

The **CRY**
and the **DEDICATION**

CARLOS BULOSAN

Edited and with an introduction by **E. SAN JUAN, JR.**



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E. San Juan, Jr.

INTRODUCTION by E. San Juan, Jr.

.....
Everywhere I roam I listen for my native language with a crying heart because it means my roots in this faraway soil; it means my only communication with the living and those who died without a gift of expression. My dear brother, I remember the song of the birds in the morning, the boundless hills of home, the sound of the language.
– Carlos Bulosan, in a letter of 2 June 1953

When I visited the University of Washington archives in the early seventies to examine the papers left by Carlos Bulosan, I came upon a typescript of a novel entitled *The Cry and the Dedication*. As far as I can gather, there is only a passing allusion to this novel, referred to in his letters as *The Hounds of Darkness* (Bulosan 1960:274). He alluded to two other novels he was completing, but this is the only one available in the archives and is the only novel of Bulosan's to be published.

In a letter dated 2 November 1949, Bulosan confessed his "secret dream of writing here a 1,500-page novel covering thirty-five years of Philippine history" (Bulosan 1960:258). This work, intended as part of a series of four novels encompassing a hundred years of Philippine history, was the one he was working on at the time and spanned the years from 1915 to 1950. Another novel was to cover the period from the birth and death of Rizal, and a third novel would run from Rizal's death to the outbreak of World War I. A fourth novel (partly fulfilled in *The Cry and the Dedication*) would cover the 1951-61 period, whose events, the pressure of "historical currents and cross-currents," Bulosan estimated as constituting "a great crisis in Philippine history." Although what really preoccupied him was "a novel covering the ideal friendship, courtship and marriage of a Pinoy and an American white woman," a riposte to the antimiscegenation law that crystallized U.S. racism against Filipinos in the first half of this century, his energies were rechanneled to elucidate a much more profound obsession: the "great crisis" not

only in Philippine history but also in his own life and the Filipino diaspora.

x What was the nature of this crisis? A brief résumé of Bulosan's life might help contextualize this novel in the light of lived experience and social circumstance.

.....
Introduction

Born to a poor peasant family in the Philippines in 1911, when the country was ruled as a classic colony of the United States, Bulosan learned the survival craft of workers and peasants resisting the tyranny of landlords, merchant usurers, petty bureaucrats, and comprador agents of the U.S. government. As he recounts in *America Is in the Heart*, the struggle of his family to overcome poverty in his homeland proved futile: Bulosan followed his two brothers, who had fled to the United States in search of a better life. When he landed in Seattle, Washington, in 1931, the community of more than 125,000 Filipino workers in Hawaii and on the West Coast was suffering from the worst crisis of the capitalist world system, the Great Depression of the early thirties. Aside from enduring severe unemployment, intense labor exploitation, and numerous legal prohibitions and exclusions, Filipinos were victims of racist vigilante violence that began in Yakima Valley, Washington, in 1928 and continued through the pogrom of Watsonville, California, in 1930, and onward (Takaki 1989). Since the violent suppression of the revolutionary Philippine Republic in the Filipino-American War 1898–1903), Filipinos in the United States had inhabited a limbo: neither citizens, refugees, nor wards, they were considered “nationals” without a sovereign country – a deracinated, subaltern species. In 1935 Filipinos were threatened with deportation to a neocolony called the Philippine Commonwealth. Bulosan's analysis of his experience in the United States, from his arrival to the beginning of World War II, can be condensed in passages from his letters (circa 1937–38):

I was completely disillusioned when I came to know this American attitude [of race hatred]. If I had not been born in a lyrical world, grown up with honest people and studied about American institutions and racial equality in the Philippines, I should never have minded so much the horrible impact of white chauvinism. I

shall never forget what I have suffered in this country because of racial prejudice. . . . And we were all thousands of miles from our islands, alone (without even our women) in a strange, and often hostile, country. . . . Most of us will die here because we can work here, and when we can work we will make a life for ourselves. Man always makes a life for himself from whatever he has. . . . Do you know what a Filipino feels in America? He is the loneliest thing on earth [surrounded by] beauty, wealth, power, grandeur. But is he a part of these luxuries? . . . He is enchained damnably to his race, his heritage. He is betrayed, my friend. (Bulosan 1960:191–93)

xi

.....
Introduction

On the eve of Pearl Harbor, Bulosan summed up his years as a labor organizer, journalist, and exile: “Yes, I feel like a criminal running away from a crime I did not commit. And the crime is that I am a Filipino in America” (Bulosan 1960:199).

Parallel to the peasant insurgency in the Philippines in the first three decades of U.S. colonial rule, the resistance of Filipino workers to capital may offer the subtext of the “crime” Bulosan was fleeing from, the latent inverted content to the manifest dream of success. This began with the organization of one of the first unions in Hawaii in 1919, the Filipino Federation of Labor, which spearheaded industrywide multiracial strikes in 1920, 1924, and later (Chan 1991). In 1934, to cite one other milestone, the Filipino Workers Association organized the militant strikes of 1934 in Salinas, El Centro, Vacaville, and the cotton fields of San Joaquin Valley, California. Drawing from this reservoir of experience, the Filipino Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (led by Bulosan's contemporaries Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz) conducted the path-breaking grape strike of 1965, the matrix of what became the United Farm Workers of America (Scharlin and Villanueva 1992). Bulosan became involved in this historic trend when he befriended activists in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). In 1934 he helped edit *The New Tide*, a bi-monthly workers' magazine, and other newspapers, which brought him in contact with progressive writers and radical intellectuals.

