



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

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

THE WHEELER CENTRE ADDS ZADIE SMITH, EMILY MAITLIS, LAILA LALAMI AND MANY MORE TO 2026 PROGRAM

Tuesday 2 December



The Wheeler Centre is adding to its 2026 line-up with an extraordinary slate of conversations, dinners, live podcasts and deep dives featuring some of the most compelling thinkers, writers and cultural voices shaping our world today.

With appearances from **Salman Rushdie**, **Nell Zink** and **Percival Everett** having already been announced for next year, The Wheeler Centre will also soon play host to literary icon **Zadie Smith**, trailblazing British journalist **Emily Maitlis**, acclaimed Moroccan-American novelist **Laila Lalami** and *New York Times*-bestselling author **Simon Winchester**, amongst a bevy of other brilliant minds.

QUOTE ATTRIBUTABLE TO ERIN VINCENT, CEO, THE WHEELER CENTRE: 'As we look ahead to 2026, it is more important than ever to have a home for books, writing and ideas and a place where people can come together for complex, provocative and inspiring conversations. At a time of growing division and uncertainty, The Wheeler Centre's year-round program offers space for curiosity and connection. This extraordinary lineup brings together some of the world's most compelling writers, journalists and thinkers, and reflects our commitment to delivering urgent and meaningful conversations for audiences, both in person and online.'

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Zadie Smith returns to Melbourne for a rare and unmissable evening discussing art, politics, memory and compassion. Celebrated for her novels *White Teeth*, *On Beauty* and *The Fraud*, as well as her incisive essays, Smith now turns to the passions and influences that have shaped her in her anticipated new collection *Dead and Alive*. In conversation with **Benjamin Law** at the Melbourne Town Hall, she reflects on the artists and writers who inspire her, the city she calls home and the intertwined forces of literature and imagination.

Trailblazing British journalist **Emily Maitlis** reflects on a remarkable career at the forefront of global news, sharing behind-the-scenes stories from some of the world's most explosive headlines. From covering the Paris terror attacks, the Grenfell fires, and Brexit, to interviewing prime ministers, presidents and Nobel laureates, Maitlis has witnessed history in the making. In conversation with **Jamila Rizvi**, Maitlis will recount scoops, confrontations and world-changing moments – including her landmark BBC 2019 interview with Prince Andrew – offering an insider's perspective on the pressures and power of modern journalism.

Bestselling author **Simon Winchester** sits down with **Michael Williams** at The Capitol to explore *The Breath of the Gods*, his sweeping new meditation on the wind as an invisible force that has shaped human history and now defines our climate-altered future. Drawing on literature, history, science and myth, Winchester charts our attempts to understand and harness the atmosphere, reflecting on the wind's generative and destructive power, its central role in global trade and culture, and the ways human activity has rendered once-predictable currents increasingly volatile. This compelling conversation offers a profound reflection on our vulnerability to – and dependence on – the unseen forces that govern our world.

Acclaimed Moroccan-American novelist **Laila Lalami** visits Australia for the first time with *The Dream Hotel*, a gripping, near-future thriller longlisted for the 2025 Women's Prize for Fiction that examines surveillance, technological overreach and the ways individuals become complicit in their own monitoring. Set in a dystopian America where dreams are weaponised and corporations trade in the subconscious, the novel follows a woman accused of a crime she hasn't yet committed. In conversation with **Sonia Nair**, Lalami will unpack the seductive power of technology, the commodification of private selves and the unnervingly plausible future in which a single line of code can determine a person's destiny.

Professor George Williams AO delivers a powerful call to restore the public mission of Australia's universities in this timely edition of *The Fifth Estate* hosted by **Sally Warhaft**. Drawing on his perspective as Vice Chancellor and President of Western Sydney University, Williams examines how decades of underfunding, corporatisation and the pursuit of global rankings have eroded student experience, creativity and public trust. With clarity and candour, he outlines the bold reforms needed to rebuild

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universities as genuinely civic institutions – ones that prioritise integrity, transparency and the communities they serve.

Stephanie Alexander celebrates 30 years of *The Cook's Companion* with a special night of feasting and conversation, honouring the beloved kitchen classic that has shaped the way Australians cook since 1996. At an intimate three-course dinner at Sofitel Melbourne On Collins' No35 restaurant, guests will enjoy panoramic city views as Alexander shares her food philosophies, career stories and the enduring legacy of her iconic book, while also offering a first look at its 30th-anniversary edition.

National treasure **Shaun Micallef** takes the stage to introduce *De'Ath Takes a Holiday*, his wildly inventive new novel about a world-weary vampire who sets off on a globe-trotting quest to restore his sickened soul. As the immortal Comte De'Ath pursues everything from psychoanalysis in Vienna to blood transfusions in London – crossing paths with royalty, war, Henry Ford and even unexpected romance – he must race against time to reclaim his mortality before his own funeral at Carfax Abbey. Expect a night of razor-sharp humour as Micallef dives into the irresistible absurdities of this modern Gothic caper.

Beloved humourist and author **Kathy Lette** returns with *The Sisterhood Rules*, a riotously entertaining and big-hearted novel about secrets, scandal, and the resilient bonds of sisterhood. Lette will discuss her latest novel with audiences at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre and Geelong's Library and Heritage Centre, sharing insights into a career built on wit and storytelling and reflecting on the joys and challenges of being professionally funny.

