

Cambridge Literary Festival

Spring 2026
22–26 April

Highlights include

Samira Ahmed
Mary Berry
Margaret Busby
Jung Chang
Ed Davey
Greg Doran
John Kampfner
Deborah Levy
Caroline Lucas
Wayne McGregor
Andrew Miller
Sarah Raven
Sophie Raworth
Elif Shafak
Zadie Smith

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2026 is the UK's National Year of Reading, which is why we're joining the Go All In campaign to encourage new readers into a love of literature and a passion for reading. Our packed programme of events will tempt the most jaded of literary palettes including many for the children in your life. We will mark literary anniversaries including the centenary of the publication of *Lolly Willowes* by Sylvia Townsend Warner and fifty years since the death of Agatha Christie. We welcome Margaret Drabble, Alan Hollinghurst and Elif Shafak, three of our finest novelists to share the books that made them.

The festival has three significant firsts this year: we have partnered with The Arts Theatre Cambridge for several of our events on festival Sunday so do join us there; we have a dedicated Children's Zone where there will be storytelling, crafts and activities throughout the weekend; and last but not least, the inaugural State of Nature lecture delivered by Caroline Lucas will provide an annual response to the global climate crisis. Completing our trio of annual lectures are Deborah Levy for the Room of One's Own and Rachel Clarke for The State of the Nation.

Our annual New Statesman Debate tackles the issue of where we are now as a nation and asks the important question whether our best days are behind us or whether optimism should prevail. On a lighter note, I am over the moon to welcome Mary Berry for her Cambridge debut appearance.

Don't forget to check our one-off events in March with Honorary Patrons, Ali Smith and Jill Dawson. See you in April and keep reading until then!

Cathy Moore
Artistic Director

Festival team

Artistic Director

Cathy Moore

Head of Operations

Danielle Patrick

Fundraising & Partnerships

Elizabeth Froy

Events Producer

Callia Kirkham

Administrator

Blakeney Clark

Honorary Patrons

Dame Gillian Beer
Melissa Benn
Alex Clark
Jill Dawson
Dame Margaret Drabble
Sophie Hannah
Robert Macfarlane
Helen Macdonald
Michael Morpurgo
Rowan Pelling
David Reynolds
David Runciman
Ruth Scurr
Elif Shafak
Ali Smith
Frances Spalding
Preti Taneja
Bee Wilson

Programme Design

Mark Mniszko

Diary Dates 2026

Winter Festival 21–22 November

Cambridge Literary Festival
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 Cambridge Literary Festival

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One-Off events – Wednesday 18 March

6–7pm | University Arms | £17/£12
Ali Smith
Glyph

The Observer has said that Ali Smith is one of our greatest living novelists – and, we add, a Cambridge literary treasure and Festival Honorary Patron. In 2024, Ali brought us *Gliff*, the first novel of an interconnected pair. We're thrilled that she now shares the second novel, *Glyph*, her most soulful, playful and vital work yet. In a brutal and divided time, join Ali to hear how we can rekindle care, solidarity, resistance and openness.

In conversation with Sarah Wood.



Special offer – 25% off total price when purchasing tickets for both events

8–9pm | University Arms | £17/£12
Jill Dawson
Pixie

Whitbread Prize- and Orange Prize-shortlisted author and Festival Honorary Patron Jill Dawson returns to the Festival with her sweeping and vivid new novel *Pixie*. Introducing us to her eponymous heroine – the real-life publisher, illustrator and occultist Pamela 'Pixie' Colman Smith – Jill brings us a tale that crosses continents. Join Jill for twists and turns, séances and secrets that will have you cheering on a young woman's talent, grit and determination.



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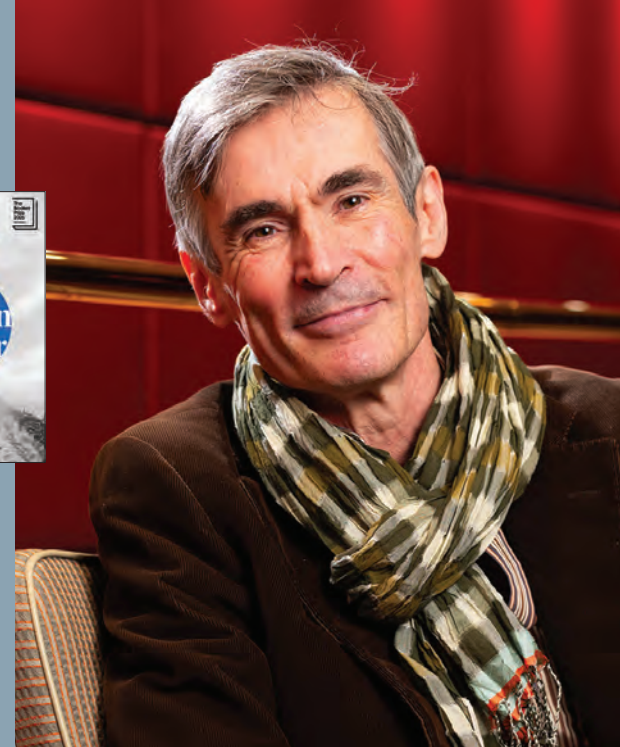
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Wednesday 22 April

6–7pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Andrew Miller
The Land in Winter

What an utter treat to open the Festival with prize-winning Andrew Miller and his novel *The Land in Winter* – a masterclass in storytelling, with its flawless evocation of a time and a place. During the terrible winter of 1962, two couples find their lives beginning to unravel. Come and hear from a novelist at the height of his powers and one of Britain's most dazzling chroniclers of the human heart.



8–9pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Frances Wilson
Electric Spark: The Enigma of Muriel Spark

Muriel Spark was – as her greatest creation Miss Jean Brodie would say – the crème de la crème of British post-war novelists. As Frances Wilson reveals in her brilliant and illuminating biography *Electric Spark*, her life was packed full of weird accidents, strange coincidences and spooky events. Join Frances to discover how Dame Muriel alchemised skulduggery, blackmail, love affairs and revenge into the material of her books. Not to be missed.



Thursday 23 April

11.30am–12.30pm | Cambridge Union,
TTP Stage | £17/£12 | Book and ticket £37/£32

Mary Berry *My Gardening Life*

What a delight to welcome Dame Mary Berry! The beloved food writer and television presenter is synonymous with foolproof, delicious recipes. However, she also has a second great love: gardening. Her new book, *My Gardening Life*, is a unique memoir, highlighting the vital role that nature and the seasons have played throughout her life. Come and share Mary's horticultural challenges and triumphs, and her deep love of plants and gardens.



