

Katherine Mansfield – A Celebration

Report by Dunstan Ward

A major event held by the France–New Zealand Association during the past year was a celebration of the life and work of New Zealand’s most famous writer, Katherine Mansfield, on 12 October, a century after her death of tuberculosis at Fontainebleau on 9 January 1923, and on the eve of her birthday in Wellington on 14 October 1888. The event consisted of an evening of talks, poetry, and music – including a world première. It took place at Reid Hall, Columbia University’s Paris centre in Montparnasse, an area particularly associated with Katherine Mansfield.

An audience of over 60 people were welcomed by the France–New Zealand Association’s president Georgia Aussenac, and then addressed by Her Excellency Caroline Bilkey, the New Zealand Ambassador in France.

The programme began with the first Katherine Mansfield Menton Fellow, the poet, playwright and broadcaster Owen Leeming, who recalled his stay at Menton in 1970 and his meeting with Mansfield’s sisters, and read an ode, ‘KM’, specially written for the occasion.

Next was a talk by the 2023 Katherine Mansfield Menton Fellow, Dr Sue Wootton. A poet, fiction writer and publisher, Sue Wootton is a former physiotherapist and has a particular interest in the intersection of medicine and the humanities; she gave a moving account of Mansfield’s long and courageous struggle with increasingly debilitating illness. Sue followed her talk with a reading of her poetry.

During the interval, New Zealand wine graciously provided by the Ambassador was served by the Association’s secretary, Clément Aussenac.

The second half of the programme featured music with a special relation to Katherine Mansfield. The audience were privileged to hear the first performance of the *Sonata in E-flat Major for Viola and Piano*, written around 1922 by the New Zealand-born composer and cellist Arnold Trowell (1887–1966), to whom the young Mansfield was passionately attracted, and whose father gave her cello lessons in Wellington. The sonata was played by

Nigel Keay, the Paris-based New Zealand composer and violist, who obtained a copy of the manuscript score from Trowell's grandson, together with the French pianist Isabelle Dutel.

Nigel Keay's *Prelude*, originally written for the 2014 International Katherine Mansfield Conference in Paris, was performed by Isabelle Dutel with another French musician, the cellist Sébastien Hurtaud.

These two musicians concluded the programme with a work by Arnold Trowell published in 1908, shortly after he settled in London and Mansfield returned there: *Six Morceaux pour violoncelle avec accompagnement de piano*, 'Dedicated to my dear Friend Kathleen M. Beauchamp' (Mansfield's family name).

Altogether this was a highly successful event, organised and presented by Dunstan Ward, in collaboration with Nigel Keay for the musical content. We were fortunate in having the participation of such eminent speakers and outstanding musicians, and the use, free of charge, of the newly-refurbished Grande Salle, with its excellent piano and acoustics, thanks to the generosity of Reid Hall. The event was warmly appreciated by the large and attentive audience, a number of whom were doubtless attracted by Georgia's beautiful poster.