

The programme may be subject to minor changes

## **Creative Writing in English 22 July-29 July 2016**

**Title:** The Mysterious Art of the Short Story, with author Philip Langeskov.

**Description:** Short stories are wonderful things – providing us with fleeting glimpses into the lives of other people – but, despite their brevity, they can be fiendishly difficult to write. Perhaps this is because they require a concentration of pure energy in order to succeed, a type of energy not required by the novel. Whatever the reason, on this course we will together explore the intoxicating power of the short story. Of course, there is no single ‘correct’ way of writing a short story, but there are things worth knowing about, not least because the short story is such a particular form: it both asks for and gives very different things, both to the writer and to the reader. Over the course of the week, we will explore these things together: by reading, by thinking, by talking and, yes, by writing. Before you come on the course, you will be given a reading list of particular stories that you should read and which we will then discuss together as a group. By the end of the course, each of you will have written a complete short story of between 2000 and 3000 words. As you will see, each day will focus on particular aspects of the short story, from the obvious such as character, setting and the generation of a story idea, to the more abstract, such as the operation of desire and the way in which we can get stories to project beyond themselves, into the afterlife of story. Cumulatively, through the course of the week, there will be exercises and homework assignments, which will bring you to the point of presenting your completed stories to the group on Friday. It will probably be the best thing you have ever done.

Room: M-649 (MARE, 5 Uus-Sadama)

### **Friday, 22 July**

9:00-12:30 Registration. Lobby, 5 Uus-Sadama

13:00-14:00 **Introduction: How the Course Will Work**

**Reading: Ali Smith, ‘True Short Story’; Ricardo Piglia, ‘Theses on the Short Story’**

Lunch break

**14:30-16:00 Moments of Being: Finding a Story**

In this session we will discuss Kevin Barry’s story, ‘Across the Rooftops’, and use it as the basis for an exercise in which we work together to find ‘a moment of being’ that might make the focus for a short story.

**Reading: Kevin Barry, ‘Across the Rooftops’**

**Evening Writing Task**

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**Saturday, 23 July**

**9:00-10:30 The Operation of Desire:**

Stories, indeed, all narratives function on desire in a number of ways: there is the desire of you, the writer, to write a particular story; there are the desires exhibited by your characters within the story; there is the desire of the reader to read a story. In this session we will look at how we can harness desire in order to draw the reader in.

**Reading: C. K. Williams, ‘The Mistress’; Roland Barthes, Extracts from *A Lover’s Discourse***

Coffee/tea break

**10:45-12:15 The Principle of Containment:**

There is more to a short story than simply the fact of being short. In this session we will examine the Principle of Containment, thinking about how it can enable us to bring focus to our short stories, ensuring that we don’t try and get them to do – or say – too much.

**Reading: Ernest Hemingway, ‘Hills Like White Elephants’; Lydia Davis, ‘Five Stories by Lydia Davis’**

Lunch break

13:00-14:30 **In class writing and discussion – getting the story moving**

**Evening Writing Task**

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**Sunday, 24 July**

11:00-12:30 **Keeping things moving, I: Gas Stations:**

Once you have the story underway, you need to find a way to keep it – and the reader – moving. In this session, we will consider ways in which you can inject interest into the story, using questions and intrigue as little ‘gas stations’ to inject fuel into your stories.

**Reading: Donald Barthelme, ‘The School’; George Saunders, ‘Rise, baby, Rise!’**

Lunch break

14:00-15.30 **Keeping things moving, II: Complications:**

Stories become interesting when situations become complicated, when desires come into conflict. In this session, by discussing Mary Robison’s ‘Likely Lake’, we will look at the ways in which we might find complication in our stories

**Reading: Mary Robison, ‘Likely Lake’**

Coffee/tea break

15:45-16:45 **In-class writing and discussion: keeping things moving**

**Evening Writing Task**

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## **Monday, 25 July**

### **9:00-10:30 Somebody's Son, Somebody's Daughter: Character I**

Characters provide the lifeblood of fiction and all characters need depth and resonance in order to live in the reader's imagination. In this session – looking at two stories, one by Katherine Mansfield and one by May-Lan Tan – we will consider the ways in which a story's characters, through their individuality, their specific characteristics, can enrich and deepen the texture of our stories.