1–3pm | University Arms | £50 Literary Lunch with Harriet Tyce

Book early for this year's two-course lunch with wine, where murder, treachery and intrigue are firmly on the menu. Harriet Tyce sets down her pen, picks up her fork and treats us to a criminally faithful discussion about her life in crime – as a criminal barrister and now as a bestselling writer – including her latest extraordinary novel, *Witch Trial*. Motive, evidence, judgement. Be prepared to question everything.

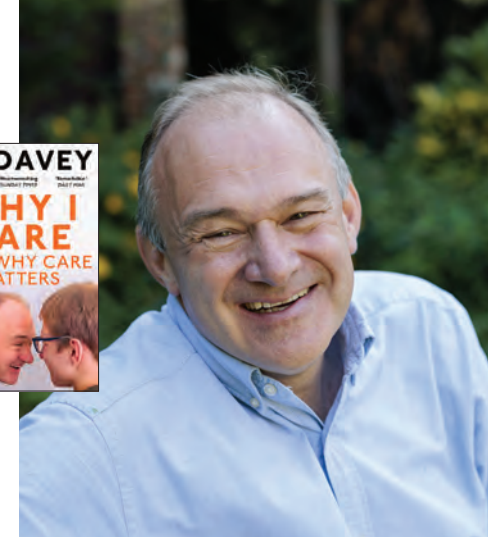


Thursday 23 April

4–5pm | Cambridge Union,
TTP Stage | £17/£12

Ed Davey *Why I Care and Why Care Matters*

Millions of people in Britain are carers, but their crucial work and efforts are often invisible. In his deeply personal memoir, Ed Davey, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, uses powerful storytelling and case studies to shine a light on the emotional, physical and financial realities of caring. Come and hear how being a carer – as a son and as a father – has shaped Ed's life and values.



4–5pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12 Giulia Enders *Organ Speak: What it Really Means to Listen to Our Bodies*

What do we truly need to thrive? This is just one of the questions raised by Giulia Enders, physician and acclaimed author of global multimillion bestseller *Gut*. Now Giulia guides us on a journey through our other bodily organs – from our muscles to our brain. Join Giulia as she shares recent scientific discoveries and be inspired into a deeper appreciation of our familiar and yet profoundly mysterious bodies.



4–5pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12 Martin Bond *A Cambridge Diary*

Martin Bond – our festival photographer – has lived in Cambridge all his life. In his personal project *A Cambridge Diary*, he posted a photograph of our city online every day. At number 5,000, he published his final daily picture and has now released three books – *Town & Gown*, *Time & Space* and *Light & Shade*. Join Martin, who, for once, will be on the other end of the lens, to share the background of *A Cambridge Diary*, his photography, and the importance of you, the viewer, in the creative process.

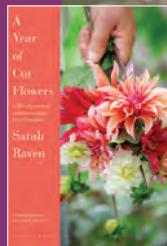


Thursday 23 April

6–7pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage £17/£12
Sarah Raven

A Year of Cut Flowers: a life of growing and arranging for all seasons

Teacher, broadcaster and owner of her eponymous mail-order plant nursery, Sarah Raven's deep love of gardening extends to all areas, from growing cut flowers and delicious vegetables from seed, to designing gardens overflowing with incredible colour and scent. Join Sarah as she shares the secrets she's developed over decades in her garden at Perch Hill. With Sarah's unparalleled expertise and guidance, your fingers will never have been so green.



Thursday 23 April

8–9pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage £17/£12

Margaret Drabble
The Books That Made Me

Go All In to the books that have inspired the life and works of Festival Honorary Patron Dame Margaret Drabble and discover the books that have inspired and engaged her from her early years in Sheffield via a degree at Newnham College here in Cambridge to a writer's life in London and, as depicted in her new collection of essays, *The Great Good Places*.



6–7pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12
Sophie Harman

Sick of It: the global fight for women's health

Why are women still dying across the world when they don't have to? In *Sick of It*, shortlisted for the 2025 British Academy Book Prize, award-winning academic Professor Sophie Harman argues that women's health is caught in the crossfire of global politics and is being used and abused by politicians across the globe. Come and hear Sophie's smart solutions and how we can all help to fix this crisis.

With thanks to the British Academy

AI NOVEL WRITING SOFTWARE

6–7pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12
AI and the Novel

The Cambridge Dictionary defines 'a novel' as 'a long printed story about imaginary characters and events' and the adjective 'novel' as 'new and original, not like anything seen before'. We expect novels to be novel but it's this that's most at risk from generative AI – or is it? Come and hear from our panel of experts as to what they hope and fear from the AI revolution. What are your dreams and nightmares for the future of the novel?

With thanks to The Minderoo Centre
for Technology and Democracy



8–9pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12
Edward Stourton

Made in America: the dark history that led to Donald Trump

Is the Donald Trump presidency 'unprecedented', as is so often claimed? Or is it in fact as American as apple pie? Veteran Radio 4 broadcaster and former presenter of the *Today* programme Edward Stourton offers an illuminating retelling of US history. In *Made in America*, Ed shows how the ideal of liberty has been tested in past generations, revealing the dark side of the American Dream. What lessons can we learn for our turbulent present?

Friday 24 April

2–3pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Thant Myint-U

Peacemaker: U Thant, the United Nations, and the Untold Story of the 1960s

In 1971, U Thant was ranked as the sixth 'most admired man' in America. In *Peacemaker*, award-winning writer, historian and conservationist Thant Myint-U traces his grandfather's rise from a schoolteacher in Burma in 1947 to becoming the United Nations' longest-serving Secretary General. Come and hear from Thant Myint-U about this golden age of international diplomacy and the power of hope, peace and individual actions in our current time of uncertainty.



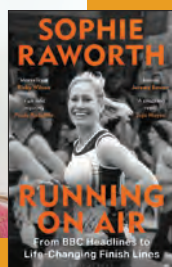
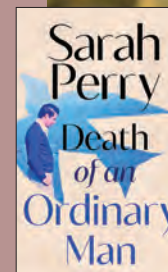
Friday 24 April

4–5pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Sarah Perry

Death of an Ordinary Man

When David Perry died nine days after his cancer diagnosis, his daughter-in-law Sarah understood, "There are no ordinary lives." Join award-winning and bestselling writer Sarah Perry as she shares *Death of an Ordinary Man*, her profoundly moving testament to David, and shows us how to confront not only the taboos and terror surrounding death but also the beauty that can come with the end of life.



