This paper looks at the politics and poetics of time—specifically, the relationship between race, time, and narrative in Carlos Bulosan’s semi-autobiographical work *America Is in the Heart*. Through a reading of *America Is in the Heart*, I pursue both a more generalized discussion of the relationship between time and narrative (in the writing of both fiction and history) and the more specific ways in which processes of racialization inflect or rearticulate that relationship. At issue here is the formal challenge, or problem, of representing difference. Paul Ricœur opens the first volume of *Time and Narrative* by noting the “predicative assimilation” driving the semantic innovation of both metaphor and narrative:

> With narrative . . . semantic innovation lies in the inventing of [a] work of synthesis—a plot. By means of the plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the
temporal unity of a whole and complete action. It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous that brings narrative close to metaphor. In both cases, the new thing—the as yet unsaid, the unwritten—springs up in language . . . [The plot] ‘grasps together’ and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole. (Ricoeur ix-x)

Where the assimilative temporality of metaphor is instantaneous (“this is that”) (as compared to the assimilative temporality of simile which admits a pause in the identificatory process through its inclusion of the comparative term—i.e., “this is like that”), the assimilative temporality of narrative works by imposing a temporal unity that does not so much organize heterogeneity as it does submerge it. For Ricoeur, it is the synthesis of the heterogeneous that provides the ground of possibility for the “new thing,” “the as yet unsaid,” and “the unwritten.” What remains unsaid in Ricoeur’s valorization of the “predicative assimilation,” however, is the way in which heterogeneity—once bound over to the “intelligible signification attached to” this “new congruence in the organization of events”—is at risk of being consigned to the realm of the unsaid and the unwritten (Ricoeur ix). Is it possible, then, to represent difference without subsuming it as sameness?

With this particular problematic in mind, I take up issues of temporality in Carlos Bulosan’s semi-autobiographical America Is in the Heart. The discussion here is part of a book project examining the politics and poetics of time—specifically, the relationship between race, time, and narrative in the work of a number of twentieth-century Asian American and African American writers. Through a reading of America Is in the Heart, I explore both a more generalized relationship between time and narrative (in the writing of both fiction and history) and the more specific ways in which processes of racialization inflect or rearticulate that relationship. How does reflecting on temporality tell us something about the limits and possibilities of representational forms such as narrative? What structuring mechanisms and ideological imperatives are at work in the social construction of time? Working with the concept of “chronotypes” (the term coined by John Bender and David Wellbery to describe the “models or patterns through which time assumes practical or conceptual significance”), I explore how historically and culturally constituted typologies of time underwrite the narration of human action—whether individual or collective, and fictional or historiographical. If assigning meanings to time raises issues of power, how do those issues emerge in the time-bound act of narration? What kinds of ideological or episte-

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1 I am indebted to David Lloyd for formative conversations about, as well as important scholarship on, this issue of “the function of metaphoric processes, as minimal narratives of identity, within the larger plot of self-formation” (72). See Lloyd.

2 This paper is drawn from the chapter on America Is in the Heart in a manuscript-in-progress entitled The Waiting Room.

3 Bender and Wellbery, Chronotypes 4.
mological work do chronotypes perform? What is the relationship of temporal construction to narrative form?

From the late thirties through the forties, Carlos Bulosan was one of the best-known Filipino writers in the Western world. While most readers today associate him with the semi-autobiographical America Is in the Heart, his literary output during the war years included two volumes of poetry — Letter From America (1942) and The Voice of Bataan (1944) — and a bestselling collection of stories, Laughter of My Father (1944). Bulosan had come to the attention of the American reading public a year earlier through the publication of an essay, “Freedom From Want,” that had been commissioned by the Saturday Evening Post (6 March 1943) to accompany one of a series of paintings entitled “Four Freedoms” by the well known artist and illustrator Norman Rockwell. At the time, the essay was regarded as a stirring testament to an immigrant’s faith in the promise of American democracy. For a postwar audience (both mainstream American and international), America Is in the Heart (1946) clearly reaffirmed that promise. Its popular acclaim led to its translation and publication in 1947 in six languages — including Italian.