**Reading: Katherine Mansfield, 'The Doll's House'; May-Lan Tan, '101'**

Coffee/tea break

### **10:45-12:15 People and Their Secrets: Character II**

The great American short story writers, James Salter, once wrote: 'There are really two kinds of life. There is...the one you believe you are living, and there is the other. It is this other which causes the trouble, this other we long to see.' In this session, we will look at the function of secrets, how they lend intrigue and tension to characters.

Lunch break

### **13:00-14:00 In-class writing exercises and discussion: writing people**

## **Evening Writing Task**

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## **Tuesday, 26 July**

### **9:00-10:30 In Your End Is Your Beginning:**

The way in which stories end is crucial to their success and stories can end in lots of ways. They can shut fast like a trapdoor, or they can end with more questions than answers. In this session we will look at the power of endings and how we might use them to ensure that our stories live long in the reader's imagination.

**Reading: Denis Johnson, 'Two Men'; Julio Cortázar, 'House Taken Over'; Virginia Woolf, 'The Mark on the Wall'**

Coffee/tea break

**10:45-12:15 Into the Afterlife:**

One of the most interesting qualities of a short story is the way that it calls into being a suggestion of the unwritten world that exists around it, in particular the world that will remain after the story has ended. In this session, we will consider what it means to project a story into the afterlife...

Lunch break

**13:00-14:00: In-class writing exercises and Discussion**

**Evening Writing Task**

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**Wednesday, 27 July**

**9:00-10:30 The Mystery of the Heart: The Unexplainable**

Perhaps as a consequence of its brevity, and the fact that it has little room for explanation, the short story is often characterised as a literary form with a particular interest in mystery. In this session we will explore the power of the mysterious, of how it can be found in even the most realistic of stories.

**Reading: Clare Wigfall, 'Free'; Flannery O'Connor, Extracts from Mystery and Manners; Austin M. Wright, Extracts from 'The Recalcitrant Short Story'**

Coffee/tea break

**10:45-12:15 The Art of Withholding:**

It's not only characters who have secrets; stories have them too. In this session, we will look at the way in which stories withhold things, keeping the reader in suspense.

Lunch break

13:00-14:00 **In-class exercises and discussion**

**Evening Writing Task**

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**Thursday, 28 July**

9:00-10:30 **Making it Good: The Art of Revision**

By this stage of the course, you should have a full draft of your story and now we will spend the day, together, going over our stories, with the intention of making the stories as good as we possibly can. According to James Salter, this is the best part of the writing process: 'The whole joy of writing comes from the opportunity to go over it and make it good, one way or another.'

Coffee/tea break

10:45-12:15 **Making it Good, continued.**

Lunch break

13:00-14:00 **Making it Good, continued.**

**Evening Writing Task – Final Revisions**

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## **Friday, 29 July**

**10:00-11:40 Final Presentations**

**11:40-13:20 Final Presentations**

**13:20-14:00 Final Presentations**

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### Requirements:

Bring your laptops for writing and contact, notebooks plus loose paper, folder for handouts, etc.

Active participation in workshops and discussions is required. At the end of the course participants are expected to present and submit a creative piece.

The language of the course is English (Level: advanced to proficiency level of English).

The course offers academic credit (upon full participation and completion of the course – 3 ECTS).

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Philip Langeskov was born in Copenhagen in 1976. He studied English Language and Literature at UCL, after which he spent ten years working for bookshops and publishing companies in London, before throwing it all in the air to return to Norwich and a place on the UEA MA in Creative Writing, which was soon followed by a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing. A short story writer, his fiction has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3's The Verb and appeared in various places, including Untitled Books, Five Dials, The Warwick Review, Unthology, and Best British Short Stories 2011 & 2014. His first (very short) book, Barcelona, was published by Daunt Books in 2013. Philip teaches Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia in Britain and is a fiction editor for Lighthouse Literary Journal.