An Ethical Revaluation of Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*

Francis C. Sollano
Department of English, Ateneo de Manila University
Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108, Philippines
Email: fsollano@ateneo.edu

Abstract Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* captures the struggle of Filipino peasants in the United States. Even at the wake of the "American century," when globalization has taken the façade of a US neocolonial capitalist ethos to the disenfranchisement people in the diaspora and the Global South, the novel continues to be socially relevant. This paper is a revaluation of Bulosan's classic novel from an ethical literary perspective by focusing on the relationship between the internal and external worlds of Allos/Carlos and his brothers, especially Macario. Without neglecting the context and informed by Bulosan scholarship, the paper argues that Allos's brotherly feeling toward Macario and his brothers is the primary condition and drive for his social and ethical self-making and search for "America." The paper also argues that an ethical literary perspective will further highlight new themes and meanings in Bulosan's other multi-genre works.

Key words brotherhood; Carlos Bulosan; ethical literary criticism; Filipino family; Filipino values

Author Francis C. Sollano is Instructor in the English Department, Ateneo de Manila University where he also finished his MA Literary and Cultural Studies. In 2015, he received the Best Graduate Thesis Award from the School of Humanities, Ateneo. His research interests include Filipino American Studies, Philippine literature in English, literature and the law, and the Philippine postcolonial experience. He is also the head copyeditor of *Kritika Kultura*, an online journal of language, literary, and cultural studies.

"I Am Your Brother… I Am Allos!"
(Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* 123)

Born in Binalonan, Pangasinan in the Philippines, Carlos Bulosan migrated

to the United States in 1931 and, from that time, experienced racial violence, unemployment, and prolonged illness until his death in 1956. Aside from active labor union work and editing the 1952 Yearbook for International Longshore and Warehouse Union, he wrote poems, short stories, and essays, gaining substantial publication and critical success. These short works were collected in *Letter from America* (1942) and *Laughter of My Father* (1944). A collection of his letters, *Sound of Falling Light: Letters in Exile* (1960), a multi-genre collection, *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan* (1995), a novel, *The Cry and the Dedication* (1995), and a short story collection, *The Philippines Is in the Heart* (2017), among others, were also published posthumously. He is most known for his novel, *America Is in the Heart* (1946/1973), hereafter *America*, which is considered "a social classic" as it "reflects the collective life experiences of thousands of Filipino immigrants who were attracted to [the US] by its legendary promises of a better life" (McWilliams n.pag.).

The readership of *America*, however, has not been consistent throughout the decades. After its initial publication in 1946, *America Is in the Heart* did not gain much attention until the late 1960s due to the political milieu in the US at that time.[1] It was through the efforts of scholars such as Dolores Feria and E.San Juan Jr that Bulosan's works were "rediscovered" during the years of the Civil Rights movement, leading to the republication of *America* in 1973; since then, the novel has been part of the US ethnic literary canon. Told from the first person perspective

1 Michael Pante and Leo Angelo Nery explains that Bulosan's works until the end of Second World War were used by the US literary establishment to promote "a neutered multicultural pluralism, devoid of his socialist and anti-imperialist leanings" (347). This was used merely as a token for the multiethnic population who were suffering inequality and oppression, even as these people were instrumental in sustaining the US economy especially during the War. After the War, the multicultural rhetoric has taken the backseat. As Susan Evangelista explains, pro-US and anti-communist sentiments were prevalent that most ethnic groups simply tried to "be as American as everyone else." Bulosan's activism—evident in his writings and in America—such as his support for labor unions were considered suspect because many believed in "a strong connection between 'foreign' and 'communist'". Therefore, ethnic literature mostly did not flourish during the ten to fifteen years through the postwar period. However, the rise of the Civil Rights movement in the late 1960s also promoted ethnic consciousness that started among Black Americans and led to "a new cultural phenomenon ... in the form of Asian-American consciousness" (42-43).

of Allos/Carlos,[1] Bulosan's alter ego, the novel is described by Carey McWilliams in his 1973 introduction to the novel as "the first and best account in English of just what it was like to be a Filipino in [the West Coast] from 1930 to 1941" (n.pag.).

