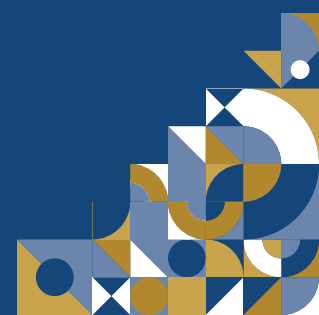


**Peter
Cowan**
Writers Centre Inc.

**600 word short story
competition**

Winners Magazine

2023





Judge's Report

by David Allan-Petale



Grateful thanks to David Allan-Petale for the many hours spent on judging this year's competition. His insight and dedication in choosing our 2023 winners, and for being a joy to work with, is greatly appreciated by all at the Peter Cowan Writers Centre.

David's report on his judging process is below.

I'm a messy reader. Always a few books on the go, and many unfinished – a bookmark at the point where I know I'll pick up the thread again. This haphazard way of reading is one of my booky pleasures. The other is rereading books that have made their mark on me.

Many people I know have told me they never watch the same film twice, and nor do they reread a book, even if it's one they greatly enjoyed. Each to their own. But I think they're missing out. Ageing is the only form of time travel we have, so it pays to avoid nostalgia and stay current. In a similar way, rereading can be a beguiling kind of time shift too. A rebellious book you may have loved at 18 like *Catcher in the Rye* can morph into something quite different when you have two kids and a mortgage. But the great joy of rereading a book is that it reveals new knowledge, darker shadows and sunnier uplands; rooms and cellar doors you may not have noticed in your first visit.

The brevity of short fiction, and in particular the Peter Cowan 600 Word Short Story competition, lends itself to reading to the end. And that short, sharp, to the point requirement of this literary form also invites the pleasure of rereading.

Judging this competition was a great honour, and I feel very privileged to have been trusted with its delivery. There's no strict blueprint for how to judge it. Just a list of required results and some hefty files containing all the entries for all the categories. Away you go. This is benevolently empowering, so I decided not to judge this competition purely as a writer, or as someone who teaches writing, but also as a reader. Someone who loves stories and what they can do. So, beyond seeking literary acumen, my yardstick was that I read the stories that hooked me to the end, and then I read those stories again and again to select the winners and standouts.

This was enjoyable for two reasons – I could enjoy the standouts stories anew, and gain an appreciation for the words, sentences, styles, and techniques each writer deployed to make their narratives hum. There's no greater pleasure for a passionate writer and reader to inhale a good tale and then go back and discover the word or image the whole thing hinged upon. Or something I missed. The creative and the technical in balance.

To me, this is the essence of great writing. That it's effortless for the reader to get to the bottom of the page, and that another look reveals hidden depths. To be able to do this in such a short format where every word counts is a testament to the skill, vision, and may I say courage of the writers who entered this competition.

There were 249 entries this year: 130 Seniors, 12 Youth, 86 general entries and 21 Students who attend Belridge Secondary Education Support Centre. From the 249 entries there were also 80 Novice entries. I'm told the oldest writer is 97, and that the youngest students wrote their stories without any assistance.

This is a sublime demonstration of why writing matters. Because it's a place for everyone. It also reminds me of how a few years ago, I had the luck of interviewing the great WA writer Kim Scott (whose work I reread), who told me something another great WA writer Elizabeth Jolley had told him – that literature is a place where people can meet.

I'm honoured to have met everyone who entered this vital competition on the page and am delighted to share the winners' stories.





Julian Cowan Youth Award

Winner: The Perfect Cadenza

by Joanna Wang

The scent of fresh carved wood and rosin tickled my nose. As I climbed the stairs with my violin, memories replayed in my mind. My heart vibrated alongside the delicate instrument each time I played, and together we became the heartbeat of the room. Witness to my successes and failures, it nurtured my heart and helped me grow. My soul, my pride, and my passion embellished my music. Today was the day to continue that musical legacy.

