

“The Endless Possibilities of Ordinary Life”: The Post-colonial Irish Novel”

Speaker: Dr. Derek Hand

Date: 16 June 2017

Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 Noon

Venue: Dataran Sastera (Arts Concourse), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker’s Profile:



Dr Derek Hand is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the School of English in Dublin City University. The Liffey Press published his book *John Banville: Exploring Fictions* in 2002. He edited a special edition of the *Irish University Review* on John Banville in 2006. He was awarded an IRCHSS Government of Ireland Research Fellowship for 2008-2009. His *A History of the Irish Novel: 1665 to the present* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2011 and is now available in paperback. He is interested in Irish writing in general and has published articles on W.B. Yeats, Elizabeth Bowen, Colum McCann, Molly Keane, Benedict Kiely, Mary Lavin, and William Trevor and on contemporary Irish fiction. He has lectured on Irish writing in the USA, Portugal, Sweden, Singapore, Brazil, Italy, Sweden and France. He is now working on a critical study of recent Irish fiction entitled *The Celtic Tiger Irish Novel 1994-2010: modernity and mediocrity*. He is also currently co-editing a collection of essays on John McGahern entitled, *Essays on John McGahern: Assessing a Literary Legacy* to be published by Cork University Press.

About the Talk: The colonised space is always the place of analogy: it is always being compared with places and experiences and supposed realities elsewhere, with the centre of empire, of which the colony can only be but a pale reflection. In this talk I plan to offer an account of how the Irish novel as a form responds to this predicament, and how it sets up a dialogue with and against metropolitan voices of domination. This is not simply a case of the Empire Writing Back, but rather is a rendering of the colonised world in conversation with itself. The novel form’s link to modernity means it is a site where the emergence of the individual into modernity can be witnessed. For the Irish person, burdened with the often-debilitating effect of the imposed stereotype, meaning that she/he is already always known, the space afforded by the novel might

allow for the complexities of the Irish individual to be played out. Of course, many novels present this as a struggle between the rights of the person in conflict with the pressures of traditional modes of community and shared experience. In Ireland this conflict is compounded by the fact that the individual person has been habitually overwhelmed in the depiction of individuals as representations of a community and of the nation. The tension in much of the best of Irish novel writing is between this wish to configure and acknowledge specifically Irish traits and characteristics, as well as the demand to recognise Ireland as a space where it also possible to be simply human. The consequence for the Irish novel, as it is for Irish culture generally, is that it has been and continues to be caught between the desire to be exceptional and the endless possibilities of ordinary life.

“That Effing Show: Building a Malaysian Community Online”

Speaker: Dr. Susan Philip

Date: 19th May 2017

Time: 3pm – 4pm

Venue: Dean’s Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker’s Profile:



Dr. Susan Philip is an Associate Professor in the English Department, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya. She has done research in the English-language theatres of Singapore and Malaysia, and has several publications in that area. Currently she is moving towards research in two different areas: crime fiction, and alternate spaces of expression such as digital media.

About the Talk:

Upon achieving independence in 1957, Malaysia became a state. Now, fifty-seven years later, there is still uncertainty as to whether the state has developed into a nation – or what Benedict Anderson (1991) calls an imagined community. I question the extent to which all Malaysians are allowed to be part of a larger, national community within the politically-constructed framework of the state.

Importantly, ordinary Malaysians have also been blocked from taking an active part in the socio-political processes which help to frame and build that imagined community. I wish to argue that the growth of the Internet and the burgeoning of social media have created a space within which a broader and more inclusive sense of community, can be confronted, examined and argued about, thus perhaps being allowed to grow and develop further. In a country in which identities are predicated on primordial notions of race, and where race has come to equal difference and separation, the online world allows the growth of a community which can (ideally) transcend race, or which, more realistically, can allow race to be lived and spoken about in ways not encouraged by official discourse. Communities may spring up which are founded on common political beliefs, or a rejection or re-embracing of racial or religious identities. The very act of talking and arguing about subjects deemed sensitive for or beyond the competence of ordinary people also allows them to participate in forming, dismantling and reforming communities, rather than having them authoritatively formed for them. I wish, therefore, to engage with the ways in which different communities might arise, which may potentially encourage a re-thinking of the narrow and exclusive ways in which community is often structured in Malaysia. In order to examine this subject, I will be analysing a popular Malaysian web show called *That Effing Show*, which produces short comic and satirical sketches commenting on Malaysian politics and society.

