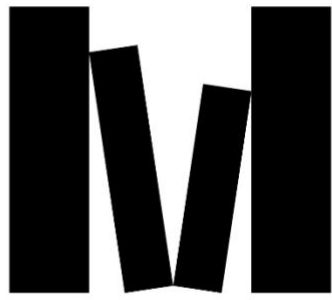




Manchester Literature Festival

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MANCHESTER LITERATURE FESTIVAL 2026: 17 DAYS THAT OFFER A WAY TO NAVIGATE THE WORLD RIGHT NOW

9 - 25 October 2026

Featuring Maggie O'Farrell, Kate Atkinson, Marina Hyde, Elif Shafak, Min Jin Lee, Patrick Radden Keefe, Lee Child, Jorie Graham, Lady Hale, Yann Martel, Russell T Davies in conversation with Bernardine Evaristo, Sarah Hall and many more.

Celebrating the National Year of Reading, one of the North's most unique literature festivals returns to ask what fiction, poetry and discussion can do in an age of upheaval.

2026: The news cycle is relentless; political turbulence at home and abroad, a climate emergency that is increasing, polarisation, misogyny and xenophobia on the rise, AI rewriting the rules of work and creativity. This October, Manchester Literature Festival brings together the writers best equipped to help you pause, listen and navigate the world around you – in a 17 day programme spanning globally garlanded novelists, Pulitzer and Booker winners, poets, journalists and campaigners.

A fixture of the UK's autumn cultural calendar for over 20 years, the Festival takes over some of Manchester's most striking spaces - Manchester Museum, Royal Northern College of Music, Contact, HOME, Waterstones Deansgate, Central Library and the historic John Rylands Library - for a city-wide celebration of storytelling, ideas and live performance, alongside workshops and family events.

THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL PROGRAMME INCLUDES:

PREVIEW EVENTS

Marina Hyde (28 Sep): The nation's sharpest political columnist and co-host of the popular podcast *The Rest Is Entertainment* brings her ferociously funny new collection *What a Time to Be Alive!* to Manchester.

Queered Up Now (30 Sep): New writing responding to the pioneering Queer Up North archive, with Louis Glazzard, Ella Otomewo and Okechukwu Nzelu, hosted by Andrew McMillan. In partnership with Queer Up North, Contact and Manchester Histories.

FICTION'S BIGGEST NAMES IN THE CITY

Maggie O'Farrell (9 Oct): One of contemporary fiction's most renowned storytellers, and author of the *Hamnet* phenomenon, returns with *Land*, a sweeping multi-generational epic inspired by her own family history and the wild Atlantic landscapes of Ireland. Sponsored by The Edwardian Manchester.

Kate Atkinson (10 Oct): The best-selling chronicler of our times unveils *Our Noble Selves*, a witty, atmospheric new novel set amid the fragile optimism of the 1951 Festival of Britain. Sponsored by The Edwardian Manchester.

Yann Martel (14 Oct): The Booker Prize-winning author of *Life of Pi* reimagines the Trojan War through an ordinary foot soldier's eye in his epic new novel *Son of Nobody*. Co-presented with the Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester.

M. John Harrison (20 Oct): One of Britain's most influential writers and Booker Prize 2026 nominee on *The End of Everything*, a darkly funny, unsettling novel of a fractured near future, in conversation with Helen Mort.

Lee Child (23 Oct): In a unique event for Manchester, one of the world's best-selling crime writers reflects on his love of crime fiction, his early days as a writer and the enduring popularity of Jack Reacher, ahead of his gripping new thriller *Chain Reaction*.

Elif Shafak (25 Oct): Returning to the Festival, the internationally best-selling novelist celebrates *In One Brief Moment All Eternity*, reimagining Gustave Flaubert's life through the women who shaped him, spanning revolutionary France to Beirut and Istanbul. Co-presented with the Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester.

THE STATE WE'RE IN

Patrick Radden Keefe (12 Oct): The New Yorker journalist behind the award-winning *Empire of Pain* returns with *London Falling*, a forensic true story of oligarch wealth, privilege and a death that exposes the city's hidden underworld. Co-presented with the Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester. Sponsored by The Edwardian Manchester.

Owen Jones (14 Oct): The author of *The Establishment* turns his attention to *The Fall of the West*, a provocative argument that today's turmoil is rooted in decades of elite failure rather than the culture-war explanations dominating headlines.

Paul Mason (11 Oct): The writer and broadcaster behind *PostCapitalism* discusses *REDS: A Global History of Communism*, tracing one of history's most contested ideas into the present day. Co-presented with the Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester.

Deborah Frances-White (11 Oct): The host of *The Guilty Feminist* podcast on *Six Conversations We're Scared to Have* – a fresh, engaging case for disagreement, openness, curiosity and the willingness to change our minds. Co-presented with the Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester.

Natasha Walter (18 Oct): The campaigner and author explores *Feminism for a World on Fire*, connecting women's rights, social justice and climate action.

