

In Our Image But Not Quite: Desire, Capital, and Flawed Simulation in Twentieth Century Western Writing on Manila

*Tom Sykes**

ABSTRACT

This paper examines almost a century of writers, from Mary H. Fee in the early 1910s to Timothy Mo in the late 1990s, who imagine Manila as a simulation of an American city, albeit one with imperfections. The notion that Manila, in trying to replicate the best of Western urbanity, has instead been a crude, kitsch spoof of New York or Los Angeles, has always suited Orientalist agendas borne from the Philippines' junior status in international power structures and its role as a heavy importer of US cultural commodities. Transfixed by the Americophile Marcos dictatorship, Western Orientalist writers of the 1970s and 1980s seek to legitimize their observations about Manila's "Pepsicolonisation" by emphasizing the ways in which Manileños have internalized—and are therefore supposedly welcoming towards—the codes of Western simulation. By the 1990s, an almost century-old model of feminine allure has been re-configured by Western memoirists and foreign correspondents who portray Manila as a salacious paradise catering to the Western male libido.

KEYWORDS: Philippine studies, literature, postcolonialism, urbanism, Asian studies, media

* Received: July 7, 2022; Accepted: April 8, 2023

Tom Sykes, Associate Professor, School of Film, Media and Communication, University of Portsmouth, UK (tom.sykes@port.ac.uk).

繪吾城而未信然： 二十世紀西方馬尼拉書寫中的慾望、 資本以及殘缺擬仿

*Tom Sykes**

摘 要

本文討論自 1910 年代初的瑪莉·費 (Mary H. Fee) 至 1990 年代末的毛祥青 (Timothy Mo) 等，將近一世紀的作家。這些作家將馬尼拉想像成美國城市的擬仿 (simulation)，儘管這樣的想像有許多不足之處。馬尼拉在試圖複製西方都市文明精髓的過程中，卻反倒成了對紐約或洛杉磯等城市粗劣、庸俗的仿製品。這一觀念一直迎合著東方主義的議程。這種議程源自菲律賓在國際權力結構中的從屬地位，及其作為美國文化商品重要進口國的角色。在 1970 和 1980 年間，被親美的 (Americophile) 馬可仕獨裁政權 (Marcos dictatorship) 所迷惑的西方東方主義作家們，試圖強調馬尼拉人民以內化 (並因此被認為歡迎) 西方擬仿符碼的方式，來合理化他們對於馬尼拉「百事可樂殖民化」(Pepsicolonisation) 現象的觀察。到了 1990 年代，馬尼拉近百年來的陰性魅力，在西方回憶錄作家和外國記者的筆下，已成為迎合西方陽性欲力 (libido) 的淫穢樂境。

關鍵詞：菲律賓研究、文學、後殖民主義、都市主義、亞洲研究、媒體

* 本文 111 年 7 月 7 日收件；112 年 4 月 8 日審查通過。

Tom Sykes，英國樸茨茅斯大學電影媒體傳播學院副教授 (tom.sykes@port.ac.uk)。

American ideas are making great inroads upon the dilatory Spanish life of sleeping Manila, and a marvelous change has been wrought in the few weeks that the city has been in our possession No longer is Manila a Spanish city. Since our army has been here stores and shops remain open all day, and in many other ways Manila is showing that she can take on American ideas Great quantities of foodstuffs are being brought in.

A large cargo of potatoes came for the commissary department by a late boat There is an excellent brass band here in Manila made up entirely of natives. It seems odd to hear them play our national airs and later tunes.

—William Gilbert Irwin and Special Correspondence, 1898

Throughout history and all over the world, cities have influenced each other's design and planning. There are many instances of newly erected or recently developed cities being effective simulations of cities that have come before. Ancient Roman architecture and sculpture was strongly informed by Ancient Greek styles. Tang Chinese urban spaces emulated Han ones. There have always been critics of the phenomenon. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, intellectuals including Denis Diderot, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, J. C. Friedrich von Schiller, William Wordsworth, and S. T. Coleridge contested the dominance of a neoclassical, Greco-Roman revival aesthetic across Europe. "Our buildings could not match those of Europe," lamented the late nineteenth century American architect Samuel Sloan of endeavours to replicate the cities of the "Old Country" in Philadelphia (qtd. in Maynard 15).

The twentieth century colonial and post-colonial development of Manila is no exception here. From the 1910s to the 1990s, successive British and American travel writers, novelists, and literary journalists employed certain representational techniques to at once highlight Manila's emergence as an advanced, state-of-the-art city under US influence and to denigrate or lampoon precisely this same process as second-rate or inadequate. Claire "High Pockets" Phillips, DeLoris Stevenson, Maslyn Williams, James Fenton, James Hamilton-Paterson, Ian Buruma, and Pico Iyer all construct Manila as a flawed simulation. In trying to replicate the best of Western urbanity the city has instead been a

crude spoof of New York or Los Angeles. This is a stereotype that suits Orientalist agendas borne from the material conditions of Manila's role as socially, politically, economically and culturally subordinate to American power.