After years of extreme privation and persecution, Bulosan was confined at the Los Angeles General Hospital (1935–38) for tuberculosis and kidney problems. The comradeship of intelligent American women friends and the self-education he acquired by a guided reading of books from the public library, Bulosan confessed, “opened all my world of intellectual possibilities – and a grand dream of bettering society for the working man.” While in the hospital, Bulosan began writing poems (accepted by Harriet Monroe for *Poetry* magazine) and stories satirizing feudal despotism and patriarchal authority that would constitute the best-selling *The Laughter of My Father*, published in 1944 and reprinted in several languages. Bulosan depicted the resistance culture of the peasantry and plebeians of his childhood years. In response to the philistine dismissal of these folkloric vignettes as commercialized exotic humor, Bulosan stressed the allegorical/didactic cast of his imagination: “My politico-economic ideas are embodied in all my writings. *Laughter* is not humor; it is satire; it is indictment against an economic system that stifled the growth of the primitive, making him decadent overnight without passing through the various stages of growth and decay” (Bulosan 1960:273). In this terrain of a subjugated milieu where commodification eroded all pieties, Bulosan celebrated the carnivalesque wit of his father and the quiet resourcefulness of his mother, that “dynamic little peasant woman” who sold salted fish in the public market of Binalonan and nurtured her son’s adventurous and daring spirit.

With *Laughter*, Bulosan enjoyed a measure of worldwide fame. Three previous books of poetry, *Chorus for America* (1942a), *Letter from America* (1942b), and *The Voice of Bataan* (1943c) went unnoticed. Earlier, his piece on “Freedom from Want” made him a celebrity when it was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* (1943a) and displayed in the Federal Building in San Francisco; its most memorable sentence proclaimed: “But we are not really free unless we use what we produce.” The publication of *America* in 1946 climaxed this itinerary of the artist’s apprenticeship. At the outset of the Cold War, Bulosan unwittingly became the hero of a stereotyped immigrant success story, one that his failed, homeless, lost protagonists had tried to imagine but could not duplicate in life.

While *America* gestures toward a Popular Front politics against global fascism, this quasi-autobiographical montage of Filipino lives is essentially an exercise in nationalitarian self-inscription. Bulosan was trying to remap his journey and waystations across an uneven, disintegrated landscape: “I want to interpret the soul of the Filipinos in this country. What really compelled me to write was to try to understand this country, to find a place in it not only for myself but my people” (San Juan 1991:172). *America*, then, is more properly conceived as a testimony to those years of struggle against denigration of one’s nationality, class exploitation, and racist violence – in effect, it functions as a critique of the paradigm of ethnic assimilation. The narrative returns to what Amílcar Cabral calls “the source” to recover a submerged tradition of indigenous revolutionary culture rooted in more than three hundred years of anticolonial insurgency. The key to *America*’s nonorganic artistic form is the often ignored first part, in which the narrator describes the effects of semifeudal, iniquitous property relations maintained by the U.S. colonial state. Of crucial importance is the 1927 Colorum uprising (Chapter 8) in his province, the site of conscientization and source of Bulosan’s solidarity with anarchists and communists during the Spanish Civil War. Given the groundwork of Part One, the narrator can easily make the connection between Franco’s fascism supported by Filipino landlords and compradors and the violence of U.S. agribusiness and the state’s coercive agencies (Allen 1993). His simplistic version of the United Front strategy against world fascism explains the melodramatic, sentimental praise of Whitmanian democracy and the deployment of the utopian metaphor of “America” as a classless, nonracist society, motifs that pervade the texts of this period.

The terror of the Cold War quickly vaporized this utopian “America.” Amid McCarthy-era witchhunts and FBI surveillance in the fifties, Bulosan was a blacklisted writer in danger of being deported with Chris Mensalvas and Ernesto Mangaoang, veteran leaders of the International Longshoreman’s and Warehouseman’s Union (ILWU), Local 37, whom Bulosan knew during the days of the UCAPAWA. The union had asked him to edit their 1952 *Yearbook*, a task that consolidated the socialist politics he expressed

in "My Education": "Writing was not sufficient. . . . I drew inspiration from my active participation in the worker's movement. The most decisive move that the writer could make was to take his stand with the workers" (Bulosan 1982:35). Bulosan's role as union journalist and defender of the democratic rights of the Filipino community demonstrated that, contrary to allegations of self-induced ruin and obscurity, he was as fertile and combative as ever; he confessed how "writing is a pleasure and a passion to me – what drives me is the force of the idea, the historical fact" (Bulosan 1960:260). Bulosan renewed his radical commitment in his editorial for the 1952 *Yearbook*: "I believe that the unconditional unity of all workers is our only weapon against the evil designs of imperialist butchers and other profiteers of death and suffering to plunge humanity into a new world war." The U.S. armed aggression against the Korean people under the banner of the United Nations (shades of the recent Gulf War), and by proxy against Filipino workers and peasants, was then in full blast.

Aware of the configuration of heterogeneous forces, Bulosan affirmed once more the ethics of solidarity with all the oppressed, not just the proletariat, in his poem "If You Want to Know What We Are." At this juncture, his predicament acquired a new urgency: he was no longer confronting Japanese fascism, which had brutalized his brothers and sisters a decade ago. He was now confronting the power of U.S. finance capital assaulting the freedom and dignity of Filipino peasants and workers, ruthlessly destroying their homes, bodies, and spirits under the aegis of a CIA-sponsored populist hero, Ramon Magsaysay (Constantino and Constantino 1978). In the same yearbook, Bulosan rallied to the cause of the Huks (acronym for "People's Liberation Army") who were fighting not only feudal landlords and compradors but also the returned invader, U.S. military forces. This repetition of 1898 provided the leitmotif of *rendez-vous* – literally, "present yourself" – subtending the theme of "national liberation" of this novel. He also sympathized with Amado Hernandez, the great insurrectionary poet and union leader, who was imprisoned in 1950 for such alleged subversive activities as an unwavering advocacy of social justice, popular democracy, and genuine national independence.

