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MANCHESTER LITERATURE FESTIVAL TURNS 20: TWO DECADES OF POWERFUL STORIES, ACCLAIMED AUTHORS AND INSPIRING IDEAS

Manchester Literature Festival (MLF) marks its 20th anniversary this year with a vibrant celebration of storytelling, creativity and cultural dialogue from **11–26 October 2025**.

Ahead of the main Festival, MLF will unveil a newly commissioned poem by multi-award-winning writer **Andrew McMillan** and a **special photography exhibition**, *From Page to Stage*, which will spotlight and celebrate iconic moments and writers from two decades of programming.

Programme highlights include:

Mick Herron - a master of British spy fiction reveals his highly anticipated new thriller *Clown Town*. *Sponsored by Weightmans.*

Sayaka Murata – the award-winning Japanese author of *Convenience Store Woman* and *Earthlings* discusses her provocative new novel *Vanishing World*. *Sponsored by The Edwardian Manchester*

Elizabeth Day - the bestselling author of *Magpie*, *How to Fail* and *Friendaholic* comes to the Festival to discuss her new novel *One of Us*. *Sponsored by The Edwardian Manchester.*

Kiran Desai – the Booker Prize winning author joins us in an intimate event to discuss her long awaited new novel, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*. *Presented in partnership with Manchester Museum.*

Irvine Welsh – one of Scotland's most iconic literary voices takes us back to the notorious world of *Trainspotting* in his blazing and hilarious new novel *Men in Love*.

Zadie Smith - A North West exclusive, the award-winning author returns to talk about her new book *Dead and Alive* that celebrates the legacy of literary greats Joan Didion, Martin Amis, Hilary Mantel, Philip Roth and Toni Morrison. *Presented in partnership with the Centre for New Writing and Creative Manchester. Sponsored by The Edwardian Manchester.*

Jeanette Winterson - 40 years after her era-defining debut *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette returns with *One Aladdin Two Lamps* - a bold, brilliant celebration of the transformative power of

storytelling and deep reading. *Presented in partnership with the Centre for New Writing and Creative Manchester. Sponsored by Weightmans.*

Samantha Shannon & Saara El-Arifi – two of the most electrifying voices in fantasy join us to discuss epic storytelling, character creation and feminist fiction. Samantha will talk about her forthcoming book, *Among the Burning Flowers*, and Saara her latest novel, *Cursebound*. *Presented in partnership with Waterstones Deansgate and sponsored by The Maldron Hotel.*

Sarah Hall & Daisy Johnson – two of Britain's most original literary talents come together to explore nature, myth and folklore. Sarah will discuss her brilliant new novel *Helm*, inspired by Cumbria's wild wind and Daisy will talk about her haunting book, *The Hotel*. *Presented in partnership with Centre for New Writing and Creative Manchester.*

Mary Portas – a passionate campaigner for creativity and the high street unveils her life in fashion and her candid new book *I Shop Therefore I Am: The 90s, Harvey Nicks – and Me*.

Patrick Grant - designer, *Great British Sewing Bee* judge, clothing manufacturer and sustainability champion shares the story behind his bold new book *LESS*.

Jung Chang – the international bestselling author explores *Fly, Wild Swans* - the long-awaited sequel to her iconic memoir *Wild Swans*. *Presented in partnership with Waterstones Deansgate.*

Yanis Varoufakis – one of Europe's most provocative and influential voices returns to share insights from his powerful new memoir *Raise Your Soul: A Personal History of Resistance*.

Hans Ulrich Obrist - the art world's ultimate connector shares stories from his coming-of-age memoir, *Life in Progress*. *Presented in partnership with The Whitworth.*

Led By Donkeys - from viral billboards to guerrilla projections on UK Parliament, Led by Donkeys have taken political satire and direct action to a whole new level. Hear the story behind their book *Led by Donkeys: Art, Activism and Accountability*.

Martin Parr - one of the world's most idiosyncratic photographers launches his autobiography, *Utterly Lazy and Inattentive*, and discusses some of his favourite photos with host **Helen Mort**.

Kate Mosse – two events by the best-selling author and founder of the Women's Prize as she talks about *How to get Published*, advising aspiring writers on their future careers and her latest non-fiction work, *Feminist History for Every Day of the Year*. *Sponsored By Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.*

Hannah Ritchie – one of the most refreshing voices in the climate conversation, the data scientist shares *Clearing the Air: A Hopeful Guide to Solving Climate Change in 50 Questions and Answers*. *Sponsored by Weightmans.*

Elizabeth Alker - the BBC Radio 3 broadcaster discusses her book *Everything We Do is Music* with DJ and BBC 6 Music presenter Deb Grant and explores how visionary classical composers helped shape the sound of modern pop and rock.

Manchester Literature Festival emerged from Manchester Poetry Festival and poetry is still one of the Festival's most important strands. This year's poetry highlights include:

Simon Armitage - Poet Laureate and Festival favourite Simon Armitage returns to read from his two new collections, *Dwell* and *New Cemetery*.