I have chosen to evaluate these particular writers for several reasons. The pluralism of my purview (memoirs, travelogues, novels, etc.) has been inspired by Edward Said's classic study *Orientalism* which, he admits, engages with a "broadly construed 'field'" of "theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts" (3-4). Whichever ways these books differ superficially in terms of style, structure or aim, they share enough of the same social, political, and cultural postulations to together constitute an imaginative geography of Manila in the sense that Said means in his *Orientalism* thesis. For him, it matters less that Lord Byron wrote poetry, Karl Marx treatises on political economy or Edward William Lane lexicographical guides. It is more important that these authors viewed the Orient through the prism of Western superiority, to some degree or other. The same is true of the Manila-preoccupied sub-species of Orientalism that, in service of the "flawed simulation" representational model, compels writers to pass generally negative value judgements on a host of issues such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, business, labour, human development, and governmental policy. As with other Orientalisms, such judgements are a concomitant of, as Robert J. C. Young terms it, "the project and practice of colonial modernity . . . constituting and generated by a specific historical discourse of knowledge articulated with the operation of political power" (383). More specifically, the novels I scrutinize have, according to Morton J. Netzorg, "appealed to a mass audience" and had "some chance of shaping American public ideas or impressions about the Philippines" (175). While other observers of Manila have been more charitable in their impressions, they have tended to work in the specialized field of academia and therefore been unable to contribute to popular opinion in the way Netzorg proposes. Moreover, as well as prose fiction, Western colonialist travelogues have, so argues Debbie Lisle, a special capacity for "disseminating the goals of empire" because "stories of 'faraway lands' were crucial in establishing the unequal, unjust and exploitative relations of colonial rule" (1). As Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan contend, such travel narratives textually produce the non-European world according to Western fixations. The examples Holland and Huggan give include the Congo having been for Joseph Conrad "a mirror to the dark side of

the soul” (69) and plucky Western adventurers regarding the Amazon as a “happy hunting ground” (77). Early twentieth century autobiographical travel writing (to which several of the texts analyzed herein belong) was particularly effective in this enterprise, as it reached a capacious audience. Moreover, as Said observes of analogous texts on the Near East, it “contributed to the density of public awareness of the Orient” (192). I have excluded a number of reference books, scientific studies and other specialist works from consideration because they do not belong to the popular genres mentioned above.

When constructing Manila as a flawed simulation, these writers engage with notions of imitation, cultural mimicry, and “contact zones” (Pratt 7). Crucially, though, their Orientalist *Weltanschauung* precludes them from envisaging these phenomena as having the progressive or emancipatory potential that many postcolonial critics ascribe to them. This is because they have little to no sympathy for the subaltern subjects who might have been able to appropriate these modes of subjectivity and expression to challenge Western colonialism by “adopting . . . [the] modern attributes of Western culture” such as democracy, nationalism, justice, secularism, and social equality (Caṭṭopādhyāya and Chatterjee 51). On the contrary, all too often Western writers—especially those transfixed by the Americophile Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s—seek to legitimize their celebrations of Manila’s “Pepsicolonisation” (Hamilton-Paterson, *Playing* 136) by American capitalism by claiming that Manileños have internalized the codes of Western simulation. By the 1990s, this process has gained a genderized dimension with Western correspondents portraying Manila as a sexual paradise catering to the Western male libido. It is a paradise that the female victims of prostitution and “mail order bride” services are allegedly keen to deliver. Such a vision is epiphenomenal of the Philippines’ political and economic subject position as “hooked up,” so the Filipina cultural theorist Neferti Xina M. Tadiar argues,

to the US desiring machine through a system of flows of labor and capital in the guise of free exchange (export-oriented, capital and import-dependent) but functioning in the mode of dialysis, which gives one the strength and life depleted from the other. As such, the Philippines is, in other words, a hospitality industry, a hostess to “American” desires, a hooker. (47)

To appreciate the long-range historical development of the flawed simulation trope, we must go back to its origins. After its bloody and genocidal conquest of the Philippines (1898-1902), the US was “able to turn a situation of utter devastation and suffering, for which it was largely responsible, into a redemptive opportunity,” according to the Filipino historiographer Reynaldo Ileto (108). The Americans set about modernizing Manila’s roads, homes, businesses, public buildings, parks and canals in order to, as the chief architect of this enterprise Daniel Burnham wrote in a 1905 letter, “create a unified city equal to the greatest of the Western world with the unparalleled and priceless addition of a tropical setting” (14). At around this time, Western writers fervently construe the capital as a successful experiment in democracy that has absorbed the best qualities of the Western metropolis. It is replete with all the commodified pleasures a Westerner could want. Some writers were eager to plot this new imaginative geography before US empire-building had really begun in earnest. The American journalist William Gilbert Irwin and an unnamed “Special Correspondent” (Special Correspondence) published a feature article called “Yankeeified Manila” in December 1898. This was several days before the Treaty of Paris that formalized US proprietorship of the Philippines and several years before the Americans had quelled the nationalist resistance. However, Irwin and his colleague write, “marvelous change has been wrought in the few weeks that the city has been in our possession” (7). The main indicator that “Manila is showing that she can take on American ideas” is greater accessibility to consumer goods (7). The United States has delivered “great quantities of foodstuffs” to the city, and stores are now open “all day” as would be expected of a modern, business-friendly society (7). Writing in 1914, the American adventurer, newspaper tycoon and founder of the Boy Scouts of America William D. Boyce lauds the Americanized district of Calle Escolta where “[y]ou can find almost anything you ask for in the shops” (229). The club life along the harbour, he points out, affords such all-American pursuits as cocktail drinking and movie-watching (253). Fifteen years later, American journalist Frank G. Carpenter, who penned the seminal *Carpenter’s World* travelogues, celebrates the “modern metropolis” populated by well-dressed and good-looking personages. They enjoy Euro-American music, food and leisure activities, amongst other things (Carpenter 15). Such fancies conform to the postcolonial historian David Spurr’s view that “the West seeks its own identity in Third World attempts at imitating it” (15). However, in the

