

# THE OSCAR WILDE TRIALS, OR THE INTERPRETATION OF LEGAL INTERPRETATION

BY Associate Professor Marco Wan  
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24 JANUARY 2017, TUESDAY

5.00PM – 7.00PM

LEE SHERIDAN CONFERENCE ROOM, LEVEL 1, EU TONG SEN BUILDING  
FACULTY OF LAW, NUS (BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS)

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses one of the most sensational trials in Victorian literary and legal history, the Oscar Wilde trials of 1895. Taunted by the Marquess of Queensberry who left a card at Wilde's club accusing the playwright of 'Posing as a sodomite', Wilde initiated libel proceedings against the Marquess. This was followed by two further trials in which Wilde was himself prosecuted, this time for committing acts of gross indecency under the Labouchere Amendment of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. This paper departs from existing accounts of the trials that tend to situate them as part of Wilde's biography or queer history to examine the interpretative assumptions inherent in the arguments made in the courtroom by both Wilde and Queensberry's lawyer. It concludes by deriving a model for understanding the relationship between law and literature from the trials. This paper is taken from the speaker's recently published monograph entitled *Masculinity and the Trials of Modern Fiction* (Routledge, 2016).

## ABOUT THE SPEAKER



**Dr Marco Wan** is Associate Professor of Law and Honorary Associate Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong. He serves as Associate Dean (International Affairs) at the HKU Law Faculty. He is also Managing Editor of *Law and Literature*, which was founded as the journal of the law and literature movement in the United States.

His areas of interest include law and literature; law and film; law and sexuality; and legal/critical theory. He has been a visiting scholar at the University of Cambridge, and in 2017 will be a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Law and Culture at the University of Bonn (Germany). His educational background is in both literary/cultural studies and legal studies; he obtained his BA from Yale University, his first law degree and PhD from the University of Cambridge, and his LLM from Harvard Law School. He was recently awarded the University of Hong Kong Outstanding Teaching Prize.

## Participation is By Invitation Only

To register your participation, please contact Ms Yvonne Lim at [lawylhh@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lawylhh@nus.edu.sg).