



**The Wheeler Centre**  
Books Writing Ideas

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

## THE WHEELER CENTRE TO EXPLORE POLITICS, POWER AND MOTHERHOOD WITH LATEST EVENT SLATE

Tuesday 21 April

The Wheeler Centre today announces a rich new series of events spanning politics, literature, performance and community – bringing together some of Australia's most compelling voices alongside emerging talent and leading thinkers for thought-provoking public conversations.

**QUOTE ATTRIBUTABLE TO ERIN VINCENT, THE WHEELER CENTRE, CEO:** 'These events captures the breadth of what The Wheeler Centre does best, from sharp and timely conversations about current events to joyful and imaginative experiences for children and families, our winter lineup reflects the Centre's ongoing commitment to bringing audiences together around ideas, stories and conversations that matter.'

In partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria and inspired by their landmark *MOTHER* exhibition, host **Maxine Beneba Clarke** gathers three extraordinary writers – **Rachel Ang**, **Lulu Houdini** and **Edwina Preston** – to present intimate new works responding to the art and themes on display. Exploring motherhood in an era of shifting social mores, evolving notions of gender and sexuality, and new reproductive technologies, this panel explores writing that is both deeply personal and universal.

Pioneer communications strategist and architect of Australia's first major online political movement GetUp!, **Ed Coper**, joins host **Sushi Das** to unmask the architects of the outrage economy – from manosphere gurus and tech oligarchs to political demagogues and corporate giants – and expose how social media has evolved from a platform for connection into an addictive arena that feeds on scandal, spectacle and extremism. As our politics grow more polarising and empathy declines, Coper asks whether it's too late to escape the rage-bait machine.

Politics is at the forefront of several editions of the Centre's flagship current affairs series **The Fifth Estate**. Host **Sally Warhaft** sits down with veteran political commentator and Editor-at-Large of *The Australian* **Paul Kelly** to discuss *The Twilight of Exceptionalism* – a forensic account of how the Liberal Party lost its way across the turbulent Abbott, Turnbull, and Morrison years and what its collapse in public support means for the future of the Australian centre-right.

**The Fifth Estate** also turns its attention overseas, with Warhaft bringing together three voices with direct, hard-won experience of Iran: author and journalist **Shokoofeh Azar**, who fled political persecution before finding refuge in Australia; **Kylie Moore-Gilbert**, the academic and Middle East expert who spent 804 days in a Tehran prison on espionage charges; and philosopher **Omid Tofighian**, renowned for his collaboration with Behrouz Boochani on *No Friends But the Mountains*. Together they will unpack the

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complexities of contemporary Iran – from the volatile political landscape to the struggles for freedom unfolding within and beyond its borders.

In July, **Warhaft** meets with acclaimed author and broadcaster **Stan Grant** for a **Fifth Estate** event discussing his expansive new book *When Words Fail Us*. Drawing on thinkers and artists as varied as Plato, Simone Weil, Cormac McCarthy, Thomas Aquinas and Radiohead, and written after Grant's withdrawal from public life, the book asks what we lose when we stop talking and what might be found in the quiet.

With far-right extremist movements gaining momentum globally and making increasing inroads into the political mainstream, host **Caitlin Reiger** brings together an esteemed panel to examine what is driving the rise of far-right extremism in Australia and what can be done about it. Trade unionist and writer **Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett**, community organiser **Tarneen Onus Williams**, immigration law specialist **Sanmati Verma**, and journalist **Cam Wilson** will explore how these movements are evolving, how they operate across borders and online spaces, and what cultural, political, and legal recourses exist to protect those most at risk.

Australia's first-ever Children's Laureate and award-winning author **Alison Lester** brings her beloved pony to life in a fun-filled celebration of fifteen years of *Noni* – joining little ones and big ones alike for an interactive afternoon of rhymes, stories, and activities in honour of the friendliest pony on the farm. With millions of copies sold in Australia alone, *Noni the Pony* has earned her place as a genuine children's classic – and this is a birthday party not to be missed.

The midwinter iteration of **The Next Big Thing** returns to The Moat, showcasing five emerging writers whose new works span memoir, romantasy, poetry, fiction, and narrative non-fiction. The lineup includes **Fernanda Dahlstrom** on trust and betrayal in family life; **Lily Crozier**'s vampire reimagining of *Beauty and the Beast*; **Kerry Jewell**'s darkly comic take on the public health system; Indo-Fijian poet **Lesh Karen** on fractured histories and diaspora identity; *The Hook Up* podcaster **Dee Salmin** on love and dating culture; and Gamilaroi writer **Harrison Abbott**, whose *Voiceworks* poem interrogates AI – or Australian Intelligence – and what it means for the future of Indigenous representation.