In the midst of the depression, Bulosan speculated that "the greatest art will appear in a happy world of free men, but this new world will not come without pain and struggle." Although he hoped that "a common vision of a peaceful, creative future" could be realized by all humanity, he was not naive. In 1943 he was learning dialectics: "The old world is dying, but a new world is being born . . . from the chaos that beats upon us all" (Bulosan 1943b:646). At the juncture of world-transforming upheavals in the fifties as *pax Americana* entered its epoch of decline, Bulosan summed up his passage through the ordeal of living in the United States as one that bridged the Filipino war of resistance against U.S. Manifest Destiny at the turn of the century, the struggle of people of color in the thirties, and the communist-led Huk rebellion in the late forties and fifties. His project of critique and social transformation was inscribed in a suppressed tradition of dissidence, which is only now being resuscitated (San Juan 1991). In a provocative idiom that emulated the polemic verve of the 1896 *ilustrado* propagandists (e.g., Jose Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar), Bulosan denounced "the vicious lies of the capitalist press and yellow journalism, the warmongering of big business, the race-hating hysteria of reactionary organizations" at the height of the unconscionable McCarthy period. Such fiery words were penned by Bulosan when he was the beleaguered editor of the 1952 *Yearbook*, a position that in retrospect one can regard as emblematic of his achievement in making the praxis of writing consonant with the labor of migrant workers in North America and with the history of the resistance of people of color everywhere.

In a 1947 letter, Bulosan reflected on the responsibility of the Filipino writer to intervene in the crisis of the *ancien regime* sweeping the country: "We should work like common people, absorbing, learning, remembering. It is only when we know the depth of the human soul, its tranquillity and violence, its magnificence and fragility, that we are really capable of writing something of significance and importance. . . . The Philippines is undergoing a great tragedy: why are the writers not challenged by it?" (Bulosan 1960:234). In *Laughter*, in numerous essays and letters, and in *America*, Bulosan bewailed the evils of "absentee landlordism" patronized by the U.S. government – when the United States con-

quered the islands in the first decades, they coopted the landed elite in administering minor local affairs – that plagued his family and millions of disenfranchised peasants in the Philippines, evils against which the Huks were fighting.

Around the time he was completing this narrative of guerrillas representing a coalition of sectors and classes with determinate peculiarities (1954–55) he expressed the fundamental principle of his vocation and the driving force behind this text:¹

What impelled me to write? The answer is – my grand dream of equality among men and freedom for all. To give literate voice to the voiceless one hundred thousand Filipinos in the United States, Hawaii, and Alaska. Above all and ultimately, to translate the desires and aspirations of the whole Filipino people in the Philippines and abroad in terms relevant to contemporary history.

Yes, I have taken unto myself this sole responsibility. (Kunitz 1955:145)

What is striking in this credo is the urge to conceive of the Filipino diaspora (now affecting 65 million Filipinos) as a central phenomenon that defines the singular historical specificity of the Philippines in the wake of three hundred years of Spanish mercantile colonialism and almost a century of U.S. domination. Bulosan's project of articulating heterogenous voices, desires, and interests in order to synthesize them coincides with the central motivation informing his previous works, like *Laughter* and *America*: "to utilize our common folklore, tradition and history in line with my socialist thinking" (Bulosan 1960:261). This goal of coordinating aesthetic and political agendas is further elaborated in another letter: "[Filipino writers] should rewrite everything written about the Philippines and the Filipino people from the materialist, dialectical point of view – this being the only [way] to understand and interpret everything Philippines. . . . The material is inexhaustible. But always they should be written for the people, because the people are the creators and appreciators of culture" (Bulosan 1960:268). In a letter written a year before he died, Bulosan encapsulated his historical-materialist orientation in these words:

Life is a collective work and also a social reality. Therefore the writer must participate with his fellow men in the struggle to protect, to brighten, to fulfill life. Otherwise he has no meaning – a nothing. . . . 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 1960:271).

I

In the spirit of Bulosan's counsel, I outline here only a few suggestions for interpreting key themes and episodes in *The Cry and the Dedication*. It is perhaps advisable to read the novel first before proceeding so as not to circumscribe one's horizon of expectations.

The historical parameter of the *fabula* embraces the political upheavals of the forties and fifties, when the Philippines, despite nominal independence, still functioned as the only Asian neocolony of the United States that supplied cheap raw materials and labor power and served as a market for expensive industrial goods. From 1898 to 1946, through "free trade" and other neocolonizing legislation, the United States perpetuated a semifeudal economy in which a landed oligarchy, in return for its assistance in pacifying the "natives," was allowed to take over as long as U.S. interests (economic and military) were safeguarded. In 1903, 29 percent of farmers were landless tenants; by 1946, the figure had soared to 40 percent, with tenants paying 50 to 75 percent of their crops as rent to landlords (Bayani 1976). Rural poverty and *cacique* abuses had intensified since Bulosan left his hometown in the twenties. In addition, the enormous destruction of World War II had left the country impoverished and heavily dependent on U.S. largesse, which was given in exchange for military control and economic-political ascendancy (Labor Research Association 1958). The passage of the infamous Bell Act of 1946 (which allowed U.S. business to exploit fully the national patrimony) and other treaties required the forcible silencing of nationalist voices and the maintenance of an unjust status quo; this soon precipitated civil war as outraged

workers and peasants took up arms against the client government seeking to preserve the old inequalities – the point of *in medias res* when Bulosan's novel begins.