As I walked into the audition rehearsal room, I gazed in fright at the mass of musicians ready to earn a spot in the orchestra. Each and every violin sounded with a full, deep tone. Musicians were playing complex repertoires at such high levels; it caused me great discomfort as my confidence began to sink lower and lower.

Plagued by whispers as they slithered into my head, thoughts of There is no way I can succeed, I am not good enough, echoed constantly like a never-ending Arpeggio.

As I took a deep breath, I steadied myself and practised the hardest section of my piece. The Cadenza. Complicated double stops, rhythm, and notes eluded me like a deer escaping a hunter. Sweat dripped from my forehead as my fingers slipped on the strings. My intonation was all over the place. Maybe I wasn't ready for this audition.

"Jo," the adjudicator called.

She sat firmly, with her legs crossed and upright. Thick, black glasses high up her nose. Her black suit buttoned up neatly and her hair tied back into a bun. Her sharp eyes squinted in the sunlight which flooded through the windows.

"You may start," she announced.

Incoherent thoughts crawled into my mind again. I'm not as good as them. What chance do I ever have of getting into the orchestra! My shaky hands gripped my violin, but I took a deep breath and began.

Suddenly, I was comforted by the violin's smooth, polished wood. This instrument had been with me through my ups and downs. When I cried, it cried too. When I cheered,

it cheered too. When I thought of giving up, it pushed me to keep moving forward. My violin kept my spirit alive through its uplifting legatos. We were spirit sisters; I wasn't going to give up on 'her' because 'she' had never given up on me.

Holding my violin to my chin, a rush of confidence swelled inside me as I started playing the familiar notes of a piece, I had practised hundreds of times. Playing through my repertoire confidently, I reached the Cadenza. The part I had been dreading. My fingers started to weaken, and the voice inside my head returned. You're not good enough.

But then, my heart swelled as my violin called to me. As I played the familiar notes, I had practised hundreds of times. We had played this together, we knew this. Taking a deep breath, together my heart and my violin led my fingers through the Cadenza.

As I finished the last chord, I glanced up at the adjudicator. Her harsh face had softened, and her eyes were closed. It was as if she didn't realise, I had finished. When she opened her eyes, I saw them glistening with tears.

"Thank you, Jo," her voice broke with emotion.

I left the room feeling uplifted.

A week later, I was accepted into the orchestra. Words cannot describe the joy I felt; I instinctively grabbed my violin, my friend, and proceeded to play. The whispers from the audition returned but this time, it resonated with me in total harmony. It was the perfect Cadenza.

Judge's Comment:

A totally realised and tautly told story that was revealing of character, driven steadily in narrative, and wrapped up as a self-contained moment in what feels like a much wider world. Very good writing, showing promising talent for wider development in longer forms, or sharpening for short fiction.





Open Category

Joint First Place: Two Men in a Cinema

by Ivan Terrence

It was a Wednesday morning and the local arthouse cinema was empty. I sat by myself in the shadows of the back corner with a boysenberry choc bomb, a cone of ice cream dipped in chocolate, nibbling at its hardened jube on top. I'd arrived early, not even the ads had started yet, when suddenly a body burst through the door.

It was a guy in baseball cap and jeans. I briefly saw his lean figure as cast by the light from the open doorway. He quickly scoped out the seats, neck flitting back and forth like a bird's, before choosing to sit in one against the far wall. The lights dimmed and curtains parted.

We restore memories, not windows.

Ad for a local glazier.

We haven't disappointed in thirty years.

Local Italian restaurant

Trust us to treat you like family.

Mother-and-son realtor team.

I tackled the half-remaining remnants of my choc bomb, now a ravaged white lunar site in a worn and failing cone, whilst discreetly watching the other man. His feet were up on chair in front of him, cap on indoors. He flicked around on his phone, its harsh glare ruining the dark of the cinema. Then the trailers.

Let the Sun Shine In, French rom-com starring the timeless Juliette Binoche.

Licorice Pizza, seventies-set teen romance by American master, Paul Thomas Anderson.

Memories of Murder, rerun of old detective film by Oscar-winner Bong Joon Ho.

