, given Deleuze and Guattari's estimation that writers working within the domain of minor literature are the best equipped to generate tools of liberation. And as Deleuze and Guattari observe, in one of their trenchant commentaries about the role of the bachelor (in their case Kafka, but in our case Bulosan, who was never actually married, despite his occasional claims of being so), in the production of minor literature:

He produces this production of intensive quantities directly on the social body, in the social field itself. A single unified process. The highest desire desires both to be alone and to be connected to all the machines of desire. A machine that is all the more social and collective insofar as it is solitary, a bachelor, and that, tracing the line of escape, is equivalent in itself to a community whose conditions haven't yet been established. (71)

Jan. 17, 1955

Dear Florentino,

Your letter was forwarded to me here. Let me explain my presence in Seattle.

Two years ago I was hired to edit the Yearbook of ILWU Local 37. This union was founded by Filipino cannery and farm workers during the depression to better their conditions. It is a very militant union. It has fought continually throughout the years until today. The objectives were won after many bitter fights. From \$30 a month poor food, unsanitary living conditions, deductions, etc. to \$250 a ~~man~~ month guarantee (plus overtime), free plane transportation back and forth, special meals, modern housing, free medical service, sick benefits, etc. These are good gains.

Today the fight is somewhat shifted to the fight for civil rights and liberties, against fascism and reaction. This change was inevitable: officers and members of the union were arrested for deportation under the Smith Act and the Walter-McCarran Act; hundred others were intimidated. But through this union a new ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court states that ~~Filipino~~ Filipinos are not deportable no matter what crime they have committed so long as they came to this country as permanent residence before the passage of the Philippine Independence Act. This covers the Smith Act.

However, they could still be deported under the Walter-McCarran Act. This piece of legislation considers Alaska, where Filipinos work in the salmon canneries every summer, a foreign country. (Don't laugh now! the ways of a tottering civilization are not strange.) Therefore, according to this law, if a Filipino who has committed any of the crimes mentioned in it, or is an alcoholic, or has been an inmate of a mental institution, or a public charge and therefore indigent, he is deportable. The union is at present fighting this law: we have a test case in the Supreme Court. But I have every reason to believe that we will win the case. And if we do, we shall again go to the Supreme Court to clarify and define the status of Filipinos in the U.S.

But let me go back to the Yearbook.

The day it came out of the press I was rushed to a sanitarium where I was confined for one year. I have been in a few hospitals and every time I came a major organ was always left behind for the doctors to play with. And this time it is my left kidney.

Now why should I write about labor unions and their struggles? Because a writer is also a worker. He writes stories, for example, and sells them or tries to sell them. They are products of his brain. They are commodities. Then again, a writer is also a citizen; and as citizen he must safeguard his civil rights and liberties. Life is a collective work and also a social reality. Therefore the writer must participate with his fellow man in the struggle to protect, to brighten, to fulfill life. Otherwise he has no meaning - a nothing.

Now culture being a social product, I firmly believe that any work of art should have a social function - to beautify, to glorify, to dignify man. This assertion has always been true, and it applies to all social systems. But always art is in the hands of the dominant class - which wields it as a power to perpetuate its supremacy and existence. Since any social system is forced to change to another by concrete economic forces, its art changes also to be recharged, reshaped and revitalized by the new conditions. Thus, if the writer has any significance, should write about the world in which he lives: interpret his time and envision the future through his knowledge of historical reality.

And these are times that demand of the writer to declare his positive stand - his supreme sacrifice - on the question of war or peace, life or death. The writer who sides with and gives his voice to democracy and progress is a real writer, because he writes to protect man and restore his dignity. He writes so that this will be a world of mutual cooperation, mutual protection, mutual love; so that darkness, ignorance, brutality, exploitation of man by another, and deceit will be purged from the face of the earth.

A writer should be political also. Governments or states are always in the hands of the ruling classes, and so long as there are states, there are also tyrannies. In a bourgeois state, under capitalism or imperialism, the tyranny is against the working class, against the majority.

Take any country in the so-called free world. Or even take the USSR: there is still a state or government. But the government being in the hands of the working class, the majority, it is tyrannous only to the remnants of the ruling class. These ~~barbarians~~ barbarians being few (or perhaps they are completely exterminated), the present efforts are directed at ~~the~~ uprooting the remaining sediments of bourgeois consciousness. The USSR is a socialist state, but its goal is communism, which is a classless society. Being classless, economic anarchy disappears, the state withers away and a "managerial" form of industry takes its place. Also now the efforts are directed toward the conquering of nature to liberate the soviet man from superstitions and to ~~fructify~~ fructify his needs.

