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*Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt:
Critical Perspectives on Carlos Bulosan*

Review Author: Leo Angelo Nery

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Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt: Critical Perspectives on Carlos Bulosan

Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016. 378 pages.

“Occupation: Writer . . . Estate: One typewriter, a twenty-year old [sic] suit, worn out socks; Finances: Zero; Beneficiary: His people” (xix). Thus read Carlos Bulosan’s obituary, which was published in the *Daily People’s World* in 1956. Penned by his friend and fellow unionist Chris Mensalvas, the tribute is a brief but poignant summation of Bulosan’s contribution not just to Philippine literature but also to social movements both in the US and the Philippines. However, although Bulosan’s place in literature and history is beyond dispute, interpreting his work (and his life) has been a site of contestation for the past sixty years. Early literary criticism of Bulosan’s writings was dominated by formalist readings until in the 1970s, under the repressive but radicalizing conditions of martial law, Bulosan and his work were liberated from “promiscuous sentimentalism” (xxi) and reimaged as products of the struggle against repressive and exploitative colonial relations between the US and the Philippines. Post-martial-law scholarship on Bulosan has since branched out to include, among other lenses, gender, migration, transnationalism, and culture; recent events, such as the resurgence of authoritarianism, ultranationalism, and the intensification of racial and gender discrimination, have made Bulosan’s experience as a Filipino exile in the US contemporary once more. The task, however, is to reintroduce Bulosan to a new generation of aspiring scholars, activists, and social scientists, without disregarding the more than half-century of scholarly work that Bulosan has inspired.

Introducing new scholars and readers to the history of Bulosan scholarship is Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao’s primary objective in his compendium *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt: Critical Perspectives on Carlos Bulosan*. It is not simply a collection of Bulosan-inspired works, but also a historical narrative of Bulosan criticism as well as an exposition on the appropriate methodology in reading Bulosan’s life and works. Affirming E. San Juan Jr.’s perspective that Bulosan should always be viewed in light of his emancipatory vision and project, Cabusao aims to contribute toward “historicizing, decentering,

and renewing Bulosan criticism” (xix). By positing that “the formation of the critical reception of Bulosan’s art parallels the formation of Bulosan’s literary imagination” (xvii), Cabusao firmly asserts that an appreciation of Bulosan’s work must also include the historico-material conditions that provided Bulosan an ethico-political vision geared toward the liberation of oppressed peoples, an interpretation that in 1972 San Juan introduced in his pioneering work, *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of Class Struggle* (University of the Philippines Press).

The book is composed of twenty works on Bulosan, curated in a manner that parallels the emergence of Bulosan’s social, political, and literary views. Part I, “Bulosan’s Voice: Listening to the Manong Generation,” serves as a starting point both for Bulosan’s literary journey and the maturation of Bulosan criticism. Part II, “Location of Exile: Creating an Alter/native Filipino Literary Practice,” situates Bulosan within Filipino and Third World writing through literary criticism produced by his texts *America is in the Heart* (1946) and *The Laughter of My Father* (1944). Part III, “The Writer as Worker: Broadening the Bulosan Canon,” charts Bulosan’s growing commitment to the utilization of literature as an instrument of social change, which coincided with his increased literary production from the Great Depression to the Cold War period. The concluding section, “Collective Memory and Revolt: Becoming Filipino—Becoming Free,” is a collection of articles that provides a unifying thread for Bulosan scholarship. By claiming that the process of remembering Bulosan is linked to the preservation of the collective memory of Filipinos as “subjects in revolt” (xxvii), Cabusao reaffirms simultaneously Bulosan’s historical significance and his relevance in the contemporary period, as the conditions of racial and national subordination are not just present, but have also intensified over the recent decades.

In addition to serving as a repository of rare and/or out-of-print works, *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt* is also an attempt at establishing a canon for Bulosan criticism, as most of the articles featured in the compendium either contributed to or defined the direction of scholarship on Bulosan. Cabusao pays homage to San Juan’s pioneering efforts in challenging tropes that negated the “proletarian aesthetics” and the complexity of representations of exile in Bulosan literature. San Juan’s three essays, “The Achievement of Carlos Bulosan,” “Carlos Bulosan: The Poetics and the Necessity of

Revolution,” and “Carlos Bulosan: Critique and Revolution,” encapsulate the history of radical reengagement with Bulosan. By challenging the immigration assimilationist paradigm that castrated the emancipatory message of Bulosan’s writings, and by situating Bulosan in the context of the social and literary movements against US–Philippine colonial and neocolonial relations, San Juan proposes that the central theme of Bulosan’s works was the “unfolding struggle for Filipino national sovereignty” (xviii).

Dolores Feria’s “Filipino Writers in Exile,” which anticipated San Juan’s shift toward a historical materialist reading of Bulosan, contributes in elucidating the experience of exile, especially Bulosan’s paradox of exile that “those who went away never succeeded in escaping from themselves, and those who stayed at home never found themselves” (40). The essays of Delfin Tolentino (“Satire in *The Laughter of My Father*”), L. M. Grow (“*The Laughter of My Father: A Survival Kit*”), and Marilyn Alquizola and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi (“*The Laughter of My Father: Adding Feminist and Class Perspectives to the ‘Casebook of Resistance’*”) challenge the comic misrepresentation of the Bulosan satire; after all, Bulosan said he was not “a laughing man, [but] an angry man” (82). Odette Taverna’s “Remembering Carlos Bulosan: An Interview with Josephine Patrick” is a valuable text, especially as a primary source, since Patrick’s recollections are one of the few first-hand accounts that prove Bulosan’s life can never be divorced from the anticolonial and antiracial discrimination struggles of his milieu. Although the reprinting of these articles and other scholarly works in Parts II and III may seem redundant given their availability in online repositories and journals, Cabusao makes them more accessible given that articles such as Grow’s are often blocked by paywalls and subscription fees.