The milieu of the novel's publication and readership affected its critical reception. In *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of Class Struggle* (1972), the book that pioneered the historical materialist reading of Bulosan's works, E. San Juan focused on the novel's critique of labor exploitation, imperialism, and racism in the US:

> *America Is in the Heart* endures as Bulosan's testament of hope in the power of socialist humanism which informs the collective struggle of the working class and the anti-imperialist nationalism of oppressed peoples everywhere. It reaffirms the ideas of solidarity, militant radicalism and self-sacrifice that animate his poems, stories, letters and essays. It memorializes the Filipino workers' rise to self-awareness, the acceptance of their historic mission, by revolt against feudalism and capitalism. (93)

Michael Pante and Leo Angelo Nery contends that most Bulosan scholars—such as Susan Evangelista, L.M. Grow, and Marilyn Alquizola and Lane Ryo Hirobayashi—are still largely corroborating and supplementing San Juan's main arguments here decades after San Juan's book was published (346-348). In a metacritical move, Pante and Nery's essay emphasized the history of the struggle of the peasantry as the context both of San Juan's book and the dominant critical reception of Bulosan's works. These intersecting voices that focus on the themes of poverty, social injustice, and oppression are not surprising, given the history of nationalism and socialist realism in Philippine novels since Jose Rizal and carried over until the resistance to US imperialism. Maria Luisa Torres Reyes notes that many "nationalist" fictional works, exemplars of which are Rizal's "realist" novels, are "loosely referred to as 'social realist' are basically 'homegrown,' akin, but not necessarily directly related to, the international art movement in the West that ... drew attention to the everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor, and who are critical

1 The name "Allos" is used in the first three parts of the novel. Toward the end, the name changes to "Carlos" to signify a turn in the writer's self- and social consciousness, as will be discussed later on. However, to avoid confusion, "Allos" will be used hereafter to refer to the main character and narrator of the novel.

of the social structures that maintain these conditions" (55).[1]

Another dominant approach to Bulosan scholarship highlights the transnational position of the writer and the post- and neocolonial relationship of the Philippines and the US. Aside from San Juan's contribution to this approach in his latter books, scholars on Filipino American Studies (and more generally Asian American Studies[2]) have situated Bulosan in the matrix of diaporic peoples and movements and their multicultural context. In this sense, Bulosan is lined up alongside writers who have attempted to construct a Filipino sense of identity and community belonging to the *Manong* generation (such as Bienvenido Santos and NVM Gonzales) and the next ones (such as Jessica Hagedorn, Luis Francia, Eric Gamalinda, and others), as well as Asian American writers. These materialist and transnational approaches often intersect because the US neocolonialism of the Philippines has always been predicated on a capitalist and neoliberal logic. Martin Joseph Ponce explains these two major approaches in the Bulosan scholarship through the use of the phrase "socially articulate"—a phrase that Bulosan used to describe himself as a writer. Ponce analyzes of this phrase to mean being articulate *about* the social ("the articulation of social ideas"), *to* the social ("to speak to the Filipino masses and to be understood by them"), and *in* the social (a transnational Bulosan) (49-50). As a Filipino writer in the US, whose migration has been possible only through the colonial connection between the two countries and whose writings represent the experience of racial and labor injustice, Bulosan is at the juncture of

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1 Reyes contextualizes "socialist realism" in the West with its definition as a "trend in American art originating in about 1930 and referring in its narrow sense to paintings treating themes of social protest in a naturalistic or quasi-expressionist manner" (from Encyclopaedia Britannica qtd. in Reyes 55). In this sense, *America* may also be read parallel to the works of US writers in the "cultural front" such as John Dos Passos, Malcolm Cowley, Langston Hughes, Edmund Wilson, Lincoln Steffens, among others, just as Michael Denning had done.

2 Situating Filipino American Studies inside Asian American Studies is, of course, not without its problems. As I have reviewed elsewhere, this is one of San Juan's main contentions in his recent book Carlos Bulosan: Revolutionary Filipino Writer in the United States (2017), echoing the concerns of other Filipino Americanists. San Juan argued that Bulosan understood the distinct position of Filipinos in the multiethnic social fabric of the US: "Bulosan was one of the first organic intellectuals of the Filipino community to have understood this singularity [of Filipinos being unique from other Asians in the US] precisely in his depiction of the Filipinos as subjects occupying a unique position: participating in the class struggles of the citizens in the U.S. for justice and equality… while at the same time demanding freedom and genuine sovereignty for the Philippines as a necessary condition for their being recognized fully as human beings" (San Juan, Carlos Bulosan: Revolutionary Filipino Writer 77).

overlapping discourses. The connections among these discourses transform the ways in which the writer and his works are read and interpreted until the present, making Bulosan arguably the most read and written about Filipino writer in English outside the Philippines.[1]