The reception of the text after its republication in 1973 differed in a number of ways from its earlier postwar reception but I focus on only one of those differences here. The conditions of reception in the immediate post-civil rights era of the seventies left many critics (especially Asian American critics) wrestling with the questions raised by what was perceived now to be a peculiarly sanguine resolution of a text that relentlessly exposed a history of brutal discrimination directed toward Filipinos in the United States in the thirties and forties.4 After recounting his, and other Filipinos’ experiences of beatings, mutilations, humiliations, vigilante actions, murders, and exploitative labor practices — a litany of

4 As E. San Juan, Jr. notes: “Almost everyone who has read Bulosan — I am speaking chiefly of those who matured politically in the 1970s and 1980s, after which Bulosan suffered the fate of the “disappeared” of Argentina, Nicaragua, the Philippines — cannot help but be disturbed and uneasy over the ending of America Is in the Heart.” This unease prompted efforts to “explain” (which often meant to explain away) the apparently affirmative and conciliatory character of the ending. The perceived “problem” of an overly sanguine conclusion (conceptually framed within binary constructions of capitulation/resistance, assimilation/subversion, and reconciliation/conflict), however, likely says more about the politics of reception than about the speaker/author’s politics. This paper, and the larger discussion of America Is in the Heart from which it is drawn, refocuses the issue by asking whether we can problematize the ending in other terms. Might we read, for example, the ending not in relation to the ostensible politics of the author/speaker but, instead, to the politics of genre (in this case, the Bildungsroman as a developmental narrative governed by a formal and ideological emphasis on resolution and reconciliation)? Might we complicate the sense of the ending by noting the presence of other narrative formations in the text, each underwritten by a mode of temporalizing that differs from, or conflicts with, that which authorizes the developmental progress of the Bildungsroman? The larger argument behind this paper locates the politics of the text in the text’s ability to re-function narrative conventions and shift their meanings not by focusing exclusively on a single genre but by bringing into contention a number of different narrative forms and the respective modes of temporalizing that underwrite them. Within the context of that larger argument, time, narrative, and race emerge here as an alternative set of critical coordinates for engaging the aesthetics and politics of America Is in the Heart.
brutalities occasionally leavened, however, by moments of kindness and gener-
osity toward the protagonist—the narrator declares:

[M]y faith in America ... was something that had grown out of my defeats and success-
es, something shaped by my struggles for a place in this vast land ... It was something
that grew out of the sacrifices and loneliness of my friends, my brothers in America
and my family in the Philippines—something that grew out of our desire to know
America, and to become a part of her great tradition, and to contribute something to-
ward her final fulfillment. I knew that no man could destroy my faith in America that
had sprung from all our hopes and aspirations, ever. (327)

Commenting on the conclusion's challenge to readerly expectations, Sau-ling
Wong wryly notes: “[I]f the tribute [to America] remains profoundly affecting,
it is less from the reader’s conviction of its inevitability than from marvel at
such single-minded devotion” (133). However, rather than locating the thwart-
ing of readerly expectations in the realm of psychodynamics, we might look to
the realm of aesthetics—for example, in the requirements of classical realism
whereby “narrative closure operates as an ideological mechanism guaranteeing
that disturbing issues are laid to rest and that competing discourses are subor-
dinated to the text's hegemonic discourse through narrative inevitability” (Foley
54). Narrative inevitability, however, can only arise in the context of a narrative
emploiment “that unifies into one whole and complete action the miscellany
constituted by the circumstances, ends and means, initiatives and interactions,
the reversals of fortune, and all the unintended consequences issuing from hu-
man action” (Ricœur x). Here, I want not so much to reiterate the point that the
imposition of such a unified whole always risks assimilating difference into a
hegemonic sameness but, instead, to introduce the question of how the unify-
ing operation of emplotment works through the mobilization of organizing
chronotypes. The semantic innovation in the narrative of America Is in the Heart is
located not in the synthesizing function of plot but, rather, in the proliferation
and dynamic interplay of chronotypes that underwrite the narrative taken as an
apparent whole.

