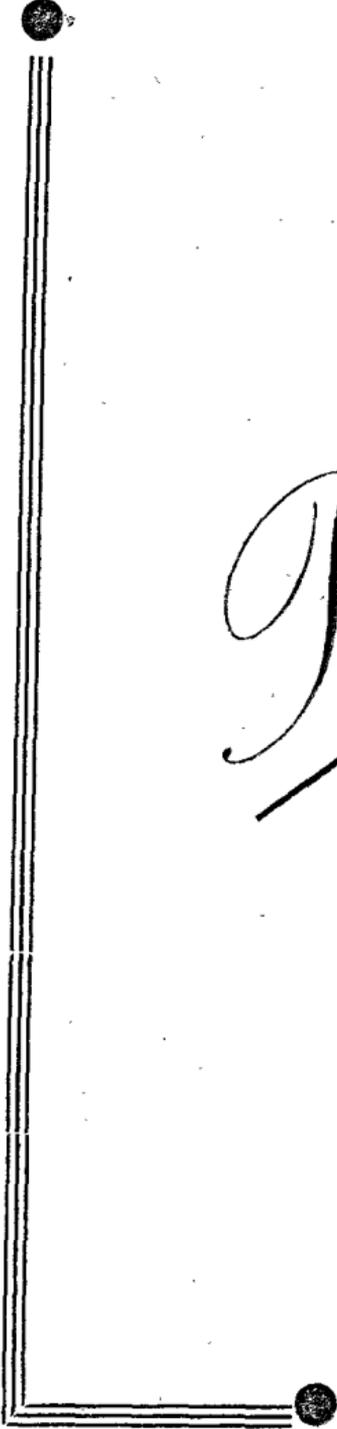


A
BLACKMAN
SPEAKS OF
FREEDOM!



Poems.

BY
Peter Abrahams.

Phone 22242

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**A BLACKMAN SPEAKS OF
FREEDOM!**

FOR

CASSIM AMRA

Who has crossed the artificial barriers of race and creed and through suffering and much loneliness learnt the secret of brotherhood;

AND

For the youth,, everywhere, who are fighting for that freedom that will restore the laughter of man.

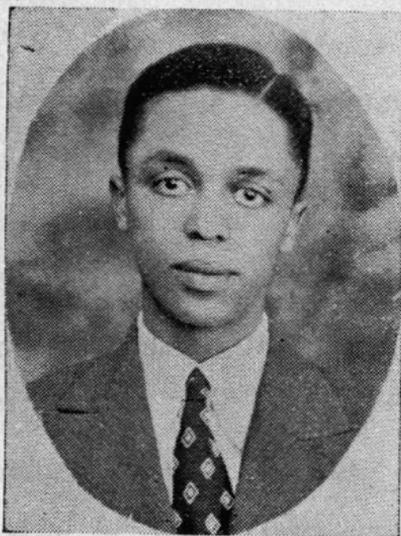
I, TOO.

*I, too, sing America,
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes;
But I laugh
An' eat well,
And grow strong.
To-morrow,
I'll sit at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.
Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed,—
I, too, am America.*

—By LANGSTON HUGHES,
Famous Negro Poet.

Listen peoples.
Anywhere punching time:
If you're walking to the moon
I've got clean socks for you.

—By Paul Potts,
Canadian Folk Poet.



Peter Abrahams.

“I want a black boy to announce to the gold minded whites
The arrival of the reign of the ear of corn.”

—From Garcia Lorca's Ode to Walt Whitman.

FOREWORD

By Ismail Meer.

The present war has laid bare capitalism in all its nakedness. There is unemployment and mass discontent everywhere. Throughout the world forces are working towards the destruction of the old system and for the establishment of a just and equitable social order.. Literature is playing its important rôle in this direction.

Since the early nineteen-thirties there has been a tremendous growth in the literature of the PEOPLE. A group of young revolutionary writers have come to the fore with NEW WRITINGS, seeking to address the ordinary people engaged in the daily struggle for existence. Many of them have been influenced by the success of the Russian Revolution. Marxist ideas and revolutionary events play a very important part in their poetry and prose.

Peter Abrahams is one of the very few South Africans belonging to this school.. He is a PEOPLE'S POET.