4–5pm | Cambridge

Union, TTP Stage | £17/£12

Sophie Raworth

Running on Air: from headlines to finish lines

Sophie Raworth, one of the BBC's main newsreaders, started running in her 40s. Since then, she has run all six World Marathon Majors and completed fifteen marathons and three ultra-marathons. Along the way, she has discovered new inner confidence, community and the power of friendship. Join Sophie as she shares how these have helped her through tough challenges, from losing loved ones and overcoming injuries, to interviewing the Prime Minister.

With thanks to Sustainable Tech 4 Good



Callum Cant



Matthew Lee

4–5pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Callum Cant & Matthew Lee

The 1926 General Strike

One hundred years ago, workers brought the country to a standstill for nine extraordinary days during Britain's only ever General Strike. Churchill feared a Bolshevik-style revolution, but this monumental standoff ended in defeat for the unions. In *The Future in Our Past*, Callum Cant and Michael Lee journey across Britain, comparing the struggles of 1926 with those of today's workers. Join the discussion as we ask: what can the General Strike teach us in 2026?



6–7pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

James Fox

Craftland

For as long as there are humans, there will be craft. Blacksmiths and wheelwrights, cutlers and coopers, bell-founders and watchmakers – for *Craftland*, academic and award-winning broadcaster James Fox travelled the country, seeking out the last remaining craftspeople and discovering not only our past but another way of life, whose wisdom could shape our future. Celebrate with James the necessary connection between our creative instincts and the material world we inhabit.

Cambridge Series



6–7pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage

£20/£14

Caroline Lucas

The State of Nature: A Lecture

Our new annual State of Nature Lecture provides an opportunity for us to hear from informed individuals at a time when nature across the world is under threat. The inaugural lecture will be delivered by Caroline Lucas, writer, campaigner, and former Leader of the Green Party. As Caroline has said, we need to recognise that "we are nature, and that what we do to the natural world we ultimately do to ourselves."

Friday 24 April

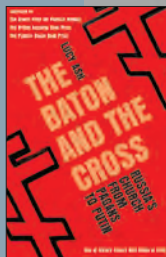
6–7pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Lucy Ash

Russia's Church from Pagans to Putin

An expert on Russia and post-Soviet countries, award-winning presenter Lucy Ash was first sent to Moscow by the BBC in 1990. Lucy's provocative new book, *The Baton and the Cross*, reveals how, under Putin, religion is being used to control the population. Join Lucy as she exposes the underbelly of politics, state security and big money, and their unholy alliance with Orthodoxy in the dystopia of twenty-first century Russia.

With thanks to the British Academy



Friday 24 April

8–9pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Harry Baker

Tender: 100 poems for the first 100 days of life

World Poetry Slam Champion Harry Baker brings his characteristic warmth, wit and wonder to a performance about new parenthood. From introducing his baby to a horse, to trying to work out if the GP really did drop them on purpose to test their reflexes, *Tender* contains poems from the first hundred days of new life and celebrates all the euphoria, panic and vulnerability that come with it. Expect more laughter and tears than ever.



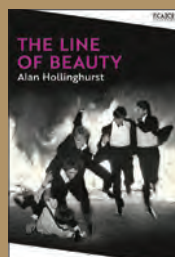
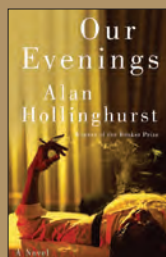
8–9pm | Cambridge Union,

TTP Stage | £17/£12

Alan Hollinghurst

The Books That Made Me

Go All In to the books that have inspired the life and works of one of our literary greats, Sir Alan Hollinghurst, who won the prestigious 2025 David Cohen Prize for a body of work written in the English language. Discover the books that have inspired and engaged him from his early life in Gloucestershire and Dorset via a degree from Oxford to a writer's life in London.



GO
ALL
IN.



8–9pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

John Kampfner

Braver New World: the countries daring to do things others won't

Award-winning broadcaster and journalist John Kampfner has had a front-row seat at some of the most seismic turning-points in modern history. At a time when it feels the world is falling apart, John reports from ten countries that are developing innovative solutions. *Braver New World* is a book of hope for hard times, and John reminds us never to despair, as the answers are out there if we look for them.



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Children's Zone & Free Activities

To celebrate the National Year of Reading we are launching our new 'Children's Zone' in the beautiful Cambridge Union Library space.



Here, children can relax with a book, take part in craft activities, have their portraits drawn by illustrator **Tonka Uzu**, and listen to captivating stories told by storyteller extraordinaire **Chip Colquhoun** (scheduled regularly throughout the weekend).

With thanks to Waterbeach



Saturday 25 April

10–11am | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage | Ages 8–12

Louie Stowell

Loki Live! A Bad God's Guide to Causing Chaos

Get ready for myths, mayhem, and lots of laughs!

Join bestselling author Louie Stowell for a rib-tickling event celebrating her doodle-packed *Loki* series. Her latest book, *Loki: A Bad God's Guide to Causing Chaos*, contains more gods, magic, monsters, and an adventure with Loki's arch enemy Vinir, an annoying luscious-locked elven menace. Come along to learn about where Louie's ideas come from and about the Norse mythology that inspires her books. Warning: mischief is guaranteed!

With thanks to Waterbeach



Saturday 25 April

12–1pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage | £20/£14

Rachel Clarke

State of the Nation Lecture

Our annual State of the Nation Lecture invites an eminent commentator to give their informed view of the country as they see it. This year's lecture is delivered by Dr Rachel Clarke. Rachel is an NHS palliative care doctor, former television journalist and the award-winning author of four *Sunday Times* bestselling books, including *The Story of a Heart*, the winner of the 2025 Women's Prize for Non-Fiction.

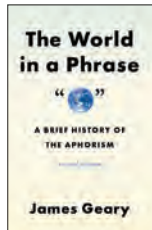


10–11am | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

James Geary

The World in a Phrase: a brief history of the aphorism

'Don't judge a book by its cover.' The oldest written art form on the planet, aphorisms have been going viral for thousands of years. James Geary's bestseller *The World in a Phrase* tells the story of the aphorism through some of its greatest practitioners, including the Buddha, Nietzsche, George Eliot, James Baldwin, Audre Lorde and David Byrne. Join James for an entertaining tour through the world's wisest and wittiest sayings.