Is this how it happened, just two men alone in a cinema? As if getting ready, the other guy put his feet down and took off his hat and packed away his phone.

My choc bomb was gone. I licked my lips, the edge of them chappy, then gently dabbed a serviette over them. The attendant shut the door of the cinema. Instantly the

room grew dark. Onto the screen beamed the first blackened and grainy frames of the film itself. Then the credits, white text on black, a rising chord underneath. I'd seen the trailer to this film, *End of the Century*, whilst seeing an outdoor film with my friends last week. It looked good, two European guys in their thirties hooking up on holiday in Barcelona.

Again. Hot LED glare against the darkness.

Couldn't he stop himself? Didn't he understand basic screen etiquette? By rights I should have gone over there and confiscated the phone. And what would he have done? Would he have remonstrated, sought out the usher? Pushed me or threatened me? Would I have held my line, gotten physical, pinned him down to the ground, his warm body vibrating between my legs?

I would have leaned in, clasped my wet mouth over his, dug around for a bit with my tongue. Then taken his shirt off, taken mine off, pressed our hairy chests together whilst lying on the floor. Someone would have undone someone else's belt.

Judge's Comment:

A story of what seems to be plain, ordinary prose explodes into something far more complex, far more nuanced, and on rereading takes on even greater layers of atmosphere. This tautly told and thoughtfully crafted story of sexual awakening and longing hides itself cleverly within steady observation of manners and of the narrator's surroundings, only revealing his true desire when it's almost too late to tell us and only available to him upon reflection – a rush that anyone who has desired anything but didn't know how to take the first step will recognise.





Open Category

Joint First Place: Whispers Between Trees by Cassie Hamer

When the council comes to inspect the damage, they won't concede it's the tree root causing her house to crack.

To Lyn it's obvious. The fissure in the pavement runs directly from the tree to where her wall has cracked. But she understands. The council does not want to pay. Repairs will be expensive.

'I like the tree,' she says. 'But it has to go.'

It gives lovely shade in summer but drops those horrible spiky balls that make her walker bounce around. Maybe if she breaks her hip the council will take out the tree? They'd be less comfortable about that than causing her lovely terrace to fall down.

Bugger you, she thinks. My house was here first.

'I'm ringing the builder today.'

She hands her son a shopping list that he reads out like a parking fine. 'Strawberry icecream. White sugar. A packet of butter. Chocolate ginger. Crème caramels. Seriously? This is a dessert menu.'

She's 88. Two fat ladies in bingo speak. One fat lady in reality. Who gives a fuck.

That night, she examines her trunk in the mirror. The scar on her breast from the tumour and the one across her pubic bone where the non-breathing baby was pulled out. Gravity has ravaged skin and swathes of it droop towards the earth. She's gone to seed, as her mother would say. Old cow.

Later, there's a storm and she lies on her bed, her life raft, in the coffin pose. The house creaks like a wooden sloop crossing the roaring 40s, timbers expanding and contracting as they bash against wild currents.

We are tougher than nature.

Two weeks later, without warning, the council arborist turns up with a hardhat, ropes and a tree removal order. When he takes up some floorboards, they peer in at the root,

fat as a boa constrictor that's swallowed a goat. Lyn offers tea and an Anzac biscuit. 'Sorry, gotta get a move on. Lots on today. Why they ever planted these trees...' He stops, pulls away from the concession. 'Did you know they communicate through their roots? Slow electrical pulses. Like warnings.'

Lyn did not know this and it's interesting but they both know the tree has to go.

The chainsaw starts up with a throat clearing growl and when he applies it to the tree, the pitch is a scream that twangs horrendously through her hearing aids.

She goes back inside, drowns out the dead thuds of branches hitting the ground by watching her favourite TV quiz show, The Chase. A chubby man is asked the year of the Melbourne Olympics. 1953, he says. Idiot. She clicks him off, closes her eyes, sees Ron Clarke singe his arm off as he lights the cauldron.