Notwithstanding the rich Bulosan scholarship as briefly discussed, this paper provides a revaluation of *America* from the perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism (ELC) that has made its resurgence in the 1980s and even more recently in Asian academia. The complementarity of this reading with the existing scholarship is done in the light of Nie Zhenzhao's formulation of ELC which emphasizes "historicism." Nie explains that unlike moral criticism that takes ethical values as absolute and judges "good" or "bad" from today's standards, ELC's "historicism" provides an "examination of the ethical values in a given work with reference to a particular historical context or a period of time in which the text under discussion is written" (84). Ethics, therefore, is a cultural artifact that may be understood and evaluated according to the standards of a particular milieu or history, making the prescriptive agenda of moral criticism and didactic criticism suspect. According to Tomo Virk, determining the function of a particular literary work is more complicated because there can be no general statement on what is intended to be descriptive or normative, as literary "function" depends on a variety of factors, such as the author and his culture, not least the historical context (6-8).

In this sense, Bulosan's writings can only be fully appreciated in the context of the ethics they reflect. This is not far-fetched from Bulosan's project as a writer. In fact, in a letter to Florentino Valeros that Alquizola and Hirabayashi considers as "a blueprint for *America Is in the Heart*," Bulosan makes a statement about the historicity of culture:

> Now culture being a social product, I firmly believe that any work of art should have a social function—to beautify, to glorify, to dignify man. This assertion has always been true, and it applies to all social systems. But always art is in the hands of the dominant class—which wields it as a power to perpetuate its supremacy and existence. Since any social system is forced to change to another by concrete economic forces, its art changes also to be recharged, reshaped, and revitalized by the new conditions. Thus, if the writer has any significance, he should write about the world in which he lives; interpret his time and envision the future through his knowledge of historical reality. (qtd. in Alquizola and Hirabayashi 177)

1 A testament to this is the publication of *America* as a Penguin Classic this year.

Here, what is universal—the "assertion [that] has always been true"—is not culture (and its ethical content) but the social and critical function of art. Therefore, the writer's role is to represent his situation and, if need be, as is almost always the case because "art is in the hands of the dominant class," to question that reality. The writer, though necessary situated in his context, is instrumental in remaking that context—part of him is grounded but part of him looks for new possibilities. More importantly, the writer can remake the future *only through* his grounding in historical reality.

The revaluation of *America* through ELC, therefore is not to replace the previous approaches to Bulosan, but to supplement those readings by emphasizing its ethical content. This paper argues that the main ethical drive in *America* is Allos's familial (especially brotherly) relations. I will focus on the Allos's connections to his brothers while growing up in the Philippines and while struggling as a writer-activist in the US. This fraternity also metonymically represents the working-class collectivity as Michael Denning suggests,[1] but in this paper limits its scope to Allos's biological brothers as his model and inspiration. What is true both with regard to the familial and the collective is that "[t]he drama of the narrative lies in its attempt to resolve the contradictory nature of this kin structure, which is the source of community and solidarity as well as of strife and violence" (Denning 275). Sociologists and psychologists have studied the centrality of the family in the Filipino psyche and culture, but the theme is barely applied in reading literary works. Allos's family is crucial to the narrative and the character's formation, but the theme has been neglected by previous scholarship, a gap that can be addressed by applying ELC to *America*. In addition, an ethical revaluation also leads to an aesthetic revaluation of the novel because it is only through Allos's "brotherly love" that readers can fully understand the character's *agon* from which the conflict and other elements of the novel come.

It may be surprising to many readers of *America* that the novel's "rhetorical climax," a speech that closes Part Two of *America* (Ponce 51-52), is not delivered

1 According to Denning, the character system of *America Is in the Heart* is "organized around a network of migrant brothers. The book opens with brother Leon returning from the First World War and it closes with his brothers Macario and Amado going off to the Second World War. […] The book's fraternity is not limited to biological brothers; the network of young migrant men from the same region serves not only as a microcosm of the Filipino community, but as a gallery of alternative lives and fates…. Many of these are thinly disguised versions of Bulosan's friends; but… they are less portraits of real people, as one finds in a memoir or autobiography, than projections of a collective subject" (275).

by Allos but by his brother, Macario. Toward the end of that two-page speech that could have been lifted from a manifesto calling for a united front, Macario ends with the following lines:

> America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling from a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him. We are all that nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illiterate immigrant and that lynched black body. All of us, from the first Adam to the last Filipino, native born or alien, educated or illiterate—We are America!
>
> The old world is dying, but a new world is being born. It generates inspiration from the chaos that beats upon us all. The false grandeur and security, the unfulfilled promises and illusory power, the number of the dead and those about to die, will charge the forces of our courage and determination. The old world will die so that the new world will be born with less sacrifice and agony on the living... . (*America* 189)

In these oft-quoted statements, Bulosan made Macario, not Allos, as his mouthpiece as if it is the former, not the latter, whose character development the readers have been following throughout the novel and whose struggle the novel narrates. Allos became only an observer to his brother's words that "seized [Allos's] imagination, so that years afterward [he is] able to write them almost word for word" (*America* 188). Why did Bulosan not make Allos speak these words, the effect of which would have been more direct and arguably stronger than making Macario speak them, especially that these words are a call to action? I think the reason has to do with how the novel also presents a coming-of-age of Allos as the main character. That means that Allos has to imbibe the principles of the collective as part of his gradual transformation to become a "socially articulate" writer-activist. In other words, Macario is the permeable membrane between the social and the personal that made the osmosis of ideas between these two spheres possible. According to Martin Ponce, *America* includes two discursive modes: first is the "lyrically rendered pastoral representations of the homeland widely used by Philippine writers at the time" and the second is the "class-based social analysis derived from interwar proletarian literatures and theories" (55). I argue that these two are bound by the fraternal-based ethics that may be found especially in Allos's relationship with Macario.

San Juan also comments on Allos's "personalistic ethics" based on his relationship with his father. However, "Macario, the intellectual in the family, [was the one] who first inculcated in Bulosan the Crusoe ethics which affords a paradigm of his quest in America" (*Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination* 95). San Juan refers to the Crusoe ethics here as "idealism" but more specifically, it is the lesson that Allos learned when Macario read him Robinson Crusoe's story early in the novel:

> [Macario] started reading the story of a man named Robinson Crusoe who had been shipwrecked in some unknown sea and drifted to a little island far away. My brother patiently explained the struggle of this ingenious man who had lived alone for years in inclement weathers and had survived loneliness and returned safely to his native land. I was fascinated by the bearded man, and a strong desire grew in me to see his island.
>
> "You must remember the good example of Robinson Crusoe," my brother said. "Someday you may be left alone somewhere in the world and you will have to depend on your own ingenuity." Then he pointed to the picture of the lonely man and his faithful dog sitting side by side on an unknown shore. "Maybe you will be thrown upon some unknown island someday with nothing to protect you except your hands and your mind…."
>
> It was the beginning of my intellectual life with Macario, the beginning of sharing our thoughts with each other; and although he went away not long afterward to escape a tragedy that was. (*America* 32)

Crusoe's story foreshadows what Allos would later on experience when he migrates to US. Here, Macario teaches Allos not only a fiction lesson ("the beginning of my intellectual life") but also the life lesson of how to survive the hard life of an outcast. In Crusoe's story, being an outcast is brought about by the geographical elements ("some unknown sea," "a little island far away") but Allos's is from the racial and labor conditions in the US. This lesson is recalled later on, almost two hundred pages after, when Allos is already a writer-activist, where the island imagery is treated more as a metaphor: "'The world is an island,' [Allos] said again, remembering. 'We are cast upon the sea of life hoping to land somewhere in the world. *But there is only one island, and it is in the heart*'" (*America* 323; italics in the original). This is the lesson that Macario wanted Allos to learn in order to survive being "left alone somewhere in the world" and being left "to depend on [one's] own ingenuity." Allos learned Crusoe ethics from his brother first, but the test of character would be given by the reality of "America" later.