Manila context at least, the operative word here is “attempts,” for the simulation is always flawed. In this respect, it is comparable to Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the second “of the successive phases of the [cultural or aesthetic] image” which “masks and perverts reality” rather than functioning as a “reflection of a basic reality” (170). Therefore, while Irwin and the “Special Correspondent” appreciate the “excellent brass band here in Manila made up entirely of natives,” it “seems odd to hear them play our national airs and later tunes” (19). As Boyce points out, while the US-built Manila Hotel is as luxurious and comfortable as any American could desire, it falls short of delivering “bread and pie ‘like mother used to make’” (251). Although she is generally upbeat about the quality of accommodation and hospitality in Manila, the expatriate memoirist Mary H. Fee—who came to Manila in 1910 with the “Thomasite” schoolteachers to inculcate the new colonial subjects with sturdy American values—objects to the “cheap, unattractive-looking European wares” (36) of the shops and the canned food available in her guesthouse. Her insinuation is that goods and services in Manila are shoddy parodies of those available at home.

A plethora of Western novels and works of life writing present Manila during World War II as an infernal site of air raids and explosions. The Japanese are positioned as the evil antagonists because they have temporarily displaced US authority over the city. *Manila Espionage* (1947), the memoir of American club singer-turned-spy Claire “High Pockets” Phillips, contains mutually reinforcing images of both a Manila as a place of hellish violence and a Manila-as-simulation, yet with fewer flaws in it than Carpenter’s or Fee’s constructions. Phillips’s oscillation between these negative and positive impressions can be explained by a number of factors including temporal moment and geographical location. These in turn are guided by postulations about the historic duty of the US in the Philippines and the wider world. After alighting from the S. S. *Annie Johnson* in Manila just two months before the Japanese are to attack, Phillips scoffs at her *émigré* friend’s concerns that “there may be a war” (Phillips and Goldsmith 7). As a good patriot, Phillips asserts that the Japanese would be “crazy” (8) to fight the US. While what she almost certainly means by this is that the Japanese would be crazy to go up against such great military odds, we might also infer that the Japanese would be crazy to destroy all the Western-style improvements the US has made to the city’s architecture, commerce and social scene. Phillips adores the “romantic setting” of the “ultra-modernistic

Alcazar Club,” the “most attractive residential” area of “Ermeta” (9; sic) and a “gay party” that is a “sight for the gods” (12). Taken together, these topographical features and social events constitute a hypnagogic world of endless hedonism where “cocktails or champagne would appear as if by magic” (8). In true Hollywood romance style, Phillips quickly falls in love with and marries a handsome American sergeant of the Thirty First Infantry. They chat wistfully about “far-off California” and “the cattle-ranches back in the Midwest” (10). That said, this charmed quasi-American life—enjoyed inside the chic nightclubs and apartments of the well-to-do districts—is interspersed joltingly with the distressing conditions out on the streets. These are ciphers of challenges, past and present, to the spatial inscription of Manila as a *protégé* of American meliorism, an ideology that Phillips subscribes to. When “[speeding] through the ancient city”—an allusion to the remnants of the old Spanish colonial capital—Phillips is “acutely aware” of abhorrent hangovers from that era such as “carromata” horse-and-carts “drawn by diminutive flea-bitten nags” (8). A much more urgent threat to the stability of the simulation is the “practice black-outs” (8) that augur the impending Japanese invasion. When she first arrives in Manila, Phillips views the black-outs with a gung-ho dauntlessness: “I hope they will have one soon” (8). However, one night she is forced to cancel her performance at the Alcazar Club when the black-out is accompanied by the noise of sirens and aircraft. The nightmare of the coming Japanese occupation is now impinging upon the dream of Americanization.

In the decades following World War II, Manila’s subordinate status in the international system of “dollar imperialism” (Jarvie 207-21) motivates various British and American authors to perceive the city as a blemished imitation of American popular culture. Phillips’s initially utopian impressions feel very *pas*. As a 1957 feature article in the American *Catholic Advance* newspaper articulates it, “Manila . . . is something less than a tropical paradise” (“Manila Today” 13). The memoir *Land of the Morning* (1956) by DeLoris Stevenson, an American woman who accompanied her clergyman husband on a post-war mission to the Philippines, limns parts of Manila as infernally ravaged by warfare. In the same book, though, Stevenson extols other districts of the city for looking “like the United States in the Far East” (14), albeit facets of that resemblance are kitschly parodic of rather than tastefully faithful to the original: “You’d laugh to see the ‘jeepneys’—corrected American jeeps—used as buses at 10 centavos a ride” (15). It is not only the price that is cheap about this tacky