And we know the birth and life of religion--superstition. No doubt the first priest

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of primitive man were conjurers or magicians, who brought rain to the starving land. And the first chief-kings were priests. Religion was a simple affair, until modern times - when it became an organized enterprise: at times the supreme ruler over all the land, but at others the handmaiden of the ruling class. Religion is opposed to science, to knowledge. It is true that bourgeois scientists have a courtship with religion, but this is traceable to the general breakdown of the bourgeoisie. When a system breaks down everything breaks down with it including morality. Bourgeois morality arose from bourgeois conditions and needs: the serfs are lower than the nobles (feudalism), the workers are lower than the rich (capitalism). Morality that arises from one system is not tenable in another: thus socialist morality comes only from socialist conditions and needs.

But our growing scientific knowledge, the dispelment of superstitions: through these achievements religion will also wither away together with its master, capitalism, its necessity obsolete, its hypocrisy unmasked. The real religion is the welfare of man on this earth, not in some tentative paradise.

And education - what kind? The filth that the culture-mongers teach in the schools? That one race is inferior to another because of the pigmentation of skin? Books that are written by cultural procurers of the ruling class?

We must unlearn what we have learned to prepare ourselves for a genuine education. To know that there is only one race - the race of man; that the unequal progress of peoples is condition by economic forces and who control the same forces. To know that we must entertain all ideas; that we must apply our knowledge not for personal gains, but for general enlightenment and comfort.

The bourgeois "thinkers" ~~claim~~ claim that values are eternal. Values changed meanings and significances when the ~~material~~ social system that breeds them is changed. And all social changes are for the betterment of man.

Filipino writers in the Philippines have a great task ahead of them, but also a great future. The field is wide and open. They should rewrite everything written about the Philippines and the Filipino people from the materialist, dialectical point of view - this being the only to understand and interpret everything Philippines. They should write lovingly about its rivers, towns, ~~native~~ plains, mountains, wildernesses - its flora and fauna - the different tribes and provinces. They should write about the great men and their times and works, from Lapu-Lapu to Mariano Balgos. They should compile the unwritten tales, legends, folklore, riddles, humor, songs, sayings. They should illustrate that there was a culture before the Spaniards uprooted it. When these are written, they should extenuate and amplify. The material is inexhaustible. But always they should be written for the people, because the people are the creators and appreciators of culture.

Now when I write about the Filipino people, I mean the workers and peasants - and the professionals and students. I don't mean the handful of landlords, papists, reactionary politicians, parasites, hoodlums. They strength of the people is unity. They should organize themselves in their various occupations and use legitimate means to achieve their goals. Students should also organize and participate in national affairs. And when the propitious time comes, they should create a national alliance; conditions would teach them how to utilize the grand alliance. And the progressive elements in the alliance, the ones who are on the side of history, would determine the social structure of the Philippines.

The making of a genuine artist or writer is not mysterious. It is not the work of Divine Providence. Social conditions, history, and the people are the factors behind it. My making as a writer and poet is not mysterious, on that I was gifted by an unknown. It was hard work and hard living. Suffering, loneliness, pain, hunger, hate, joy, happiness, pity, compassion - all these factors made me a writer. Plus, of course, my tenderness, my affection toward everything that lives. Plus, again, my participation in the people's fight for peace and democracy, ~~commitment~~ *commitment*.

I did not know any writer until I had three books published. Some writers are reluctant what writers influenced them. I probably read most of the greatest novels, plays, short stories, poetry of many nations, but those who influenced me most are Americans, ~~British~~ and Russians. In particular, Balzac, Jack London, and Maxim Gorki. But mostly Gorki in the novel and the drama, Nicolas Guillen and Pablo Neruda in poetry, and the Marxists in literary criticism. If you have ever lived in one of slums of the U. S., I know you would also be influenced by it. I lived in the slums of Los Angeles, and I never escaped its terrors, its soul-sickening atmosphere.

The Philippines is not free. I want to see a free Philippines - a Philippines of the workers, peasants, etc. I want the Philippines friendly with neighboring countries. I suppose this is a big order, but this is not the place to elucidate it. And I hope I have given you what your wife needs.

I don't care what some writers in the Philippines think of me. That is their privilege. But I care about what they write, for or against war, for or against life. In the Biographical Dictionaries and Who's Who's the following is used as the date of my birth: November 24, 1914. Good luck and best wishes -

Sincerely,

note: The fight, of course, is spearheaded by the Washington Committee for Protection of the Foreign Born

Fig. 2 . Carlos Bulosan's letter to Florentino B. Valeros, January 17, 1955.

