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Present

Getting Manila Wrong Since 1840: Flawed Simulations, Third World Blues and Other Western Literary Misrepresentations

By Dr. Tom Sykes

Senior Lecturer, Creative Writing and Journalism
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Discussant: Prof. Vernadette V. Gonzalez

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3:00 pm – 4:30 pm**

Abstract: Misrepresentations of the Philippine Capital Drawing on arguments from his recent book *Imagining Manila*, Dr Tom Sykes of the University of Portsmouth, UK explores several enduring representational tropes and devices that have defined a trajectory of British and American Orientalist fiction, travel writing and journalism about the city of Manila. Over the centuries, a number of Western writers have condemned or fetishized poverty, vice and other social problems in Manila by decontextualizing them from transnational capitalism, (neo)colonialism and globalized inequality. Such 'third world blues' (Mary-Louise Pratt) has informed imaginative geographies of Manila as both an irrational, hell-like, 'seething cauldron of Evil' (Catholic Advance newspaper) and as a crude, flawed simulation of a Western city. Sykes also addresses a more nuanced literary and media discourse of so-called 'liberal Orientalism' dating back to the mid-nineteenth century that has mobilized the rhetoric of fraternity, guidance, romantic love, democracy and assimilation to conceal ethnocentric prejudices and (neo)imperialist depredations. These signifying practices have been crucial to the Western mediation and public understanding of key events in Manila's history including the 1896 Revolution, Spanish-American and Philippine American Wars, World War II and the repressions of the Marcos and Duterte regimes. Sykes discusses a counter-hegemonic canon of writers, both Filipino and foreign, who have dissented from the reactionary assumptions of so-called 'Manilaism': Carlos Bulosan, Jessica Hagedorn, Gina Apostol, Ivan Goncharov and others.

About the Author/Speaker: Dr Tom Sykes is Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and Journalism at the University of Portsmouth. He has been visiting and researching the Philippines for over ten years and his latest book is the academic monograph *Imagining Manila: Literature, Empire and Orientalism*, a postcolonial analysis of Western literary and media discourses on the city of Manila dating back several centuries. Tom has also published *The Realm of the Punisher: Travels in Duterte's Philippines*, a political travelogue of the contemporary Philippines that earned good reviews from the *TLS* and *The London Magazine*. Tom completed his PhD in Creative Writing and Literature at Goldsmiths College, University of London under the supervision of Bart Moore-Gilbert and others. His academic essays have appeared in *Interventions*, *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *A Global History of Literature and the Environment* and other outlets.



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