Lady Hale & Lara Feigel (21 Oct): The UK's first female Supreme Court President and writer Lara Feigel come together to explore law, motherhood and power; a rare, candid look at how justice is experienced by families. Sponsored by Weightmans. Co-presented with the Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester. Sponsored by Weightmans.

Frank Cottrell-Boyce (13 Oct): Beloved children's author discusses *A British Childhood*, his warm, urgent reflection on books, imagination and the realities of childhood in Britain today.

Sarah Hall: Burning Snowflake – The Faber Lecture (10 Oct, SOLD OUT): The award-winning novelist delivers a fierce rallying cry for radical imagination as a weapon in the fight for climate survival. Co-presented with Faber Members, Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester.

INTERNATIONAL VOICES

Min Jin Lee (21 Oct): The author of *Pachinko* makes a rare trip to the UK to launch *American Hagwon*, a breathtaking epic of migration, sacrifice and inheritance across three generations. Co-presented with the Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester.

Akane Araki (10 Oct): One of Japan's most exciting young crime writers on her prize-winning debut *Murder at the End of the World*, a darkly funny mystery set days before an asteroid strikes Earth. Co-presented with the Japan Foundation.

Nao-Cola Yamazaki (19 Oct): The acclaimed Japanese author on *Beautiful Distance*, a profoundly moving novel of love, loss and connection. Co-presented with the Japan Foundation.

Hernan Diaz (22 Oct): The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Trust* introduces *Ply*, a wildly original thriller of technology, capitalism and shifting identity set centuries from now.

Willy Vlautin (19 Oct): American musician and novelist Willy Vlautin discusses *The Left and the Lucky*, his moving new novel of unlikely friendship and working-class life in America.

Eliza Chan & Sunyi Dean (24 Oct): Bestselling fantasy authors discuss Hong Kong, ghosts, folklore and their new novels *Harbour of Hungry Ghosts* and *The Girl with a Thousand Faces*. Co-presented with Waterstones.

POETRY, PROTEST AND THE PLANET

Simon Armitage (18 Oct): The Poet Laureate returns with an exhilarating new verse translation of *Gilgamesh*, the oldest surviving epic in world literature, brought thrillingly to life for a modern audience.

Carolyn Forché & Kwame Dawes (16 Oct): US 'poet of witness' Carolyn Forché and Jamaica's Poet Laureate Kwame Dawes share five decades of testimony, survival and political engagement in verse. In partnership with Manchester Poetry Library, Bloodaxe Books and Renaissance One.

Ian McMillan (12 Oct): Host of Radio 4's *The Verb* launches *Red River Valley*, a funny, poignant new collection drawn from family life and South Yorkshire. Co-presented with Manchester Poetry Library.

Manchester Multilingual City Poets (15 Oct): Jeremy Pak Nelson and Nóra Blascsó debut new commissions on heritage and inheritance, performed in English, Hungarian and Mandarin. Co-presented with Manchester UNESCO City of Literature.

Cabaret for Freedom (17 Oct): Malika Booker, Mali Hayes, Shirley May, Clive Hunte and Young Identity celebrate unsung women campaigners including Olive Morris and Kath Locke, at St John's Church, Old Trafford.

Karen Solie: Rylands Poetry Reading (22 Oct): This year's Rylands Poetry Reading, from the T.S. Eliot and Forward Prize-winning poet behind *Wellwater*, at the John Rylands Library.

Jackie Kay (25 Oct, closing event): The acclaimed poet, novelist and former Scottish Makar performs from her landmark *Selected Poems 1991–2026*, closing the Festival on a note of warmth and humanity.

FROM STAGE, SCREEN AND STUDIO

Russell T Davies & Bernardine Evaristo (11 Oct): The writer behind *Doctor Who*, *It's a Sin* and *Tip Toe* is in conversation with Booker Prize winner Bernardine Evaristo about his forthcoming memoir *The Queerest of Folk* - hilarious, hard-won stories from a career that changed British television.

Hugh Bonneville (17 Oct): The star of *Downton Abbey* and *Paddington* discusses his life on stage and screen and reveals how discovering his mother once worked for MI6 inspired his children's spy series.

Dave Haslam & special guests (24 Oct): Manchester DJ, writer and broadcaster Dave Haslam launches *Creative Journeys*, drawing on four decades of conversations with figures including Terry Hall, Neneh Cherry, Maxine Peake and Lemn Sissay.

NEW VOICES AND DEBUTS

Louise Kennedy & Wendy Erskine (15 Oct): Two of Northern Ireland's most acclaimed contemporary writers discuss their new novels *Stations* and *The Benefactors* with BBC 6 Music's Deb Grant.

Sufiyaan Salam & Monika Radojevic (18 Oct): Two fresh voices from Stormzy's #Merky Books discuss *Wimmy Road Boyz* and *Strangerland*, exploring identity and belonging. Co-presented with Manchester Museum, Centre for New Writing & Creative Manchester.

Claire Lynch & Claire Adam (23 Oct): Award-winning writers on *A Family Matter* (Nero Gold Book of the Year) and *Love Forms* (Booker-longlisted), exploring mothers, daughters and hidden truths.

