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## Two Bulosan Letters from America

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## Texts and Documents

### Two Bulosan Letters from America

OSCAR V. CAMPOMANES  
TODD S. GERNES

A Letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend.

—Emily Dickinson

It is not a simple analogy: writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by the Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems—conversely—to borrow its metaphors.

—Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

Metaphors of writing, the body, and the spirit are conditioned by specific social and historical circumstances as well as by philosophical and aesthetic traditions. Although two letters of Carlos Bulosan have some of that "immortal," romantic quality that Dickinson described, the act of writing for Bulosan was generated by a "genealogical anxiety," intensified by expatriation.<sup>2</sup> These newly discovered documents, two letters from America to Bulosan's nephews in the Philippines, reveal a writing process deeply engaged with struggles

This note in a slightly different version first appeared as part of a longer article in *Melus* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1988):15-46.

1. Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 196; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 35.

2. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 124.

of the body and spirit. Because Bulosan's nephews, like their fathers, were tillers of the soil, because they were engaged in a method of cultivation other than reading, they could not find time to read his most important work, *America is in the Heart*. Realizing the power and importance of his letters, however, Bulosan's nephews preserved them, in spite of unfavorable conditions.

The letters, dated 8 March 1948 and 1 April 1948, were recovered during an interview with Bulosan's nephews, Wilfredo and Arthur, in the northern Philippines.<sup>3</sup> When Bulosan's private letters and published writing are juxtaposed, the set calls out for an intertextual reading, a reading that illuminates Bulosan's act of writing. This assembly of artifacts reveals Bulosan's assumption of a name and voice for his people, those submerged in poverty and oppressed by the social structure of the new country and the old. Defining this structure is the political relationship between the Philippines and the United States, a disequilibrium which is played out again and again in the lives of Filipinos who venture across the Pacific. These letters show Bulosan groping for the proper techniques of expression and communication, for a method of blending folk forms (such as the tall tale), biography, and fiction. Mining the past for its lessons lies at the root of his search for "proper forms," as he tells Arthur in the beginning:

I can still remember when I left Binalonan: you must have been a year old at the time, or around that age, because your mother was carrying you in her arms. But many years have come and gone since then, Arthur. I'm not going to write about all those years, not now anyway; but I will remind you of certain incidents in my life with your father and mother, and with my parents too, and with the rest of the family when I was a little boy, so that you will find in my example something to cling to when you go out into the world alone.

Similarly, his letter to Wilfredo identifies local knowledge and family history as the source and pivot for his accounts and advice:

I really don't know how you will fight your way through life. I can't map it out for you, and no man can do it for you; it is you alone who can do it. We older people can certainly point out things from our own

3. Letter to Arthur Bulosan, 8 March 1948; Letter to Wilfredo Bulosan, 1 April 1948. Arthur and Wilfredo are the sons of Bulosan's politician-brother Silvestre, who was cast as Luciano in *America is in the Heart* and figures prominently as the model for other Bulosan characters in short stories collected under *The Laughter of My Father* and its sequel, *The Philippines is in the Heart*.

errors and other experiences in life, and you can determine your own course of action through our trials. It is only from our mistakes that you can learn to arrange your life.

For Arthur's benefit, Bulosan proceeds to recount episodes from his boyhood in Binalonan with Arthur's father, illustrating Silvestre's admirable qualities, his importance to his own beginnings. He claims to have written about two memorable incidents with Silvestre in the short stories, "My Brother Osong's Career in Politics" and "The Poet and the Store."<sup>4</sup> Then he reveals: "You will know more about your father in my two books, *The Laughter of My Father* and *America is in the Heart*; in the first, I tried to interpret him in a character named Osong; in the second, a character named Luciano."

With Wilfredo he takes another approach. Responding to his nephew's confessed weakness for gambling, Bulosan reasons:

Now you tell me you gamble a great deal. Essentially it is bad to gamble because it blackens your outlook on life; it can also make your heart ugly and your soul impure. It can make you a brutal and cruel person. But all the world gambles, Fred, from Jesus Christ to your Uncle Joe here in America, from the white to the black man, from President Roxas to the janitor at your local market place. I gamble too once in a while; when I am desperate and in need of a little money, I take a chance with what I have on my person.