10–11am | Old Divinity School |

£17/£12

Tim Minshall

Your Life is Manufactured

Unless you are floating naked through space, you are currently in direct contact with multiple manufactured products – furniture, technology, clothing, or even food. Revelatory and fascinating, *Your Life is Manufactured* reveals the profound impact manufacturing has had on our lives and the natural world. Join Tim Minshall (the inaugural Dr John C Taylor Professor of Innovation and Head of the Institute for Manufacturing at the University of Cambridge) as he explores better choices for ourselves, our communities, and the planet.

Cambridge Series



12–1pm | Palmerston Room | Ages 3–7

Rashmi Sirdeshpande

Super Uma

Join award-winning author Rashmi Sirdeshpande for a joyful event celebrating her new picture book *Super Uma*, illustrated by Nakul P. Rashmi will share a read-aloud, talk about dreaming up stories that crackle with imagination and explore the themes at the heart of *Super Uma* – collaboration, empathy and creating spaces where everyone can feel safe and happy. Expect warmth, humour and lots of joining in!

With thanks to Waterbeach

12–1pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Samira Ahmed, Sam Leith & Margaret Busby

Writers on Reading

To celebrate the National Year of Reading, join a stellar line-up of professional readers – a broadcaster, publisher, writer and critic – to discuss the important role that reading for pleasure has in improving life chances, building confidence and fuelling creativity – and how we can encourage readers new and old to embrace reading again.



Samira Ahmed



Sam Leith



Margaret Busby



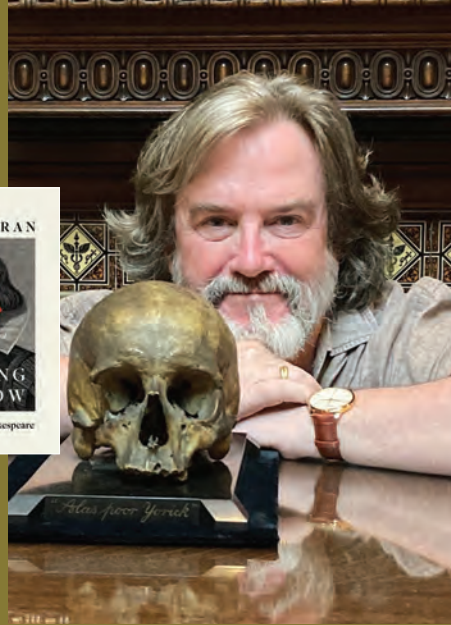
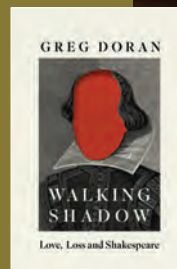
Saturday 25 April

2–3pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage | £17/£12

Greg Doran

Love, Loss and Shakespeare

Sir Greg Doran is one of the greatest Shakespearean directors of our era. After the death of his husband, the renowned actor Sir Antony Sher, Greg was inspired by the surprising history of *Shakespeare's First Folio* to see as many copies as he could find across the world. Marking more than 400 years since *Shakespeare's First Folio*, join Greg as he shares *Walking Shadow*, his compelling blend of memoir and travelogue, and illuminates Shakespeare, his times and global legacy.



2–3pm | Palmerston Room | Ages 2–6

Nick Butterworth

Percy the Park Keeper! Stories from the Park

Join award-winning author and illustrator Nick Butterworth, creator of the much-loved magical world of *Percy the Park Keeper*. For this very special family event Nick will share his favourite stories from the Percy collection and introduce his brand-new picture book *Once Upon a Journey* where Percy embarks on a camping holiday in a 'sailing car'.

With thanks to Waterbeach



2–3pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Catherine Carr

Who's the Favourite? The loving, messy realities of sibling relationships

Award-winning documentary maker and host of the hit podcast *Relatively*, Catherine Carr is a Festival favourite. Her first book *Who's the Favourite?* separates fact from fiction in the sibling relationship. Loving or fraught, competitive or codependent, these dynamics are integral in shaping who we become. Catherine invites us to spool through our own memories of those who saw us at our best and our worst – perhaps we can forge stronger futures together?

Saturday 25 April

THE NEW STATESMAN

4–5.30pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage | £20/£14

New Statesman Debate

This house believes that Britain's best days are behind it

There is in Britain today a widespread mood of public despair, a deep premonition of imminent national decline. According to Ipsos, just over half of Britons feel worse off since Keir Starmer was elected. Going further back, 60% feel the country has gone backwards since 2022. Both right and left have been appealing to an idealised past – before the Tories wrecked Britain, say Labour and Reform, or before New Labour did, says the right generally. At the same time, both left and right have been trying to imagine radical solutions for Britain's ills, from the Anglo-Futurism of the right, to the radical utopianism of the left. It seems the political landscape could be remapped, not in terms of left and right, but of optimists and pessimists. Should we brace ourselves for a future in which things just keep getting worse, or should we embrace the possibility of genuine progress?

Pratinav Anil: Marxist historian and critic, writing regularly for *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *UnHerd*. He is a lecturer at St Edmund Hall at the University of Oxford.

Rachel Clarke: a British writer and physician, specialising in palliative and end of life care, and writer of multiple books about medicine and life as a doctor.

Maurice Glasman: a Labour peer and intellectual founder of the Blue Labour tendency in British politics.

John Kampfner: journalist and former editor of *The New Statesman*, whose books include *Blair's Wars* and *Why the Germans Do it Better*.

Gary Stevenson: a British YouTuber, author, economist and former financial trader known for his economic commentary and activism against economic inequality.

Polly Toynbee: veteran *Guardian* columnist and author and vice-president of Humanists UK. Her most recent book is *An Uneasy Inheritance: My Family and other Radicals*.