When her eyes open again, it's dusk. Did she sleep? Maybe. The line between consciousness and the beyond grows blurrier every day. The sky is strawberry ice cream, and she wants to see the arborist's work. Outside, sapling perfumes the air. Where once were branches is now naked, unfiltered sky. The stump sits like a wooden stool. Rings of its history morph in neutral tones from vanilla to chocolate. Lyn sits, shivers though it's not cold. The space, the emptiness, is unbearable.

Oh, she thinks. What now?

It comes to her. A new tree. If the council doesn't plant a replacement, then she will. Maybe even the same type, and who cares about the roots? When they're big enough to cause a problem, it won't be hers.

She'll be bony ash, returned to the earth.

Conveying whispers between trees.

Judge's Comment:

A story that burrowed into me. Its mix of beautiful prose, stark imagery, and honest character drives the narrative of an elderly woman having a nuisance tree cut down, then regretting her actions in the unknown time she has left to live. What good can we take from our time? What is our legacy when all will return to the soil? So much philosophy and thought in this beautiful story.





Open Category

Second Place: Taking Control

by Helen Lyne

and Winner of our Seniors Category

It's the final bell on Friday afternoon. Here comes the double-up wave: Year 12 Maths boys. They crash into the corridor and hurtle in my direction. I stand my ground. Students surf around me as if already on their boards. The ones in my French class shout, 'Bon week-end, Madame!' They thunder out of the building.

The dread will start soon. There should be silence but raised voices are coming from the Maths room. I recognise the snide twang of Sandy Warren, the Maths teacher and the gruffness of Joe Morris, the school's star rugby player. Other teachers say Joe's a useless student and a thug. At the beginning of the year, I gave him a list of rugby vocabulary in French. I had to look up every word. None of my students has ever learnt a list so fast!

Suddenly there's a thump, like a body falling on the ground, and a high-pitched gasp. What's going on? Should I get someone? A gurgling sound. Holding my sides, I limp quickly into the classroom.

Sandy's lying on the teacher's table, feet dangling, arms flailing. Joe's left hand is on his throat, his right fist raised.

I might be a mousy little person, but one tool I've always used to advantage with students is my voice. It's melodious and when I want, I can make it sexy. I'm not about to make it sexy now!

'Joe,' I say firmly.

He doesn't look at me, but his right arm freezes.

'Joe. Don't...'

'He says my exam mark's rubbish and he'll get me kicked off the team.'

His right arm swings back.

'Joe!'

I run, I actually run - not bad with cracked ribs! I put my hand on his raised arm.
Not that

I could stop the downward blow. His muscle is hard like sun-warmed stone. His eyes flick onto mine. I've got him!

'You're eighteen. You hit him - it's a criminal offence and you can say good-bye to a footie career.'

I wait. A few seconds can feel very long. As gently as if I were a child, Joe pushes me away from the table. Grasping fistfuls of Sandy's shirt, he jerks him upright and sets him on his feet. Sandy's trembling. Fear or fury? Sandy's taller than Joe, but skinny and unfit. The humiliation of being seen at the mercy of someone shorter will intensify his vengefulness. Joe will need protection. I'll make sure he gets it.

Sandy glares at me with hatred and Joe with venom. I'm used to both. I gesture for Joe to exit the classroom ahead of me and we walk silently to the street. A car full of thumping music, surfboards and students is waiting for him. Before getting in, he looks down at me and, with chivalrous courtesy surprising in a supposed thug, says, 'Merci Madame. Bon week-end!'

No, I won't be having a good weekend. With all its turbulence and noise it's school that's safe, not the house where I live. And yet, as I sit on the bus, the dread doesn't paralyse me as it usually does. I hadn't been passive. I'd taken control!

I get off the bus before my stop, cross the road and wait for the bus going in the opposite direction. I'll spend the weekend in a backpackers' place at Manly Beach. It'll be full of young people. They don't scare me. Some of my students' parents are lawyers. On Monday I'll get some phone numbers. Taking control. I've started.

Judge's Comment:

A sharply told story with well controlled action, a skilful use of narrative to examine an external character and deft use of shadow and revelation to hint at deeper meanings for the narrator.