appropriation of an iconic American vehicle. Stevenson's remark that the simulation currently has deformities is necessary for her concluding proposition that "the Philippines is truly a land of tomorrow" (144). While at this moment, the country may be falling short of Western ideals, this "daughter of the American republic" will, to extend her metaphor, surely grow up into a closer likeness to her father (144). A brief chronicle in the American newspaper *The Journal Herald* of President Lyndon Johnson's 1966 visit to Manila stresses the eagerness of Filipinos to disguise themselves as Westerners. Sometimes this is literally, as in the case of a motorcycle policeman called "Lt. Jose" who "wore a red cowboy hat" while escorting the US president ("In" 8). The Manila Hotel (originally built in 1909 by the US colonial regime) has only recently hosted the Beatles, the unnamed reporter writes, who at that time are the epitome of Western pop cultural cool. In an echo of Phillips's simulation within/hell without dichotomy, protestors outside the hotel waving placards calling Johnson a "Modern Hitler" take the shine off an otherwise successful ritual of Philippine-American conviviality (8). Frequenting Manila in the late 1970s, the Australian travel writer Maslyn Williams, who made his name directing ethnographic documentary films of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, notices ambiguities within the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos that are analogous to the flawed simulation of the post-war period. The "image they [the Marcos family] project," writes Williams, "is as stimulating as that presented in the US at the beginning of the 60s by the Kennedys" (17). But this will soon be tempered by Williams's meeting with "relatives of a woman who has recently been reduced to a heap of neuroses" by torture at the hands of state enforcers (20).

These formulations of First World glamour marred by Third World tyranny are new accretions to the flawed simulation palimpsest. Their effect is to muddy straightforward distinctions between what the Western gaze imposes on Manila and how Manileños self-identify and conceive of their own urban milieu. Whereas the simulacra of Fee, Boyce et al. earlier in the century seldom acknowledge the thoughts and feelings of Manileños, their heirs often do acknowledge them, but in ways that only serve to reinforce a Western fantasy-production of Manila. Perhaps wary of such high colonial prescriptiveness and exclusive reliance upon one's own subjective prejudices, Williams, Hamilton-Paterson and others are keen to demonstrate the consent of Filipinos in their visions of Manila as a space of imperfect Western mimicry. As Tadiar explains,

“while the West owns the codes of fantasy, the non-West is no less an active and willing participant in the hegemonic modes of imaginary production that are predicated on these codes [T]he postcolonial nation-states of the non-West demonstrate that they have acquired a certain fluency in these codes of fantasy of the West, making full use of them in the pursuit of their elites’ desires” (12). The key phrase here, in my view, is “the pursuit of their elites’ desires” (12). All too often, these writers can only vindicate their versions of Manila through canvassing the opinions of those *comprador* Filipinos whose power depends on Western patronage, or those lower-class Filipinos who have been indoctrinated by *comprador* hegemony to desire Western commodities, copy Western lifestyles and seek out migratory opportunities in Europe and the US. This problem of preferential selection is crystallized by Benedict Anderson’s critique of the British foreign correspondent James Fenton. His 1986 reportage on the fall of the Marcoses is, avers Anderson, over-reliant on the opinions of upper-class Filipino officials and privileged Western *habitués*. “[Fenton] . . . misses the opportunity to see a single Muslim,” writes Anderson, and talks with “the owner of a vast banana plantation (but not with any of his 6,000 labourers)” (3). Had Fenton consulted a socially broader range of sources, it may have invalidated his perception of a Manila that, while not exactly a simulation of a Western city, is nonetheless a site of commercialized thrill-seeking. Anderson then accuses Fenton of “transforming” Manila “into advertisable commodities” for a Western readership (4). At the other end of the social spectrum, the dream of most provincial Filipinos of low or medium income is to relocate to the “Fantasyland” or “Las Vegas” of Manila, the British author Hamilton-Paterson informs us in his memoir *Playing with Water* (1988). “There in the distance,” he writes, “beckons baroque structures of vice” and “Disney-esque set-pieces of outlandish appetites” (Hamilton-Paterson, *Playing* 131). If the hopeful refugee can travel as far as the simulation then they may be lucky enough to graduate to the “real thing,” for Manila is seen as “a necessary first step to emigration” to a Western country, although “America remains the Promised Land” (126). While Hamilton-Paterson cogently elucidates the psychological allure of these fantasies of Manila and beyond to ordinary Filipinos, he does not incorporate other sources that are particularly critical of the false consciousness around emigration. However, to his credit—and unlike any of his contemporaries—he does reflect on the link between Manila’s function as a preparatory experience for relocation to the West with the

economic necessity of overseas remittances to the degraded Philippine economy and the labour demands of foreign capital.

Hamilton-Paterson, Fenton and Williams are, perhaps understandably given their time of writing, all mesmerized by the Marcoses' eccentric fantasy-production of Manila as a city enjoying its ersatz Americanization. Williams suspects that the Marcoses' identification with the Kennedys is a myth of their own making (17). Hamilton-Paterson eloquently summarizes the dictatorship's propagation of "myths and fragments of myths, ranging from the conquering hero to Cinderella, from cosmogony to Camelot, . . . snippets of Abe Lincoln" and a "Disneyfied version of handsome princes and happy endings" (*America's Boy* 359). At the same time, these writers are well aware of the shortcomings and anomalies of these myths, for their analyses concur with Tadiar's claim that the Philippines is popularly conceived as

a country dominated by misplaced dreams . . . [,] a place of ironic contrasts and tragic contradictions, where politics is a star-studded spectacle set amid the gritty third world realities of hunger and squalor. A third world place in first world drag. (1-2)