Chaired by **Anoosh Chakelian**, Editor of *The New Statesman*



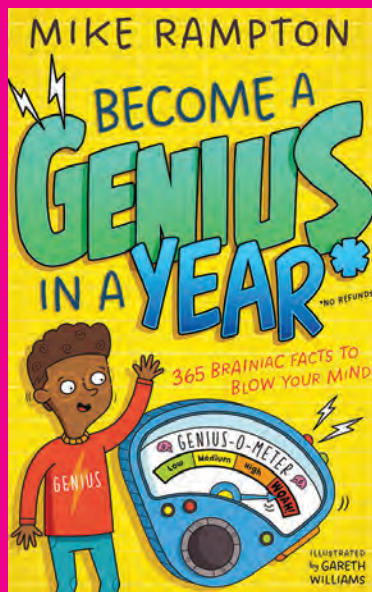
Saturday 25 April

4–5pm | Palmerston Room | Ages 7–11

Mike Rampton *Become a Genius*

Do you want to become the world's greatest clever-clogs? Then this is the event for you! Writer, journalist, and occasional stand-up comedian Mike Rampton joins the festival to share his most hilarious and interesting facts that you don't learn in school. From how to milk a cow, to the history of the duck-billed platypus, Mike has all the answers in his new book, *Become a Genius in a Year!*

With thanks to Waterbeach



Saturday 25 April

6–7pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage | £17/£12

Margaret Busby *Part of the Story – writings from half a century*

We are truly honoured to welcome Margaret Busby back to the Festival. A pioneering writer and cultural activist, Margaret founded publishing house Allison & Busby in her 20s and became the UK's first Black female publisher. She later edited the ground-breaking anthologies *Daughters of Africa* (1992) and *New Daughters of Africa* (2019). Come and be inspired by Margaret, a true trailblazer, who has had such a galvanising, positive impact on British culture.

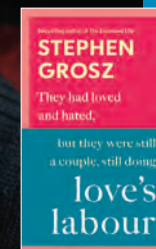
With thanks to St Mary's School



6–7pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Stephen Grosz *Love's Labour*

When it comes to love, why do we find things so difficult? Drawing on over forty years of candid and surprising conversations with his patients, psychoanalyst and writer Stephen Grosz asks, "What gets in the way of our falling in love? And what must we do to stay there?" Join the bestselling author of *The Examined Life* as he brings his unerring abilities to identify what hides behind the pain of heartsickness.



4–5pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Samira Ahmed *A Hard Day's Night*

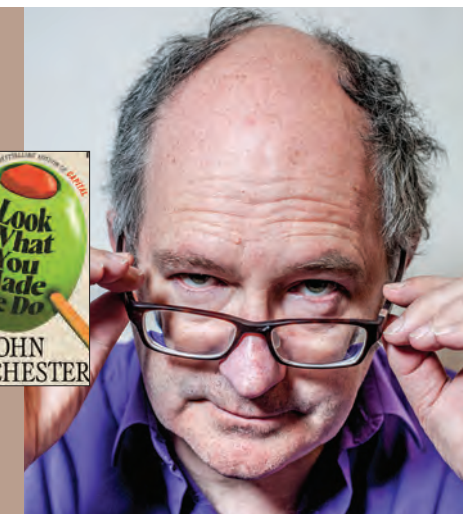
In all Samira Ahmed's work as a journalist and BBC broadcaster presenting Radio 4's *Front Row*, she's fascinated by the intersection of pop culture, politics and social change. In her new book, she explores *A Hard Day's Night*, which she used to watch again and again. Samira says, "Like the train the Beatles board at the start of the film, it's a wild ride." Jump on board and enjoy the ride!



6–7pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

John Lanchester *Look What You Made Me Do*

What if the year's most talked about TV show was all about your marriage? But who has betrayed whom? Who gets to tell whose story? Compelling, funny and vivid, *Look What You Made Me Do* is the latest novel from prize-winning writer and journalist John Lanchester, author of *Capital*. We're excited to welcome John, a master of fiction, with this hugely entertaining comedy of resentment, entitlement and inter-generational-sparring.



Saturday 25 April



8–9pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage
£17/£12

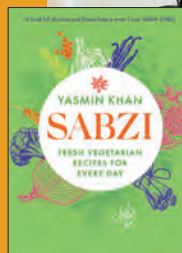
Steve Richards *Rock 'n Roll Politics*

In a special Festival show, commentator Steve Richards (author of *Tony Blair – A Biography* and *Turning Points – Crisis and Change in Modern Britain*) takes us behind the scenes of the latest epic political dramas and seeks to make sense of it all... sort of. Can Keir Starmer survive? What's causing the fracturing of British politics from Reform to the Greens? As Trump triggers mayhem, will Britain move closer to Europe? Plus Unreliable Predictions, Question Time, and much more.

8–9pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Yasmin Khan *Sabzi: fresh vegetarian recipes for every day*

Critically-acclaimed cookery writer and broadcaster Yasmin Khan invites us to enjoy delicious meals that are good for the health of people and the planet. Her new book *Sabzi* takes its name from the Persian word for 'fresh greens and herbs', and celebrates the best of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and South Asian flavours. Come to hear how Yasmin's travels and her home-cooking have inspired her vegetarian and vegan recipes. Irresistible.



8–9pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Merlin Holland *After Oscar: the legacy of a scandal*

Oscar Wilde died in November 1900, exiled in Paris and exhausted by scandal and prison life. His only grandson, Merlin Holland, has dedicated himself to studying Oscar's life and works, and their wider legacy. In *After Oscar*, Merlin debunks many inaccurate or entirely fictitious stories that have grown up around this iconic figure. Join Merlin for much-needed light on the reverberations of a life and a scandal.

Sunday 26 April

10–11am | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage | Ages 7–12

Cressida Cowell *Which Way to the Future*

We welcome the return of festival superstar and award-winning author (and former Children's Laureate) Cressida Cowell, creator of the book and film sensation *How to Train Your Dragon*, and other bestselling series *Which Way to Anywhere* and *The Wizards of Once*. Cressida will introduce her latest bestselling book, *Which Way to the Future*, talk about her inspiration and give writing and drawing tips. Her events are energetic, inspiring and unmissable.

With thanks to Waterbeach



10–11am | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Lord Nicholas Stern *The Growth Story of the 21st Century: the economics and opportunity of climate action*



The world stands at a crossroads. Can we avoid climate, biodiversity and economic catastrophe? Can we unlock a new era of sustainable, resilient and inclusive growth? In *The Growth Story of the 21st Century*, Nicholas Stern, IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government at the LSE, explores why we need a transformation that delivers both prosperity and a healthier planet. Why might delay be the riskiest option of all?

10–11.30am | University Arms

£25

Breakfast with the Editors

Over coffee and pastries, join leading journalists from *The New Statesman's* political team – Ailbhe Rea, Ethan Croft and Megan Kenyon, with Anoosh Chakelian in the Chair – for a discussion of the major news stories of the moment, and a chance to make sense of our turbulent and ever-changing world.