If ever there was an apt word to describe the contents of America Is in the
Heart, “miscellany” might be it. The text features an episodic and sometimes
disjointed narrative, a cast of thousands—each of whom receives only cursory
(and sometimes inconsistent) definition, and the incessant movement of that
cast across vast expanses of the western United States. While the text proceeds
chronologically, there is no overarching developmental trajectory. The text sel-
dom provides the expected detailing of events, feelings, or thoughts that cus-
tomarily lead up to momentous turning points in the protagonist’s life. Encoun-
ters with other characters often seem random or accidental. Remarking on the
text’s “perfunctory characterization and emplotment,” Sau-ling Wong notes
how “[e]vents that should, in commonsense logic, vary in significance are in-
discriminately described in an unmodulated prose. Amount of detail is not pro-
portionate to the event’s alleged developmental import” (134). Over the course of the book, the protagonist’s experiences pile up in such a way that each significant turning point in his life is almost immediately countered by an event that challenges, if not thwarts, the possibility of a unified, developmental process of subject formation. The invocation of a challenge or a thwarting only makes sense, of course, in the context of a given readership’s horizons of expectation vis-à-vis the formal procedure, and the temporal modality, of an autobiography or a narrative of formation. In the next section, I focus on a moment in the text that makes legible how *America Is in the Heart* brings into contention different narrative constructions and the respective modes of temporalizing that underwrite them, contending constructions that contribute to the peculiarly disjunctive quality of the narration.

The moment in question has the protagonist, Carl, puzzling over why his friend and political mentor José, a Filipino American labor activist, has suddenly been arrested and almost as suddenly released. José tries to explain to him the significance of the events unfolding before them:

> It’s hard for me to explain to you. It is a long story. This is a war between labor and capital. To our people, however, it is something else. It is an assertion of our right to be human beings again, Carl.

How are the Filipino farmworkers discursively positioned in relation to these respective “stories”? What does it mean for José and other Filipino farmworkers to participate in both of these stories simultaneously? Do they represent compatible or contradictory projects? What are the chronotypes underwriting these two stories—one a story of class emancipation and the other, a story of Filipinos reclaiming their humanity? From labor’s standpoint, the story of the war between labor and capital is underwritten by a revolutionary telos; it is represented as a linear, stagist development of an emancipatory progress. However, the latter story is not necessarily aligned with the former and, in fact, may cut across this first story in a number of significant ways. What chronotypes are mobilized in the telling of the story of the Filipino struggle to assert their right to be human beings again? How has this latter story been shaped or circumscribed by an historical repertoire of temporal constructions of racial otherness? What might be the conceptual significance of the temporal coordinates used to frame the story of the Filipino struggle to assert their right to be human beings?

Here, Johannes Fabian’s work on chronopolitics in *Time and the Other* offers a useful point of departure. In the course of critiquing the epistemic foundations of his discipline, Fabian argues that anthropology has emerged and established itself as a “science of other men in another time. [Anthropology] is a discourse whose referent has been removed from the present of the speaking/writing subject” (143). This process of temporal distancing—or “allochronism”—denies “coevalness” to the Other. The denial of coevalness was exemplified in the way nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropology “promoted a scheme in terms of
which not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a
temporal slope, a stream of Time—some upstream, others downstream. Civilization,
evolution, development, acculturation, modernization (and their cousins
industrialization and urbanization) are all terms whose conceptual content de-