Testimonies of surviving associates suggest that Bulosan was not totally the protagonist he portrays himself to be in *America is in the Heart*, the writer forced by circumstance into temporary association with the underworld. Bulosan's narrator-hero is more likely a composite character drawn from autobiography, family history, and the experience of the typical Pinoy. During the Depression, many Pinoy had some contact with the underworld, due in part to their racial and economic marginalization. Dionisio, the other Bulosan ("Uncle Joe"), did become a creature of the underworld and so Carlos had a familiar model from which to draw his character sketch. Bulosan goes on to claim in his letter that he himself was "a professional

4. Manuscripts for some of the titles he cites here were never found. Dolores Stephens Feria notes with fondness that he was forever working on new projects, most of which remained unfinished, if they were ever undertaken at all. "With no filing cabinet," Feria intimates, "it is possible that many Bulosan drafts have been irretrievably lost." (Interviews with Dolores Stephens Feria, University of the Philippines, 1983.) "We were told that he wrote to the detriment of rest and sleep . . . that he would submerge his feet in a basin of cold water to keep from sleeping . . ." (Interview with Mario Bulosan, Binalonan, Pangasinan, 1983.)

gambler for five years in America, during the great depression," but the knowing reader realizes that Bulosan was merely mythifying himself in order to give his nephew strength to face harsh socioeconomic realities. Bulosan thus develops his tale: ". . . I traveled up and down the Pacific Coast every day, from city to city and from house to house; but it was because there was nothing else for me to make a living except scrubbing the kitchens of white people, and I felt that that was not the thing for me."

Carlos therefore assumes the role of the typical Pinoy of those years, pushed to the edge then reclaiming ground in the way that he knew best. Yet the act of reclamation also becomes an act of defiance, of fighting back: ". . . you are still a young fellow," Bulosan continues, "and someday, you might find something for yourself. But if you will not . . . if gambling will be the only way—if gambling will become a passion to you (like writing to me), then do it in a big way . . ." With this parallelism, "gambling" finally acquires coherent figurative powers and a positive meaning, especially as Bulosan recapitulates: "Everything is a gamble: life, love, marriage, happiness, death, etc. Everything, Fred." Bulosan reconstructs, reshapes, and redefines experience for the benefit of his nephew. Gambling is released from stigma, as Bulosan builds a sense of his nephew's dignity and self-worth.

Given this pattern of lyrically reorganizing experience through the act of writing (either letters or fiction), Bulosan's claim of being a "professional gambler [traveling] up and down the Pacific Coast every day" should be read figuratively. Seizing the literal act and image of gambling, Bulosan attempts to realize a communion with his potential reader, the equally tormented and marginalized nephew, through the imaginative reformulation of their collective travails. This strategy, this conscious retrieval of what at face value appears to be trivial, configures the aesthetic design of *America is in the Heart* and of Bulosan's corpus. Bulosan blends historical and biographical materials liberally in a manner that renders them aesthetically and spiritually useful to his people.

For example, in a letter to his nephew, Fred, Bulosan attempts to uplift his spirit:

But whatever is your profession, gambling or writing, you must remember always not to be unkind to the poor and unfortunate people especially your own class of people: the exploited peasants who work every day for years just to earn a few centavos to feed their children with the fat of an old cow. When you grow older and you want to gamble, do

not think of getting a few pesos from that working man or from this poor woman; but do it in a big way, in a way that will make many people work for you, in one town or in many towns or even throughout the Philippines. That is the way, nephew.

He designates himself as the center, the rallying point, and the composite figure but does not privilege the status. It is clear that he invests himself with centrality only because it is potentially empowering to an oppressed people, whose poverty extends to the absence of viable symbols, the scarcity of cultural capital. In another passage, he challenges Arthur, because the uplift he envisions for the disadvantaged must originate from a conscious and decisive recognition of their common heritage, history, and future, which is suddenly laid open to change:

I am glad that you are trying to get some education. It is very important to know what is going on in the world. . . do not be ashamed to be poor . . . And whatever the future has in store for you, I request you to challenge it first before giving up. But never forget your family, your town, your people, your country wherever you go. Your greatness lies in them. And when you walk to school in ragged clothes and some people spit at you . . . keep saying in your mind this: "My uncle Carlos walked to school ragged and barefoot and hungry in this same street for years. They despised him too. But now he is the most well-known Filipino writer in the world!" That will help you a great deal, Arthur. That will urge you to try your best to elevate yourself from the poverty and ignorance of a peasant life.

