

Media Release

Thursday 12 September

Victorian Premier's Literary Awards celebrate 40 years: 2025 submissions now open, including new category in honour of John Clarke

Entries to the 2025 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLAs) are now open, and the Victorian Government has further strengthened its support for Australian writing with the introduction of a new award category in 2025, the John Clarke Prize for Humour Writing, as part of the awards program which includes the country's most lucrative literary prize.

The award – named in honour of satirist, writer and actor John Clarke – expands the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards' total prize pool to AUD\$315,000, with The Wheeler Centre providing a further \$2,000 for the People's Choice Award. Established by the Victorian Government and the Clarke family, the prize celebrates the distinct literary craft of comedic writing, in the tradition of best-selling author, poet, playwright and screenwriter, John Clarke.

As one of only two awards to recognise humour writing in Australia, the inaugural VPLA Prize will be open to books of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and young adult writing published in 2023 and 2024. Writer-director Lorin Clarke, the eldest of John's two daughters, will serve as a member of the prize's judging panel.

QUOTE ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE CLARKE FAMILY:

"It was only when John Clarke relocated to Melbourne from New Zealand that he really took to the craft of writing. Having made a name for himself in New Zealand as a performer, he had been mostly, as he put it, 'performing his way out of trouble'. When he settled in Melbourne, he wrote for newspapers, radio, film, theatre, and television. The local creative community welcomed John with open arms and he never forgot their generosity. Over the next few decades, he wrote many best-selling books, including a novel and two poetry collections. For the Victorian government to support such a significant award in his name so that humorous writing can be celebrated is a wonderful and fitting tribute."

Backed by the Victorian Government and administered by The Wheeler Centre, the VPLAs will celebrate 40 years in 2025. Over the years, the VPLAs have played a vital role in championing Australia's brightest literary talents, with past winners across the prize categories including Jessica Au, Archie Roach, Leah Purcell and Gerald Murnane. With their substantial prize fund, the awards also provide significant financial support to the winning authors whilst bolstering awareness and interest in Australian literature more broadly.

QUOTE ATTRIBUTABLE TO MINISTER FOR CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, COLIN BROOKS:

wheelercentre.com

Trading as Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas
ABN 97 134 682 189

“The late, great John Clarke made an exceptional contribution to our cultural life, using sharp writing and humour to hold up a mirror to ourselves while giving us the gift of laughter. We are thrilled to introduce the new John Clarke Prize for Humour Writing, and to continue to offer the most coveted literary award in the country.”

QUOTE ATTRIBUTABLE TO ERIN VINCENT, CEO, THE WHEELER CENTRE:

“John Clarke created his own brand of humour, and it remains beyond compare. He was so skilful with words, I can’t think of anyone more deserving of a Victorian literary award in their name. To know this prize will help strengthen the careers of future humour writers is a beautiful and fitting tribute to one of the great satirists of our time.”

Established in 1985 by The Hon. John Cain, Premier of Victoria, the VPLAs set out to honour and recognise literary achievement by Australian writers. The awards were also originally inaugurated to commemorate the centenary of the births of Vance and Nettie Palmer, two of Australia’s most renowned writers and critics who are remembered for their nurturing of the country’s early literary identity. Having received ongoing bipartisan support since their inception, the VPLAs are now a mainstay of the Australian cultural awards landscape.

Alongside the addition of the new Humour Writing category in 2025, the existing suite of awards includes the prizes for Fiction, Non-Fiction, Drama, Poetry, Award for Indigenous Writing, Children’s Literature and Writing for Young Adults, with winners each receiving \$25,000.

The winners of these seven main categories, including the new John Clarke Prize for Humour Writing, go on to contest the overall Victorian Prize for Literature. Worth an additional \$100,000, it is the single most valuable literary award in the country.

Beyond the principal suite of prizes, the Award for an Unpublished Manuscript has firmly established itself within the industry as a leading indicator in the unearthing of new literary talent, with many past winners going on to secure lucrative publishing contracts and subsequent bestseller status.

The likes of *New York Times* bestselling author Graeme Simsion, recent Miles Franklin Literary Award winner Jennifer Down and the ‘queen of outback noir’ Jane Harper all first came to the attention of publishers and readers via the recognition of the VPLAs Award for an Unpublished Manuscript.

The winner of the Award for an Unpublished Manuscript receives \$15,000 in prize money and a two-week residency at McCraith House in Dromana, as part of a partnership between The Wheeler Centre and RMIT Culture.

Australia’s reading public also has a role to play with the awarding of the \$2,000 People’s Choice Award. Shortlisted and highly commended titles will be eligible, with the general public able to vote for their favourite via The Wheeler Centre website.



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

176 Little Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
+61 3 9094 7809

With submissions for the 2025 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards officially opening today, the prize administrators at Melbourne's The Wheeler Centre are now welcoming eligible entries.

Submission guidelines and forms are available [here](#). Entries close at 5pm on Friday 27 September

The 2025 shortlists will be announced in late January 2025..

Winners for all categories will be announced at the Award Ceremony in March 2025.

– ENDS –

Media contact

Alice Lewinsky

alice@commonstate.co

0403 837 351

Media centre

Images available [here](#)

NOTES TO EDITOR

- The 2025 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLAs) are now open for entry
- The Awards are administered by The Wheeler Centre on behalf of the Premier of Victoria
- Submission guidelines available [here](#)
- A new prize category will be awarded for the first time in 2025: The John Clarke Prize for Humour Writing
- The total VPLAs prize pool is AUD\$317,000
- Winners for all categories will be announced at the Award Ceremony in March 2025

wheelercentre.com

Trading as Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas
ABN 97 134 682 189



Melbourne
City of
Literature