His first booklet, "Here, Friend," was a tremendous success. And now he presents us with another collection of poems, speaking of the oppressed and suffering people. To a country like South Africa, a country poor in literature, this is a very important contribution. Such efforts must be encouraged. We need more creative writing of this type. In the field of NEW WRITINGS Peter Abrahams is a pioneer.

I therefore send it out to the PEOPLE for whom it has been written. ALL SUCCESS!

Cover Design by: D. K. M. Moodley.

Foreword by Ismail Meer.

Poems by Peter Abrahams.

THANKS

I want to thank all those people who have made this booklet possible. Specially do I want to thank George Singh and Ismail Meer, and also all the others, who have been very helpful.

This stuff is copyrighted, but not from any worker, white or black, who might be able to make use of it in any way possible.

For Laughter!

Laughter! It is such a wonderful thing. Especially the laughter of the eyes. Some inner happiness touching a person so deeply that sound comes from the mouth and the eyes are lit up! That is laughter. A deep joyous happiness. That is what man wants more than anything else. That happiness.

Instead we are harnessed by wars and slumps and unemployment. Instead there is no laughter anywhere.

Now it may be unpatriotic, but a German boy will never be a Hun to me. An Italian will never be a Wop. Deep down we are brothers. The German, the Italian and I. That is a faith. It's firm and deeper than any Almighty Lie. If that Italian or German boy kills me, he will do so because he has been misled by his rulers, just like I can be misled by my rulers. Not because he's a Hun. All the Hitlers in the world cannot stop him from being my brother. Just like all the segregation laws and all the attempts to prove that because my skin is black, I'm half animal, will not give me a tail or horns.

But we have no laughter.

There must be some reason. There is. And I have proved to myself that this is the reason: Man, the majority of man, is not given the opportunity to worship God. Yes, I said God. To me God is many things. But first and foremost He is your body.

Now I'm no great Objective Brain. I haven't a scientific answer ready for everything. But I do believe in my own and other people's experiences.

I was hungry as hell. So I went out one day and looked at the sea and the sky and the earth. And there was nothing in them. They were dead. And I looked at the people and I hated them. They all seemed filled with food while I was empty. Then I met a friend, and said: "Have you money?" And he said, "Yes, two shillings." And I said, "Let's go and eat, and I will show you the secret of God. And we ate. Then we went out and looked at the sea and the sky and the earth. And behold they were good! The sky was rich and held a promise

of laughter. And the sea whispered great secrets. And the earth! It was the good earth. It was like a woman, eager to bring forth the first child. And people, I loved them; they were a part of me.

Destroy this body and then?

Does it matter if I have a beautiful mind or soul?

No! Destroy the body and I'm finished completely.

So that is God. And for many reasons man is not given a chance to worship it. The chief reason for this is because man and his God are both enslaved by Big Business. So if we do away with Big Business there is every likelihood that you might worship that God and that laughter might return to the earth.

For myself I am sure of this.

In these poems I am trying to say that man has a right to laughter and the beauty of his body and what he sees through it. And I'm trying very hard to tell you, and you, and you, that it is something worth fighting for. People are more important than *any thing*. These poems are not polished little pieces of art. I run too fast to be able to do that. They are one note in a song. There are other poets who must help make the whole song. Let them come forward and sing the People as a whole. And let there be laughter on earth!

SELF

I am a shadow,
Restless,
Roving everywhere.
Dawn greets me
Sneaking from a park bench
And a rendezvous with cold and sky,
I'm a bum, hungry and lonely;
Milk vanishes from doorsteps at dawn
As I pass.

I'm a prostitute,
Seeking a pick-up from the street.
I have a kid and it cries for bread.
I'm a mother.
Just heard my son died at the Front—
A medal and an empty heart.

I'm a toiler, sweating all day,
But somehow I've more debts to pay.

I'm in the cold,
A youngster, hungry and thin,
My soul cries for love and laughter,
But I'm on this side of the window;
In there, there's fire and laughter
And the warmth of love.

I'm a poet,
And through hunger
And lust for love and laughter
I have turned myself into a voice,
Shouting the pain of the People
And the sunshine that is to be.

