

# **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.

Manchester Literature Festival  
The Department Store  
5 Oak Street  
Manchester M4 5JD  
[www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk](http://www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk)

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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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