The metafictional function of Crusoe's story in the novel prompts the readers not only to be attentive to the parallel between Crusoe's and Allos's situations but also to the connection between the fictional and the non-fictional. Through metafiction, a "text" becomes conscious of its own fictionality. However, the self-consciousness of the "text" of its intention to be read as fiction is complicated in *America* as the "work" is also based on Bulosan's life. What needs review here is the text/work binary which is a necessary move in ELC. Yang Gexin notes that we should review this distinction in order to highlight the moment of reading as an event. He says that what is lost in the emphasis on the "text" is "the idea of the creative labor that is continued in the moment of reading" (41). Because of Barthes, the poststructuralists, and the New Critics, the author has been deemed "dead" and irrelevant; however, ELC implies and necessitates that "the words as part of the continuous work have 'the quality of authoredness'" (Gexin 41). To focus on the ethical content of the work, the holistic "creative labor" from the author to the reader through the work that has been broken down needs to be reconnected: "The 'workness' of the text ... lies in the effects it produces in the reader" (Gexin 42). In other words, every reading of the novel as an event is a continuation of Bulosan's "work"—and ethics—as a writer. This is befitting the fact that *America* is partly autobiographical. The Crusoe ethics, therefore, is passed (or continued) from Daniel Defoe's "work" to the Crusoe "text" in *America* and from Bulosan's "work" to the readers of the novel, making literature a prolonged "event" rather than a mere object of critique. Gexin also comments that the event of literature "is to feel oneself taken into a new realm of thought and feeling, perhaps only fleetingly and temporarily, but occasionally with profound and long-lasting effects" (42). In *America*, Allos was lead to his transformation through "new realm of thought and feeling" that he first encounters when Macario read Crusoe's story to him. Inside the fictional world of Bulosan's novel, Macario and Allos are the readers to which Defoe's novel had "profound and long-lasting effects." Consequently, these same effects may arrive to the readers of *America* decades after Bulosan's novel and centuries after Defoe's novel.

Macario's role in Allos's self-making, moreover, is not only to him a person but also as a writer. At the end of Part Three, while Allos was already sick and could not do hard labor that was expected of Filipinos immigrants, Macario told Allos, "I'll sacrifice my life and future for whatever you think is right…." from which Allos got his drive to be a writer, changing his name again to "Carlos":

> I felt vast and immortal. Now he had used my native name again. I looked at him and knew that he meant it. I knew that he would help me live for a while so that I

> could write about our anguish and our hopes for a better America. I knew that if he died somewhere in pursuit of what he had wanted to be, he would live again in me and in all the words that seized my mind. (*America* 261)

If Macario's speech is the novel's "rhetorical climax," this part is specifically the formal climax of the novel, prompting the character transformation of Allos. It is Macario's brotherly sacrifice that conditioned the writer's self-making. Allos wanted to be a writer primarily to be make Macario and everything that he represents—the working class, racial minorities, Filipino peasants, and all victims of oppression—live again through literature. In the light of Macario's speech noted earlier, Macario is the "America"—the collective "we" that Macario himself articulately spoke about—that Bulosan is writing for and writing about.

What makes Macario that crucial so as to determine the transformation of Allos? It is here that the Filipino "value" of the family operates, especially as seen in Bulosan's life and in the novel. According to PC Morante in his biography of Bulosan, the writer has four brothers (Aurelio, Apolonio, Silvestre, Dionisio) of which he is the youngest and two younger sisters. Morante also notes that Bulosan's activism for a just world comes from "a very sensitive soul" because of his personal experiences and encounters:

> Because Carlos was a very sensitive soul it was inevitable that the seed of protest against the idea of being ordered or pushed around would find nourishment for growth in the unhappy situations he saw and in every social injustice he observed or personally encountered. The themes of all his writings revolve around the following: the struggle for equality and fairness and freedom; defense of the poor and the oppressed; a yearning for peace and idyllic life. In him we saw the seed grow and survive the original stresses (social, economic and political) burdening the people in his native soil. (40-41)

Even after Bulosan has moved away from Binalonan, he has maintained closed connections to his brothers and other family members as shown in the copious letters he has written to them.[1] Morante provides the details of how Bulosan credits

1 For example, Oscar Campomanes and Todd Gernes wrote about Bulosan's letters to his nephews, which "in their attempt to renew family ties and to refresh social and cultural solidarity, shed light on Bulosan's act of writing." These letters to family members and friends are full of ethical content as well as they are "designed to uplift his people from the ravages of a deeply-rooted social oppression" (19).

his brothers in shaping of the various facets of his character:

> Apolonio taught him to be "a man of few words"; another brother taught him "to love the earth"; another told him "to always stick to [his] convictions"; and another impressed upon him "the importance of study." […] [Carlos] credited his brother Aurelio for encouraging him to keep up with his literary pursuits." (Morante 40)

What the biographer shows to the readers of Bulosan is how the writer is an ethical formation only possible through his familial and brotherly relationships. If the literary work is a product of the writer's creativity, the writer himself lends to that work a part of his ethical formation, in this sense, through the mediation of his family. His brothers' influence in Bulosan's life is reflected in Macario's role in Allos's, as discussed above.