During and after the war, resistance against the Japanese occupation had rekindled the indigenous revolutionary spirit of the Indonesians, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Filipinos, among others. But while the Chinese and Indonesians succeeded in winning autonomy, the Filipino masses organized by the Huks lost whatever freedom they had won – to the old occupier. They never arrived at the site that the prophetic singer of the native's return, Aimé Césaire, once called the "rendezvous of victory." Those who fought against the Japanese encountered only treachery and betrayal at the hands of their American "liberators" and their lackeys. The onset of the Cold War, however, brought forth not only a reactionary tide of repression but also the decline of *pax Americana* signaled by the triumph of the People's Liberation Army in China in 1949 and the U.S. debacle in Korea at about the time the CIA was transplanting to Vietnam its newly tested counterinsurgency schemes in the Philippines. The postwar popularity of the Huks and the phenomenal growth of the Communist Party of the Philippines (founded in 1930 as a worker-peasant alliance) may be attributed to their resolute leadership in fighting the brutal Japanese occupation assisted by puppet collaborators (landlords, compradors, bureaucrats) – the very same politicians in the colonial regime whom General Douglas MacArthur would reward with economic and political privileges (Chapman 1987).

Such reversals and denouements were not strange to Bulosan. In *America* he displaced the predicament of exile in a way that would engage the paradoxes and ironies at the heart of this novel. If his composite memoir wrestled with the disjunction of past and present, the antinomies of dream and reality, and then conclude with a homily that all victims are united in the crusade for freedom, justice, and equality, such a textual strategy was no longer viable. The problem for the artist now became how to translate this ecumenical unity of antifascist forces into dramatic terms, into cogent symbolic action. For the first time, the convergence of the Cold War and U.S. counterinsurgency in the Philippines afforded

Bulosan an extraordinary shock of recognition in which he grasped the linkage between the national democratic agenda of the Huks and the agitation of multiracial workers in the United States, a moment of vindication in which he seized the present as history – analogous to the messianic "Now-Time" of Walter Benjamin (1969) and as the fulfillment of the promises given to now muted, vanquished, but still unpacified martyrs of the revolution.

In structuring his novel, Bulosan was also exploring the predicament of exile and confronting the task of calculating one's bearings in the postwar era. We have here a field of political-ethical forces representing the uneven and unsynchronized maldevelopment of the country. In this arena, the chief concern of the actors is how to establish linkages and channels of communication to bring people, races, classes, and genders into contact. In designing this project, the contingencies of space and time are textualized in the mutations of ideas, passions, impulses of memory and hope that fragment and at the same time reconstitute individuals. In registering these changes, the archive of Marxist critique lends Bulosan a precision instrument for mapping the conflict of wills, interests, and desires. Since the proletariat as a universal class – defined as the main producer of social wealth and the only agency that can liberate humanity from class bondage and reification – has no country in the ultimate reckoning, Bulosan's account of peasant/worker revolts in the neo-colony transcends its geographical provenance. By suturing revolts occurring thousands of miles away from the U.S. mainland with the resistance of class-conscious organized workers on the West Coast exploited by monopoly capital, Bulosan's writing practice is able to capture the emergent totality of the struggle of all dominated people. In particular, this multiracial spearhead of the struggle in the United States during the forties derives from the antifascist Popular Front around the world that climaxed the narrator's search, in *America*, for a coherent pattern or overarching purpose that would give meaning to his nomadic, deracinated existence.

We have here the advent of a new genre: the transnational allegory of a Third World imagination. In the interaction of overlapping generations and incommensurable lifeworlds, Bulosan delineates the evolution of the popular democratic movement against

colonial barbarism into an anti-imperialist united front. When he portrays guerrillas seeking to free the masses from semifeudal bondage and neocolonial subalternity, he is also confronting the main source of violence against his race and nation: the rule of U.S. finance capital. And so it turns out that the Huk insurgency is a pretext or figure that transcodes in the local context the struggle of oppressed people of color in "the belly of the beast" and the formidable task of purging the beast from the colonized "native" psyche. In the last analysis, one cannot divorce the autochthonous struggle of the Filipino masses for justice and independence from the fight of Third World nationalities ("internal colonies," in one formulation) in the United States for the exercise of the right to self-determination, including the right of secession.

Although living thousands of miles away from the islands, Bulosan never left the Philippines in mind and heart—he never became a U.S. citizen. Vicariously he joined the peasant revolt against despotic landlords, avaricious compradors, and corrupt bureaucrat-capitalists—the local clients/agents of the U.S. elite. One might say that he was engaged in the same struggle on two fronts. It was in this dialectic between the concrete practice of Bulosan the artist and the historical pressures of his identity-on-trial as a Filipino migrant (unable to return home, choosing a permanent state of transition) that this novel germinated. Because Bulosan consciously integrated the Filipino struggle for complete and true independence with the migrants' efforts to oppose racist violence, he discovered in the process the resources of a critical and transformative imagination. Such a discovery is essentially the governing principle, the controlling vision, of this narrative—so far the first and only sophisticated rendering of that epoch in Philippine history whose repression up to now only begets its relentless repetition.

The schema of this novel has a daunting simplicity. It can be conceived as a mimesis, an inventory if you like, of a constellation of attempts and failures—a continuum of desire with its flux of traumas and sublimations. The history of the struggles of the Filipino people for genuine independence displays such a trajectory, a series of truncated flights toward a series of rendezvous: first, with the 1896 anti-Spanish revolution and the subsequent war against

U.S. aggression (1898–1902), then with the insurrections of the twenties and thirties (such as the Tayug revolt described in Chapter 8 of *America*), and finally, with the Huk-led resistance against the Japanese and their Filipino collaborators, which was suppressed after the war by U.S.-supported "puppet" regimes. Each journey yields lessons of fidelity often betrayed, alliances tested, and trust sometimes regained. While the final meeting with destiny (the attainment of the objectives of the struggle) is deferred or postponed, the process of moving toward it—with its accumulation of nuanced experiences, its actualization of human potential—eventually comes to define the substance of national liberation. As Salud Algabre, leader of the 1935 Sakdal rebellion, once said, "No uprising fails. Each one is a step in the right direction" (Sturtevant 1976:296). In effect, the ordeal of the quest, the encounter with one's self (the collective agent) mediated through alterity, becomes the constitutive element in the project of achieving true autonomy or self-determination.

