Death Stalks the Doll’s House: how a season of epidemics shaped Katherine Mansfield and her world

Redmer Yska

In 1888, writer Katherine Mansfield (Kathleen Beauchamp) was born in Wellington, amidst a wave of epidemics caused by poor sanitation. Between 1886 and 1891, 548 residents died from infectious disease chiefly typhoid, including several of Beauchamp’s family. The paper posits that the climate of fear created by the epidemics sent families like the Beauchamps out to safer rural environments like South Karori. The family did not return to Thorndon until a sewage scheme was completed. Placing Mansfield’s early years in historical context, with a particular focus on public health issues in a colonial urban setting, offers a new reading of themes of illness, death, grief, class and refuge in her writing.

Redmer Yska is a Wellington writer and public historian. His books include NZ Green, the Story of Marijuana in New Zealand (1990); All Shook Up, the Flash Bodgie and the Rise of the NZ Teenager in the 1950s (1993); An Errand Of Mercy, Captain Jacob Eckhoff and the Loss of the Kakanui (2001); Wellington: Biography of a City (2006); and NZ Truth: the Rise and Fall of the Peoples’ Paper (2010).

Friday 29 November 2013 12.30 to 1.30
Small Lecture Theatre  ALL WELCOME!