Open Category

Third Place: At the end of the Word

by Doug Jacquier

The man had sensed the teenage boy was out there, even before the dog smelled him and hunted him into the clearing, nipping at his heels.

‘Call your bloody dog off!’ the boy snapped.

The man looked at the dog and it sloped off to drink water from a tin bowl.

‘You oughta have him chained up.’

The man turned his back on the boy and went to sit in the old armchair under the lean-to veranda. He took a sip of tea from his enamel mug, picked up a book, opened it at the page marked by a feather and began to read.

‘Can I have something to drink?’

The man didn’t look up but nodded in the direction of the rainwater tank. A tin mug dangled from a rusty chain on the tap.

‘Jesus, mate, I’m not that desperate. What about a coffee?’

The man continued to read.

The boy began to walk towards the house. The dog moved into his path, with its lip curled and emanating a guttural sound. The boy groaned before moving towards the tank.

When he’d finished, he sat on a tree stump and looked around the clearing. Apart from the small house, there was a chook run, a veg patch enclosed by chicken wire, and an outhouse.

At dusk, the man put down his book and entered the house, leaving the door open. Shortly after, a light appeared in the window and wispy smoke began to emerge from the chimney.

The boy ventured as close as the dog would allow him and called out ‘Any chance of a feed?’

Just before dark, the man appeared, dropped a blanket on the armchair and put a plate of steaming stew, with a spoon sticking out of it, on the veranda floor. The dog

emerged and settled on a pile of hessian bags between the chair and the door. The man returned inside, closed the door with the thunk of a heavy bolt and the light was extinguished.

The dog allowed the boy to pick up the plate and sit in the chair to eat. After eating, the boy stared briefly into the total darkness. He closed his eyes and wrapped the blanket tightly around his thin frame.

...

The boy woke to the sound of caroling magpies and a vehicle navigating its way up the twisting track to his house. The man was up. He pointed to the bush and the boy took off.

When it arrived, a Police officer stepped out and said 'G'day. Sergeant Cameron Thomas, Yarra Valley Police. Just wondering if you could help me.' The man said nothing.

Thomas produced a photo and showed it to the man. 'Recognise this lad?' The man's face remained immobile.

Thomas noticed an ancient and battered Land Rover. 'Do you have drivers licence?' The man retrieved a wallet from his back pocket and extracted a plastic card which he proffered to Thomas. He wrote down the details in his notebook, took a photo of the card with his phone and returned the licence to the man.

Thomas climbed into his vehicle and started the engine but before he drove off he said through the open window, 'If you do come across that young bloke, be careful. I think he could be dangerous.'

After Thomas left, the man returned to his armchair on the veranda, picked up his book and apart from turning the pages, he and his dog sat perfectly still. They knew the boy would not come back.

Judge's Comment:

Haunting. Brilliantly realised sense of place, and so much character drawn from so little description. Good, hard writing.





Novice Category

Winner: At Tipping Point

by Jamie Erak

Eunice sat quietly on the scorching pavement outside the Oceania 101 skyscraper. It was a very hot day, almost fifty degrees Celsius. Only the urgency of the present situation could make her hold a cardboard sign for six hours in the CBD of Sydney.

Eunice wanted to be a scientist, but thanks to climate change, there was little left to explore. Although she passed on the warnings of the world's scientists, no-one seemed to have time for her. Even her mother, an executive of the Pacific Petroleum Company, disapproved of how Eunice questioned her line of work. Eunice hadn't given up, however. Every Friday, she got off the school bus five stops early at the CBD to protest against fossil-fuel exploration.

"Eunice, what are you doing here?" a familiar voice sounded, causing Eunice to jump to her feet and drop her sign. Terrified, she turned around slowly to see her mother, dressed neatly in her business suit. As she caught sight of the sign Eunice had been holding, her expression of shock was replaced by one of fury.

"So, this is why you skip school, so you can tear down my life's work!?" Despite her fear, Eunice faced her mother as she shouted. "All the other children gave up, why do you persist!" Eunice looked defiantly into her mother's eyes. "Because the world isn't supposed to be like this! Fifty-degree heat, category-six cyclones, citywide evacuations, this was unheard of ten years ago! Your work is steering humanity off a cliff!"

