

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Remembering Carlos Bulosan

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Philippine Studies vol. 34, no. 1 (1986) 121–123

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

translation, since he often leaves terms in the Spanish or the vernacular untranslated (*estampas*, *patadiongs*, *catapusan*, *pastillas de leche*) or mis-translated (as when he calls the Zamboanga pidgin, or *Chabacano*, "Spanish jargon"). It is his solution to the problem of how to represent the native speech in English. Footnotes and glossaries are awkward and can interrupt the narrative flow (although he does supply one footnote, to explain why he spells *maong*, denim, *mahong*) — and one cannot always explain the term within the sentence, as in "They belong to what they called the *quinta columna*, or fifth column, the unseen powerful army of spies . . ." (p. 18). He handles the problem by interjecting an occasional *aba*, or *hijo*, and keeping in the original Spanish or vernacular, the terms that carry too much of a cultural context to explain on the spot.

However, the too-lush style that marred *The Devil Flower* has here been controlled, and except for the ending, in which the author tries to pull together all the narrative threads by explaining — rather than rendering — the final epiphany, Enriquez's novel is absorbing, holding the reader in personal involvement with the family and the events of the war, while inviting reflection on the social significance of family pride and on the implications of war for everyone. Although it appears almost four decades after the end of the Pacific war, it joins Stevan Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn*, Edilberto Tiempo's *Watch in the Night*, Gilda C. Fernando's "People in the War," and other war fiction in preserving the Filipino images of war, while presenting the texture and feel of Filipino life at the individual, family, and community levels.

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REMEMBERING CARLOS BULOSAN. HIS HEART AFFAIR WITH AMERICA. By P.C. Morantte. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984. 164 pages.

I was privileged to read this book many years ago when it was yet an unpublished manuscript and P.C. Morantte was, for me, another Old Timer who might throw light on the life and times of Carlos Bulosan. He did. We talked once in Lompoc for two days, and P.C. told me story after story about Carlos and the streets of Lompoc and Los Angeles, and what it was like to be a Filipino in California in the thirties, and to be a friend of Carlos Bulosan. His accounts were so personal, so vivid, so emotional, that I felt as if I had been there, and I went away with my vision of Carlos Bulosan permanently modified.

Morantte's book should have much the same effect on the reader. It is per-

sonal, it is emotional, and for an audience whose main impressions of Bulosan were formed through the criticism of Epifanio San Juan, it presents Bulosan in an entirely new light. Here we see Bulosan not primarily as a political figure, but as a lonely misfit who spent aimless afternoons browsing in bookstores and drinking coffee in cheap cafes or playing poker. We find that he spent some time in Washington working (albeit briefly) for Quezon's government-in-exile and hating it, hating especially the classy cocktail parties that went with the job, and which convinced him that he really didn't belong — but all the while admiring President Quezon himself. We see the struggling writer gazing wistfully into bookstore windows at other people's publications, looking for outlets for unknown poets — and here, by the way, are a few good leads for scholars who may want to dig up some of Bulosan's earliest publications, which may have been, says Morantte, in such little local literary magazines as *The New Talent*, *Clay* (this one Villa's), *The Magazine*, and *Blast*. But primarily we see into Bulosan's personality, his rather anti-social character, his abhorrence of all hypocritical relationships, his fear of and attraction to beautiful women.

Even Morantte's consideration of Bulosan's politics — and there is plenty of this in the book — is directed towards the personal instead of the theoretical or the doctrinaire. First Morantte does a little myth-shattering, pointing out about the great Marxist peasant from the Philippines that he was *not* Allos from *America is in the Heart* because he 1) came from a family which was not all that poor; 2) finished third year high school in Lingayen; 3) once in the U.S., never went to Alaska and never worked in a cannery; and 4) was actually too weak to do much field work at any time of his life, and was thus not very directly connected to the labor movement either.

Biographically Morantte is correct, and so the image as it was is slightly tarnished. However, from this point, Morantte reweaves the fabric of Bulosan's political thought out of such diverse threads as his barrio background (where the men would sit out under the stars and talk at leisure far into the night); his great sensitivity to human pain; his experience of the abuses suffered by Filipinos in the United States in the thirties; his reflections on the other inequalities and injustices he witnessed in America, and what seemed to Bulosan to be the effects of the capitalist system on the human character, stimulating as it did materialism, greed and alienation. Morantte acknowledges Bulosan's interest in Communism, but stresses the emotional and experiential basis of this interest instead of confining himself to a more intellectual or theoretical discussion.

Now one does get a feeling that Morantte is being overly cautious here, hesitating to label Bulosan's beliefs for what they are, perhaps from fear that the reading public is not really ready to hear that Bulosan was a Communist. There is also the feeling that Morantte is answering San Juan, consciously attempting to discredit or at least modify San Juan's straight-forward Marxist

approach. This is perhaps a healthy situation in criticism, for one may hope that the airing of all sides will yield some new truth. Morantte's book will strike many readers as *too* emotional, *too* personalistic. It is sometimes cloying. On the other hand, it works well as an explanation for Bulosan's writings, which were always tinged with emotion and were never as doctrinaire as the Marxist critic might desire. The fact that Morantte and Bulosan were of the same generation, were friends, and shared a set of experiences and feelings together, suggests that Morantte's social and political orientation may parallel Bulosan's.

If Morantte's book may be said to have a single theme, it is that Bulosan was entangled in a love-hate relationship with America (hence the subtitle "His Heart Affair with America"). Like other Filipinos of his generation who were eventually to go abroad, he was nurtured by the Thomasites and their successors in a colonial education which idealized America as the land of freedom and justice for all. Actual immigrant experience shattered the illusion. But somehow the dream remained alive — witness the sentimental mush on the American Dream in *America is in the Heart* — perhaps because even in racist depression California, Bulosan found a hopefulness in people, a willingness to undertake making their own destiny. Bulosan liked to juxtapose cruelty with goodness in his writing, often drawing attention to the contrast and wondering how vigilantes who tortured and beat people for simply being poor (and brown and looking for work) could exist in the same land as the sympathetic souls (oddly enough, all women) who welcomed and aided immigrants, unionists, fugitives. Bulosan wanted America to be perfect, and wanted to be a part of it, and thus hated the injustices he saw and hated anything that excluded him, even as he still loved the ideal. Morantte further says that Bulosan fed on the pain that exclusion and injustice caused him, and turned it eventually into the creative energy that sustained his very prolific career as a writer.

Again, this interpretation of Bulosan's psyche will annoy some people, will seem too personalistic, too heavily relying on bourgeois individualism. So it is, and I would not pretend that this is the only useful way to approach Bulosan. Still, Morantte's book serves to explain a great deal of what Bulosan wrote and seems, at times, to duplicate Bulosan's moods and attitudes. In this sense it could well have been written forty years ago with *America is in the Heart*, but even now it is valuable for the new light it sheds on Carlos Bulosan. Next we should get Dolores Feria and Josephine Patrick to write *their* memoirs of the Bulosan years.

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