“Angels by the Murky River: Readings & Conversations with Shivaji Das”

Speaker: Shivaji Das

Date: 16th March 2017

Time: 3pm – 4pm

Venue: Dean’s Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker’s Profile:



Shivaji Das was born and brought up in Assam, India. He is a graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Calcutta. He is currently a management consultant in Singapore. Shivaji’s writings have been published in magazines such as *TIME*, *Asian Geographic*, *Venture Mag*, *Jakarta Post*, *Conscious Magazine*, *PanaJournal*, *Freethinker*, and *Outlook Traveller*. He has presented talks in Singapore, Morocco, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brazil. His interviews have been featured on BBC, CNBC, Channel News Asia, Travel Radio Australia, Around the World TV, Radio Roaming, and Singapore

Discovery Centre's IFD exhibition. His photographs, in collaboration with his wife Yolanda Yu, have been exhibited in the Darkroom Gallery, Vermont (USA), Kuala Lumpur International Photography Festival (Malaysia), the Arts House (Singapore), and the National Library (Singapore). Shivaji also takes an active interest in migrant issues. He is the conceptualizer and one of the key organisers of the Migrant Worker Poetry Contests in Singapore and Malaysia. Shivaji's other books include *Journeys with the caterpillar: Travelling through the islands of Flores and Sumba, Indonesia* and *Sacred Love: Erotic art in the temples of Nepal*.

About the Talk:

The talk will be based on Shivaji Das's latest book, *Angels by the murky river: Collecting stories of unheard lives* (Yoda Press: New Delhi, India). The author will read from his work, a collection of thirty-one travel narratives from sixteen countries based on his encounters with those whose stories remain largely unheard – Nepalese security guards in Malaysia, the homeless of Mumbai and Seoul, ageing anarchists in Melbourne, poverty-stricken diamond miners in Indonesia, all-renouncing monks in the material city of Singapore, farmers-turned-painters in Morocco, an elderly couple who scribble love poems on walls of small-town China while not daring to meet each other, Filipino women boxers and beauty pageant contestants, and migratory mothers-in-law, to name a few. The collection documents the immense diversity of human conditions and also the commonalities that make us human; our resilience in the face of adversity, our ability to stay passionate about cherished ideals, and our capacity for creativity, kindness, and humour, irrespective of our backgrounds. The author will also talk about his writing life.

“Literary Silence and the Nation-State: A Comparison between Malaysia and Brunei”

Speaker: Dr. Grace V. S. Chin

Date: 2nd March 2017

Time: 4pm – 5pm

Venue: Dean's Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker's Profile:



Grace V. S. Chin received her B. A. and M. A. from Universiti Malaya and her Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Hong Kong. She has published journal articles and book chapters that examine gender- and race-related issues in the study of postcolonial (mostly Anglophone) literature, with emphasis on the intersections of colonialism, nationalism, migration, and globalisation, and their corresponding effects on identities and subjectivities within the Southeast Asian context. Her articles have appeared in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *World Englishes*, *Postcolonial Text* and *Journal of International Women's Studies*, as well as in books published by John Benjamins and Cambridge Scholars Publishing. She has a forthcoming publication, a co-edited book by Springer titled *Women in postcolonial Southeast Asian literature: Gender, identity, and nation*. She has previously worked at universities in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Brunei, and is currently a visiting senior fellow at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in Leiden, the Netherlands.