There was silence. Several tense moments passed, before Eunice's mother spoke in a voice of forced calm. "You need to be careful about what you say." Eunice didn't respond. "Mining has given us so much, Eunice. Not just to me and you, but to everyone. The world needs power, now more than ever. We owe everything to fossil fuels."

Before Eunice could think of responding, however, the noises around them were drowned out as an emergency siren sounded. An automated voice echoed through the streets of Sydney. "Ocean surge incoming. Proceed to your nearest shelter immediately."

In a matter of seconds, the panic set in. Masses of people poured onto the streets, pushing and shouting, and Eunice found herself separated from her mother. She looked desperately for a disaster shelter, and saw it, about one-hundred metres up the street. As she began struggling towards the massive concrete building, she felt water rising around her feet.

The water was warm, almost hot enough to burn her, and already she was wading through it. As people used any means available to get to higher ground, panic overcame Eunice as she realised how quickly the water rose around her. The shelter was less than thirty metres away, but the water was waist-deep, and the current was getting stronger. Eunice felt the heat of the water against her skin, and a piece of debris narrowly missed her. She knew the current would overpower her in seconds, but the entrance was metres away. She reached out for the metal door, just as her feet were swept away from the ground.

As Eunice fell, she felt a strong grip on her arm. Someone was pulling her into the shelter. Eunice lowered her feet. Her mother stood beside her, sealing the door. They looked at each other for several long moments, until Eunice's mother spoke. "We'll be staying here for a while, Eunice, let's get upstairs." Eunice could only nod. As they followed the lights side-by-side, Eunice noticed the plaque on the wall. 'Circular Quay Disaster Shelter – supported by the Pacific Petroleum Company'.

Judge's Comment:

Really excellent dystopia with clever world-building and a sardonic endpoint. Written with passion that smoulders.





Student in a Secondary Education Support Centre Category

Winner: A Present for Ganyu

by Lila

In the beautiful afternoon in Liyue harbor in China I was walking around in Liyue to give a nice present for Miss Ganyu, I found Qiqi she was waiting for me “ traveler!” Said Qiqi “ yes “ I said “ can we get a present for Miss Ganyu Traveler?” Asked Qiqi “ of course “ I said Qiqi smiled a little bit and I decided to help out. Miss Ganyu is a qilin whose element is cryo like ice. She is a hopping zombie, very friendly, wears a Chinese hat and is always sleepy.

“ how about we get flowers for Ganyu as a present for her “ I said “ yes she loves flowers it because she’s a Qilin “ said Qiqi. I asked Qiqi what kinda flower she likes “ she likes Qingxin Flowers !” Said Qiqi “Ok, she likes Qingxin Flower right?” I Asked “ yes “ said Qiqi , Meanwhile we are searching for the flowers for Ganyu and we went to a meadow outside of Liyue harbor Qiqi found the flowers. We picked the flowers and wrapped them in paper for Miss Ganyu

“ Traveler I found them “ said Qiqi “ exultant job Qiqi , mission accomplished “ I said, we went back to Liyue harbor and we found Miss Ganyu she was sitting the bridge looking at the ocean view. She thought it was very pretty. “ miss Ganyu!” She looked at me “ hey traveler how you doing “ Said Ganyu she stood up and walks up towards me “ How you two doing ? “ asked Ganyu “ we’re good and I got you a little something what you love Lady Ganyu” I showed the Qingxin Flower to Miss Ganyu, she was surprised “ this is so beautiful how do you find the Qingxin Flowers ?” Said Ganyu “ I found them in the meadow with Qiqi “ I said Ganyu smiled “ aww thank you “ she gave me a hug and Qiqi it was a best gift for her. They went back home and thought of more gifts.

Judge’s Comment:

Great opening. A bright story with good back and forth and some hinted characters, well done.