Careful to clarify the notion of an impoverished milieu, he writes of a story about Arthur's father: "Your father was a poet at heart, but he did not realize it. Binalonan was too small for him; he did not have a chance to utilize his talents . . ." In a similar tone, Carlos also describes "the Grand Old Bulosan," his father, who never had the chance to escape from the confining seasons of a peasant's life: "He was a little old man, who could have done better too if he had some education. All that bountiful land in Mangusmana, he had made it with his bare hands, all by himself; he had dug every inch of that broad land with his own fingers; every blade of grass passed through his hands." These letters, in their attempt to renew family ties and to refresh social and cultural solidarity, shed light on Bulosan's act of writing. Bulosan blurs autobiography and social history in an epistolary mode, designed to uplift his people from the ravages of a deeply-rooted social oppression.

## THE BULOSAN LETTERS

March 8, 1948

Dear Arthur,

I received your letter the other day and I was surprised to know that you are now a young man. I can still remember when I left Binalonan: you must have been a year old at the time, around that age, because your mother was carrying you in her arms. But many years have come and gone since then, Arthur. I'm not going to write about all those years, not now anyway; but I will remind you of certain incidents in my life with your father and mother, and with my parents too, and with the rest of my family when I was a little boy, so that you will find in my example something to cling to when you go out into the world alone.

Your father was my very good friend; he was more than a brother to me. Once when I was in the second grade under a woman teacher named Miss Costez, your father gave me an army cap for Xmas which some boy in the class stole. Your father gave me a beautiful American doll, too; but later, because the teacher liked it so [much, I gave it to her.] I can still remember how your father came to school in [khaki to ask about the missing cap. Because he was then a soldier at Camp Stotsenberg, I was able to retrieve my cap. It was returned immediately, of course, but what impressed [me] at the time was how I saw him walking toward me in full stride, legs long and [strong] and sure, the boots shining in the sun and the hands sure and firm. This is my first memory of your father. Then when I was about ten years old, when he came back from the army to recuperate from TB, a disease which he had acquired in service, we went to Mangusmana together and planted tobacco. Belen, your sister, must have been three at the time; but this was before you were born. Your father had been waiting for his pension, but it did not come that year; he decided to farm then, because he had come from a farming family, but when our tobacco was about two feet high and was beginning to leaf, his pension came from America; and he quit immediately and returned to town and immediately afterward he entered local politics. He gave the tobacco land to your grandfather, who was my father, for nothing; and that was the kind of guy he was. I remembered this incident when I was writing my book, *The Laughter of My Father*, so I wrote about it under the title "My Brother Osong's Career in Politics," a story which became famous in the United States; it is now included in a book called *The Best American Short Stories of 1945*, edited by Martha Foley. The first incident, however, about the lost cap and the doll, I just wrote about it in a story called "The Good and the Evil." You will know more about your father in my two books, *The Laughter of My Father* and *America is in the Heart*; in the first, I tried to interpret him in a character named Osong; in the second, a character named Luciano. When I was about twelve years old, I received a pair of brown shoes from your father. I was then

with your uncle Aurelio in Bayambang, where he was going to school and I was cooking and washing his clothes for him. Later, very much later, when I was idling in Binalonan at age 16, your father was my constant companion. He used to have a little store [store?] on the highway to Puzzorobio, and we used to sit in front of the store watching the shiny American automobiles whizzing by. And he used to take me to his house for dinner, and there he would show many American novels that he had brought home with him from the army. In fact, your father was the first to tell me to write and read. I can still remember all the titles of the books that he used to read to me. He was very good in mathematics, too. And he could speak Spanish. It was quite amazing because your father had gone only as far as the sixth grade. Anyway, I wrote a story about that store on the highway too entitled "The Poet and the Store." Your father was a poet at heart, but he did not realize it. Binalonan was too small for him; he did not have a chance to utilize his talents; and had he traveled to some far country, I am very sure now that he would have done something good for his country. I have written many stories based on the life of your father, and my life with him, and also his life with my family. And then when I came to America, I lost him for many years. Your uncle Aurelio will tell you why: but in those days life was swift and terrible in this country. But when I was sick and dying in a hospital in Los Angeles, in 1937, I received a letter from my cousin Amando telling me that your father had died. Arthur, nephew, I crawled to the bathroom and wept in the middle of the night; I had lost a good brother and a wonderful friend. But I remembered what he used to tell me: "Go to America, Allos. Go as soon as you can and be a journalist." I did not know what he meant then; but at the hospital, years later, I knew. So I looked out the window of the hospital into the dark night of the city and said: "Yes, I will be a writer. I promise you I will make you all live in my words again!" And I did just that, Arthur. I wrote about your father and my brothers and sisters and parents, and I will go on writing about them until I die. I have never been able to give them something in return, but my books will be a monument to their goodness to me. That was your father, and that was how he had influenced my mind when I was a little boy.