Abstract:

The 1970s and 1980s were considered a dark period for Malaysian literature in English. Creative production had suddenly ceased, and the vibrant voices of writers who had been active in the field became silent. Scholars who examined this period gave the local literary scene a grim prognosis; they wrote about its “dwindling” and “distraught” state (Quayum, Talif and Omar 2003, p. xviii), its “sorry condition” (Merican, Hashim, Subramaniam and Mohd Mydin 2004, p. 13) and “arrested ... growth” (Quayum and Wicks 2001, p. xi). While these scholars have attributed the loss of voices to the subordination of English as a second language, they have not fully considered the psychological and affective consequences of state discourses of censorship (and its reproductive structures of silencing and being silenced) on the writers, particularly within the context of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. I have similarly observed this pattern of silence and absence emerging from Bruneian literature in English, especially prior to 2009, when published Anglophone works, if any, were far and few in between. My talk addresses the geo-political and social specificities of each country, how they have influenced Anglophone literary production and productivity, and the extent to which they have defined the identities of English language writers based on the state discourses of race, culture and language in the nation space. I will also discuss the tenuous subject-position occupied by ethnic minority writers, which is reflected in their absence from the local productions of literature at different points of national history in each country, and how this is tied to the racializing of identities and communal relations in Malaysia and Brunei.

2016 Seminar Series

“Folktales and Femininity: Girlhood and the Transmission of Cultural Values in Malaysian Children's Literature ”

Speaker: Dr. Sharifah A. Osman

Date: 18th November 2016

Time: 3pm – 4pm

Venue: Dean's Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker's Profile:



Dr. Sharifah A. Osman is Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Her research interests are Nineteenth-century British Literature, Romantic Orientalism and Children's Literature in Malaysia. She has published on Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, Felicia Hemans and Isabella Bird, and is currently involved in a research project on feminist ideas in Malaysian children's literature.

Abstract:

Based on the representations of female identity in selected Malaysian folktales, this talk argues that the definition of "feminine" qualities in such stories is influenced by an inherently patriarchal ideology, one that emphasizes the secondary role of young women--often depicted either as a means of redemption for the hero, or as "damsels in distress" awaiting rescue. Such tales often serve as sites for "the construction of appropriate gendered behaviour" in affirming and perpetuating patriarchal values (Parsons 2004) through their emphasis on "feminine" docility, filial piety and sacrifice. Through close readings of three Malay folktales, namely *Puteri Pucuk*

Kelumpang, Puteri Sanggul Berjurai, and Puteri Bunga Tanjung, this talk illustrates how these stories, while subscribing to stereotypically gendered roles in their portrayal of young women, also offer a revisionary reading of female characters within the context of Malaysian children's literature through the focus on these women's wisdom, resourcefulness and intelligence. As significant repositories of cultural identity and national heritage, folktales should indeed be preserved and widely circulated. Yet more also needs to be done for such tales to appeal to contemporary young female readers, many of whom would find it difficult to relate to passive depictions of womanhood, given the increasing awareness of women's rights universally. Thus, as the discussion will show, to remain historically and culturally relevant as a genre, contemporary anthologies of Malaysian children's literature, and folk tales in particular, need to evolve by offering young women readers more empowering narratives from which they can imagine themselves and their roles in society.

“Dante Alighieri (*Divine Comedy*) and James Joyce (*Ulysses*) as Vectors in the Hermeneutics of Literature”

Speaker: Professor Charito Pizarro

Date: 10th November 2016

Time: 4pm – 5pm

Venue: Dean's Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker's Profile:



Charito Pizarro is Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Education, College of Arts and Sciences at the University of San Carlos in Cebu City, Philippines. He received his PhD in Philosophy and English Linguistics and Literature, *magna cum laude*, from the University of Heidelberg in Germany. He is former Chair of the Department of Languages and Literature at the University of San Carlos and former assistant professorial chair at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. He has also served as Visiting Professor at the University of Heidelberg and has

presented lectures in the Philippines, Germany, Switzerland and Hong Kong. His most recent book publication is *The Symbolic Foundation of Human History: The Symballein* (ISBN 978 6219541015; Cebu, Jader Publishing House; August 2016), which was described at its launch as “unparalleled in the country.”

