

# M20<sup>years</sup>



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NEW COMMISSION IN CELEBRATION OF MANCHESTER LITERATURE  
FESTIVAL'S 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

*hive* and *a brief history of the species*

## hive

*in celebration of Manchester Literature Festival's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary*

I open the book of Manchester  
and the words grow wings and leave speechless  
I follow them humming my body  
through the crowded streets of the city  
that scatters and regrows itself nightly

and the tram-side field is a festival  
of colour and in the morning's waking  
the canal is inky and full and whole  
paragraphs of birds unroost and write  
their songs across the skyscraped skyline

and I keep pace with the words or rather trail  
their buzz passed the bustle and the busses  
and the one long sentence of the roads  
dense with gridlock until I come upon their home  
watch them swarm like smoke before they enter

through tunnels of shelving to a hive  
of paper where each page dusted with the pollen  
of fingerprints is a doorway to a chamber  
where the outside world can be shaken off  
and changed where each cell like a honeycomb's braille

can reveal a different story and I watch  
the words land on the tongue on the air in the ear  
and hands come together like wings in flight  
because what is gathered will be shared  
and what is written will be heard

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Footnote: hive was commissioned by Manchester Literature Festival to celebrate MLF's  
20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in autumn 2025.

## **a brief history of the species**

first there was the herd

and then there was the farm

and then there was the town

and then there was the word

the word on a stone

the word on a wall

the word on some skin

and the word was home

and home was a picture

and then home was carved

and then home was a grunt

and then home had a structure

and that's how we remembered

and that's how we traded

and that's how we dreamt

and that's how we invented

how we invented the pen

invented the page

invented the press

reinvented the world    again and again

and then the page was a screen

then the screen was our hand

and our hand was a mirror

that would never come clean

and there's no longer a pattern

language gets harder

attention shrinks like a glacier

and maybe literature makes nothing happen

and yet and yet and yet and yet

in the long single sentence of our species

each new letter moves us forward

step by step

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footnote: a brief history of the species is a prelude to hive. hive was commissioned by Manchester Literature Festival to celebrate MLF's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in autumn 2025.