

Katherine Mansfield and the Art of the Short Story

Bandol, France, 10-12 June 2016

Organised by the Katherine Mansfield Society
Hosted by the town of Bandol, France
Supported by the New Zealand Embassy, Paris
and the University of Northampton, UK

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Professor Enda Duffy

University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

Professor Ailsa Cox

Edge Hill University, UK

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

This international conference celebrates the centenary of Katherine Mansfield's visit to Bandol, where 'The Aloe' (the first draft of 'Prelude'), was completed, Jan-March 1916. The genesis of this story bears witness to Mansfield's development as a modernist writer, with her everyday subject matter and privileging of modernity, her focus on small, seemingly insignificant details at the expense of comprehensive description, her preference for the vignette which provides the reader with only fleeting glimpses of people and places, and her preoccupation with colour and her emphasis on surfaces and reflections. Her employment of multiple, shifting perspectives which are both subjective and fractured also displays an affinity with Impressionism, as does the attention she pays to the ephemeral effects of artificial and natural light, weather effects, and seasonal changes.

Like painting in watercolours, short story writing may seem a deceptively easy task for those who have not attempted it, and this goes part way to explain the dismissive tone taken by so many critics towards the genre. H. E. Bates was an early-twentieth-century critic who understood this difficulty: '[t]he short story is the most difficult and exacting of all prose forms; it must not be allowed to foster the illusion [...] that its very brevity makes it easy to do'. Clare Hanson makes the claim that the short story has often been the 'chosen form of the exile [...]

who longs to return to a home country which is denied him/her', Mansfield's work being an obvious example of this tenet.

Even today, the short story is perceived to be a lesser genre, contributing to the view held by some critics of Mansfield as a minor writer. Yet, the development of her own particular free indirect discourse form of writing, linking it to literary impressionism, culminated in her position as one of the most important early exponents of the modernist short story. Her techniques include the use of symbolism and humour; themes incorporate violence, war, death, childbirth, relationships – especially in marriage – together with feminist and sexual issues.

Suggested topics for papers might include:

- The modernist short story
- KM as practitioner of the short story genre
- KM's development as a short story writer
- KM in the South of France
- KM as commentator on the short story
- KM and her legacy to the short story form
- Literary influences on KM as a short story writer
- Artistic and musical influences on KM as a short story writer
- KM, the short story and the marketplace
- Reception of KM as a short story writer

Abstracts of 200 words, together with a short bio-sketch, should be sent to the conference organisers:

Dr Gerri Kimber, University of Northampton, UK
Professor Janet Wilson, University of Northampton, UK

at kms@katherinemansfieldsociety.org

Submission deadline: 31 March 2016.