POVERTY

A poet has sung his songs and died
Quietly, quickly he met the night.
No one knows how this poet sighed,
Now one cared how he kissed the night.
Stealthily, steadily came on death,
The unknown singer gave life his breath.
A poet has sung his song and died.

FOR LAUGHTER

Man's laughter is dead.

I have been peaceful,
Meekly obedient,
Humility spoke from my eyes,
Christ's reflection from my smile;
I craved their love,
They served me hate;
I yearned to be "brother,"
But was paid with "bastard."
Humbly I accepted.
'Twas the "Will of God."

But I have witnessed
My sisters selling their bodies,
Thousands of them, everywhere . . .
 The factories are slow,
 The bosses want profits,
 My sisters must eat.

I have been awakened
By strange machines
Wiping laughter for ever
From the eyes of my regimented brothers.

I have been shaken,
And tears that I thought long gone
Brimmed my lids
When a starving white said "Brother!"

I have seen in death
Hate fall away
And black fear and white fear
Twisted into human fear;
And black cries and white cries
Turned into human cries:
And black skins and white skins
Tortured into workers' skins.

I searched for laughter
In the eyes of children,
But soberly they went about
Digging peels from gutters.
Instead of laughter

Death leered at me
From their hungry eyes.

I have learn to love
Burningly
With the fiercest fire;
And I have discarded my humility
And the "Will of God"
And the stories of my wise teachers.
Arming myself with the wretchedness
In every plain man's life,
And all the to-morrows my soldiers
I battle on behalf of that freedom
That will restore the laughter of man!

TO WHITE WORKERS.

Now listen,
For you are my comrades.
Does a song sound sweeter
Being made by a white man?
When you listen to Robeson
Do you listen to his colour?

And so
When you think of freedom
Is it a white symphony
Or one of many colours?
And when you wish for laughter
Is it the laughter of all men?

I have a song to blend both hues,
I have a dream for you and you,
A symphony for black and white,
A love for all mankind!

FREEDOM'S CHILD

The echoes are dying,
The whisper is gone,
But every tree seems to nod its head.
Is it its ghost . . . ?

1.

I am China,
They call me Le-Yen,
The ricefields own me,
My best years are gone ;
I have sweated,
Eaten opium,
And at last I died—
And now I'm going to die again.
But I've heard it, this whisper,
And I love its sound.
I'm China,
But they call me Le-Yen down here.

2.

And I am a mother,
Some call me Japan.
I don't want an Empire,
Or a wonderful navy,
I don't care what rate I am—
I have no fight—
All I want
Is my son to return
And food for the children,
A dress for my daughter,
My afternoon tea.
And no uniforms.
I want peace, I want quiet
And my children's love.
That whisper—
What promise does it hold . . . ?

3.

My name is Coolie. Untouchable.
I am a jewel,
The brightest in a crown
Of a foreign king.

From my blood
 Princes make gold to weight them-
 selves.
 I'm an Anna a day, I spit blood when
 I cough.
 I am the floods
 And a hundred million starving souls.
 I am the droughts
 And a hundred million dead.
 I am Nehru
 I languish in jail.
 I am an Anand—
 The tears of a tortured soul.
 But I've heard this whisper,
 My body grows
 Bigger!
 BIGGER!!
 Now there's room for me only here—
 No kings or princes,
 And I cry:
 "Inquilab Zindabad!"
 I am India!

4.

I am the gold mines,
 Paying huge dividends;
 I am the preacher—
 Shining car, well fed;
 My sermon is race purity,
 And God was white and
 White men must guard blacks.
 I am the banker, Kipling,
 And East and West
 And the white man's burden.
 I am the Institute of Race Relations,
 And racial mixture is a crime
 I am a half-caste—
 Racial mixture is a crime
 I am gold,
 Fashioned out of beads of sweat of
 black men;
 I am segregation and the pass-law;
 I'm eight million slaves
 But somewhere, too,

I nurture a volcano,
And out of love
I shall cause a wild eruption
With an aftermath of laughter.

5.

Slaves of masters, world without
choice,
Serving those masters I still hear your
voice;
The great lords who rule you are
heading for death,
They suck in its vapour with every
breath.
Bending you backs to tyranny's yoke,
Taking the full force of every stroke,
The master beasts are marching to
death—
I heard it whispered in a dying
breath.
The whisper was caught by the
Proletarian breeze
And carried away across the seas,
And every sufferer heard the voice,
And in quiet I heard the wind
rejoice.
And clear in the twilight the clouds
burst wild,
Singing my song — "Freedom's
Child!"