Melbourne's sharpest cultural commentators, the team behind *The Paris End*, headline the first **Up Late** of 2026 with an evening of wit, irreverence and literary revelry. Founded by **Cameron Hurst**, **Sally Olds** and **Oscar Schwartz** – and described by Helen Garner as "scarily hip" – the much-loved newsletter dissects the quirks, contradictions and cultural fascinations of Melbourne with sardonic humour and sharp-eyed insight. In this special event, the trio lift the lid on their new anthology, share the stories and stray gossips behind their work, and raise a glass to the city that fuels their singular brand of commentary.

Join veteran sports journalists **Gideon Haigh** and **Peter Lalor** for a live recording of their hit podcast *Cricket Et Al*, as they break down the drama, brilliance, and heartbreak of the 2025 Ashes series. Revisiting defining moments, standout players and key strategies, Haigh and Lalor provide expert analysis on the biggest highs, lows and controversies of the summer, offering fans an insider's perspective on the evolving game of cricket.

Bookish Club is back for 2026 with **Virginia Trioli** leading a lively discussion on **Daphne du Maurier's** gothic classic *Rebecca*. Attendees are invited to explore the suspenseful tale of love, murder, and

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lingering secrets at Manderley, sharing insights and favourite moments over wine and nibbles at The Moat in an evening of rich literary conversation.

Former New South Wales premier **Bob Carr** shares an intimate look at love, grief and resilience in his memoir *Bring Back Yesterday*, reflecting on his 50-year partnership with his late wife Helena and the profound impact of her passing in 2023. Speaking with **Sally Warhaft**, Carr explores moments of beauty, hope, and defiance amid loss, offering a deeply personal and resonant meditation on enduring love.

Philosopher **A. C. Grayling** returns to Melbourne to examine the global decline of democracy in his new book *For the People: Fighting Authoritarianism, Saving Democracy*. Joined at The Capitol by The Fifth Estate host **Sally Warhaft**, Grayling explores the forces undermining democratic ideals – from partisanship and gerrymandering to corporate interference – and offers urgent solutions for safeguarding freedom, civil liberties, and public faith in democratic institutions.

Discover five standout emerging voices in Australian writing at the first **Next Big Thing** of 2026, held over a drink at The Moat. From speculative fiction and historical fantasy to sharp contemporary storytelling and lyrical nonfiction, the evening features **John Morrissey, Lisa Moule, Cameron Sullivan, Olivia Tolich** and **Saskia Lynzaat** as they explore themes of parenthood, friendship, myth, romance, grief and political upheaval. Hosted by **Diem Nguyen**, this showcase of captivating readings highlights a new wave of writers poised to make their mark on Australia's literary future.

– 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

Cricket Et Al: Live

Gideon Haigh, Peter Lalor
6.30pm, Thursday 12 February
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Kathy Lette: The Sisterhood Rules

Kathy Lette

7.00pm, Tuesday 17 February

Clarendon Auditorium, MCEC

Kathy Lette: The Sisterhood Rules [Geelong]

Kathy Lette

6.00pm, Wednesday 18 February

Geelong Heritage and Cultural Centre

The Fifth Estate: Universities and Australia's Future

Professor George Williams, Sally Warhaft

6.30pm, Thursday 19 February

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Up Late: Dispatches from The Paris End

Cameron Hurst, Sally Olds and Oscar Schwartz

8.00pm, Friday 20 February

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Simon Winchester: The Breath of the Gods

Simon Winchester, Michael Williams

1.00pm, Saturday 28 February

The Capitol

Laila Lalami: The Dream Hotel

Laila Lalami, Sonia Nair

6.30pm, Wednesday 4 March

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Emily Maitlis: From Headlines to a Fallen Prince

Emily Maitlis, Jamila Rizvi

7.00pm, Thursday 5 March

Clarendon Auditorium, MCEC

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A. C. Grayling: Fighting Authoritarianism, Saving Democracy

A. C. Grayling, Sally Warhaft
1.00pm, Saturday 7 March
The Capitol

Zadie Smith: Dead or Alive

Zadie Smith, Benjamin Law
7.00pm, Tuesday 10 March
Melbourne Town Hall

Bob Carr: Bring Back Yesterday

Bob Carr, Sally Warhaft
6.30pm, Wednesday 11 March
The Wheeler Centre

The Next Big Thing: Butterfly Effect

John Morrissey, Lisa Moule, Cameron Sullivan, Olivia Tolich, Saskia Lynzaat
6.30pm, Monday 16 March
The Moat

Bookish Club with Virginia Trioli

Virginia Trioli
2.30pm, Saturday 21 March
The Moat

Stephanie Alexander: 30 Years of The Cook's Companion

Stephanie Alexander
6.30pm, Monday 23 March
No35 Restaurant
Presented in partnership with Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and Sofitel Melbourne On Collins

Shaun Micallef: De'Ath Takes a Holiday

Shaun Micallef
6.30pm, Tuesday 31 March
The Wheeler Centre
Presented in partnership with Melbourne International Comedy Festival

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The Wheeler Centre is Melbourne's home for smart, passionate and entertaining public talks, and exists to support writers, readers and thinkers. Through live and digital conversations, debates, readings, performances and discussions, it deepens public engagement with the most pressing topics of the day. It is dedicated to creative collaboration, community engagement, diversity, and innovation.

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Melbourne
City of
Literature