Appendix

Carlos Bulosan's letter to Florentino B. Valeros, dated January 17, 1955 (Fig. 2), which we quote from extensively, is reproduced in its entirety here. Readers should note that this document appears to be a copy of the original letter. Further, there are corrections, written in pencil, throughout. The Pacific Northwest Curator of Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, noted that these were written by Bulosan himself, and that corrections along these lines are typically found in Bulosan's correspondence (Anne Jenner, personal communication). The most important (and hardest to decipher) appear on page two of the letter. These are as follows:

1. In the seventh complete paragraph, lines two to three, the corrected text should read, "My making as a writer and poet is not mysterious, neither was I gifted by an unknown power."
2. In the same paragraph, line seven, the sentence should end, ". . . democracy, coexistence and freedom."
3. In the eighth complete paragraph, line two, the sentence was corrected to read, ". . . are reluctant to reveal what writers influenced them."
4. In the same paragraph, line four, the text was revised to read ". . . are Americans, French and Russians."
5. In the ninth complete paragraph, line two, the revision is, "I want the Philippines to be friendly. . ."
6. At the very bottom of the letter, Bulosan wrote, "note: The fight, of course, is spearheaded by the Washington Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born."

Notes

We would like to acknowledge conversations with Professor Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao who helped us formulate this piece. Also Ms. Anne Jenner kindly aided us in terms of obtaining permission from the University of Washington Libraries, where she works, to cite the Bulosan/Valeros correspondence and to include the following documents:

University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Carlos Bulosan Papers, MS Collection No. 0581-012 B4 F8, Reel 6. *Letter from the Committee to Sponsor Luis Taruc's Autobiography*.

University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Carlos Bulosan Papers, MS Collection No. 0581-012 B4 F8, Reel 5. *Carlos Bulosan letter to Valeros, Jan. 17, 1955*.

Finally, we are grateful to Vincenz Serrano and Francis Sollano of *Kritika Kultura* for their careful attention to our essay.

1. See Liz Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/biography* 12 (2004); and Mary Jo Maynes, et al., *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Cornell University Press, 2008), both of which are useful introductions to the analysis of personal narratives such as are inherent in letters.
2. Professor E. San Juan, Jr. also applies Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "minor literature" to Bulosan in an earlier essay titled "Revisiting Carlos Bulosan" in *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), 61-84. While San Juan applies the concept of minor literature to Bulosan's novel, *The Cry and the Dedication*, we expand the application by looking at Bulosan's correspondence through a similar lens. We thank Professor Jeffrey A. Cabusao for bringing this citation to our attention.
Further, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) analyze Kafka's (and Proust's) correspondence in terms of a tripartite distinction between the duality of the subject; the externalization of the horrific; and the return of guilt. While these specific themes do not strike us as being particularly useful for a deeper understanding of Bulosan's work as an artist, the Deleuzian intent in terms of looking at letters as part of envisioning a given author's overall writing machine, is highly instructive.
Finally, we note the importance of exegesis as essential to navigate the complexities of Deleuzian terminology and epistemology. Commentary that has been especially helpful to our efforts in this piece includes that of Bensmaia 1986; Bogue 2005; and Patton 2010.
3. Although it appears that the Bulosan Manuscript Committee deposited the bulk of their collection to the University of Washington Libraries in 1959, around the time that Dolores S. Feria was finalizing her manuscript for publication, Feria did not have access to this resource. Rather, she made contact with a number of Bulosan's colleagues and friends, and lists those individuals who shared their personal correspondence with Bulosan which she drew from for her book; see *Sound of Falling Light* (1960) page 9.

4. The letters, exchanged between Valeros and Bulosan, are cited with permission of the University of Washington Libraries. The letters themselves are held in Special Collections, Carlos Bulosan Papers, MS Collection No. 0581-012 B4 F8, Reel 5. *Carlos Bulosan letter to Valeros, Jan. 17, 1955.*
5. Letter, Valeros to Bulosan, 1955.
6. Letter, Bulosan to Valeros, 1955.
7. For overviews of Bulosan's life and work, see the two introductions to the 2014 re-issued edition of Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (2014), by Cary McWilliams (2014), and Alquizola and Hirabayashi (2014), respectively, as well as the annotated bibliography at the end of the Alquizola and Hirabayashi's new introduction to *America*.
8. The union for which Bulosan worked in the 1950s was originally the International Longshoremen's and Warehousman's Union, Local 7-C. By the time of the publication of the union's 1952 Yearbook, the formal name of the organization had been changed to ILUW, Cannery Workers, Local 37. We will use the name of the union as it was when Bulosan first became involved in it, Local 7.

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