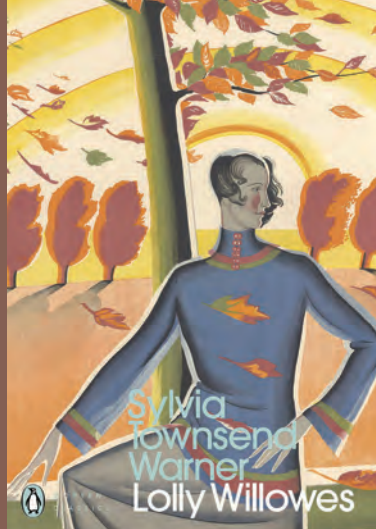


Sunday 26 April

10–11am | Old Divinity School | £17/£12
Harriet Baker, Alex Clark & Peter Swaab
Lolly Willowes at 100

"Women have such vivid imaginations, and lead such dull lives," says the eponymous heroine of *Lolly Willowes* to the Devil. This year marks the centenary of the publication of Sylvia Townsend Warner's satire about a single woman who steps outside societal expectations in the aftermath of the Great War. Join our panel of experts as they celebrate this subversive novel and its continuing significance in 2026.

Chaired by Erica Wagner.



Cambridge Series

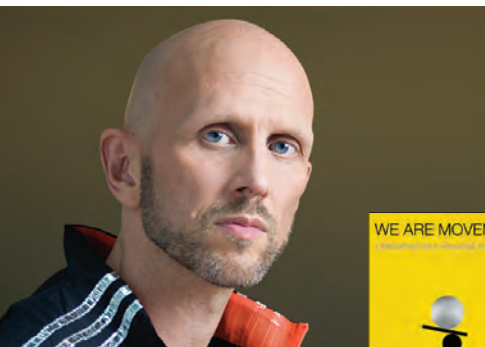
Sunday 26 April



12–1pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Clare Jackson
The Mirror of Great Britain

Though best known as the intended victim of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, James VI of Scotland and I of England was a major intellectual, whose preoccupations ranged from witchcraft and theological controversy, to hunting, diplomacy, poetry and sartorial fashion. Join prize-winning Clare Jackson, Honorary Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Cambridge, who brings her flair and insight to a perception-changing reappraisal of this highly unusual monarch.



12–1pm | Cambridge
 Union, TTP Stage |
 £17/£12

Wayne McGregor
We Are Movement

Internationally-celebrated, trailblazing and award-winning choreographer of The Royal Ballet, Sir Wayne McGregor CBE, reveals how we can all become more physically fluent – and so become better communicators, more creative thinkers, and ultimately live fuller lives. In his new book *We Are Movement*, Wayne argues that physical intelligence is instinctive, pre-verbal, and continually upgrades itself. Come and hear how releasing the knots in our physical and emotional selves, leaves us free to experience new forms of creativity and connection.



12–1pm | Palmerston Room | Ages 7–12
Athena Kugblenu
History's Most Epic Fails

Get ready for the kind of history you've never heard of before! Join comedian and CBBC's *Horrible Histories* writer Athena Kugblenu for a mind-boggling event based on her book *History's Most Epic Fails!* From ridiculous rulers to ludicrous inventions and totally terrible disasters, Athena reveals the moments when history went hilariously wrong. Think you know everything about history? Think again!

With thanks to Waterbeach



2–3pm | Cambridge Union, TTP Stage
 £28/£19

Deborah Levy
Room of One's Own Lecture

An annual opportunity for one of our foremost women writers to contemplate how far we have come since Woolf said, "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind." The fourth lecture in this series will be given by novelist, playwright and poet Deborah Levy. A commemorative pamphlet containing the lecture is included in the ticket price.

With thanks to PS Books

Sunday 26 April



2–3pm | Palmerston Room | Whole family
Jude Simpson
A Noise Annoys Show

Poet, entertainer and three-time national slam champion Jude Simpson performs an uplifting hour of witty wordplay, silly songs and fun interaction for anyone aged 6+ and their families. From a song celebrating peanut butter sandwiches to a tongue twister about naming your pet badger, there is lots of joy, a healthy dose of nonsense, and a few heartfelt moments of beautiful hush.

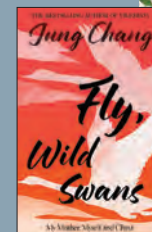
With thanks to Waterbeach

Sunday 26 April

4–5pm | The Arts Theatre Cambridge | £20/£14
Jung Chang
Fly, Wild Swans: my mother, myself and China

Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* defined a generation: an epic personal history of Jung, her mother and grandmother. We are thrilled that Jung returns to the Festival with her sequel *Fly, Wild Swans*, which brings the story of Jung's family – along with that of China – up to date. Join Jung for a deeply moving and unforgettable account of life under a communist dictatorship and the threat modern China poses to the world.

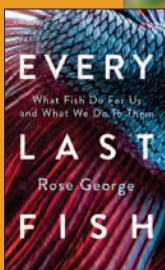
With thanks to Mills & Reeve



2–3pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12
Rose George
Every Last Fish: what fish do for us and what we do to them

Cold-blooded, slippery, wet and strange: fish are our fellow animals though we usually just think of them as food.

In *Every Last Fish*, journalist and author Rose George takes us inside the vast legal industries that support our appetite for fish fingers and smoked salmon sandwiches, and the equally colossal illegal fishing trade whose practices and standards are unmonitored and often dangerous. Can fishing ever return to sustainable levels?



4–5pm | Palmerston Room
£17/£12
James Macintyre
Gordon Brown: power with purpose

Polls regularly suggest that Gordon Brown is the most popular living former Prime Minister, and he continues to wield significant influence. Yet his short time in Number 10 ended in bitterness and election defeat. Journalist and author James Macintyre's fascinating new biography of Gordon Brown provides a compelling portrait of a true political giant, and reveals the private man behind the public figure: his family life, his faith and what still motivates him.

Sunday 26 April

4–5pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

The Observer's

Debut Novelists 2026

Every year, *The Observer* shines a light on the debut novelists whom they consider to be the rising stars of fiction writing – Louise Kennedy, Bonnie Garmus and Jo Browning Wroe are just a few of the novelists who soared to the top, and this year is no exception. We are delighted to present Stephanie Sy-Quia, Rebecca Perry and Jem Calder, three of this year's rising stars of fiction.

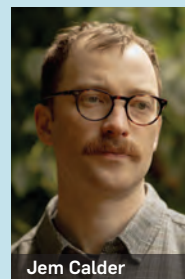
Chaired by Tom Gatti, Literary Editor, *The Observer*.



