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If Devo Manc was an  
animal, what would it be?

*Maybe one of those mini pigs – it seems cute and getting one is a good idea at the time, but it turns out there's no such thing as a mini pig, but they grow and grow and grow...*

Dr Sarah Marie Hall, Lecturer in Human Geography, University of Manchester

# **The Mini-Pig**

## **by Sarah Butler**

It was decided behind closed doors: what Manchester needed was a mini-pig. Nobody else had one. Nobody else was even close to having one. And so Manchester would be the first, and the rest of the country would be sick with envy.

It wasn't easy to get hold of one. Compromises and concessions had to be made, deals had to be struck. Those on the other side of the closed doors banged their fists and raised their voices: it would cost too much; nobody wanted it; it was a trap, a trick, a bloody stupid idea. But the men-in-charge told each other it was worth it – for the city, for the future, for their own careers.

And so, one day, the mini-pig arrived and took up residence in the Town Hall. It chose one of the finest rooms – with wood panelling, hand-painted wallpaper, gold leaf, stained glass – and settled itself in a carved wooden chair on a small dais. It demanded the Town Hall's best catering and ate more than anyone could have imagined. Once it had finished the egg sandwiches and the tomato quiche, the chocolate brownies and the fruit skewers, the mini-pig let out a loud burp, curled up in its chair and fell fast asleep. The men-in-charge tried to hide their concern. It was just settling in, they told each other. Great things would come of their decision; they just needed to be patient.

The mini-pig continued to eat, and as it ate, it started to grow. The men-in-charge told the caterers to stop bringing food, and the mini-pig howled its fury. We have to stand firm, the men-in-charge said, we want a mini-pig, not a monster, and so they locked the mini-pig in its room and went about their business. The next morning, they gathered together and tentatively unlocked the door. As soon as it was open, the mini-pig barrelled past them, hooves skittering across the tiled corridors, ears flattened, snout twitching left to right, and before the men could stop it, it was down the stairs and out onto Albert Square.

A rampage was how the newspapers described it. A travesty. A disaster. The mini-pig had raced across the city, eating whatever it could find – rooting in dustbins, stealing

people's lunches, raiding shops. The men-in-charge issued statement after statement, making wild promises of prosperity and growth, power and connectedness. These are merely teething troubles, they said. We have a mini-pig; we can do anything.

Eventually, the men-in-charge managed to recapture the animal and drag it back to the Town Hall. They tied it up and sat themselves down to discuss what to do. One of them googled 'care and control of mini-pigs'. According to Wikipedia, he told his colleagues, mini-pigs were only an idea, they did not, in fact, exist. The men looked at the mini-pig, which was chewing the leg of the carved wooden chair. It looked real to them, and it was getting bigger.


Outside on the square, a protest had begun. 'We never asked for the pig', people shouted. 'Send the hog home.' But part of the deal the men-in-charge had made was that under no circumstances could they send the mini-pig back. There was no return address; no refund available.


We could keep it locked up, they said. We could try and negotiate. We could bring in a specialist trainer. We could drug it. We could kill it. The pig grunted and they turned to see that it had chewed through its rope and was sitting on the chair like a king on a throne, its hooves dangling off the edge, its skin fat and taut and pink, and they wished, to a man, that they had never started any of this.


This is one of three stories by Sarah Butler which explore what Devo Manc might be and mean for the city. Sarah met with a range of academics working on Devo Manc, as well as other residents and campaigners in Manchester. She asked each of them: If Devo Manc was an animal, what would it be? Their answers inspired the three stories.

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The Manchester Urban Institute (MUI) aims to contribute to the realisation of more inclusive and just cities that are both environmentally and socially sustainable for the current and future generations through world-leading research, engagement/impact and training activities. For more information, please visit the MUI website.

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The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account-funded hub brings together work from across the University of Manchester on Devo Manc. More information is available at:

<http://www.mui.manchester.ac.uk/devo-manc/research/>

Sarah Butler explores the relationship between writing and place through prose, poetry and participatory projects. Recent writing residencies include writer-in-residence on the Central line; at Great Ormond Street Hospital; and with people living in temporary accommodation in East Manchester. She has two novels published by Picador in the UK and with fourteen international publishers: *Ten Things I've Learnt About Love* (2013) and *Before The Fire* (2015).

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