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MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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YOUNG WELLINGTON WRITERS RECOGNISED

Samuel Marsden Collegiate School student Siobhán Costello was named the winner of the 2024 Mansfield Short Story Award at an event held for finalists at the National Library of New Zealand on Thursday 26 November. Costello's story 'Us' charts the waxing and waning of a friendship from childhood to teenage years and the effect of mental health challenges on relationships.

The annual competition is open to Year 12 and 13 students in the Wellington region. A shortlist of ten finalists was judged by Wellington writer Brannavan Gnanalingam, who said the winning story by Year 13 Costello had a "beautiful rhythm and structure, which built up to a powerful ending. There was real skill in the way little details accumulated over the course of the story and showcases some impressive talent."

Speaking at the awards, Gnanalingam said he was honoured to be asked to judge but found awards difficult as ranking something creative like writing was so subjective. He was impressed by the talent displayed by the shortlisted stories, saying "Writing is something you get better at with more practice, so I'm actually quite jealous of the talent and skill these writers show at such a young age."

Runner up was Eden Ingerson, Year 13 at Upper Hutt College, with 'Unuhanga Taniwha' which draws on the story of Ngake and Whātaimai, the taniwha of Te Whanganui-a-Tara, to explore a friendship. Gnanalingam noted that the use of Ngake and Whātaimai to frame the story added thematic resonance and there was a "deep sadness that underpinned this moving story."

Two stories were highly commended. 'The Fox' inhabits the mind of its titular character whose mantra is "Sleep, hunt, eat; repeat" and Gnanalingam praised the "impressive and tight control of language" by Year 12 Hutt Valley High School student Rosa Watt. 'You Don't Know Your Own Name, But You Know Mine' by Year 12 Wellington College student Thomas Beaglehole-Smith was inspired by a song about visiting someone suffering from a neurodegenerative disease. Gnanalingam described the story as having a "satisfying and well-earned ending."

The award is run by Katherine Mansfield House & Garden, the birthplace of internationally acclaimed Modernist writer Katherine Mansfield. It is supported by a bequest from longtime Wellington English teacher Gay Saker, whose children Nicola and John were at the awards.

With a \$500 cash prize, the Director of Katherine Mansfield House & Garden, Cherie Jacobson, sees the annual award as a great way to encourage young writers in the region to have a go. "Some students enter stories they have written for school assignments, but many write something especially for the competition and take inspiration from all sorts of things, even video games!"

As well as celebrating the life and work of Mansfield, Katherine Mansfield House & Garden promotes reading and writing through initiatives such as the annual Mansfield Short Story Award and school holiday creative writing workshops. “Encouraging young writers and offering opportunities for them to develop their skills is a really important part of honouring Mansfield’s legacy – we love seeing previous finalists’ names in print elsewhere and being part of growing the next generation of leading Aotearoa writers,” says Jacobson.

Guests at the event were able to view a range of Mansfield’s personal belongings and manuscript material on display at the National Library as part of the exhibition ‘*A child of the sun*’: *Katherine Mansfield’s last year*.

“We are very grateful to the National Library for hosting the event,” says Jacobson. “As the home of the most significant Mansfield collection in the world, it’s the perfect venue and the opportunity for the finalists to learn more about Mansfield through the poignant exhibition was very special.”

The stories of all 10 finalists have been published on the Katherine Mansfield House & Garden website, the winner will also be published on the Verb Wellington website.

ENDS – contact details follow.

Photographs supplied. Photographer: Emily Brown.

Image 1: Judge Brannavan Gnanalingam (back row, second from right) with all ten finalists.

Image 2: Judge Brannavan Gnanalingam with winner Siobhán Costello.

Image 4: Judge Brannavan Gnanalingam with (L-R) highly commended Rosa Watt, runner-up Eden Ingerson, winner Siobhán Costello and highly commended Thomas Beaglehole-Smith.

Finalists’ stories can be found at: www.katherinemansfield.com/creative-corner/km-short-story-competition. The winning story will also be published on the Verb Wellington website: www.verbwellington.nz.

The annual Mansfield Short Story Award has a \$500 cash prize and is made possible by the Gay Saker Bequest. Gay Saker was a Wellington teacher of English and reading for over 20 years and a great admirer of the writing of Katherine Mansfield. The awards event was supported by the Oroya and Melvin Day Trust. Oroya Day founded the Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Society that established Katherine Mansfield House & Garden and her husband Melvin, a renowned New Zealand artist, was also a strong supporter of the house.

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