The plot also exhibits a geometric simplicity.² It is structured around the journey of seven guerrilla partisans who are attempting a rendezvous in the capital city of Manila with an expatriate from the United States bearing help, or more precisely, "instructions" on how to secure funds from friends overseas. The protagonists are thus assigned a mission to establish contact with the world outside, traversing villages and towns, crossing boundaries of every kind. Linkages, empathies, and affinities are consequently drawn across ruptures, divides, suspicions. The journey of the seven guerrillas involves a reconnaissance of contested terrain, a wager of loyalties in a time of betrayals and broken promises. Before they enter the inhospitable terrain of the city, the guerrillas are required—there seems to be no plausible reason, a lack whose supplement may elicit the key to deciphering the novel's rationale—to return to their home villages to reunite with their families or to "settle accounts" with them. At those sites, we find their individual life histories unfold their antinomies and contradictions, a drama over which the "spirit of place" presides, the matrix of an emergent symbolic order. In the process, the guerrillas discover who their friends and enemies are. "Reunion" thus engenders schisms and demarcations. Less

horizontal than vertical, this movement is both advent and departure, strategically offensive and defensive at the same time. This is in turn overshadowed by an enigmatic figure at the end who, as a messenger of solidarity and succor, also bears the stigmata of violation ("vital disfigurement") and anonymity. Dante, the only person who can recognize the expatriate, returns to his hometown only to meet his death, thus aborting the original script.

While this overview indicates the chronotope of homecoming as the model of the final rendezvous (thus its impossibility) and the organizing principle of the incidents, we are not sure what generic expectations to have until the characters are more concretely fleshed out. As though anticipating this, the author himself has obliged and provided (in a handwritten sheet in the archives) a table of correspondences anatomizing his characters and their "humours," here reproduced verbatim:

Hassim – brooding
 (city [Manila] proletarian self-taught) (factory worker)
Dante – detached
 (seen other lands, other peoples) (educated proletarian)
Old Bio – compassionate
 (unlettered peasant of the old generation)
Dabu – laughing (peasant of young generation:
 went 3rd grade; then cane plantation worker)
Legaspi – slow but decisive when he acts
 (unlettered peasant of young generation)
 (rice field worker) (village)
Mameng – silent
 (once a grade school teacher)
 (finished high school) (town woman)
Linda Bie – philosophical
 (college graduate: middle family: provincial capital)

One may remark in passing how this carefully outlined character system with its implied scenarios attests to Bulosan's divergence from the paradigm of the "typical" in conventional realism. The counterpointing of subjective (agency) and objective (institution) elements and the articulation of dynamic social tendencies and their

dialectical resolution are regulated by the geometric schema, which reinforce the allegorical cast of the novel's structure. This manifests both antipicaresque and counterpastoral tendencies. One perceives the antipicaresque impulse in its conversion of the traditional rogue into a partisan band of "outlaws," a move that undermines hierarchy and questions the legitimacy of the social order. Meanwhile, the counterpastoral thrust resonates in passages that subvert the still seductive myth of the harmonious and innocent countryside. Both aspects are meant to defamiliarize the techniques usually associated with the adventure/war novel – most by American veterans of World War II – set in the tropic isles.

Deploying the chronotope of a pilgrimage to the city where each station becomes a pretext for testing/interpellating each character, the narrative links rural and urban, center and margin, past and present, the morality of the village and the demystifying telos of the socialist project. Everything becomes problematized: each character discovers a shifting void in the psyche – the death of loved ones, changes in the physical environment, a lingering *ressentiment*, and so on. What the text unfolds in antithesis is the quest for a resolution in the solidarity of the underground movement (vis-à-vis the individualism of the market), a quest repeatedly blocked by the inertia of tributary customs and bourgeois property relations.

One rendering of the "crisis" Bulosan had in mind (noted in my opening) can be illustrated by Chapters Ten to Thirteen, the second rendezvous. Legaspi returns to his hometown after five years of absence. Instead of reuniting, this ~~vi~~ dis-members. Legaspi's brother, a traitor-agent of the class enemy, is killed by the insurgent chief Hassim in a violent scuffle witnessed by the whole family. With a theatrical gesture, Hassim tries to console the aggrieved father, delivering a speech on proletarian humanism. He invokes the "only one true flag . . . the flag of the working class everywhere in the world. . . . There is no bowing to the flag of the working class we represent, because it is a symbol of liberation from exploitation and the achievement of human dignity. . . . We are not slaves. We are free men. . . ." This poignant episode ends with the father's recognizing Hassim as one of his sons, more exactly a substitute, a

symbolic affiliation based on adherence to a political ideal that transcends bloodties, filial piety, the Oedipal law. This transcendence of proletarian allegiance over familial bond is meant to resolve Legaspi's predicament. It also functions as a sign foreshadowing Dante's fatal wounding by his brother – their estrangement is a symptom of the weakening of the conservative disciplinary regimes of patriarchal family and church – and the subsequent renewal of guerrilla comradeship in the wake of their withdrawal from enemy terrain. It allegorizes a transition in which social contact supersedes kinship; the clan dies only to be reborn from group sacrifice as a community of equals, the nation conceived as an artifact.