Open Category

Highly Commended

Dark Matter by Rob Johnson – *Excellent foreshadowing and subtext.*

The Eternal Dance by Don Linke– *Great action and emotion control.*

Sixty-five and fearless by Kellie M. Cox – *Great ending, vivid description.*

Public Transport by Margo Daly – *A thrill of a story. Buzzing with honest life.*

Freckles of Light by Alison Davis– *Quite beautifully defiant. Really stayed with me.*

Innocence Lost by Angela Dilley – *A gut punch of a story – very powerful. Great control.*

Doggy Bag by Maria Bonar – *Dark and aptly done.*

Bush Bashing by Caitlin Mahoney– *Subtext and character excellently fused with landscape.*

I Carry Your Heart by Anne Blair – *Dahl-like and hilarious. Didn't see that coming!*





Seniors

Shortlist

Escape by Wendy Stackhouse – *Haunting and lyrical – an enigmatic story of great imagination and stark, controlled prose fusing fantasy to coastal prose.*

Hellfire Pass by Ian Laver – *Taut and unsparing, this portrait of memory and mateships gifted an ending of courageous sorrow as good as the best literature.*

Gordon by Jan Hayes – *A wonderful passage of impressionism and narrative, told with great empathy and observation, with well-controlled narration and perspective.*

At the end of the Word by Doug Jacquier – *Haunting. Brilliantly realised sense of place, and so much character drawn from so little description. Good, hard writing.*

Jimmy D by Brendan Kelly – *One that hooked me into several readings. A riddle of a story, with deeper currents and worlds behind every line.*

Highly Commended

I Carry Your Heart by Anne Blair – *Wickedly funny. Dahl-like in its shadowy dreamscape of wry humour and horror.*

A Reason to Be by Janet Mell – *A self-contained story that nevertheless reveals so much of a wider world – the essence of short fiction and written with elegance.*

Rain by Peter Symes – *A slice of time and place where friendship and compassion win out over the coldness of a declining life. Beautifully told and ended just right.*

A Final Hurrah by Janet Mell – *At first blush a good story well told in simple style – but reread and discover the humour, and the whole thing unfurls as the beginning and end of a world.*





Youth Category

Shortlist

The Woman on the Stairs by Opal Raynor – *Well written with some good turns and deflections. A literary jack in the box with a soulful ending.*

The Haunting Power of The Summoning by Aarin Arora – *A classically dark horror with just the right amount of scare and farce. Could make a good start of something longer?*

At Tipping Point by Jamie Erak – *Really excellent dystopia with clever world-building and a sardonic endpoint. Written with passion that smoulders.*

In the Dying of the Light by Bridget Ng – *Beautiful, strong prose with soulful themes and undercurrents. On a technical note, I appreciated the pacing and well placed eliding, which gave the sentences a propulsive quality.*

What I Wouldn't Give for Executive Function by Rory Opie – *Very funny, wryly observed, and written with good control and expression.*