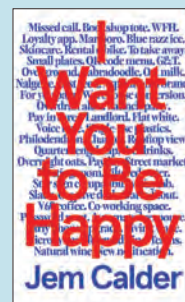
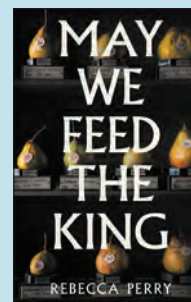
Stephanie Sy-Quia



Rebecca Perry



Jem Calder



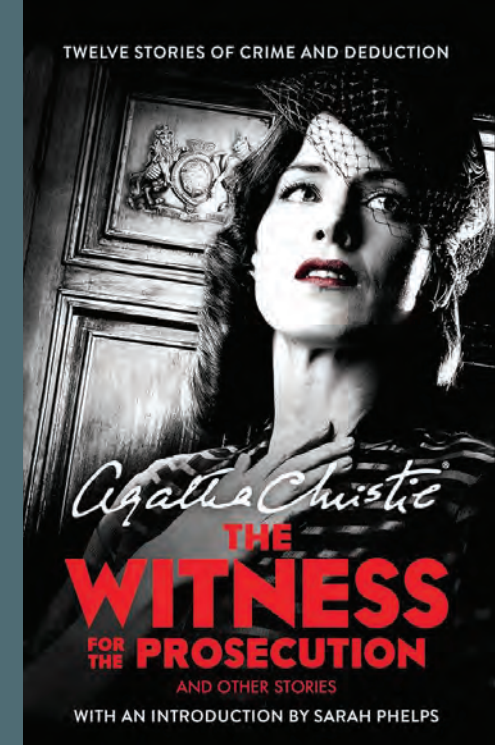
Sunday 26 April

6–7pm | Palmerston Room | £17/£12

Julius Green, Sophie Hannah & Kate Rhodes

Agatha Christie Anniversary

Although Agatha Christie died fifty years ago this year, her books have now sold over a billion copies in English and a billion in translation. Join our panel of experts – award-winning theatre producer and entertainment historian, Julius Green; bestselling writer of crime fiction, Sophie Hannah; and bestselling crime novelist, Kate Rhodes – as they celebrate Christie's enduring appeal and legacy, and attempt to solve the mystery of how she did it.



6–7pm | The Arts Theatre Cambridge

£20/£14

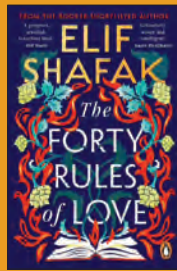
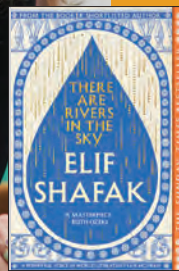
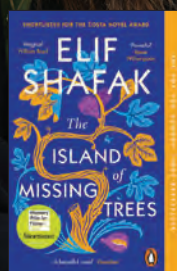
Elif Shafak

The Books That Made Me

Go All In to the books that have inspired the life and works of Festival Honorary Patron Elif Shafak and find out which books have influenced and engaged one of our greatest international writers. A British-Turkish novelist and storyteller, Elif is also an advocate for women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and freedom of expression. Her

latest novel *There Are Rivers in the Sky* spans centuries and continents, and was shortlisted for the 2025 Orwell Prize for Political Fiction.

GO
ALL
IN.



Francesca Wade



Deborah Levy

6–7pm | Old Divinity School | £17/£12

Francesca Wade & Deborah Levy on Gertrude Stein

Avant-garde American writer and art collector who made her home in Paris, godmother of modernism, queer icon, friend to Picasso and Hemingway, and self-declared genius, Gertrude Stein has been enduringly fascinating for a century. Join two of our boldest writers, who will discuss the enigma that is Gertrude Stein.



Sunday 26 April

8–9pm | The Arts Theatre Cambridge

£20/£14

Zadie Smith

Dead & Alive

Zadie Smith returns to the Festival with her exhilarating new essay collection *Dead & Alive*, focusing her dazzling skills on the subjects that have recently captured her attention. From literary memorials for writers we've lost, to trips to the movies, Glastonbury and Kilburn High Road, this is a collection about everything that makes life fizz – love, loss, culture and politics. Come and share Zadie's insightful world.

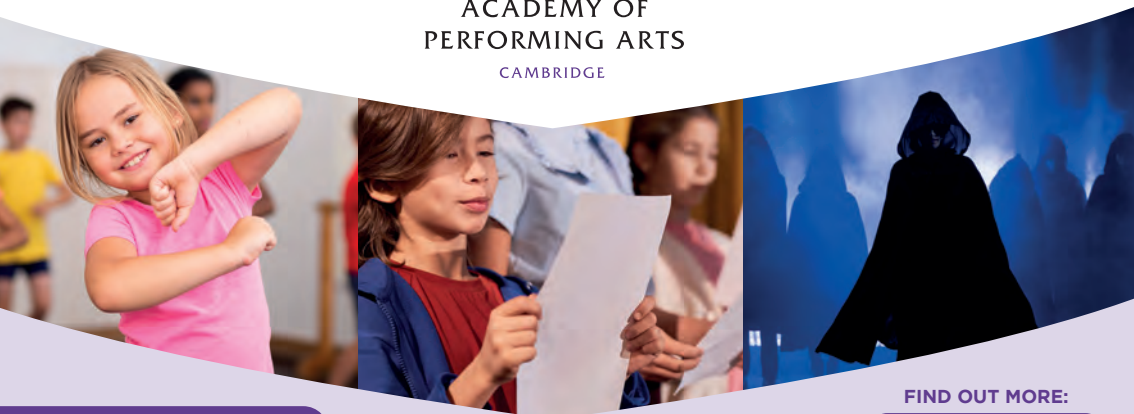
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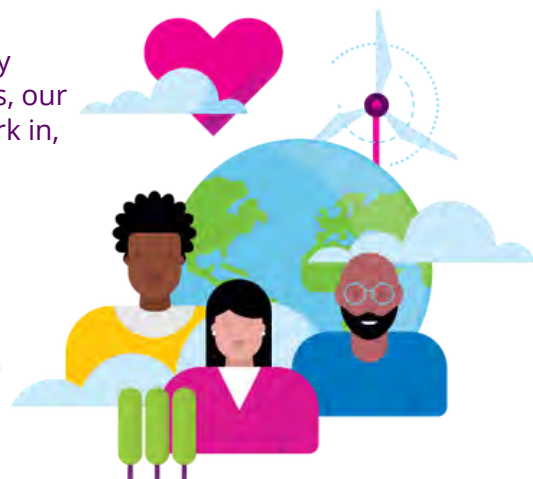
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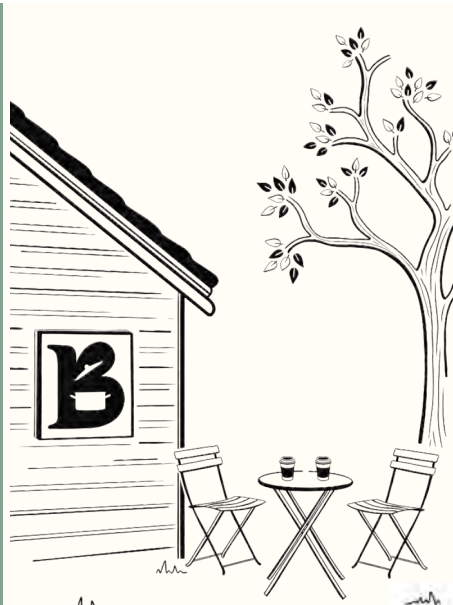


