

Poem for Katherine Mansfield

The name Katherine Mansfield heard
so many years ago
meant little to me
where I lived no one read

No need to travel far
the hills the forest there
where you were born with your sisters
the rainy days have a special beauty

Sometimes leaving is a duty
beauty love your own country
are not enough for a soul
striving for freedom and greatness

How I love your eyes
the way they gaze on things
nothing seems to hold them long
in them burns the urge to love

This brother perhaps
had he remained
were it not for that pointless war
would have stayed with you longer

You were suffocating here you said
among these uncultured people
but in England you were proud
to claim your New Zealandness

Across from the Chinese embassy
on the hills twenty-five hectares
the botanic garden where I imagine you all

sisters brothers parents happy
the pines of southern France
under the July sun
in those years too soon gone
reminded you of Wellington

In your city there were always
people to love you
at a meeting your face on a poster
so so beautiful

Soon a writer will come
from New Zealand perhaps Wellington
to live there where you lived in Menton
writing your life into history

Now that I know you
Thinking always of Wellington
Tinakori Hill the solitary hours
I must ask myself, where would you be, here?

unfinished

translated by Sian Robyns and Jean Anderson