Before focusing on the thematic logic of Dante's homecoming and the compensatory efficacy of the ending, I want to pose certain questions for readers to puzzle out: Is the first rendezvous in Old Bio's town a reaffirmation of tradition, organic folk togetherness, and patriarchal supremacy, all of which are designed to guarantee village self-sufficiency? Is the second rendezvous an instance of "revolutionary" justice superseding primordial ties, as well as a repudiation of the mystique of aristocratic honor? Is the third rendezvous – the spectacle of horror and the indiscriminate carnage that follows – testimony to the power of the spirit of revenge and a displacement of patriarchal wrath in the son's obedience to filial duty? Coming quickly after their disruption of the wedding festival (Chapter Fifteen), Dabu's wild vengeance implies a breakdown of discipline and the return of *lex talionis*, of archaic residues. Much more problematic is the fact that each site of the rendezvous, each occasion for restaging the presentness of the past, proves to be precarious if not hostile ground; the enemy lurks everywhere, the town hall serving as its bastion and the police its private army. There is as yet no mass base or zone of freedom for the revolution, despite Dimasalang's dictum that "where there is oppression, we have friends everywhere." Indeed the struggle may be "one and indivisible all over the planet"; lacking hegemony, however, this remains a sectarian view. A foretaste of the revolutionary will evolving toward its self-defined rendezvous is shown in the fraternal exchange with the group's double (another guerrilla formation)

in the last chapter, already prefigured in the recruitment of father and son earlier, and in the potential of erotic transcendence in those rare scenes invested with the charisma of Mameng/Alicia.

After the emotional reunion of Mameng with her mother and sister, the only encounter with the past where blood is not spilled, we witness in the next rendezvous Dante's outburst of anger at his brother-priest for failure to recognize a personal debt, thus provoking his death. With the past mediated by verses from alien/Euro-pean culture heroes, San Juan de la Cruz and Francis Thompson – uncanny symptoms of pre-Oedipal longing or sacramentalizing death drive? – we observe Dante's last act of ordering Dr. O'Brian to heed Old Bio, "an act that took him thirty-five years to arrive at and execute, which was the ultimate fusion of his two selves; he, Dante, who was an American one moment and a Filipino the next, complete now at the very door of death." In what sense does this scene reconcile Dante's past (revived in the fratricide) with his present? Is this rendezvous with his local past (his presentation of self to his blood brother) a means of rescuing his "American" double? Or is it a punishment inflicted on his guilty self for leaving home? Is Dante trying to exorcise the hatred of the white world (evoked by the memory of the howling mob in San Diego) that once overwhelmed him before he lost consciousness?³

Before Dante dies, however, he settles accounts with the past in the person of Dr. Jack O'Brian, a self-confessed hater of Filipinos, who fails to save his life. It seems to me that Bulosan here contrives a somewhat forced catharsis when he peremptorily declares that Dante, no longer remembering but apprehending danger, achieves the "ultimate fusion of his two selves," the American and the Filipino. Despite this implausible if utopian gesture, this scene nonetheless illuminates part of Bulosan's motivation on which I have commented earlier: re-membering as a gathering together of fragments to reconstitute the whole; anamnesis as exchange of gifts (memories), with the novel serving as amanuensis and compensating for the imbalance in the psychic economy of the colonized. What the journey then enacts is the crossing of boundaries (physical and spiritual) to establish the possibilities of communicative action, a strategy of exchanging space for time – the classic guerrilla

maneuver. Recall that in the first chapter Hassim, in a dialogue with Old Bio, talks about Dante's book, in which the old revolutionary figures prominently; a text tracing Philippine history "from the revolutionary viewpoint, from Chief Lapu-Lapu and his pagan men who killed Magellan and most of his mercenary soldiers and drove the others to their boats and thence to Spain, to the formation of the underground in Mt. Arayat, where Alipato took the military leadership in this our latest struggle against tyranny." In this sense the narrative form replicates what it is trying to convey, evincing in the process the locutionary difficulties accompanying the performance.

Both the personal and historical crises which I pointed out earlier can be resolved, it seems, only by Dante's sacrifice, inasmuch as this immediately leads to the dismantling of the original plan and the recognition of the collective double. In retrospect, the libidinally charged rendezvous with Felix Rivas (the author's quasi double; a reincarnation of Felix Razon in *America*) turns out to be a symptom of a collective predicament. In effect, Rivas functions as the empty space and the signifier of the negative; further, he serves as a metaphoric vehicle for the illusion of dependency, the colonial *habitus* of demanding recognition/acknowledgment from the master's gaze. Disfigured or virtually castrated, Rivas thus becomes the telltale icon of a disappeared hope, a trust sold out; of a scandalous betrayal that may be said to configure the underlying structure of a long-repressed contradiction between the United States and the Philippines of which Filipinos abroad (for whom Bulosan acted as spokesman) were the living embodiment.

So then the participants in this allegorical pilgrimage are cut off from their destination in the city, with two more rendezvous involving Linda Bie and Hassim postponed and the whole mission aborted. Their fortuitous rescue by another group of armed peasants intimates the discovery of the real objective or meaning of their final rendezvous, which I would like to underscore: the encounter with others whose sharing of a common purpose yields the gift of mutual recognition. Doubting this proposition, one can inquire further: Is this denouement Bulosan's emblematic figure of self-reliance or even autarky? Does it express a covert insistence on privileging the supremacy of the mass line?⁴ All these questions

find their answers in the repetitions of the narrative scheme, a pattern that focuses less on punctual chronology than on salvaging relics of messianic time from mutilated life histories, a re-membering via going back, with each homecoming or rendezvous conceived both as self-discovery and a presenting of self, or its "rendering back," for the Other.

We can finally venture the hypothesis that Dante's plight epitomizes the contradictions of individualist, "free enterprise" ideology ripened in a Third World neocolony undergoing mutations and distortions, a crisis whose long-range implications cannot yet be fully spelled out except as a negation of the moribund status quo. Dante's death would then signify the historical obsolescence of the petit bourgeoisie, more exactly bourgeois liberal ideology, and in particular the neocolonized intelligentsia caught between its obsession with Western lifestyles and the reality of class antagonisms. We sympathize with Dante's situation as he tries to bury the nightmare of the past, incapable of exorcising its specters until he himself assumes the role of victimizer; and in this self-estranged position, he is delivered from suffering by the violence of his brother-priest. We can now conceive of Dante as a figure for the fragmented body of the nation, a body cut up and its members dispersed around the world today as in the past as "warm body export," their labor power treated as bargain commodities for sale. Dante the "unprodigal" son whose body now blends with one inalienable earth (localized in Philippine soil) remains an enigmatic personification of the Filipino exile torn from his still occupied homeland. His experiences can then be read as the allegory of Bulosan as dismembered culture hero, of the worker robbed of the fruits of his alienated labor and therefore of his life, of the peasant dispossessed of the land he had made fruitful, and of the millions of women (mothers, sisters, wives) who in the march of imperial progress were forced to make the absolute sacrifice.⁵

