THE BEEKEEPER *by* GORDON MACKEY

He had read Snelgrove on swarming,
of Huber's invention of moveable frames,
but was none the wiser for it.
No matter how many times he tried,
he could not breed a queen to his liking.

Matters got worse when he learnt
that honey bees have five eyes,
that flowers transmit radio signals
to the hairs on a passing bee's leg
only if fresh nectar is available.

Informed that his bees could count,
he gave up trying to figure them out.
Accepting them as sentient creatures,
equipped with their own grasp of reality,
beyond worthy of being treated as equals.

Bees were a biological amalgam of atoms,
creatures centred in their own perceptions,
individuals experiencing consciousness.
So, like them, the things he best perceived
were the swarms entering his hive mind.

The Beekeepers and the Birdnester, circa 1568
Pieter Brueghel the Elder
(Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin – Museum of Prints and Drawings, Berlin)

THE HIVE *by* GORDON MACKEY

I lift the lid, square as a chair
on stumpy legs, anticipating
the pleasure of surprise,
at the murmuration of bees.

A complexity of smells
betrays a work in progress.
Nurses feeding plump pupa
sentries manning the gate.

Foragers crash landing
loaded with globs of pollen.
All the active attributes
of a classless caste system.

Into this thriving city
descends the hand of God
to trim eruptions of wax
from unplanned streets.

Unripe comb gets crushed
soaking attendant courtiers.
Were it not for the veil
I would pop it in my mouth.

Today's blossom is Hawthorne
"death in the marriage bed".
Transformed by enzymes
into the noble nectar of life.

The queen is about her chambers
groomed and sprightly
as every vacant cell
is inspected for perfection.

Unhurried she deposits eggs
minted at thirty an hour.
Tubular incubi stood tiptoe
fractal soldiers on parade.

It is pointless to draw conclusions
from this numerate collective,
neither of capitalist cant
nor of proletarian solidarity.

It's a limited partnership,
telling me in its own language
"we are busy here,
close the lid and go away".