Jaime Bulatao's eminent study of Filipino values discussed that "emotional closeness and family" is the most significant because of its double function:

> First, it provides an outlet for the need of a person to get out of himself and come into contact with another person in a free and unguarded emotional exchange. Secondly, it provides understanding, acceptance, a place where, no matter how far or how wrongly one has wandered, he can always return. (11)

Congruent to what was mentioned previously, Macario is the outlet for Allos to go outside the world and to whom Allos can first exhibit concern for fellow humans and common humanity. When Macario left for the US in the first part of the novel, he told Allos that he will "be brave" like his younger brother and prompting him that maybe Allos can come to visit Macario when Allos has grown up. Allos answered with certainty, "I will come" (*America* 46). Macario also becomes Allos's home in the "unhomeliness" of the social injustice that he experiences in the homeland and in the diaspora—no wonder that Allos has been looking for his brothers the moment that he has stepped foot in the US. Allos's exclamation, "I am your brother… I am Allos!", is both a plead for recognition and a cry of triumph that he has found his brother in a world of struggle and injustice. Throughout the novel, one senses that Allos suffers not only personally but also collectively, a suffering as mediated first through the plight of his family members, especially when they lost their land, when his mother was humiliated in the market, and when his brothers were forced to go away from their hometown. Allos's migration to the US, then, may be seen as

a search primarily for his brothers and the connection he has with them, and only incidentally of "America." What sustained Allos to endure hardships is this search of "home" far away from home, but this search also prepared him to a greater purpose and brotherhood. Bulatao also notes that the value of "patience, suffering, endurance" is among those that "in large part [a] means for the attainment of [the value of the family]" (22, 19).

If Macario is central to Allos's character transformation and the novel's climax, he also figures prominently in its resolution. Macario decided to leave and Allos had a sense that he is seeing his brother for the last time.

> I knew it was the end of our lives in America. I knew it was the end of our family. If I met him again, I would not be the same. He would not be the same, either. Our world was this one, but a new one was being born. We belonged to the old world of confusion; but in this other world—new, bright, promising—we would be unable to meet its demands. (*America* 324)

Note how their last meeting in the novel's last pages also heralds what Allos has been struggling for: a new world. The end of their family is also the beginning of new world that the brothers, and the rest of the family help usher. If there is a role for ethics in the novel, it is this ushering forth of a "new, bright, promising" world. *America* is a novel of this movement from the ethical to the social or, if more precisely, of this transformation of the social through the ethical. Even San Juan concedes that even if it is not Bulosan nor his family that is the hero in *AIH*, but rather "the Filipino peasant-worker transposed into different social backgrounds and milieus that occupies the focal space in history," Bulosan needs "a mediating device, a consciousness that will bring various interesting possibilities together in some discernible pattern of meaning or purpose" (*Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination* 94). I argue that formation of that consciousness that would function as a mediating device is shaped by the familial and brotherly ethics, especially of Allos and Macario.

Toward the end of the novel, Allos's brothers are thankful to him for realizing the transformation of the world through his character, works, and activism. When Amado also bids farewell to Allos, for example, he says "Thank you, Carlos... . Thank you for being my brother" (*America* 297). Like Macario's, Amado's farewell also shows the cyclic flow of the present promise and memories of past struggles:

> I saw him in the pale light waving his hand with the long scar. He was

> weeping— not because I was going away from him, but because of the swift, frightening years. His eyes, when he looked at me for pity and understanding, were haunted with the terror of those years. They were the same eyes that had looked at me kindly in the heavy rain of Mangusmana. They were the same eyes that had looked startled when my father had struck him sharply across the face—the same eyes that cried with a deep brotherly love when he shouted to me in the heavy rain, "Good bye, Allos!"
>
> It seemed so long ago that Amado had waved his hand to say good-bye. When I remembered him waving at me with his mud-caked hand, I was startled when I discovered that it was now scarred. […] I knew that in a strange way we were together again—that no terror could ever make us hate each other. (*America* 297)

The brotherhood among the characters in *America* is the main ethic that sustains the narrative from the start to end. Of course, this brotherhood is also framed by Allos's relationship with his whole family, together with his father and mother that he left in Mangusmana. Even if this paper does not deal specifically with that topic, an ethical reading of Allos's the parental relations would supplement the examples given here. The transnational and activist consciousness of Allos is formed through his memories of childhood, especially of the poverty, hunger, and humiliation that his parents experienced. By connecting the past memory of home and his present struggles in the US, *America* can be read using ELC as a bildungsroman novel, just as Reyes did to Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (54-60), where the transformation of the main character becomes allegorical of the transformation of the nation. Bulosan's other works in fiction and poetry, in relation to his letters and essays, may also be read for their ethical content.

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