

Writing and Life



**Wed 11 May
at 4 pm**

**Room
127
Building
1455**

In my talk, I bring together perspectives from philosophy and creative writing to talk about the relationship between writing and life. First, I deal with the ethical question as to whether authoring fiction presupposes a certain kind of life. Martha Nussbaum has famously argued that literature makes us better people—so my aim will be to invert the claim and see if we need to be better people in order to write.



An Open Lecture by Heikki A. Kovalainen (Tampere, Finland)

The mute lover drives Petrus to an Institute. This is the beginning of an experiment whereby Petrus wants to make himself whole. At first, he's moved around from one building to another, until Petrus himself starts running around.

In Petrus's imagination, all the guys in the Institute, excepting himself, belong to a lower class; every one of them suffers from a handicap or excessive sensitivity. Petrus is a fool and his dream a virtual utopia: to rise above all the other guys in the Institute. It will be easy to get there once you surrender yourself to one of the guys...

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Heikki A. Kovalainen is a philosopher and an author interested in the link between fiction and thought. He holds a docentship in history of ideas, and he's currently working in the Institute for Advanced Social Research at the University of Tampere, Finland. He's previously worked as a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University, and in addition to the novel *Rudiments of the Rotten Life* (the synopsis of which is presented above), he's published two monographs on Ralph Waldo Emerson's philosophy.



Second, I discuss the tie between writing and life vis-à-vis the relationship between fact and fiction such as manifested through literary examples. In addition to examples drawn from my own prose, I will refer to Henry David Thoreau's famous experiment of living at the Walden pond—which produced *Walden* the literary classic. Finally, I will conclude with a few reflections on the linkage between writing fiction and thinking about (and researching) fiction.