I don't know much about your mother. I don't remember much about her.

Now I will tell you about myself when I was a little boy in Mangusmana and when I was a young man in Binalonan. You must not be ashamed that we came from poor parents, Arthur. I was a herdboys in Mangusmana all the days of my childhood. I love that land there near the mountains, and the mountains themselves, and the many dawns that came with the birds of summer. I had a cousin named Bansiong: we used to herd carabaos together. My father and I lived in a little grass hut together for years, and once in a while we used to go to town with a sack [of?] vegetables and fruits for the rest of the family. My father was a good [. . .?] he never saw a pair of shoes. I don't think he could read or write his name. He was illit-



erate, but not ignorant. He had been born at a time when education was forbidden; I was born at a time when it was difficult to get; now you are a little better because it is popular. I don't think there is any picture of your grandfather. He was a little old man, who could have done better too if he had some education. All that bountiful land in Mangusmana, he had made it with his bare hands, all by himself; he had dug every inch of that broad land with his own fingers; every blade of grass passed through his hands. Someday you go to Mangusmana and visit that grass house where he and I had lived together; walk on the land where I had walked as a little boy; climb the trees I had climbed. Poor man, he died while he was eating, all alone, and his sons were far away. When I [r]eceived the news that he was [had?] died, I gave up working as a dishwasher at a small restaurant. It was winter. I had no money. But I decided to enter a new life forever. And I did: I entered the vicious life of the underworld and the other scums of the earth. It was the beginning of my life of terror, my defiance against a system that treated human beings like rotten animals. But I will not go into this now. There will be time enough for it.

When I was a little older, I went to the town of Binalonan. I lived with [my] mother and my two sisters there. My sisters did not go to school because we were [very] poor at the time. They worked with my mother so that some of us like my bro[ther] Aurelio, could go to school. My mother is a very wonderful woman, a good mot[her] and the source of my inspiration here in America. I have never, never for a single moment forgotten her. That was when I went to a place called [America]. I wrote the story of our lives together in the book called *America is in the [Heart]*. I wrote about my mother faithfully and affectionately. It is too bad that s[he could] not read the book herself. My mother used to tell me stories when we had noth[ing to] eat in the house. I remembered some of her stories when I started to write; so [I] used some of them. My story "My Father Goes to Court" was one of her favorite stories. The idea in this story is found in nearly all the folk tales of the wo[rld] but I don't know how my mother knew it. She can't read and write, so evidently [she] must have heard it when she was a little girl. This story of mine is very famous too; it has been reprinted in many anthologies and it is also included in a textbook in the United States. It is also included in a book called *Oxford's American Short Stories*. Now do not cry when your grandmother dies. Oh, yes, hide somewhere and cry with all our affection. It is good to cry. But don't let sorrow kill your life. Let it be the beginning of something finer, stronger and sweeter. We will all die: it is only in the affection that we give to each other when we are still alive that keeps the world moving. Your grandmother has already fulfilled her life on the earth in raising a large family. Fortunately, she is sturdy enough to survive the years; long enough to see her grandchildren grow up. I don't think she realizes that she has given the world many good sons, not important and rich, but noble in heart and soul.

I [am] glad that you are trying to get some education. It is very important to know what is going on in the world. Do not be ashamed to work

your way through school; do not be ashamed to be poor. And when you are old enough to go away, Arthur, do not hesitate to go out and face life. And whatever the future has in store for you, I request you to challenge it first before giving up. But never forget your family, your town, your people, your country, wherever you go. Your greatness lies in them. And when you walk to school in ragged clothes and some people spit at you, do not be ashamed, and keep saying your mind this: "My uncle Carlos walked to school ragged and barefoot and hungry in this same street for years. They despised him, too. But now he is the most well-known Filipino writer in the world!" That will help you a great deal, Arthur. That will urge you to try your best to elevate yourself from the poverty and ignorance of a peasant life. And some day, if you happen to be a great or rich man, do not be unkind to the poor and unfortunate people. Do not assume a new personality; be always as you are, companionable, understanding, kind. The power of money is dangerous; all other powers are dangerous too. The greatness of a man lies in the positive application of his power; like a literary genius, for instance, [it lies in his illumination of the nobility of man's intent. I am saying all of this] because I have seen many years, suffered intense pain, drowned in deep loneliness, and explored unbeaten trails to unhappiness.