I want to adapt Tadiar's ideas to the specific discourse of Manila-focused Orientalist literature by arguing that many of the same writers who draw attention to tragedy, hunger and squalor also peddle the flawed simulation. In these cases, the "ironic contrast" between the two is explicable by the historical forces governing Philippine-Western social, cultural, economic, and political interactions. In the Marcos era, the Orientalist representation of both Manila's consumer-oriented replicas of Global Northern cities and its Global Southern poverty zones are partly a response to government "strategies for the containment of . . . [Manila's] contradictory and antagonistic elements" (84). These include inequality, overcrowding, pollution, inadequate housing and political protest. Thus, the Marcoses committed themselves to "erecting walls to hide slums, relocating squatters, and imprisoning and torturing members of urban resistance movements (including squatter organizations)" (84). It turns out that the Marcoses' scheme was prototypical, with succeeding initiatives to "beautify" Manila responding to new crises that "have necessitated a makeover of capital's infrastructure for greater and more efficient accumulation" (83).

In the 1990s, Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim demolished slums and cracked down on crime to stimulate investment and raise productivity. This tension between social ills and the efforts to mitigate or conceal them is apparent in the fictional, Manila-esque city of Gobernador de Leon of the British-Chinese writer Timothy Mo's novel *Brownout in Breadfruit Boulevard* (1999). Here, "democracy and prosperity are not bedfellows" (Mo, *Brownout* 24) because the economic progress symbolized by new investment opportunities and construction projects—"space-age 2001 slaps of the New Asia" (21), as Mo describes them—is being subverted by widespread corruption, chicanery and a cover-up of a foreign mining company's malpractice (32). The city's Cultural Center (perhaps modelled on the Manila Film Center, Imelda Marcos's real-life pet boondoggle from the 1970s) is large but ultimately unpopular and under-attended (35). Similarly, the "snowily dressed cashiers looking like starlets on \$2 a day" (24) and other poorer Filipinos with access to the pleasurable codes of Western consumerism, are outnumbered by petty-minded gangsters, scheming officials and sexual perverts. This is the sort of distasteful social element that precludes Gobernador de Leon from evolving into a successful global city on a par with London, New York, or Los Angeles. Although Mo's novel offers insights into globalization and neo-colonialism, it has a strong undertone of what Tzvetan Todorov calls "culturalism" (137). This is effectively racism in a politer guise, as it is based on "the rigidity of determinism . . . and the discontinuity of humanity, compartmentalised into cultures that cannot and must not communicate with one another effectively" (Spurr 137-38). Mo has also made his Orientalist attitudes known to the British *Independent* newspaper the same year as the publication of *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*:

It seems to me absolutely demonstrable that cultures are different And if they're different, they will by definition be unequal A society where you're taken off in the middle of the night for torture, or your kids fail an exam at school because you don't pay a bribe to the teacher: they are inferior societies. (qtd. in Tonkin 2)

While Mo is himself a member of the British Chinese diaspora and has won critical accolades for addressing the intricacies of cultural identity, in the final

analysis he is a *démodé* essentialist. In his later novel *Renegade or Halo*² (2000), large parts of which take place in Manila, he writes of “[t]he immutability of our natures” (20) and elsewhere in that *Independent* interview claims, “[s]tereotype has got a negative connotation, in ordinary life and for a novelist. But I’ve never found it a bad word Stereotypes are more likely to be correct than anything else” (qtd. in Tonkin 2). Similar tropes populate the darker, more dramatic Manila of *The Tesseract* (1998) by British novelist Alex Garland. The city is a frightening abyss of murder, intimidation and vendetta occasionally brightened by the gaudy, playful semiosis of Western materialism: McDonald’s, trashy American film and television, and so forth. By the late 2010s and President Rodrigo Duterte’s lethal anti-drugs crackdown—a far bloodier and more ambitious programme than Lim’s—the flawed simulation tool has gone astray from the Orientalist kit. Books such as Jonathan Miller’s *Duterte Harry: Fire and Fury in the Philippines* (2018) and, once again, the reporting of James Fenton for the *New York Review of Books*, damn Manila as an abominable quasi-warzone that can no longer be redeemed either by elite efforts to spruce it up or by the *jouissance* of Western apéry (Fenton 1).

Let us return to the Marcosian imitations of the West that so intrigue our 1970s and 1980s writers. When such imitations fail—as they invariably do—the blame lies, so these writers claim, with the Marcoses for being the architects of the fantasy or with ordinary Filipinos for being gullible enough to fall for it. While Fenton, Williams, and Hamilton-Paterson are fairly withering about American sponsorship of the dictatorship, other Marcos-era writers avoid indicting the West. Worse than that, the Dutch writer and erstwhile editor of the *New York Review of Books* Ian Buruma dismisses the socialist historian Renato Constantino’s thesis that “Washington, through the CIA and multilateral lending agencies, has deliberately kept the Philippines in a state of colonial dependence” because it is “uncomfortably close to anti-Semitic nightmares of an international Jewish conspiracy of bankers and politicians to dominate the world” (Buruma 84-85). Buruma’s analogy is puzzling given that neo-colonial injustices in the 1980s Philippines have little to do with anti-Semitism in 1930s Europe, historically, ideologically or geographically, or in terms of common victims and/or perpetrators. More troublingly, Buruma’s tainting of Philippine left nationalism with the spectre of the Holocaust might make someone think twice about claiming Western culpability for Philippine woes lest they find themselves guilty of anti-Semitism by association.