Although the primary objective of the book is to introduce (and reproduce) pivotal articles on Bulosan, *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt* also provides new material that can serve as starting points for new research and reengagement with Bulosan’s life and art for the contemporary period. Kenneth Bauzon’s “Identity and Humanity in the Age of Corporate Globalization: A Review Essay” and Michael Viola’s “Filipino American Hip-Hop and Class Consciousness: Renewing the Spirit of Bulosan” assert that Bulosan is still relevant in contemporary times, given the need for collective struggle and resistance amid the onslaught of neoliberalism, racial tensions, economic exploitation, and wars of aggression. “The Bulosan Files: Another

Layer in an Ongoing Dialogue,” a written dialogue between Alquizola, Hirobayashi, and Arellano, highlights opportunities for new research on Bulosan. Recently released archival materials such the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s surveillance of Bulosan reveal additional layers on Bulosan’s life, his generation’s engagement with coercive US state instruments, and the consequences of their struggle against neocolonialism in the US and the Philippines.

The primary sources found in the appendix are as valuable as the articles selected for inclusion in this volume. The appendix contains rare photographs of Bulosan and his works and selected sections of the 1952 *Yearbook* of the Local 37 of the International Longshoremen’s and Warehouse Men’s Union, which Bulosan edited. The editorial of the 1952 *Yearbook* as well as the articles “To Whom It May Concern” and “Terrorism Rides in the Philippines” provide a glimpse of Bulosan and his generation’s perspectives on social justice and equality along class and racial lines. As Bulosan declared, the union did “not discriminate against sex, race or national origin,” and the “unconditional unity of all workers [was the] only weapon against the evil designs of imperialist butchers and other profiteers of death” (326–27).

Cabusao’s rationale for the selection of essays included in this book is to offer “critical perspectives” on Bulosan scholarship. But glaring are his omissions, which may be due to the voluminous nature of Bulosan-inspired texts and copyright issues; still, it is evident that commentaries by Leonard Casper, PC Morante, and Joseph Galdon have been excluded, even though they could provide context to the conflicts within Bulosan scholarship. The debates between San Juan and his critics, Casper and Galdon, represent a turning point for Bulosan scholarship, as well as literary criticism and cultural studies. Because Bulosan scholarship was a site of contestation, especially during the 1970s, these debates offer a historical perspective on the emergence of committed scholarship, especially since it occurred during the repressive conditions of the Marcos regime. The introduction to *All the Conspirators* (University of Washington Press, 1998) by Caroline Hau and Benedict Anderson could also have enriched discussions on Bulosan’s literary vista, but copyright issues and the recency of *All the Conspirators* might have contributed to its exclusion.

Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt fulfills its basic objective, which is to serve as an introduction to Bulosan, his works, and theoretical perspectives they have inspired. Despite the exclusion of some works that could have

contributed to an appreciation of the evolution of Bulosan scholarship, this volume provides readers with an excellent starting point to expand the field and make it relevant amid contemporary challenges and issues.

Leo Angelo Nery

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Institute of Arts and Sciences
Far Eastern University
<lanery@feu.edu.ph>

MARIA SERENA I. DIOKNO, ED.

Hidden Lives, Concealed Narratives: A History of Leprosy in the Philippines

Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2016. 293 pages.

Leprosy, or Hansen's disease, has attracted scholarly inquiry for a number of right reasons. For one, scholars can examine the ways by which societies and regimes of power have made sense of a disease that has caused mass suffering in different places at different times. While it is now known that the microbe *Mycobacterium leprae* causes leprosy, the disease's longevity had allowed it to gain various cultural meanings in the past, ranging from its Judeo-Christian association with impurity and sin to miasmatic interpretations to its association with lewd behavior and lack of hygiene— notions that are general knowledge in the literature. In the Philippines the history of leprosy has inspired scholarship, from Enrico Azicate's MA thesis, "Medicine in the Philippines: An Historical Perspective" (University of the Philippines, 1989) to Warwick Anderson's "Leprosy and Citizenship" (*positions* 1998:707–30). Yet, there are more stories to tell. Enriching the literature is the book *Hidden Lives, Concealed Narratives: A History of Leprosy in the Philippines*, commissioned by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) and edited by Maria Serena Diokno, professor of history at the University of the Philippines-Diliman and former NHCP chairperson. With Diokno are esteemed Filipino scholars, mostly historians, who authored the chapter essays. Marshalling materials that include missionary documents, travelogues, materia medica, health journals, as well as oral testimonies, the book retells Philippine history through the lens of the history of leprosy.

Hidden Lives, Concealed Narratives is composed of three parts that are organized chronologically. Part I looks into the precolonial and Spanish