Abstract:

With the variety and multiplicity of views espoused in literature, the persevering unifying element seems to be that every literary work – whether it comes from the east or west (“the twain” that Rudyard Kipling said “shall never meet”) is a piece of Dasein’s insight on the human settlement marked by a very peculiar space-time continuum. Acknowledging the reality of Martin Heidegger’s Dasein also implies that we likewise accept the reality of Zeug or ‘tools or equipment’ given, whether by nature or in man-made works, in this case literature, to enable Dasein to make sense of anything and everything. My claim is that Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, besides being landmarks in literature, perform an extraordinary function, that of providing vectors for our human navigation: Dante’s through the heliotropic metaphor, which Paul Ricoeur considers essential for what he calls ‘metaphysical raising’ and Joyce’s through his unique notion of ‘consubstantiality’ aligned with freedom.

“Promoting Peace, Building Cultural Bridges and Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred in the West through Literature”

Speaker: Qaisra Shahraz

Date: 19th October 2016

Time: 2pm – 3pm

Venue: Dean’s Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker’s Profile:



Qaisra Shahraz is one of the key literary figures who have helped establish a strong Muslim literary tradition in contemporary Britain. All her major fictional works – *The Holy Woman* (2001), *Typhoon* (2003), *Revolt* (2013) and *A Pair of Jeans* (2013) – are best sellers. Based in Manchester, Qaisra is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a member of the Royal Society of Literature. Of Pakistani origin, Qaisra has been writing since the age of 14, and has used her literary work to raise awareness about gender, social and intercultural issues. Currently through dialogue, she is keen to promote a better understanding about Muslims living in the West, in particular in Germany where her work is studied at a higher level. She is dedicated to

building bridges between East and West. In the current time, Qaisra uses her literary and interfaith work to combat Islamophobia and challenge extremism.

“Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Tash Aw, and Anglophone Chinese Diasporic Literature”

Speaker: Associate Professor Dr. Walter S. H. Lim

Date: 23rd September 2016

Time: 11am – 12 noon

Venue: Dean’s Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker’s Profile:



Walter S. H. Lim is Associate Professor of English Literature at the National University of Singapore. He is the author of *The Arts of Empire: The Poetics of Colonialism from Raleigh to Milton* (1998), *John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism* (2006), and *Narratives of Diaspora: Representations of Asia in Chinese American Literature* (2013). He is also coeditor of *The English Renaissance, Orientalism, and the Idea of Asia* (2010).

Abstract:

As authors of the Chinese diaspora whose lives are entwined with Malaysia, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Tash Aw produce literature that represents life in Malaysia and the movements of persons of Chinese ethnicity from this nation-state to foreign lands. Shirley Lim’s autobiographical *Among the White Moon Faces* (1996) narrates the Malaysian-born Chinese subject’s transpacific crossing from Malaysia to the United States, a narrative framed by the interpretative lenses of a postcolonial

and American immigrant perspective. Where *Among the White Moon Faces* narrates the process of naturalization in the New World, Tash Aw's *Five Star Billionaire* (2013) focuses on the lives of five Chinese characters from Malaysia who find themselves drawn to the promises of Shanghai, the consummate cosmopolitan city representing the economic power of twenty-first century China. Reading *Among the White Moon Faces* in conjunction with *Five Star Billionaire*, I trace the evolution of Anglophone Chinese Diasporic Literature from an America-centric phase to a China-centric one, a development that strives to navigate between the pull of the promises of the free West and the more recent enticements of modern China.

“Shakespeare and the Law: *Henry IV Part 2*, Common Law, and the English Utopia”

Speaker: Professor Paul Raffield

Date: 6th April 2016

Time: 3pm – 4.30pm

Venue: Dean's Meeting Room 2, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker's Profile:



Paul is Professor of Law at the University of Warwick, where he teaches Tort Law, Origins of English Law, and Shakespeare and the Law. After graduating from Cardiff University with a degree in Law, Paul went to drama school and subsequently worked for twenty-five years as an actor, prior to his appointment at Warwick. While an actor, Paul studied for a PhD at Birkbeck Law School. He has subsequently published extensively in the fields of Law and Literature and Legal History. In 2007, he co-organised an international conference at Warwick on Shakespeare and the Law, which attracted leading Shakespearean and legal scholars. The papers were published in an edited collection: Paul Raffield and Gary Watt (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2008). Paul is the author of *Shakespeare's Imaginary Constitution: Late*

Elizabethan Politics and the Theatre of Law (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010) and *Images and Cultures of Law in Early Modern England: Justice and Political Power, 1558-1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). His forthcoming monograph, *The Art of Law in Shakespeare*, will be published by Hart/Bloomsbury in 2017. He is founding co-editor-in-chief of the journal *Law and Humanities*, and a member of the Italian Cultural Association for the Study of Law and Literature. Paul is a National Teaching Fellow, a Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy, and a recipient of the Warwick Award for Teaching Excellence.