It is interesting to observe these authors of the 1970s and 1980s indulging in a form of simulation or mimicry themselves via what literary critic Debbie Lisle calls “shadowing” (77). In this technique, a traveller-writer explicitly alludes to another Western traveller-writer from an earlier period who limned the same geographical site(s) (Lisle 77). For Lisle, shadowing often reinforces a reactionary nostalgia within the later writer because “to mimic the adventures of great colonial explorers” is “part of the attraction of reviving colonialism and patriarchy” (77). Like so, we find the writers under examination here composing in the shadow of previous Western visitors to Manila for the purpose of validating their own peccadilloes. Buruma cites General Douglas MacArthur to support his point that, long after achieving independence, Filipinos remain infatuated with a foreign figure who formerly played a significant role in their governance: “There is something extraordinary about a colonised country receiving the general of the colonial power back as a savior” (71). Occasionally, Western writers will shadow Filipino writers and intellectuals, if only to substantiate ethnocentric prejudices. Buruma paraphrases a book by Reynaldo C. Ileto that “traces the forms of peasant rebellion back to folk versions of the passion” (170). For Buruma, Ileto’s scholarship shows that the contemporary Philippines remains beholden to “ancestor worship,” “a succession of messiahs” and other atavistic customs (170). In similar spirit, while Hamilton-Paterson commends the renowned Filipino author Nick Joaquin for his capacity to “glimpse the palimpsest beneath” (*Playing* 129) the “shapeless, confused and unrelievedly twentieth century mess” (*Playing* 128) of Manila’s streets, ultimately what Hamilton-Paterson finds in the shadow of Joaquin is yet another glum Orientalist banality: “A pleasurable sense of history is hard won in Manila” (*Playing* 128).

The Marcos regime collapsed in 1986 at a time when tourist arrivals in the Asia Pacific region were increasing by 10% a year (Singh 2) and the globalization of the world economy was boosting Western exports of consumer goods to the Philippines and elsewhere in the developing world (“United States Exports”). The Orientalist gaze is re-calibrated by the “domestication” and “global marketing” of post-colonial societies by Western tourism and culture industries (Huggan 12-13). Late twentieth century simulations come to be dominated by fantasies of play, pleasure, desire, and consumption of metropolitan goods and services that have been transplanted to the periphery, if imperfectly. The geographer John Connell has detected a coincident process in

the regeneration of parts of Manila in the 1980s and 1990s, when new neighbourhoods with titles like “Little Italy” would be “[d]esigned and marketed as fragments of Europe in a global era” (17). Hamilton-Paterson sums up post-Marcos Manila as an “Asian re-creation of an American garrison town” (*Playing* 130) catering for the transgressions of comparatively wealthy foreigners. The British Indian travel writer Pico Iyer’s *Video Night in Kathmandu* (1988) posits Manila’s identity as dependent on the most vulgar aspects of Western popular culture. It is a textual space crowded by European pornography, indigenous sex workers dressed like their American counterparts, rock bars where Filipinas sing songs by Madonna and Cyndi Lauper, and steak houses evocative of “New England” serve food tasting of “cardboard” (Iyer 179). The artifice of it all is underlined by Iyer’s wry—albeit problematic—allusion to black and white minstrels: “Master of every American gesture, conversant with every Western song . . . the Filipino plays minstrel to the entire continent” (180).

It is not just Iyer’s simulation that is well furnished with sexual licentiousness. The late 1980s/early 1990s saw a profusion of Western media reporting on the new phenomenon of British and American men obtaining Filipina “mail order brides” or “video brides” from the Philippines. In her 1988 dispatch from Manila, reporter Sara Barrett of the British *Daily Mail* newspaper stretches Iyer’s metaphor over a Manila that, more than a counterfeit of the West, is a space onto which Western male fantasies of sexual domination can be projected. In an authorial voice that is, to borrow a phrase from another *Mail* article on the same subject three years later, “a mix of fascination and revulsion” (Hardy 1), she visits a queue of “beautiful” Filipinas waiting to be filmed by an agency that will match them with “old men who looked like Peter Cushing in the Hammer Horror films, gaunt-faced, bald-pated” (Barrett 17). This conjuring of Manila as a hedonistic sexual playground has survived into more recent Western narratives. In Rafe Bartholomew’s sports memoir *Pacific Rims* (2010), a US Marine boasts to the author that “he’d parlayed a hot hand at a craps table into an ‘eight-some’” and advised that “I shouldn’t board my Manila-bound flight without first packing a suitcase full of rubbers” (2). Bartholomew’s liberal cosmopolitanism obliges him to critique such macho posturing, unlike Barrett the reactionary hack who objectifies, dehumanizes and racially fetishizes the Filipinas she meets, reducing them to a cluster of basic physical functions sure to entice a self-serving, misogynistic Western man. These women are, she

writes, eager to perform maid duties and “provide sex” (Barrett 17). Interviewee Gloria Camit, 28, with her “neat little face” and “chocolate eyes,” wants as soon as possible to have a baby with whoever her future groom will be (17). Disturbingly, Barrett reveals, some British men have sexually abused or forced their Filipina wives into prostitution. While Barrett does not herself condone these violations, it is significant that she quotes without judgement Gloria’s declaration, “I am not afraid of a man trying to make me a slave” (17). One wonders if a potential predator reading that in 1988 would consider using the same match-making service to access a “slave” whom he could mistreat with impunity.