Beloved author **R.A. Spratt** brings her irrepressible hero back in *The Epicly Awesome Odyssey*, a hilarious Nanny Piggins retelling of Homer's classic, featuring man-munching monsters, rage-prone Greek gods, and the long-overdue revelation that Odysseus was, in fact, a staggeringly beautiful woman – and a pig. Spratt will appear at Kyneton Town Hall and The Capitol in Melbourne for an afternoon of myths, jokes and mayhem.



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The latest edition of **Bookish Club** will gather **Tough Guy Book Club** founder **Shay Leighton** and host **Tim Byrne** at Bakery Hill Distillery in Kensington for an afternoon of spirited conversation over whisky and beer. On the table: Jock Serong's *Cherrywood* – a wonderfully offbeat novel of a mysterious pub that refuses to stay put, part ghost story, part deeply human tale of legacy and community.

For those looking to put words on the page rather than the stage, **Shut Up and Write!** returns for two sessions in June and July, inviting writers of all kinds to set aside distractions and write alongside others in a welcoming, pressure-free space. No critiquing, no sharing: just protected time, shared purpose, and the quiet motivation that comes from being in a room full of people doing the same thing.

Finally, The Wheeler Centre is proud to partner with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority to host the **2026 Plain English Speaking Award State Final**, an annual public speaking competition that brings together Victoria's most accomplished high school orators to present original speeches on topics they care deeply about, celebrating innovative thinking, rigorous research, and the art of clear, direct communication. Come and witness the next generation of Victorian voices compete for a state championship.

– ENDS –

**Media contact**

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**Media centre:** Images available [here](#)

The full list of events and dates are listed below. For more information, please visit [wheelercentre.com/events](http://wheelercentre.com/events)

**Ed Coper: Angertainment**

Ed Coper, Sushi Das  
6.30pm, Wednesday 24 June  
The Wheeler Centre

**Shut Up and Write!**

Xanthea O'Connor  
10.00am, Saturday 27 June  
The Wheeler Centre

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**MOTHER: An Afternoon of Art and Storytelling**

Rachel Ang, Lulu Houdini, Edwina Preston, Maxine Beneba Clarke  
2.00pm, Saturday 27 June  
The Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, Federation Square

**The Next Big Thing: Love, Lies and Liminal Lives**

Fernanda Dahlstrom, Lily Crozier, Kerry Jewell, Lesh Karen, Dee Salmin, Harrison Abbott, Pranati Narayan  
Visweswaran  
6.30pm, Monday 29 June  
The Moat

**Iran at the Crossroads**

Shokoofeh Azar, Kylie Moore-Gilbert, Omid Tofighian, Sally Warhaft  
6.30pm, Tuesday 30 June  
The Wheeler Centre

**Alison Lester: 15 Years of Noni the Pony**

Alison Lester  
10.00am, Wednesday 1 July  
The Wheeler Centre

**The Epically Awesome Odyssey with R. A. Spratt [Kyneton]**

R. A. Spratt  
2.00pm, Tuesday 7 July  
Kyneton Town Hall

**The Epically Awesome Odyssey with R. A. Spratt**

R. A. Spratt  
1.00pm, Wednesday 8 July  
The Capitol

**Understanding the Rise of the Far-Right in Australia**

Caitlin Reiger, Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett, Tarneen Onus Williams, Sanmati Verma, Cam Wilson  
6.30pm, Wednesday 15 July  
The Wheeler Centre  
*Presented in partnership with Human Rights Law Centre*

**Stan Grant: When Words Fail Us**

Stan Grant, Sally Warhaft  
7.00pm, Thursday 16 July  
The Capitol

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**Tough Guy Bookish Club**

Shay Leighton, Tim Byrne  
2.30pm, Saturday 18 July  
Bakery Hill Distillery

**Paul Kelly on the Coalition Years**

Paul Kelly, Sally Warhaft  
6.30pm, Tuesday 21 July  
The Wheeler Centre

**Shut Up and Write!**

Xanthea O'Connor  
10.00am, Saturday 25 July  
The Wheeler Centre

**Plain English Speaking Award: 2026 Victorian State Final**

10.30am, Friday 31 July  
The Wheeler Centre

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