You must obey your uncle Aurelio always. He is my very good friend and brother. We had suffered together in America, and we understand what it takes to live. I respect him for his courage to take up a new life with you and the rest of the family, sacrificing his own life and future for all of you. Now you may not know the full meaning of his decision, but someday when you are a little older you will understand and cry. For you see, Arthur, every man dreams to make something of himself, but sometimes he gives up these dreams for others. And that is the greatest decision of all for a man to make. Now my brother has given up everything that he had ever dreamed for himself, not for you alone there but for me also here in America. Do not grieve, Arthur. You must go on and pick up where he had left off, and somewhere there in the uncertain future, it will give you courage just to remember his great sacrifice. I can't tell you how much I like him; it will take many books to comprehend it all. But when I die, Arthur, do not weep over me. Go to your uncle Aurelio and tell him: "Your brother Carlos loved you very much. I will love you too, now that he is dead, in his place." That is the way to keep the dignity of the human race: love your family first of all. I have willed everything to my brother Aurelio, but when I die he will take care of all of you in the family. I have nothing much to give, except the good name I have made and the books I shall leave behind me and the simplicity of my heart. My brother will know what to do when I am gone.

[Now I will tell you about your other uncle, Joe. He lives about 39 kilometers a way from here. He married a young American woman. I don't [know?] much about it, but [yo]ur uncle Aurelio can tell you. He is a nice man, too. He left the islands [a] long time ago, in 1925, and that was 23

years ago. He was merely a boy then. [I] think he is coming to Los Angeles tomorrow to see me.

I like you to know that I finished a book about ten days ago called [*My?*] *World and Uncle Sator*. By the time you get this letter another book, a novel, will be written, and it is called *Joy to Every Man*. In the early part of this [ye]ar, however, I wrote a collection of stories called *A Wondrous Lad Was I*. Last [yea]r I arranged another volume of my stories under the title, [*The*] *Amorous Ghost and Other Tales*. I am also arranging a collection of my poetry [to] be called *Love Songs and Elegies*. All these manuscripts are at hand. On the [tent]h of March, this month, I will start another novel, a psychological thriller, [to b]e called *The Pursuit of Fear*. And [as?] soon as I will be on the way with this [novel,] I will start another novel to be laid in Hollywood called *The Deeper Seas*. [I do]n't [know] how long it will take me to write these books, but I can guess that it [will] I probably be about two months. Then I will write three books for children, [or] maybe what we call a play; and I am giving myself until June to finish [all] these projects. I am writing very fast because I would like to write about [a m]illion words within the next two years, and that is plenty of work. Next year, I hope, I will write a big novel based on the life of Jose Rizal; then perhaps I will visit the Philippines and write a book about it. I know you will get bored with this talk about writing; but your uncle Aurelio will understand it. I hope I will live a little longer to have enough time to see the islands. I'll surely write about it and what [?] about what I see there. Your Uncle Aurelio will tell you about what I believe, if you ask him some day. But I will not write about politics in this letter.

I am enclosing the working draft of an idea that I had incorporated in my autobiography, *America is in the Heart*. I wrote it one day while waiting for a train to San Francisco, and, I believe, it is the only thing written by me with a pen. That is its only value. I am also enclosing a picture with a girl in it which was taken last year.

Did you say you are 5 feet 3 inches tall? And 112 pounds? I am only a little over 5 feet tall and 95 pounds. You are a tall boy and you will be taller. Your father and mother were both tall and light in color. I am a small man. . . ., with [little feet and hands. But I have fun. Your size does] not really matter. It is your brain that counts, above all, and your dealing with your neighbors.

Now be good and obey your uncle Aurelio always. Be kind to your grandmother. Treat your brothers and sisters respectfully. And when you suffer defeat, Arthur, face it like a man. That is our way in the family.

You must write to me again and tell me about your progress and the welfare of the family.