Westerners born long before Barrett—and who were far more accomplished writers than her—have similarly placed docile, unfeeling brown-skinned women centre stage in their Orientalist *mise-en-scènes*. In the nineteenth century, the French novelist Gustav Flaubert, shocked by what he believed to be a shortage of chastity and fidelity in the Middle East, claimed, “the oriental woman is no more than a machine: she makes no distinction between one man and another” (qtd. in Tadiar 58). In our contemporary age of Western sex tourism facilitated by inexpensive travel, accommodation and other goods and services, this “machine” metaphor has come to stand for the role of poverty-stricken Filipinas as just another product for sale—either legally through services like the one in Barrett’s article or semi-legally via prostitution or pornography—on the international market of jaded male desire. According to Tadiar,

[p]roduced as physical commodities, they [Filipina women] cease to be treated as humans. To their consumer-clients, they are indeed what they are advertised (on t-shirts around the US bases) to be: “little brown fucking machines powered by rice.” (58)

These submissive female bodies, Tadiar avers, are a constituent feature of a larger-scale imaginative geography—and geopolitics—of the “Philippines [as] an exploitable body,” “the ‘prostitute’ of ‘America’ who caters to the latter’s demands (ostensibly demands of global production and consumption)” (47). When Tadiar argues that US-established “free trade zone” are yet another sexually and economically exploitative feature of the “body/land of the Philippines” (47), it is hard not to think in the same terms about Barrett’s

imbuing of the physical topography of Manila with the typology of paedophilia, the most egregious sub-genre of Western sexual proclivities brought to bear on the Philippines: “All the way past the Hyatt hotel in Manila, where the palm trees with white painted trunks look like schoolgirls in bobbysocks” (Barrett 17).

If we agglomerate the observations of all the writers examined in this article, we find ourselves imagining a surrealistic patchwork Manila made of scraps of Florida theme park, Tinsel Town studio, Upper East Side club, Las Vegas casino and Texas whorehouse. It is populated by, amongst others, Filipino Elvis impersonators, Californian lounge singers, politicians aspiring to cinematic heroism, nubile native beauties and perverted British retirees. While this unflattering textual-civic identity has followed the protean fads of Western popular culture (itself, of course, shaped by wider geopolitical economy), it is, in Orientalist terms, traditional, conventional and no more than the updating of an attitude long held by Western intellectuals that Eastern cultures are, as Edward Said avers, “repetitious pseudo-incarnations of some great original (Christ, Europe, the West)” (62).

In conclusion, we should interrogate the entire episteme of the flawed simulation by returning to the instructive analyses of the twentieth century Filipino author Nick Joaquin. In his collection of lyrical essays *Language of the Street* (1980), written under the anagrammatic pseudonym Quijano de Manila, Joaquin prefers to see Manila as a site of productive fusions and hybridities. In a cool, reflective tone that is antithetical to the serio-comic contempt of the flawed simulation enthusiasts above, Joaquin cites an impressive array of sources—from Ernest Hemingway to esoteric theology to the anti-imperialist intellectuals José Rizal and Claro M. Recto—to construct a multifaceted Manila whose hybrid architecture, cuisine, fashion, art, literature, educational institutions, and religious festivals bear the hallmarks of US, Latin American, Chinese, and European cultural influence. “Manila has been a Malay city, a Spanish city, an American city, and is now a Filipino city” (Joaquin 87), he writes. But rather than these previous influences constituting Manila as a flawed simulation, they are precisely the preconditions for its contemporary uniqueness. Manileños today should therefore not be confused or uncertain about their identity; rather they have every reason for “civicism” (Bell and de-Shalit 1): “When a Manileño speaks, he speaks—whether he knows it or not—

with all his past behind him, which is why his voice rings with such authority and pride” (87).

