



Katherine Mansfield House & Garden
25 Tinakori Road, Thorndon, Wellington 6011
PO Box 12006, Thorndon, Wellington
(04) 473 7268
director@katherinemansfield.com
www.katherinemansfield.com

MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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STANDOUT VOICES OF YOUNG WRITERS CELEBRATED

Wellington College student Kael Kincaid was named the winner of the 2025 Mansfield Short Story Award at an event held for finalists at the National Library of New Zealand on Tuesday 9 September. Kincaid's story 'The Boy Who Wouldn't Bow' was described by judge Anthony Lapwood as a "commanding and clear-eyed story [that] follows college student Te Ariki as he fights to maintain his mana in a colonial schooling system."

Lapwood commended the Year 13 student's skilful control of language and dramatic tension, "grounded in a strong sense of identity and an energetic voice, the story pits the risk of punishment against the chance for progress."

The annual competition is open to Year 12 and 13 students in the Wellington region. A shortlist of twelve finalists was judged by Lapwood, an award-winning Wellington writer, who was unwell on the night so beamed in from his home via Zoom. Lapwood told the students that to be shortlisted from a record number of entries is a huge deal, "It's a recognition not only of your skill, but of having a voice that stands out. Your superpower as writers is to help others see the world, and themselves, in a new light. The proof of this superpower is clear in the pieces I read – rich in feeling and insight, and wide-ranging in style and subject."

Runner up was Emily Liu, Year 13 at Samuel Marsden Collegiate School, with 'Remembrance' which charts the rise of technology from present-day tools of convenience to near-future autonomous devices of coercion and compliance. Lapwood noted that "While the story has terrific fun cataloguing its dystopic tech – in delightfully inventive and precise turns of phrase – like the best science fiction, its focus remains on the human questions, including technology's slow erasure of long-held ideals about freedom, truth, connection, and contentment."

Two stories were highly commended. 'A Held Breath' by Year 12 Samuel Marsden Collegiate School student Marama Hambly explores an estrangement between a grandmother and her grandchild. Lapwood explained that "The success and beauty of this atmospheric piece rests on its many carefully preserved details and small wonders." 'Māhina's Bridge' follows Haeata, a young woman struggling with the loss of her nan, who is talked back from the brink by an elderly stranger on a bridge above a dry river. Lapwood praised the story by Year 13 Wellington Girls' College student Keiana Roffey as "Compelling and sophisticated, this story approaches its difficult subject with a mature eye."

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 daughter Nicola was at the awards.

With a \$500 cash prize, the Director of Katherine Mansfield House & Garden, Cherie Jacobson, says this year a record number of entries was received. "The quality was also really high, it's exciting that so many students are expressing themselves through writing, especially at a time when there are concerns about literacy levels and how technology is impacting creativity." The rules of the competition include that stories must not be generated with the assistance of AI.

As well as celebrating the life and work of Mansfield, Katherine Mansfield House & Garden promotes reading and writing through initiatives such as the annual short story award and school holiday creative writing workshops. "We love seeing the next generation of writers through these initiatives, Mansfield herself had stories published from a young age, so giving young people an opportunity to develop their skills and get recognition for their work is a great way to honour Mansfield's legacy."

As the home of the foremost Mansfield collection in the world, the National Library is the perfect location for the awards. "We love being at the Library, for some students it's the first time they've visited and gained insight into the work that the Library does and the resources it offers."

Guests at the event were able to view some of Mansfield's personal belongings on display from the Katherine Mansfield House & Garden collection. "Seeing objects that Mansfield used – like a postcard she sent home to Wellington from London and treasured volume of Milton's poetry – helps to make her a real and relatable figure."

The stories of all 12 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: Stephen A'Court.

Image 1: Judge Anthony Lapwood on screen with all twelve finalists.

Image 2: Judge Anthony Lapwood on screen with winner Kael Kincaid.

Image 3: Winner Kael Kincaid and runner-up Emily Liu look at the Katherine Mansfield objects on display.

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.

For more information contact:

Cherie Jacobson, Director, Katherine Mansfield House & Garden

director@katherinemansfield.com

(04) 473 7268 | 021 125 8634