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## **Bound to Empire by Brands**

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school of Filipino writers has arisen to address the phenomenon, not, presumably, for its perverse glamor and ready audience appeal alone, but because it was a searing historical experience that affected their lives, in some cases quite directly, as the circumstances of the *Monsoon Collection's* composition suggest.

What's more, whether one agrees or not with the direction in which it revises Rosca's previous fictional estimate of the Marcoses, the more nuanced and even ambivalent portrayal found in *Twice Blessed* is welcome as a step toward a fuller literary and cultural reckoning with a historical legacy surely as complex as it is controversial. Still, the hope may be allowed that Filipino writers—the gifted fictionist under review perhaps among them—will not continue to reckon with that legacy at the expense of attention to the more recent past and the present. In the experience of a slow, unglamorous, often uncertain, but critically important transition from authoritarian rule, there are sure to be subjects which, while they may be no more “colorful” in themselves than the latest brownout, will nonetheless reflect vividly on the process Rosca's largely unstated yet ultimate focus in *Twice Blessed*, of “a nation struggling to be born” (p. 257).

Gerald T. Burns

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**Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines.** By H.W. Brands. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. xii, 384 pages.

Historical studies are often so crammed with elaborate details that they make for boring reading. One has to go through thickets before one can see the forest.

This book is a delightful exception. It is full of details and information which are expertly woven together under vivid, sometimes “punny” subtitles such as “Manic Depression,” “Dewey or Don't We?,” “The Datu and the Proconsul,” etc. The book is an engaging tale of the bittersweet history involving the rise of the United States as an imperial power in the Pacific. And for better or for worse, the author asserts, Filipinos have felt the American impact more directly than most other people. Nine decades of Philippine-American relations provide for historians and social scientists “samples of history that exhibit general tendencies in concentrated form,” similar to “particular instances under heightened temperature and pressure” that chemists encounter when they study certain classes of reactions.

The main value of the book lies in its extensive use of primary archival material and manuscript collections, many of which have not been tapped

by previous scholars, in illuminating the Philippine-American story. The author went through nearly 80 collections in the U.S. and the Philippines, including heretofore relatively unknown or untouched repositories of research materials such as the Edward Bell papers, Nathaniel Davis papers, Stephen Bonsal papers, Wayne Coy papers, Jacob Dickinson papers, among others. In the Philippines, the author is probably one of the first to use such materials as the Emilio Aguinaldo papers, Miguel Cuaderno papers, Manuel Roxas papers, Elpidio Quirino papers, Jose P. Laurel papers, the Philippine Insurgency Records, and other documents now gathering dust from disuse over time.

As a result of H.W. Brands' painstaking research, readers get a more thorough picture of the politics on both sides of the ocean on the issue of Philippine annexation, and consequently, of independence.

The role of Protestantism in the development of American imperialism; the machinations of Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge and the other imperialists; the fundamental differences between the Democratic and Republican administrations on the Philippine question; the debates in the U.S. Senate; the duplicity of William Jennings Bryan; and, of course, the ever-commanding presence of Douglas MacArthur are all elucidated to provide an informed and wide-ranging view of American ambitions and actions in the Philippines. Equally substantive chapters deal with the Cold War in Asia, the dimensions of the Philippine-American relationship, and the events between 1965 and the mid-1980s, which showed American accommodation of or complicity with certain political developments, e.g., Marcos' martial law regime.

Two chapters, "Retreat 1941-1944" and "Return," are lumped together under a section entitled *Utang na Loob*. Here the author lapses into the usual penchant of Western scholars on the Philippines to use Filipino cultural concepts like *utang na loob* without really understanding them. The *utang* is an overused paradigm. Literally the concept stands for "debt of gratitude" but it connotes much more than that. It is not clear how and why Brands is using it to characterize the two chapters on the retreat from and return of the Americans to the Philippines during the war. The conventional notion was that in whitewashing the collaboration (with the wartime Japanese government) charges against Filipino leaders, General MacArthur did something which the latter felt compelled to acknowledge and probably even reward, otherwise they would all have been thrown into jail. At best this is questionable. It was not so much culture that was at work in Philippine postwar politics as an attempt on the part of the traditional elite to reestablish their power or positions of influence in the now-wartorn country. That was their main motivation, and MacArthur had his own reasons for reinstating the prewar elite to their positions of power.

The weakest part of the book is its conclusion. After having developed a powerful argument on the nature of American imperialism in the Philip-

pines, the author launches into questions like "Did the American presence in the Philippines benefit the Filipinos?" (p. 348) He contends that answers to questions like this run up against "the same counterfactual difficulties as before." He theorized that "because the United States did annex the Philippines in 1899, there is no way of knowing what the Philippines would have been like in 1991 had the United States refrained from annexing." Then he concludes that the issue is not whether the Filipino people were better off in 1991 than in 1899, but whether they were better off than they would have been without the American relationship.

In the end the author has reduced the issue to a polemic. How does one define "better off?" The issue was that the American forcible annexation of the Philippines robbed a nation of its victory over centuries-old Spanish oppression and eventual sovereignty as embodied in President Emilio Aguinaldo's proclamation of the First Philippine Republic on 12 June 1898. After that, the Malolos Congress drew up a charter for the new nation. That charter replaced the earlier "dictatorial" government of Aguinaldo with a "republican" form. From all indications there was already a sophisticated structure for Filipino political governance. It was not as though Filipinos were incapable of "self-government." This was the myth peddled by the Schurman Commission and other instrumentalities of the incipient American empire to justify the annexation and colonization of the country by the U.S.

It is also disappointing that the author quibbled over the distinction between "formal" and "informal" imperialism. This is useful for analytical purposes. But from the perspective of colonized peoples, in this case the Filipinos, this distinction is not meaningful. Imperialism in whatever form was an insidious and unwelcome force in their history. Benign or brutal, imperialism was propelled by the same motives of power and greed that punished, killed, impoverished and otherwise denigrated people who were once free and sovereign.

To infer that America's treatment of the Philippines stacks up "rather well" compared with Britain's treatment of India, the French record in Indochina, and so on, is at best specious. It bears repeating that however benign American colonialism in the Philippines appeared to be, and that is not even true, this does not stack up well with Filipinos who continue to bear the ill effects of that colonialism.

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