Reimagining v.: **Malika Booker, Jo Clement & Paul Farley** - 40 years on from Tony Harrison's seminal poem v., three acclaimed and distinctive Northern poets re-imagine his verse and read from their newly commissioned poems. Hosted by **Andrew McMillan**. *Presented in partnership with Manchester Poetry Library.*

The Poems of Seamus Heaney - **John McAuliffe, Bernard O'Donoghue, Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn** and **Nick Laird** gather to mark the publication of *The Poems of Seamus Heaney* and read some of their favourite poems by the Irish Laureate. *Presented in partnership with the Centre for New Writing and Creative Manchester.*

From Page to Stage: 20 Years of Manchester Literature Festival Exhibition

12 September – Tuesday 16 December 2025

To mark Manchester Literature Festival's 20th anniversary, Manchester Central Library hosts a photography exhibition celebrating two decades of literary magic. This intimate collection of photos charts the Festival's journey from its early days to becoming one of the UK's most distinctive literary events. Unforgettable moments and remarkable voices that have shaped the Festival – from award-winning novelists and poets to leading songwriters and musicians, activists and change-makers - are revisited through striking images. Writers featured include **Lemn Sissay, Jeanette Winterson, Jackie Kay, Simon Armitage, Johnny Marr, Guy Garvey, Linton Kwesi Johnson** and **Vivienne Westwood**, capturing the energy, diversity and creativity that defines the Festival.

As always, the Festival includes **events and workshops for families and children** including Manchester Literature Festival's **Family Birthday Bash** with *Supertato* creator Sue Hendra, CBBC presenter Katy Ashworth and Pia's Pet Party with Serena Patel and a Wild Science Animal Encounter, plus bestselling author and comics creator **Jim Smith** delivers an hilarious draw-along to celebrate his latest book, *Genius Kid Goes Viral*.

Manchester Literature Festival Co-Directors Cathy Bolton and Sarah-Jane Roberts said:

"This year is the 20th anniversary of Manchester Literature Festival and we're excited to welcome hundreds of writers, readers and culture lovers back to the Festival. We've seen both Manchester and the literary landscape radically transform since 2006 but the one thing that's stayed consistent is people's desire for storytelling and connection.

We feel privileged to have welcomed some of the world's greatest writers to our UNESCO City of Literature and as we look forward to the future, we'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all the authors, artists and audiences who have joined us on our journey so far, their creativity, curiosity and civic engagement are the pulse of Manchester Literature Festival."

Jen Cleary, Director North West, Arts Council England said:

“Congratulations to Manchester Literature Festival on reaching its 20th anniversary! We’re pleased to support the festival as one of our National Portfolio Organisations; it’s always one of the autumn’s highlights bringing a wide variety of writers, poets and thinkers together to celebrate creativity and different storytelling genres. This year’s programme has an exciting line up of acclaimed authors and inspiring voices worthy of marking 20 years as one of the key literary festivals in the North and I’m sure that everyone will find an event to tempt them.”

Dr. Kaye Mitchell, Director, Centre for New Writing said:

“Two decades on, Manchester Literature Festival remains a creative force for good and a perennial source of inspiration within the cultural life of the city. The Centre for New Writing at The University of Manchester is proud to act as the Higher Education Partner of the Festival, and MLF 2025 promises an array of literary luminaries and cultural icons, with some compelling commissions and unmissable events. Here’s to the next twenty years!”

Councillor Garry Bridges, Deputy Leader Manchester City Council said:

"MLF has pulled out all the stops again with an incredible line-up of top literary talent and the chance for festival-goers to hear from some of the most talented and creative writers and thinkers currently around. We couldn't be more excited about the depth and range of the programme on offer which reflects our status as a UNESCO City of Literature and we can't wait to welcome writers and readers to Manchester this autumn."

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[PRESS IMAGES HERE](#)

Notes to editors

Manchester Literature Festival runs 11-26 October 2025

Full festival details visit <https://manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk/whats-on>

Over the past 20 years, Manchester Literature Festival 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, 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, 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 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 the late Vivienne Westwood.

Join the conversation: #MLF2025 @McrlitFest

<https://www.threads.net/@mcrlitfest>

<https://bsky.app/profile/mcrlitfest.bsky.social>

Ticket and booking information:

Booking for the full Manchester Literature Festival 2025 programme opens for MLF Members on Tuesday 12 August at midday. General tickets on sale on Thursday 14 August.

Manchester Literature Festival membership from as little as £25 per year. Full details of membership benefits and buying options [HERE](#).

Manchester Literature Festival gratefully acknowledges the generous support of our main funders Arts Council England, Manchester City Council and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, our higher education partner The University of Manchester, Festival Friends Weightmans and the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and our Principal Hotel Partner The Edwardian, Manchester and Associate Hotel Partner Maldron.

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. Our vision, set out in our strategy *Let's Create*, is that by 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. Between 2023 and 2026 we will have invested over £467 million of public money from Government, alongside an estimated £250 million each year from The National Lottery, to help ensure that people in every part of the country have access to culture and creativity in the places where they live. Until Autumn 2025, the National Lottery is celebrating its 30th anniversary of supporting good causes in the United Kingdom: since the first draw was held in 1994, it has raised £49 billion and awarded more than 690,000 individual grants. Visit [our website](#) to learn more about our work.