For Fabian, chronopolitics is the mobilization of time as a modality of power. Chronopolitics in the form of a scientific discourse on evolutionary hierarchies helped justify both European colonial enterprises, as well as restrictive immigra-
tion policies in the United States. In the early decades of the twentieth century,
debates over immigration restrictions for Filipinos were often couched in the
language of evolutionary advancement, with Filipino men described as “jungle
cfolk,” “untamed,” “primitive,” and “little brown men about ten years removed
from a bolo and a breechcloth” (Takaki 325, 327). In his study of American social-
ism and evolutionary thought, Mark Pittenger notes that from the nineteenth
century through the first two decades of the twentieth, American socialists be-
lieved that social development was a universal, teleological process wherein “[n]
on-westerners and non-whites could be judged either as less advanced in the
hierarchy or as predestined to achieve a lower level of development” (178). The
politics of time enabled American socialists to read difference as distance—both
spatial and temporal, and helped stake the majority opinion that one’s comrades
had to be one’s evolutionary peers. To the extent that discourses of emancipa-
tion and developmental narratives continue to incorporate conceptual content
deriving from evolutionary time, the temporal construction of freedom-as-pro-
gress can simultaneously be the temporal construction of unfreedom—in this
instance, constituting Filipino farmworkers as spatial and temporal outsiders of
the nation-state as well as of class emancipation. Even for those within the so-
cialist ranks who did not espouse a scientific racism predicated on evolutionary
time, a strong current of socialist inevitabilism meant that it was not necessary
to take up the race question because it was understood that the arrival of social-
ism would bring with it the end of racism.

In this final section of the paper, I discuss this text’s formal challenges, and
resistance, to the ideological imperatives of the chronotypes underlying progress
theories of history and developmental narratives of subject formation. On a bus
to San Francisco, having fled the town of Stockton after being mistakenly accused
of being the Filipino Communist leader of the strike underway there, the protago-
nist dreams about his childhood in the Philippines. In the first of two dreams, he
sees that his mother will not eat because there isn’t enough food for everyone.
Feigning illness and a diminished appetite, the young Carlos leaves the family
gathering so that his mother can have his portion. In the second dream, the young
Carlos has run away again from the poverty and hunger of home but has been
returned to his family by a kindly police chief from a neighboring town. In this
dream, his mother assures him that there is now enough food for everyone. Awak-
ened by a fellow passenger who tells him that he had been crying in his sleep,
Carlos says apologetically: “it was just a dream” (283). Then Carlos comes to the sudden realization that the events of the dream had actually taken place when he was a child: “it had come back to me in a dream because I had forgotten it. How could I forget one of the most significant events in my childhood? How could I have forgotten a tragedy that was to condition so much of my future life?” (283).

If to forget is to consign to an irretrievable past that which one had experienced, then Carlos’s forgetting in this instance should be referred to another order of remembrance. That is to say, in his dream, Carlos retrieves not that which had happened on that occasion of too many people and too little food but, instead, retrieves that which had not yet happened. The misrecognition, or missed recognition, pertains to the mother’s feigned story of having enough food for the entire family when, in actuality, the larder was still empty. In this text, misrecognitions and missed recognitions abound, and explanations do not always follow immediately on the heels of the event or issue to be explained. Particular tensions are often hinted at, even noted, but then left in narrative limbo until some later point in the text. For example, the promised explanation about the tension between race and class only surfaces some ninety pages later. The text regularly suspends the requirements of probability and necessity that constitute the conventional basis for a meaningful connection or arrangement of events, and its meticulous recording of innumerable departures and arrivals, “accidental itineraries,” foreclosed possibilities, abortive starts, and premature endings keeps cutting across a historicism that privileges the straight lines of progress theories of history. The child Carlos’s then helpless desire to resolve the problem of hunger and poverty for his family finds renewed expression as well as greater political traction and danger at a later moment when he begins to play an increasingly effective role in the labor struggle.

His present recognition of the incident’s significance is what Walter Benjamin would call a recognition of the sign of a “chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (Benjamin 496). Carlos’s present recognition of continuing conditions of scarcity and hunger in the United States (as evidenced by the striking farm workers) allows the past trauma to be crystallized into an historical subject. The site of personal, familial trauma becomes the site of social trauma. The text represents the process whereby Carlos moves from a recognition of his plight as a personal one, to a racial and class condition, and traces his shifting affiliations from his immediate family to a universal brotherhood.

