

By Melanie Wicks

The organisers of **Mani Lit Fest** look back at 2018 ...

A new event for the area, **Mani Lit Fest** almost invented itself. It began one lazy day last summer, with a cup of coffee in the shady garden of Patriko Bar in Stoupa, and a conversation with historical novelist **Carol McGrath**. A part-time resident of the area, Carol had previously done a 'Meet the Writer' event at the bar, where she had talked about her first novel 'The Hand-Fasted Wife' (volume one of her Daughters of Hastings trilogy). Carol having recently published her fourth novel, 'The Woman in the Shadows', the talk turned to the possibility of her doing another similar event at the bar. Less than an hour later, the idea had somehow grown into a full day event of workshops, talks, performances and literary-themed cocktails, and we realised we suddenly had a Lit Fest to organise.

The first Mani Lit Fest took place on 11th October 2018 and was a great success, thanks to the remarkable generosity of the participants, who gave their time and freely shared their expertise and experience. A big thank you is due to Christina and Irini and all of the staff of Patriko, who went out of their way to make the day a success and were very helpful with realising our ideas for literary-themed food and drinks.

The event kicked off mid-morning, and the day was occupied with creative writing workshops on the subjects of poetry, short stories and novel-plotting. Thanks to Alizon Robertson, Sarah Bower, Neil Fawcett, Stephanie Rouse and Heather Worsley, for running such excellent and highly enjoyable workshops. The evening session began towards sunset, as we launched our newly-created cocktails onto an unsuspecting audience, from the ouzo based 'Ill Met by Moonlight', the chilli laced 'Fahrenheit 451' and the floral notes of 'The Secret Garden'. Our most successful creation however seemed to be the gin-based cocktail 'Woman in the Shadows', many of which were imbibed as Carol McGrath delivered a talk on her book of the same name, the story of Elizabeth Cromwell (wife of Thomas Cromwell of 'Wolf Hall' fame) with a fascinating background of cloth merchants and the use of textiles in Tudor England. Next Sarah Bower read her short story 'Metamorpho', written specially for the Lit Fest and inspired by the mythology of the area. Having a story written specially for us was an incredible and unexpected gift. Sarah's story can be found on our website, in the 'Lit Fest Library'. Other highlights of the day were events by the group 'Write Club the Podcast', 'Mani Memoir Group' readings, and an 'authors' panel' question and answer session. The finale of the event was a poetry performance by Neil Fawcett, (who sometimes leaves off writing poetry in the blue shed at the bottom of his garden in South Manchester to spend some time in the Mani). Can a poetry performance be described in prose? You just had to be there. It was moving, it was brilliant, it was extraordinary. It was the perfect end to a great day. It was enhanced by a joint reading from the works of the Greek poet Cavafy, in both Greek and English, Neil being joined by Maria Xanthea, whose melodious voice reading Cavafy brought a touch of mystery to the end of the performance as the light faded and the event came to a close.

Short Story Competition 2018

The winner of our 2018 short story competition is Martha Sowerby for her story 'The Turquoise Doorway'. (Available on www.manilifest.com in the 'Lit Fest Library'). Martha lives in Scotland, and has been a regular visitor to the Mani region for the last fifteen years or so. With her story Martha wanted to evoke that feeling of mystery engendered as we wander through a deserted Mani village, wondering what forgotten stories lie behind the high walls and the closed doorways with their faded peeling paintwork. The judges felt

that she had captured some of that spirit of the Mani.

Thank you to our three judges, Mat Dean, Carol McGrath and Alizon Robertson for their time and careful consideration of the entries. With their permission we would like to share some of their comments on the winning story:

‘the picture that the author painted of the village of Vathia ran true with my experience of being there, as well as adding to the mysterious quality of the piece. It achieved the very difficult task with so few words at the author’s disposal, of drawing me in’

‘I loved the past present comparison, I loved the ending. It was intriguing.’

‘I too wanted to know more about Bea and the mystery of her grandfather’.