SUNSET

The murky dusk of night
Enfolds day's parting light,
The last ray of the sun
Like one whose work is done,
Who gave to life his all,
And having nought must fall;
Unknown, unseen,
Dies slowly in the west.

FANCIES IDLE

1.

Idle fancies in the heat of the lazily growing day,
Idle dream idly dreamt by an idle mind,
What is to-day to the tune of to-morrow,
What to-morrow to to-day?
Poets are forever questioning
Like the artist of the brush;
What of to-day and to-morrow and yesterday and the perfect "I"?
But really the question is the "I."

2.

Who was the singer who sang you to sleep?
Yesterday I saw you deep in the arms of slumber,
And smiling, and I knew—
You are not the smiling type, you live labour—
The singer of dreams had touched your lips.

3.

Mine dumps of the Rand.
These pyramids speak hands
Torn and bleeding,
Black, hard, rocky,
Like the black earth, wind-swept and touched by time
To leave
Torn nails and twisted thumbs
And missing spaces where the first and third fingers lived.
These pyramids speak eyes
Turned dim by gas and semi-blindness by day,
Deep, thousands of feet deep in the heart of the ocean-like
earth,
Then daylight
And the hardness of the sun to turn them dim.
These pyramids speak lungs,
Tortured and touched with the coat of death,
Daily piling up layer upon layer
And wrecking the soul in a lung tearing cough,
Hour by hour with the passing of the night.
These pyramids speak bitterness
Of black men,
Thousands of black men, wrenched from their mother-
earth,
And turned to gold-makers for the wealth of the earth
That grant them not the right of human thought.
These pyramids

Scattered over the body of the Rand,
Mighty in their grandeur and aloofness,
Monuments of the Twentieth Century Pharoahs,
Speak the world,
Not thousands of black men,
But millions of toilers,
Welded into a rock of firm aloofness,
Like them, made of the soul of suffering;
These pyramids are the symbol of revolt!

4.

Idle dreams, like Auden, McNeice,
But not like Lewis and Lipton
(They are not idle),
But they touch the centuries of suffering
And lead them on to the consummation of revolt.

5.

And Jesus said:
"For a camel to pass through a needle's eye
Is easier than for a rich man to pass St. Peter
With his keys, at the gate of heaven"
Ask Jesus what He meant,
And labour will reply.

6.

You were lovely in that dress, my dear,
More lovely than a queen.
It was torn at the breast,
With a smudge on the sleeve
And was wrinkled and old as time.
(Idly my mind turned to labour, dear),
You were labour's wife and queen.

7.

Looking down on the waters from the back of a boat,
With the drifting song from the lounge,
And the lovers leaning across the rail
And the moon playing clear on the sea;
Tell me, why were you restless and could not find peace.
Was it the sailor boys toiling—
And you idling away?

8.

Even fancies idle—
Unlike with Yeats and others
(Not degenerates like Lewis, Lipton, I)—
Refuse the Ivory Tower
And revolve idly on the "rabble" of the earth,

The toilers and sufferers—illiterate and crude,
To drift on the note of revolt

Idle dreams idly beating on the pulse of labour

WEARINESS

Jesus Lordy, I'm so weary,
Oh so weary of dis earth,
Christ, I'm tired, really tired,
Of the knocks and bumps I had,
Sometimes, Lord, I lose my temper;
Den I cannot help but curse.

Jesus Lordy, you have been here,
Even dough 'twas long ago,
And you know how men can temp' you
If your soul is all in peace.
Did not you git weary, too, Lord,
When dey kept'n damning you?

I have promised I won't swear, Lord,
I have prayed and ask yo' help,
But de'missus always nags me
When I haven't gut no work,
Hard I try to keep ut in, Lord,
But ut's always jumping out.

And dat good-for-nothing son, Lord,
Drags my soul right into hell,
Always there is something wrong, Lord,
Wimmin, wine or gamble den;
Sometimes I can stick ut nomore,
Den I drop a satan curse.

