

**Friday 21 September 2012**

## **AWARD-WINNING WRITERS JOIN UEA AS UNESCO CITY OF LITERATURE PROFESSORS**

Olivier award-winning playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker and Whitbread-winning novelist Ali Smith are joining the University of East Anglia as the first UNESCO City of Literature visiting professors.

They will spend a semester each with the university to help students hone their creative writing skills via a series of lectures, masterclasses, individual tutorials and graduate seminars.

They will also work with Writers' Centre Norwich to share their skills and expertise with the wider Norwich literary community, via public readings and discussions.

The new posts come after Writers' Centre Norwich led a successful bid for Norwich to become England's first and the world's sixth UNESCO City of Literature, joining Edinburgh, Melbourne, Iowa City, Dublin and Reykjavik. The permanent status recognises Norwich's literary heritage, contemporary strengths and future potential in the field of literature, creative writing, reading and the literary arts.

Playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker will join the university next week for the autumn semester, followed by Ali Smith in the spring.

Wertenbaker grew up in the Basque country. She is best known for her 1998 play *Our Country's Good*, based on the novel *The Playmaker* by Thomas Keneally. It was awarded the Laurence Olivier/BBC Award for Best New Play and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best New Foreign Play, as well as being nominated for six 'Tonies'.

Other celebrated works include her 1992 satirical portrait of the art world *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, which won the London Critics' Circle Best West End Play Award, the Writer's Guild Award (Best West End Play) and the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize.

She has also written screenplays for film adaptations of Edith Wharton's *The Children* and Henry James' *The Wings of the Dove*.

Ali Smith was born in Inverness in 1962. Her 2001 novel *Hotel World*, which follows the adventures of five characters, including the ghost of a chambermaid killed in a bizarre accident, was shortlisted for both the Orange Prize for Fiction and the Man Booker Prize, as was her 2004 novel *The Accidental*, which went on to win the 2005 Whitbread Novel of the Year Award.

In addition to her five novels, she has published four collections of short stories and is a regular contributor to *The Scotsman* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Prof Andrew Cowan, director of UEA's creative writing programme, said: "This has been a great year for creative writing at UEA and for Norwich as a whole. Our creative writing programme, which has produced so many successful graduates, including the Booker prizewinners Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro and Anne Enright, received a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Further and Higher Education.

"Then came the news that Writers' Centre Norwich, Arts Council England and UEA will be creating a £3million International Centre for Writing in the city, followed by the announcement that Norwich will be the first UNESCO City of Literature in England.

"The UNESCO City of Literature visiting professorships are named in celebration of these developments, and we're looking forward to welcoming Timberlake Wertenbaker and Ali Smith to the university. They're exceptional writers of international reputation and will enhance our students' experience as well as enriching the literary life of the city."

Chris Gribble, Writers' Centre Norwich CEO, said: "We're delighted UEA has chosen to celebrate Norwich's UNESCO City of Literature status in such a productive and exciting way. UEA is home of the country's most outstanding Creative Writing MA and its reputation as a world leader in the field helped secure the success of our bid."

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## **EDITOR'S NOTES**

1/ For more information or to request an interview, please contact the UEA Press Office by emailing [press@uea.ac.uk](mailto:press@uea.ac.uk) or call 01603 593496.

2/ UEA's world-renowned Creative Writing MA was founded in 1970-71 and was the first course of its kind in the UK. It has aided the careers of many contemporary authors and counts Booker Prize-winners Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro and Anne Enright among its alumni.

3. Writers' Centre Norwich is a literature development agency specialising in talent development, international working and innovation in the worlds of writing and reading. For more information on the UNESCO City of Literature accreditation see <http://www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk/unescocityofliterature.aspx>  
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or Richard White on 01603 877177 [richard.white@writerscentrenorwich.org.uk](mailto:richard.white@writerscentrenorwich.org.uk)

4. The creative writing programme was awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Further and Higher Education in 2011 - the UK's most prestigious higher education award, given to those who can demonstrate outstanding work at a world-class level.

[www.uea.ac.uk/creativewriting](http://www.uea.ac.uk/creativewriting)