Your uncle,  
Carlos Bulosan

April 1, 1948

Dear Fred:

I received your very frank and good letter last night. I read it when I was eating in a restaurant downtown called Saddlerock Cafe (your uncle Aurelio can describe the place for you). I laughed a great deal because you must be a strong-willed little fellow. I showed your letter to an American woman who took me to the restaurant (she paid for the bill, too): and we talked about your character, how unafraid you are like your father about many things in life, and how you are like me in the sense that you know how good you are in some things and how bad you are in others. And that is the way it should be with you for always, Fred. I will go into that later in this letter.

First, I will write about your father who was my very good friend when I was a little boy. Do not cry because he is dead, and that he was not able to provide properly for you and your brothers and sisters. Your grandparents were very poor people who had come from the peasants in the north, but they were very hard-working and honest; they had tried their best to provide for their children the way they knew how, and that was to clothe them, feed them, and give them a little education so that they would not be subjected to the malice and greed and treachery of other men. Well, we are their children, your uncles and aunts, and some of us are dead now too; and if we did not all become famous or rich, it was because we had practically nothing to stand on in the beginning. One thing, however, that you should remember is this: we have lived in a changing time, when confusion reigned supreme. And that was our gain from it all: we were able to see through the darkness of our time into another period where happiness could reign supreme. In a vague way, Fred, your father had dreamed of this time too; but he did not have the words for it, he did not have the social instruments to analyze it. Now it is you, his son, to break loose completely from all the fear and hunger and slavery that we had all known before you came to the world.

I really don't know how you will fight your way through life. I can't map it out for you, and no man can do it for you; it is you alone who can do it. We older people can certainly point out things from our own errors and other experiences in life, and you can determine your own course of action through our trials. It is only from our mistakes that you can learn to arrange your life. Now you tell me that you gamble a great deal. Essentially it is bad to gamble because it blackens your outlook on life; it can also make your soul ugly and your heart impure. It can make you a brutal and cruel person. But all the world gambles, Fred, from Jesus Christ to your uncle Joe here in America; and all the men around you gamble, from the white to the black man, from President Roxas to the janitor at your local market place. I gamble too once in a while; when I am desperate and in need of a little money, I take a chance with what I have on my person. I

was a professional gambler for five years in America, during the great depression, and I traveled up and down the Pacific Coast every day, from city to city and from house to house; but it was because there was nothing else for me to make a living except scrubbing the kitchens of white people, and I felt that that was not the thing for me. Yet you are still a young fellow, and some day you might need something for yourself. But if you will not be able to find a different path of life, if gambling will be the only way—if gambling will become a passion to you (like writing to me), then do it in a big way and do not be ashamed of it. Everything is a gamble: life, love, marriage, happiness, death, etc. Everything, Fred. But whatever is your profession, gambling or writing, you must remember always not to be unkind to the poor and unfortunate people especially your own class of people: the exploited peasants who work every day for years just to earn a few centavos to feed their children with the fat of an old cow. When you grow older and you want to gamble, do not think of getting a few pesos from that working man or from this poor woman; but do it in a big way, in [a] way that will make many people work for you, in one town or in many towns or even throughout the Philippines. That is the way, nephew. And do not be ashamed. The Bible says it is a good virtue to be poor and to bow your head to other men like a slave. Don't you believe it. It is not good to be poor, and I'm telling it to you because I have seen enough of life. And do not bow your head to another man like a slave; that is not the way to realize your fullest manhood and dignity. Bow only because it is the nicest thing to do, but not because some man cracks a whip at you mentally or economically. I used to be humble and afraid to look another man in the eye. What happened? I almost starved myself to death: out of it a disease came, and I am still suffering from it. And when I was humble, I almost destroyed my whole personality; I was even afraid to talk to your uncle Aurelio, that is how low I had bowed to another man. Well, Fred, it took me a long time to be myself again. And I am whole again. And that is why I'm telling you these things from experience.