At this point, the novel's closure inserts a caesura in our meditation and provokes the following speculation. The ending might be understood as a parable in miniature: the incidence of Dante's sacrifice leads to his group's rescue by a counterpart band of antilandlord partisans who have already demarcated a territory for

themselves, perhaps a token of decentralized grassroots politics in gestation. A politics of hope is also insinuated here with a detour in nostalgia for the organic community, leading finally to a redemptive rescue. The novel's closure then compensates for the sentimental and melodramatic excess the earlier incidents might have produced, for the insensitivity to the "woman question," and other improbabilities. It neutralizes somewhat the essentializing tendency of liberal humanism immanent in the self-deceptive misrecognition of Dante's bifurcated self, the duplicities in each of the protagonists, and all other contradictions that are exposed but are deliberately left unresolved.

In the end, Hassim displaces Dante as the undisputed central intelligence of the narrative, distancing Bulosan from his own predicament. In response to the American doctor's racist harangue, Hassim "knew that he had to say something to this proud man [Dante] to remember him by. He had to grapple with space and time, wrest away from the silence of the years a land called America and fling it upon this room, beside this proud man, and point to towns and cities where fragments of Dante's life had been lost and where drops of his blood had been spilled to make the soil of that land rich for vegetation." Connotations revolving around the Orphic and Osiris myth charge this passage with a prophetic force oriented to a future redemption. In Chapter One, Hassim's character operates as a totalizing consciousness bridging past and present, opening the space for the intervention of a utopian Now-Time: Old Bio was confused by "what Hassim had said about their revolutionary tradition, then what they were fighting for in the underground, and now about himself and the revolution against Spain. Time and space seemed to converge in Hassim's mind freely" and this "resilient thinking" is what enables Old Bio to be transported in time. Of crucial significance is this passage in Chapter Fourteen, the middle of the book, where Hassim distinguishes the peace of childhood and the peace of commitment:

Was there no other meaning of life? Hassim could look back to the beginning, almost at the end of time, and seek out among the wreckage of other lives, all that he had known, if there was

another, more tangible than what he had found among his companions in these last few hectic years. But he could not find any: for there at the beginning was a false peace, the peace of childhood that took nourishment from the unfailing roots of parenthood; not the peace of awareness, of knowing the world and the people in it, and their relations to each other as they were striving to weave a motif as a setup of their pattern of living. It was the false peace of childhood, deeply embedded in his memory and everybody's memory; yet he knew that from it started the yearning for real peace, the peace that came with maturity and awareness; and in it were first revealed the magic casements that revealed the dawn and murmur of real peace, becoming more murmurous and brighter as awareness grew, as it grew steadily until it became an imperishable reality. So that was the beginning of real peace after all, he thought.

A dialectic of past and future is being negotiated in Hassim's mind, culminating in a "peace of awareness" (lived by Hassim and his comrades in the guerrilla struggle), the genesis of "an imperishable reality." But it is ultimately Hassim's invocation of Dante's fertilizing blood that allows this text to function as the conscience of all oppressed nationalities, people of color whose labor and its fruits have been expropriated by capital and whose spirit is now being stirred up to reclaim what has been alienated from it. Bulosan's novel thus critiques the utopian humanism of *America* and rewrites it in the allegory of revolutionary praxis.

II

Given the ambitious scope of the themes woven in the novel, one can claim that *The Cry* is a magnificent achievement by a Filipino artist of world stature, a counterhegemonic text rendering in allegorical terms the tragic *agon* of a neocolonial formation such as the Philippines, a cultural performance equaled only by Jose Rizal's novels, the poetry of Amado Hernandez, and the films of Lino Brocka.⁶

This novel is the only narrative of this magnitude by a self-

taught writer born of the peasantry that successfully integrates (albeit in a problematic form) the anti-imperialist people's war in the Philippines with the self-transmuting experience of Filipino migrants, wandering vendors of cheap labor in the United States, in the first half of this century. It develops with compelling intensity the theme of combined class, national, and racial struggles traversing the unsynchronized time-space of *America*, as well as the theme of collective renewal by satiric demystification elaborated in *Laughter*. Those themes are then rearticulated and syncopated in this novel through the lives of typical but fully concretized characters whose internal complexities surface in the feud between blood relations, in recurrent antagonisms that explode phallogocentric authority, feudal patronage, and the ideological apparatuses of neo-colonial subordination. In effect, one is tempted to read these internal splits as symptoms of the underlying structural mutations suffered by the body politic. Plot and characters can then be properly glossed as allegorizing tropes for the conflicts that fragment the populace along class, gender, and racial lines, suspending the claims of kinship and other organic ties for the sake of a larger ethicopolitical affiliation such as "the Filipino people" or "the national-popular forces" – rubrics of a symbolic identity-in-process – without which all resistance against the consolidated power of capital remains dispersed and futile.