Brutalist Ghost Stories (17 Oct): Northern novelists Jenn Ashworth, Nicholas Royle, David Gaffney and Beth Barker read from an anthology turning Britain's post-war architecture into the uncanny.

EVENTS FOR CURIOUS FAMILIES

From poetry and spy fiction, football and dancing, families can enjoy events with *Paddington* actor and spy fiction writer **Hugh Bonneville**, football freestyler **Ben Nuttall**, musical theatre star **Robert Tregoney** plus the **Beano** presents **Dennis the Menace's Year of Mischief**.

Manchester Literature Festival Co-Directors Cathy Bolton and Sarah-Jane Roberts said; *"In this National Year of Reading, we invite audiences to immerse themselves in great stories, new ideas and insightful conversations about the world around us. Books - and their authors - have a unique way of helping us understand the issues shaping our lives, introducing us to different perspectives and encouraging us to listen, engage and dig deeper. This October, we're bringing an extraordinary group of writers to Manchester, from Booker and Pulitzer winners to poets, journalists and fresh new voices, all ready to entertain, challenge and inspire you."*

John McAuliffe, Associate Vice-President, Culture Portfolio, University of Manchester said, *"Hard questions, argument and disagreement are the cornerstones of a university education where new ideas are tested and established, which is why, at the University of Manchester, we love partnering with the Manchester Literature Festival. This year's typically stellar programme (again!) promises exchange, discovery and the kinds of events which we will be talking about long after the visiting speakers leave the stage."*

Jen Cleary, Director North West, Arts Council England said *"We're proud to support Manchester Literature Festival as one of our National Portfolio Organisations as it always offers the best in cultural and political discourse from international thinkers and writers alongside events with celebrated authors, poets and new voices. This year's programme ambitiously aims to make sense of today's turbulent world while showcasing storytelling, creativity and the power of new ideas. We look forward to joining in the discussions and events."*

Councillor Shazia Butt, Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Libraries, Manchester City Council said: *"Booklovers across the city and beyond will be thrilled to see that the Manchester Literature Festival team have done it again! With yet another packed programme of events and a brilliant line-up of writers all heading to Manchester this Autumn, it's time to make space on your bookshelves and in your diaries. As a UNESCO City of Literature, we couldn't be more excited about what's coming up this year and getting to host and to hear direct from some of the world's most talented and creative authors right here on our doorstep."*

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Notes to editors

In 2025 Manchester Literature Festival celebrated its 20th birthday and as well as attracting writers of the highest calibre, looked back over the past two decades with a photographic exhibition, *From Page to Stage* at Manchester Central Library. Over the years, MLF has featured many of the biggest names in literary fiction and spoken word as well as prominent cultural figures from across the globe, including Monica Ali, Martin Amis, Tori Amos, Raymond Antrobus, Simon Armitage, Kate Atkinson, Margaret Atwood, Malorie Blackman, Malika Booker, Joe Boyd, Jung Chang, Neneh Cherry, Gillian Clark, Susanna Clarke, Kit de Waal, Kwame Dawes, Jeremy Deller, Roddy Doyle, Margaret Drabble, Jennifer Egan, Anne Enright, Bernardine Evaristo, Percival Everett, Guy Garvey, Matt Haig, Paula Hawkins, Natalie Haynes, Seamus Heaney, Mick Heron, Lindsay Hilsum, A.M. Homes, Alan Hollinghurst, Jackie Kay, Rebecca F Kuang, Kazuo Ishiguro, Howard Jacobson, Alan Johnson, Daisy Johnson, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Barbara Kingsolver, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Hanif Kureishi, Deborah Levy, Olivia Laing, Valeria Luiselli, Johnny Marr, Paul Mason, Armistead Maupin, Val McDermid, David Mitchell, Paul Morley, Michael Morpurgo, Walter Mosley, Kate Mosse, Andrew Motion, Sayaka Murata, Jo Nesbo, Maggie O'Farrell, Andrew O'Hagan, Ben Okri, David Olusoga, David Peace, Max Porter, Richard Powers, Ian Rankin, Kamila Shamsie, Will Self, Elif Shafak, Lemn Sissay, Zadie Smith, Meera Sodha, Elizabeth Strout, Douglas

Stuart, Kae Tempest, Neil Tennant, Colm Toibín, Rose Tremain, Dame Harriet Walter, Sarah Waters, Colson Whitehead, Jeanette Winterson, Xinran and Asako Yuzuki.

The festival has also welcomed prominent activists, campaigners and disruptors including Led By Donkeys, Mary Portas, Patrisse Cullors (co-founder of Black Lives Matter), Angela Davis, Reni Eddo-Lodge, Edward Enninfu, Afua Hirsch, Caroline Criado Perez, Caroline Lucas, George Monbiot, Arundhati Roy, Rebecca Solnit, Gloria Steinem, Senator Bernie Sanders, Yanis Varoufakis and Vivienne Westwood.

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