So you are not good in school? It does not really matter. It only means that you are ahead of the other boys of your age; that conditions outside the school bother you and without knowing it you are trying to fight back and want to escape. It is easy to pass from one grade to another; just read your book carefully and memorize some passages, and the teacher thinks you are clever. But it is not so. It is how you adapt yourself to life outside the school that truly reveals the quality of your mind. Of course, I can say that a good education is necessary and an important weapon to fight your way. But it takes more than a high school education to make you realize this fact. So whatever you do, and wherever you are, try to read some good books; it is not really important to go to the university. A college degree does not mean that you are educated; it only means that you have gone through all the years in school. Education comes after school, from your relations with your fellow man, from your understanding of yourself as a man on the earth. Education is actually the application of this discovery:

that you are a human being with a heart, and a mind and a soul. Intelligence is another thing, of course. We are all born with it; one man has it in a big way, another in a small way; still one man has it in a sharper way, another in a duller form. Intelligence is what we called a gift from the divine, and it is what differentiates us from animals. Genius is still another thing; it is a mysterious spark from the divinity of creation, but no man on earth was able to discover its origin and formation. But let us not go into [that] subject now, Fred. But if some day you discover that you are a genius, do not misuse your gift; apply it toward the safeguarding of our great heritage, the grandeur of our history, the realization of our great men's dream for a free and good Philippines. That is real genius: it is not selfish; it sacrifices itself for the good of the whole community. We Filipinos must be proud that we had the greatest genius in Jose Rizal, who sacrificed his life and happiness for the people. Money has only a temporary power and influence; it is genius that lives longer and influences the lives and minds of many men. Do not be ashamed when you move about in Binalonan and some people refer to us as the poor Bulosans. Tell those people that even if we are poor it will take them a long time to make another Carlos Bulosan, your uncle who went away poor and insufficiently educated. And do not be afraid when some men speak out loud words or point their guns toward you. Don't let them scare you: but tell them that we all die, rich or poor, brown or white; that any time to die is as good as any other to you. But while I say all this to you, Fred, try always to seek the goodness in your fellow man. That is the greatest wealth of all: goodness. And beauty, too. The beauty that you find in all good things.

Now I will tell you about some great men so that you will know what to do with yourself; so you will not feel insufficient with your little learning. Of course, you have heard about Jose Rizal; born a Filipino, but he was what we call a universal man. Fred, he belonged to the whole world; to all mankind; that is Jose Rizal, your greatest hero in the Philippines. He was well educated, of course, because he came from a rich family and he had traveled with cultured men in many civilized countries. But Andres Bonifacio, the founder and leader of the Katipunan had no education to speak of; and Apolinario Mabini, the intellectual leader of the revolution against Spain, educated himself by selling grass (and his mother helped him by selling peanuts in the streets of Manila); and General Malong of Pangasinan, who at one time almost conquered northern Luzon, had only two years of education. Francisco Balthazar the greatest Filipino poet who is known as Balagtas; he had a very little schooling too, and, in fact, he died in jail for writing what he thought of the Spaniards. Now there was a Russian named Maxim Gorki: he did not go to school for even one day, but he became one of the greatest writers in the world. He is the founder of what we call proletarian literature; in other words, he wrote books about the poor people in his country that showed that we poor people in all lands are the real rulers of the world because we work and make things. We make chairs, we plow the land, we create children; that is what Gorki means. But those who

do not work at all, those rich bastards who kick the poor peasants around: they contribute nothing to life because they do not work. In other words, Fred, we can still have a nice country without money and politicians. We just need workers. Everything we see and use came from the hands of workers. The rice you eat, the clothe[s] you wear, the books you read, the money you spend: all these came from the hands of workers. Not from politicians who speak out loudly during elections; not from the rich who sit in their nice houses with fat cigars in their mouths; not from those people who do not even know what a carabao looks like, nor from their wives and daughters (who wear the best clothes and the costliest jewelries) who do not even know how to boil water and eat with their hands. That is what this great Russian writer means when he said: "Workers of the world you have nothing to lose but your chains!" There was a great man in America too a long time ago named Abraham Lincoln; he had no schooling but he became the president of the United States. And not only that: he became one of the greatest men in history in that he used his heart and mind together in making great decisions. I did not have much education, either. But I have written more books now than any Filipino in all times, and I expect to write more books; and I hope to leave behind me 50 books. That will be unmatched, Fred. Millions of words, dozens of books: that is me—your uncle Carlos who herded carabaos in Mangusmana a long time ago.

Now I will stop because my typewriter has suddenly stopped working. I can't write with the pen. Always respect and obey your uncle Aurelio, and when you feel like writing to me, do so. And give my love to your grandmother always, and to your brothers and sister also—

Your uncle,

Carlos Bulosan