Abstract:

“...more of (Shakespeare’s) lines are devoted to discussing law than any other profession. (Some think his knowledge of the law was so detailed that the “real” Shakespeare must have been a lawyer.)”

- Why lawyers love Shakespeare, *The Economist*, 8 January 2016

How much did Shakespeare know, technically, of the law? Was the evolution of early modern legal history captured accurately in Shakespeare’s plays?

One of the many facets of Shakespeare’s great diptych of the English State, *The History of Henry the Fourth* and *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth*, is a mimetic reflection on both the role of law in English society and the immemorial custom of England’s legal institution.

In the course of the lecture, Professor Paul Raffield will analyse the important role played by common lawyers in shaping the development of the unwritten constitution with reference to two characters in *Henry IV, Part 2*: the Lord Chief Justice and Justice Shallow. For this reason, while agreeing with the great classical and literary scholar E.M.W. Tillyard that for purposes of extrapolating a unified theme the two parts are better addressed as a single play, Paul places almost exclusive emphasis on *Henry IV, Part Two*, and in particular on those scenes in which Justice Shallow and the Lord Chief Justice appear.

He will consider the influence of several judges of the early modern period (the most significant of whom in this context is the Lancastrian Chief Justice, Sir John Fortescue) over the depiction of these two characters, both of whom constitute multifaceted representations of common lawyers.

“Why Read Literature?”: Appeasing the Appetite for Play”

Speaker: Nicholas Osborne Pagan

Date: 10th March 2016

Time: 10am-11am

Venue: Dean’s Meeting Room 1, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Speaker’s Profile:



Nicholas Osborne Pagan is Visiting Professor in the Department of English at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. His research interests include literary theory and criticism, literature and philosophy, literature and science, 20th Century and contemporary American literature and culture, and comparative literature. He is the author of *Theory of Mind and Science Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and has published in a wide range of journals including *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*, *Journal of American Studies*, *Philological Quarterly*, and *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. He is currently pursuing an interest in cross-cultural communication and working on the question “Why literature?” principally through the work of theorists who include Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser, and Bill Brown.

Abstract:

This brief talk begins by invoking Friedrich Schiller’s idea of a “play drive” to suggest that it is especially people’s play instincts that lie behind their engagement with literature. Before attempting to lend support to this claim the presentation considers briefly the “ethical turn” in literary studies that began in the late 1980s and is associated with the work especially of J. Hillis Miller and Derek Attridge. Both of these thinkers link literature to performativity and the idea of a literary text as an event.

Turning to links between literature, performativity, and play the presentation then turns to the writings of Sigmund Freud and Wolfgang Iser. While Freud is seen to be discussing the literature-play nexus only in isolated passages, Iser treats this nexus in far more detail beginning in his early reader-response theory right up to his work in “literary anthropology” which does not so much constitute a new direction in his thinking but rather a continuation of or supplement to the earlier

work. Iser's claim that the reader both plays with and is played by the literary text as well as his suggestion that through their reading readers can become "present to themselves" are discussed along with "free play" vs. "instrumental play;" and the "Fictive," the "Imaginary," and the "Real." The presentation then highlights Iser's use of concepts borrowed from play theorist Roger Caillois: *agon*, *alea*, mimicry, and *ilinx*.

Finally, an attempt is made to carry forward Iser's work by making use of these terms during a reading of a passage from Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Overall, Iser's literary anthropology is lauded not only as a provider of useful tools for the reader but also for helping substantiate the idea that the reading of literature is fundamentally underpinned by the desire to play.