Novice Category

Shortlist

Beyond Bourke by Robyn Koller— *Great narrative in a short space.*

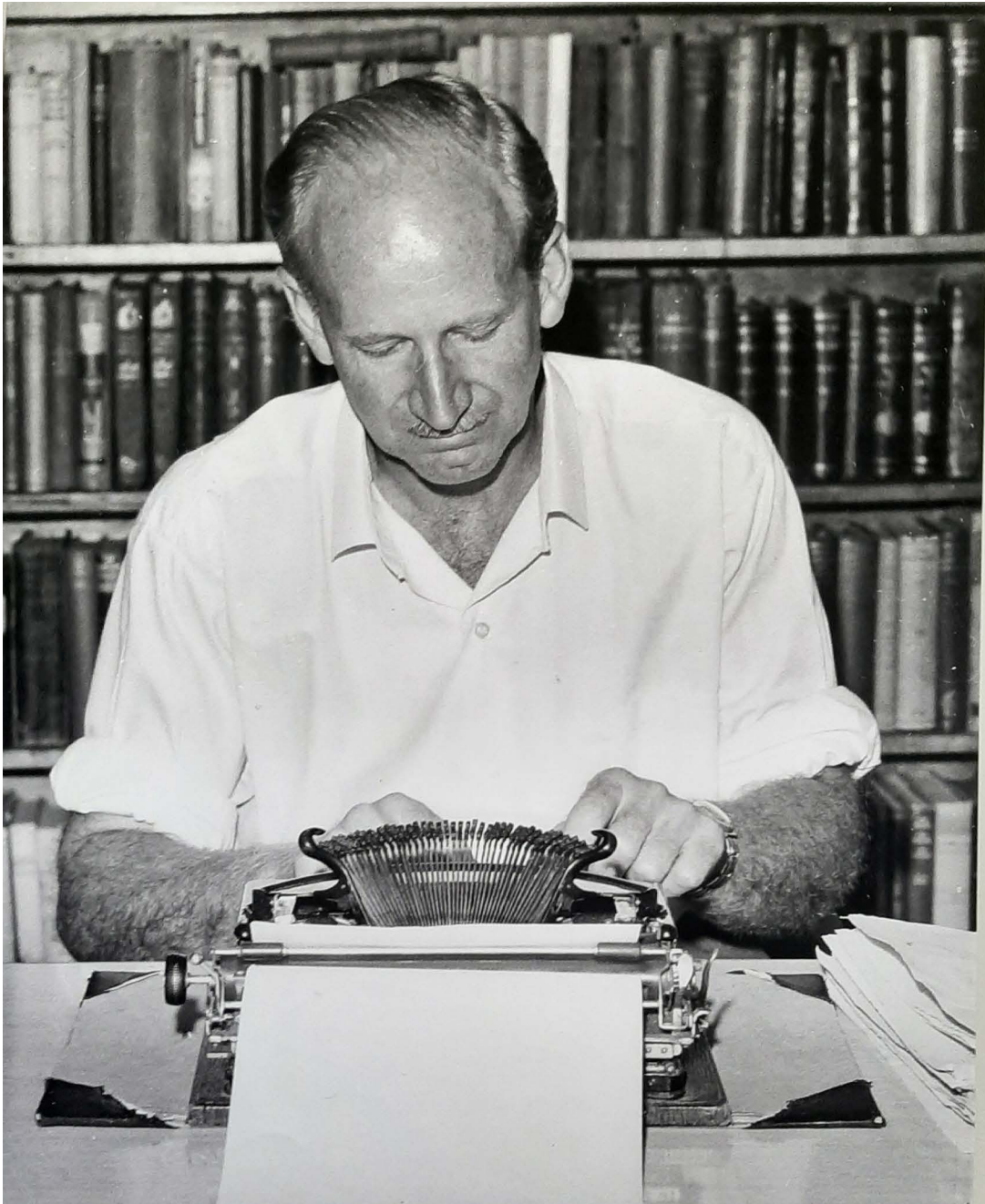
Two Men in a Cinema by Ivan Terrence— *A literary surprise – excellent work.*

Old Jago by Lyndal Weightman— *Wonderful character exploration.*

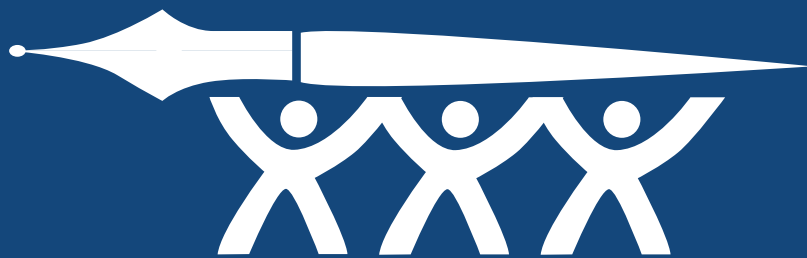
The Perfect Cadenza by Joanna Wang – *Wonderfully contained, brimming with character.*

I've Lost My Husband by Julia Burns – *Heart in the mouth till the end.*





In Memory of
Peter Cowan



Peter
Cowan
Writers Centre

Supporting writers of all ages and abilities