Joaquin’s formulation of a city’s hybridity culminating in particularity would likely be accepted by the Orientalists discussed above as a fair description of the British and American cities they came from. So why are they unwilling to apply it to Manila and instead favour, as we have seen, deriding or ridiculing it as a flawed simulation? An answer may derive from Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of “ambivalence” wherein a colonial order is never wholly committed to projecting its values onto its subjects for fear they will come to identify too closely with those values and demand more rights and privileges from their masters (87). This form of ambivalence intersects with other ambivalences that make American colonialism in the Philippines somewhat unique in comparison to, say, British or French varieties in Asia and Africa. For one thing, the US always denied that it was a colonial force in the territory at all, preferring the conciliatory language of “aid,” “tutelage,” and “benevolent assimilation,” despite its genocidal subdual of the Philippine struggle for self-determination at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout the period there were also uncertainties about how the Philippine possession should be interpellated by the burgeoning US empire; at certain points it was mooted that the archipelago should become the fifty-first state (Francisco 2-16). The Orientalists writing after Philippine independence may have been motivated—consciously or subconsciously—by new anxieties about the Philippines departing the American sphere of influence either through domestic revolutionary activity or, later on, forming closer ties with China. It seems reasonable, then, that these political and strategic ambivalences across the long twentieth century played some part in producing the flawed simulation trope’s oscillations between respect and disdain, optimism and pessimism, desire and repulsion.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. "James Fenton's Slideshow." *New Left Review*, no. 158, 1986, pp. 1-11.
- Barrett, Sara. "Video Brides Who Think Heaven Is Having a British Husband." *Daily Mail*, 14 Mar. 1988, p. 17.
- Bartholomew, Rafe. *Pacific Rims: Beermen Ballin' in Flip-Flops and the Philippines' Unlikely Love Affair with Basketball*. New American Library, 2010.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Mark Poster, Stanford UP, 1988.
- Bell, Daniel A., and Avner de-Shalit. *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age*. Princeton UP, 2011.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1990.
- Boyce, William D. *United States Colonies and Dependencies Illustrated: The Travels and Investigations of a Chicago Publisher in the Colonial Possessions and Dependencies of the United States, with 600 Photographs of Interesting People and Scenes*. Rand McNally, 1914.
- Burnham, Daniel. Letter to William Taft. 24 June 1905. Burnham Papers, Chicago Art Institute Library, Chicago. Manuscript.
- Buruma, Ian. *God's Dust: A Modern Asian Journey*. Vintage, 1989.
- Carpenter, Frank G. *Through the Philippines and Hawaii*. Doubleday, 1929.
- Caṅṭopādhyāya, Pārtha, and Partha Chatterjee. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Zed Books, 1986.
- Connell, John. "Beyond Manila: Walls, Malls, and Private Spaces." *Environment and Planning*, no. 31, 1999, pp. 15-24.
- Fee, Mary H. *A Woman's Impression of the Philippines*. A. C. McClurg, 1912.
- Fenton, James. "Murderous Manila: On the Night Shift." *New York Review of Books*, 2 Mar. 2017, p. 1.
- Francisco, Luzviminda. "The First Vietnam: The U.S.-Philippine War of 1899." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1973, pp. 2-16.
- Garland, Alex. *The Tesseract*. Penguin, 1998.

- Hamilton-Paterson, James. *America's Boy: The Marcoses and the Philippines*. Granta, 1998.
- . *Playing with Water: Alone on a Philippine Island*. Sceptre, 1987.
- Hardy, Frances. "Sex Victims of Marriage by Mail." *Daily Mail*, 25 July 1991, p. 1.
- Holland, Patrick, and Graham Huggan. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. U of Michigan P, 2000.
- Huggan, Graham. *The Post-colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, 2001.
- Ileto, Reynaldo C. *Knowledge and Pacification: On the U.S. Conquest and the Writing of Philippine History*. Ateneo de Manila UP, 2017.
- "In Manila Hotel: Beatle Suite Redecorated For LBJ." *The Journal Herald*, 24 Oct. 1966, pp. 8-9.
- Irwin, William Gilbert, and Special Correspondence. "Yankeefied Manila." *Atchison Daily Globe*, 1 Dec. 1898, p. 7.
- Iyer, Pico. *Video Night in Kathmandu*. Black Swan, 1988.
- Jarvie, Ian. "Dollars and Ideology: Will Hays' Economic Foreign Policy 1922-1945." *Film History*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1988, pp. 207-21.
- Joaquin, Nick. *Language of the Street and Other Essays*. National Bookstore, 1980.
- Lisle, Debbie. *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- "Manila Today Is No Longer Known as Tropical Paradise." *The Catholic Advance*, 10 May 1957, p. 13.
- Maynard, William Barksdale. *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*. Yale UP, 2002.
- Miller, Jonathan. *Duterte Harry: Fire and Fury in the Philippines*. Scribe, 2018.
- Mo, Timothy. *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*. Paddleless Press, 1997.
- . *Renegade or Halo?* Paddleless Press, 2002.
- Netzorg, Morton J. "The Philippines in Mass-Market Novels." *Asia in Western Fiction*, edited by Robin W. Winks and James R. Rush, Manchester UP, 1990, pp. 175-95.
- Phillips, Claire, and Myron Goldsmith. *Manila Espionage*. Binfords and Mort, 1947.

- Pratt, Mary-Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1991.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Peregrine Books, 1985.
- Singh, Amrik. "Asia Pacific Tourism Industry: Current Trends and Future Outlooks." *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, no. 4, 1997, pp. 1-5.
- Spurr, David. *Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Duke UP, 1993.
- Stevenson, DeLoris. *Land of the Morning*. The Bethany Press, 1956.
- Tadiar, Neferti X. M. *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order*. HKU Press, 2004.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*. Harvard UP, 1993.
- Tonkin, Boyd. "The Books Interview: Timothy Mo—Postcards from the Edge." *The Independent*, 9 July 1999, p. 2.
- "United States Exports." *Trading Economics*, tradingeconomics.com/united-states/exports. Accessed 14 Apr. 2020.
- Williams, Maslyn. *Faces of My Neighbour: Three Journeys into East Asia*. William Collins, 1979.
- Young, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2001.

CONTRIBUTOR

Tom Sykes is Associate Professor of Creative Writing and Global Journalism at the University of Portsmouth, UK. He is the author of *Imagining Manila: Literature, Empire and Orientalism* (Bloomsbury, 2021) and six other books. His articles have appeared in *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, *Formations*, *Social Identities*, *A Global History of Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press), *Supernatural Cities*, *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* and *Children's Literature Review*.