The text’s emphasis on redeeming the “lostness” of the past bears a formal resemblance to the phenomenon of déjà vu, understood here as the peculiar temporal operation and historical force of the coming again of remnants of the past. In a comparative reading of Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch’s philosophies of history, David Kaufmann refers to a conversation between Benjamin and Bloch.

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5 The preeminent figure of “lostness” in the text is Carlos’s brother Amado. See Amado’s letter to Carlos on p. 322.
on the subject of déjà vu in which the two interlocutors arrive at a new interpretation of this phenomenon. For Bloch, “the actual ‘fausse reconnaissances’ does not lead us back to real experience in a previously existing life . . . [instead,] it reproduces an act of the self’s own orientation” (Bloch, qtd. in Kaufmann 35). The eerie sensation occasioned by the feeling that one has already experienced something that is actually happening for the first time is reconceived here not as a movement from the past into the present but, instead, from the future into the present via the past. What appears to be the coming again of something from the past is, in fact, the coming again of that which is not yet past. In this recasting of déjà vu, Kaufmann tells us, the “eerie sensation of shock . . . registers an orientation that has been forgotten or repressed . . . Shock marks the recognition of what has been displaced and disrupted” (36). The sudden appearance of that which appears to be a repetition of the past is, instead, “a reminder of what one had meant to do for the future” (36). Here, we would do well to recall another aspect of Carlos’s dream in which the police chief, on the drive back to Carlos’s home in Binalonan, tells Carlos that he once had a friend from Binalonan who had become “a maker of songs in America” (283):

“America is a land far away,” he said.
It was the first time I had heard about America. I was going back to my family from a town that seemed hundreds of miles away.

This invocation of an as yet uncalibrated set of spatial and temporal coordinates adumbrates an open field of historical possibilities. The passage operates with the sense of déjà vu that Ernst Bloch characterizes in The Principle of Hope as a kind of “forward dawning,” an anticipatory orientation that comes from the “opposite side of forgetting.” Here, Bloch tells us, latency belongs not to the “No-Longer-Conscious” realm of forgotten or repressed content, but to the “Not-Yet-Conscious” realm of “content that is only just objectively emerging in the world”(116).

Carlos’s dream registers not forgotten or repressed content but, instead, content that is only just objectively emerging in the world. The reappearance of Carlos’s memory content launches a non-linear and non-teleological concept of history in which ideas or actions that were either too early or too late in their own historical moments to gain sufficient transformational traction could do so at a

6 Ernst Bloch, The Principle of Hope, 116. In Part II of this volume—entitled “Anticipatory Consciousness”—Bloch refers to a process of “forward dawning” and to the “forward dream”: “The Not-Yet-Conscious is thus solely the preconscious of what is to come, the psychological birthplace of the New. And it keeps itself preconscious above all because in fact there is within it a content of consciousness which has not yet become wholly manifest, and is still dawning from the future. Possibly even content that is only just objectively emerging in the world; as in all productive states which are giving birth to what has never been there. The forward dream is disposed towards this, and Not-Yet-Conscious, as the mode of consciousness of something coming closer, is charged with it; here the subject scents no musty cellar, but morning air.”

SUNN SHEELLY WONG
later date. We see in this return of individual memory the possibility of a collective futurity. On this point, David Kaufmann remarks:

Déjà vu is to the individual what [non-contemporaneous] ideological formations are to the collective: memories of positions and orientations that were promised but have not yet come to be, ciphers of orientations that have yet to be fulfilled. They serve as the outstanding debts of personal and cultural history . . .” (36)

Bringing into contention narrative forms and the modes of temporalizing that underwrite them, America Is in the Heart returns necessity to contingency, synthesis to heterogeneity, and “complete action” to incomplete action, thereby allowing “various years in general [to] beat in the one which is just being counted and prevails.”
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