Picking bones and memories

by Radhika Vyas

NTU-NAC Writer-in-Residence Yong Shu Hoong shared insights from his forthcoming new book, *The Viewing Party*, at the HSS Creative Studio on Wednesday, 25 September, with the audience treated to some interesting revelations about the inspiration behind some of the pieces.

The book, which will be officially launched at the Singapore Writers Festival this November, features a short story at its core and includes prose poems and micro fiction. Yong, a computer scientist by training and also a former winner of the Singapore Literature Prize, revealed that the inspiration behind *The Viewing Party* came from the term, “listening party”, where fans of a band gather to hear tracks from a new album. He decided on the title of the book before writing most of the pieces in it.

Published by Ethos Books, *The Viewing Party* examines among other things death and cinema. *Dragonflies*, for instance, recounts Yong’s memories of his late grandfather and provides glimpses into his childhood. Yong said that his first book *Isaac* (1997) was inspired by his stay in the US where he was studying and included a section about his grandmother. Following the publication of *Isaac Revisited* (2001), *dowhile* (2002), the Singapore-Literature-Prize-winning *Frottage* (2005), and *From Within the Marrow* (2010), he decided that *The Viewing Party* would feature a nine-part poem about his grandfather, with each part in tribute to one decade in the latter’s life.

Yong also read some of his 100-word flash fiction works such as *The Mercy Seeds* and *12 Minutes After the Water Boils* – the latter a humorous description of the art of egg-boiling.

He also revealed the inspiration behind his previous book, *From Within the Marrow*, which was published by Firstfruits Publications in November 2010.

“This book has a reversal-in-time narrative style and was inspired from movies with a similar theme such as *Irreversible* and *Memento,*” said Yong. The book starts in the present day and rewinds up to the time of birth of the author in 1966.

Yong also spoke about his experiences with fellow travellers while travelling through Scandinavia, including the incidents during the trip that inspired the writing of particular poems. He added that memories of school days at St. Gabriel’s Primary School and Raffles Institution stirred him to write on topics such as religion, faith and even physics. Speaking
fondly of a former Physics teacher, he said, “We were a bunch of really notorious students and looking back, I can imagine what he must’ve gone through!”

“I absolutely loved how Mr. Yong’s work evoked certain memories and the feelings portrayed were not pretentious but extremely truthful,” said Sarah David, a Year 3 English Division student who attended the reading. “His way of using an object and transforming it into a symbol that gave meaning is certainly inspiring and heart-warming.”

Indeed, Mr. Yong’s sharing session gave everyone a glimpse into the creative writing and self-making process – a rare treat amid the helter skelter that dominates our everyday lives.