An' dat daughter, too, Lord,
Her dat sits all day at home,
In de night wit' paint and powder
Galavanting on de street.
Her I always curse and knock, Lord,
But she's harder dan a horse.

But de hard part comes in, Lordy,
When I take a little drink
Wit' ole Joe or Charley one-arm
When dey pocket's full of chink,

Den de devil's in my soul, Lord,
And I dunno what I do.

Lordy Jesus, please forgive me,
'Cause I'm just an ole man,
And my eyes are not too good, Sir,
And my back is full of pain;
So you see, I'm not so strong, Lord,
But I'll try to keep de word.

Preachter says dere's milk and honey
In de region of de bles',
Down below food's very scarce, Lord,
So I ask dis favour here:
Lordy take me when I'm sleeping
To de land where I can eat.
And I tank you, Lordy. Amen.

LOVE SONG

Hunger is your lyre,
You pull its strings
And soft melodies of pain flow out.

I love you, kind piece of stale bread,
As a dreamer loves his visionary love;
For you I'll do anything
As the poet for his beloved;
Pride, honour, respect, all
I throw at your feet
Because I love you so,
Because you are my life,
In your sight I live—
Without you I die.

CAPITALISM

I long for laughter but dwell in pain,
I love the sunshine but kiss the rain;
My song is meant to be of mirth,
But here, with you, it has no birth.

DELIRIUM

What are these walls that choke me,
That hem my spirits in,
What is this lonesome city,
With fearsome grabbing men?
What am I, crazy poet?
Why should these hinder me?
My soul steals from these shadows,
Day dreams receding fast.
Within these crushing four walls
That press my spirits down
And grip my throbbing saint-heart
And dam my blood from life;
Within this squallid hovel,
With want and death my guests,
I feel the force immortal
That turns the course of planets,
That change the span of nations;
That makes the thief a Jesus,
The prostitute a Mary.
That raise the low,
Bring down the high,
The beggar lord,
The lord a knave.
This is the touch immortal,
This is my poet-soul,
To sing the souls of poor men
And make these say "I am!"
And this shall be my statue,
A monument with time,
Deeprooted in the eager earth
With life and love infused.
When all the wealth and grabbing men—
The shadow great, are dust,
Undying pillars raise your head,
This is a poet's wish!

OCTOBER

Song of Happiness!
Jubilant March!

Good morning, mister worker,
And good morning, comrade;
One October's gone,
A hundred million workers
Are slaving now no more.
They tread along the moonbeam
And laugh out with the stars,
And their rumbling song of freedom
Girdles all the universe.
And clear comes their password:
"Comrade!"

October is the dawn of history,
A clear morning
When the profit system is buried
And every worker,
However mean,
Becomes a builder
In Lenin's Rome.

SPRING IN A COLOURED WOMAN

Bruised lips lisped lingering love,
But mockery choked its embryonic soul.
You are seeped with life, pregnant woman,
Your full lips tell the tale of new creation,
The deep mystic rivers reflected in your eyes,
Flashing the flushed self-satisfaction,
Infuse your sensual lust with godly power.
The moon plays on the rivers,
Gliding over them with Merlin's transformation powers,
Gold planets rising wave of wave as many moons on a
single river,
And each diffusing the gold of the other.
Rivers are strange in a woman's eyes—
In a pregnant woman's eyes.
The earth and the flesh and the sea and the sky,
They are one, pregnant woman. This is your Springtime!
Gasp your breath through your parted lips,
Swollen and clammy with the touch of life!
What though death's breath may blow it away,
The hot breath of want suck the life from its soul—
Part your lips with that catch in your laugh,
Laugh long and free for Spring's in your blood!
A poet could not but share in your joy—
What of to-morrow's pain and want:
The tears of a poet and the joys of a poet
Are a mother's tears and a mother's joys.
You are godlike, pregnant woman,
With your bruised lips and torn dress;
You are the earth, fertile and productive in your Spring,
Though all the year round just a "bastard wench."

NIGHT

Red the rose as of innocent blood,
Dark the night as the toilers' plight,
The swelling surge of life's ocean's flood,
The ceaseless hum of the darksome night,
The crushed and crying dying men.
These are the signs of life to-day.
But the new dawn will bring
Its own glorious ray!

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