

BELONG & OPEN UP

Lemn Sissay

Lemn Sissay was commissioned by Manchester Literature Festival to write these poems in response to the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's era-defining *I Have a Dream* speech for a celebratory programme co-produced with Manchester Camerata. The poems were written to be performed rather than to be read on the page. They were performed at Manchester Town Hall on Saturday 19 October 2013, interspersed between movements of Beethoven's String Quartet No.13 in B flat, OP. 130, performed by Camerata principal players.

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BELONG

(Written by Lemn Sissay for performance)

Have you seen the churches of Lalibella
Swam in the warm springs of Addis Ababa
Have you heard the reaching Nile
Of the bible and the Koran My Abyssinia

Have you heard whispering widow peaks of sand
Seen the reeling rainbows as Victoria falls
Felt the mists on the Simien mountains
And the dust clouds of Harare's hyenas call

And did you see the gentle man taken
Then imprisoned for twenty five years
Who walked out of chains and became president
And who faced down the world's fears

Did you see his example to the world
How he embraced his adversary
Spoke of unassailable truth and reconciliation
Then we flounder in wars' anniversary

Hold me while spirits of the past
& Rivers of blood run through me
All this past feeds this present
And brings the truth into me

His story your search, his journey ours
Something rings true inside and strong
I stand atop Piccadilly Tower and sing
I belong. I belong.

I the Mogadishan who knows troubled waters
I the Belfast man who knows troubled cities
I the Ethiopian who knows troubled lands
I the Serbian who crosses troubled seas

Who walked through darkened valleys
Under the shadows of death and bled
And who lay amongst the freshly killed
And in fear of tears played dead

Those who have cried cities sobbed roads
In the name of here and where they came from
Stand with children atop Bridgewater Hall
And sing I belong here I belong

I am the blackest blackest blackest man
The tongue twists the skin dark
I moved next door to the whitest poet
In John Cooper Clarke

I'm buried in the cemetery where Morrissey walked
In the earth from where grew stone roses
I am the seamstress for Manchester's dream coat
I designed the clothes for Moses

I am the PSV, the sanctuary the kitchen
I am the reno red rhythm the bull ring's blues
I am the dread in its red and for all that's said
Wherever I go I am you

I grew in the villages of Lancashire
You stood on my horizon since birth
The reason I came from to Manchester
Is because it's the greatest place on earth

I bring my past I bring my future
I bring my rights and I bring my song
I stand atop the Hacienda and shout
We belong Here. We belong.

OPEN UP

(Written by Lemn Sissay for performance)

Where did all that cotton come from
That filled the employment factories the mills?
Why do you think Indians came here and Africans
With their calm and their sense and their skills?

Nobody owes anybody anything in this world
But all this world is for all and every one
And borders are bullies and boring
So let's have done with them. Let's get them gone.

Let's have no north and no south
Only truth and lies
And let's see how we understand the world then
Find out where lies the land and the land ties

Land rights land longs plain landing
I am from the North western tribe
But anyone who tells me it has one colour
Is telling lies

I'm from north western tribe
We say good morning we drink tea
We walk to Rivington Pike each year
If from Atherton Bolton Leigh

But more than any other point
In its growth and self-improving
I can tell the confidence of any street
When a stranger moves in

The more closed we become
The more foreign our spirits seem
The more closed we become
The more our heart's quarantined

The more closed we become
The darker our heart
The more closed we become
The more apart

The more territorial
More terrorist

Open all borders break down all walls
Shred all birth certificates burn all passports
Open all doors windows and gates
Open all access all areas open all records

Open all fields open all curtains
Open all memories open all galleries
Open all fears open all dreams open all
Cure all maladies

Open all educational facilities
Open all secret services open all doors
Open all senses open all defences
Ask what were these closed for

Open all family secrets open all trap doors
Open all dark passages open all attics and cellars
Open all battles open all secret wars
Open all and unlock interstella... The interstella

The possibilities of light
The nature of trust
The strength of the unassailable
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