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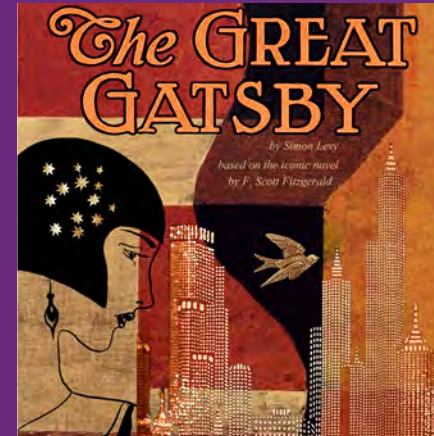
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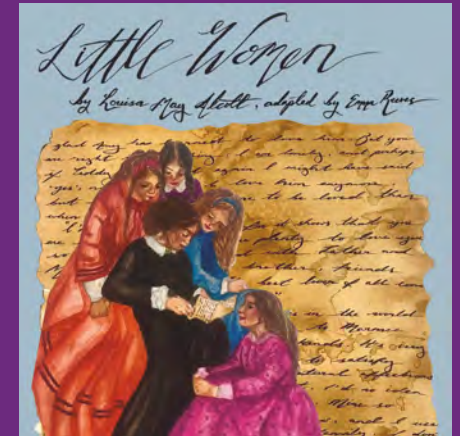
Cambridge University Musical Theatre Society

THE GREAT GATSBY

By F. Scott Fitzgerald, adapted by Simon Levy

It's the glittering world of 1920s New York: where champagne flows, secrets simmer, and dreams shimmer just out of reach. Simon Levy's stage play adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* brings Fitzgerald's iconic story to life in a production that feels both thrillingly immersive and quietly unsettling.

TUE 17 - SAT 21 FEBRUARY 7.45PM
SAT 21 FEBRUARY 2.30PM



Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club

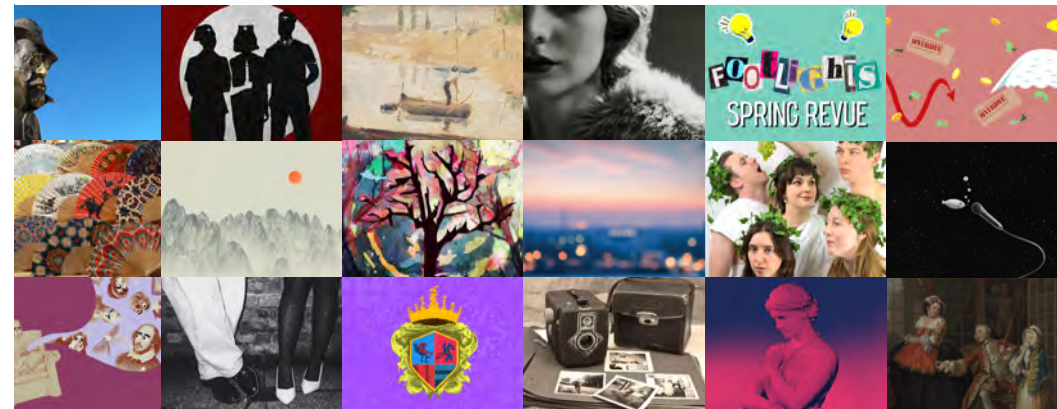
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By Louisa May Alcott, adapted by Emma Reeves

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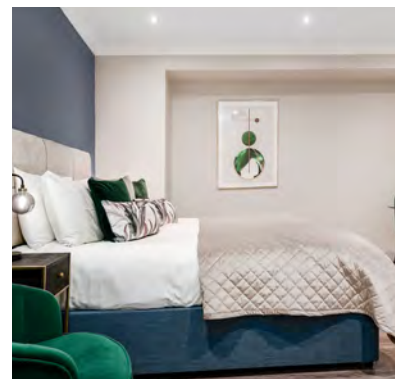
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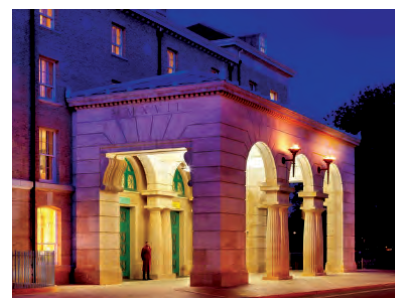
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Each book in the trilogy contains 365 images, one for every day of the year, hand-picked by the author and covering three distinct periods of the city's - and the photographer's - growth.

His images pull beauty from chance, conjure up novel relationships between uncooperative elements, emphasise the rhythms of existence, and invite us to enjoy the passing of time.

Again and again, Bond shows his gift for bringing a distinctive twist or an arresting angle to a familiar scene, making even those who live and work in this city question whether they really know it at all.

Bond's engaging writing style moves from spare and witty to ponderous and reflective, from historically insightful to personal and anecdotal. His captions describe the routines and rituals, the joy and the humour, the quirkiness and the tenderness of human life on the streets of Cambridge.

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- 1 Old Divinity School (0 mins)
- 2 Cambridge Union, TTP Stage (5 mins) & Union Library (5 mins)
- 3 Palmerston Room (10 mins)
- 4 The Arts Theatre Cambridge (15 mins)
- 5 University Arms (25 mins)

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Festival highlights