From the perspective of the nineties, Dolores Feria, Bulosan's trusted literary confidante, speculates on Bulosan's prescience: "The novel, as it would have to be, is largely an ideological construct with only an allegorical resemblance to the factual nitty-gritty of day-to-day revolutionary tactics. What is most impressive is the power that the book succeeds in generating in spite of its obvious factual lapses. For the fictional journey of Hassim (was he a stand-in for the Persian poet whom Bulosan said had influenced his poetry?) and his six companions on their way to Rendezvous 7 is merely a journey in the time continuum from the Hukbalahap bases of the late 1940s to the New People's Army of 1969 and subsequent years. It was Bulosan's only way of coming to terms with a historic phase from which circumstances had totally excluded him and yet for which he had waited for 25 years."⁷

In that framework, I suggest that the narrative be interpreted as a transnational allegory of a new kind, to modify Fredric Jameson's heuristic category. It performs a mapping of the complex, ever-shifting constellation of social/psychic forces underlying that conjuncture when the hegemonic "language" of U.S. liberalism disintegrates on collision with the heteroglossia (to use Bakhtin's term) of its victims. It is in this light that Bulosan may be said to decenter the monologic discourse of U.S. supremacy by deploying the oppositional voices of his underground agents, catching off balance the phalanx of ideological mechanisms used to reproduce subalterns and sustain the parasitic regime of capital. The novel aims to dramatize the crisis of this system, of U.S. hegemony, as it is being challenged by the organized force of peasants, workers, and intellectuals – the first serious challenge since the Filipino-American War of 1898–1902.

Because of his incisive critique of U.S. imperialist domination and its racist violence coexisting with tributes to the idea of "America" as a creation of mass democracy, Bulosan has become a battlefield of political contestation. Were he alive today, he would most likely relish this position of being the medium through which life-and-death questions, formerly muted or sidetracked, are released into a phantom "public sphere" for debate. In a dependent formation such as the Philippines, however, what preponderates in intellectual circles is not so much reason as hope and fear, the twin passions of the modality of finite existence, which Spinoza considered barriers for enjoying freedom. One can argue that *The Cry* challenges the omnipotence of these barriers, even if indirectly, in the fixations and defense mechanisms of his protagonists. Not that Bulosan was trying to fabricate an ingenious Aesopian discourse to outwit the police; his effort to craft a transnational allegory had no traditional precedents, hence its novelty may annoy conformist taste. The conventional mode of reception is certainly blind to the way Bulosan transforms the motif of the journey (as elaborated, for instance, in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*) into a cognitive-aesthetic cartography of the vicissitudes of U.S.-Philippine relations. Nor is it sensitive to the way Bulosan's discursive method interweaves the more subtle ideological "war of position" with the largely econ-

omistic conception of the "war of maneuver" rendered by doctrinaire realism (Libretti 1994). This is understandable because the problem of hegemony (the mix of force and consent enabling social reproduction) that preoccupies this novel and his other writings has not really been addressed by critics with a historical materialist rigor. What we need is a politically transformative approach to cultural texts like Bulosan's that would be cognizant of the specific audiences for whom he was writing, the circulation and reception of his texts in changing environments, the dialectical play of forces overdetermining his writing practice, and the limits and possibilities of the semiotic codes and genres within which he was operating. The present essay is only a preliminary contribution toward inventing such a materialist approach.

At the peak of the Cold War, Bulosan expressed (in a testament cited earlier) the synthesizing vision of his art, his project of striving to concretize the "grand dream of equality among men and freedom for all," a dream immanent in "the desires and aspirations of the whole Filipino people," which he vowed to actualize as his "sole responsibility." This task of interpellating a Filipino subjectivity-in-process coeval with the emergence of a truly sovereign Filipino nation is one that Bulosan accepted as he straddled the boundaries between two worlds, the Southeast Asian colony and the Western metropolis, collapsing the distinction between center and margin in the process of dramatizing the psychological and ethical dilemmas of the characters in this novel. One can propose that in general Bulosan's writings assumed the responsibility of unleashing the transgressive impulses locked in folklore, indigenous tales and songs, newspaper accounts, oral and graphic testimonies, journals, propaganda, and other intractable practices of quotidian life — forces and energies that can be harnessed for popular democratic emancipation.

In trying to fulfill the mandate of his responsibility, Bulosan envisioned a just, egalitarian, convivial world — a socialist society that would emerge from the cultural awakening and political mobilization of the multiracial working class in the United States. He prophesied such an event being catalyzed by the defeat of imperialism at the hands of the armed organized masses in the Third World.

Bulosan died before his insight could be partly confirmed by the popular democratic victories in Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and several countries in Africa. The struggle for "national liberation" is still raging in the country of his birth. In Bulosan's description of how Filipino workers in his lifetime united with progressive sections of U.S. society in their fight against predatory capital, in his affirmation that workers and oppressed nationalities in metropolis and periphery constitute the principal motive force in the making of world history, Bulosan composed a powerful testimony to the immense potential of "the wretched of the earth" to transform exploitative structures and uncover the wellspring of beauty and freedom in the self-renewing creativity of cooperative labor. Celebrating the sanctity of life and solidarity of the "common" people, Bulosan hoped in his works not merely to give pleasure and knowledge but also and above all to disturb the peace of tyrants and empower the masses with the spirit of revolt. Given this achievement, Bulosan's name today has come to symbolize the implacable revolutionary will of people of color everywhere combating racist oppression and exploitation by transnational capital, fighting for the right of self-determination, for justice and human dignity.

NOTES

1. In 1991, Dolores Feria proposed a correction to the editor's hypothetical dating of the novel (San Juan 1986) by adducing certain biographical circumstances surrounding its composition. She calculated the time of writing as between 1949 and 1952, a period when Bulosan drifted between Los Angeles and Stockton, associating with people who were then distributing Taruc's autobiography, *Born of the People*, published in 1953. Bulosan's article on the capture of the Huk Politburo, "Terrorism Rides the Philippines," appeared in August 1952 in the *Yearbook* he edited. The idea of a guerrilla march and rendezvous could have been inspired only by the strategic marches vividly recounted in Taruc's memoir. The age of Dante, Bulosan's fictional surrogate, coincides with Bulosan's age in 1953. I would strongly suggest that the book was begun sometime in 1952 or 1953 and was completed in 1955 when, in a letter to Florentino Valeros, Bulosan first mentioned the early title of this novel, *The Hounds of Darkness* (Bulosan 1960:274).