

1992

THE ANNA MARY LETTERS To Hans Christian Andersen

Stephen Gray

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Gray, Stephen, THE ANNA MARY LETTERS To Hans Christian Andersen, *Kunapipi*, 14(3), 1992.
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol14/iss3/5>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

THE ANNA MARY LETTERS To Hans Christian Andersen

Abstract

Dear Mr Andersen, My name is Anna Mary, Last-borne of Mary my mother, deceased Of the desert fever while I was but a 'wee bairn'; I am but ten, too young to remember her voice. I do like your fairy tales so much - the tin soldier and the ugly, Ugly duckling. I would like to go and visit you; When Papa comes home from Africa I intend To ask him to take me. I live where he began As a piecer of cotton, threading those bales ... Long enough to join us over six thousand miles; What with the water-thrust and water-damp The Clyde is perfect for the manufacture of cloth; Without cotton my dolly'd have no clothes. I'm sure he will agree. In the New Year.

Stephen Gray

THE ANNA MARY LETTERS

To Hans Christian Andersen

I

Ulva Cottage
Hamilton
Scotland
1 Jan. 1869

Dear Mr Andersen, My name is Anna Mary,
Last-borne of Mary my mother, deceased
Of the desert fever while I was but a 'wee bairn';
I am but ten, too young to remember her voice.
I *do* like your fairy tales so much – the tin soldier and the ugly,
Ugly duckling. I would like to go and visit you;
When Papa comes home from Africa I intend
To ask him to take me. I live where he began
As a piecer of cotton, threading those bales...
Long enough to join us over six thousand miles;
What with the water-thrust and water-damp
The Clyde is perfect for the manufacture of cloth;
Without cotton my dolly'd have no clothes.
I'm sure he will agree. In the New Year.

II

17 June 1871

Four of his children in this cottage on the Clyde; good and damp
Enough to drive the cotton, even if it's not Victoria Falls.
I send you the photo of my Papa and me:
His arm is about me and mine about my dolly.
I would like you to notice my hoop-skirt and pantaloons,
But not my face and hair scooped away, ugly still;
Papa draws back breath and calls me 'sprightly' now;
If you ask me he's forgotten the meaning of his own hearth;
He says we're sickly and weak, bad seed,
But he's the one won't kiss for bad teeth, rotten tongue;
He was born here, he should know; we were born
In the wildest desert so generous, where a man may breathe indeed.

He said bright Denmark was out of the question:
 Only dark Africa calls, where he may make himself
 A paradise away from this, his woven, wet hell.

III

24 Sept. 1874

O Hans Andersen, You will have seen from the papers
 How the tale has no magic ending for us, *quack quack*.
 My father is the one Mr Stanley found out there
 And he could not persuade him to return to us.
 Robert's gone, Thomas and Ossie too –
 Poor seed, this little mermaid never will swim;
 What great, great sorrow I have had this year.
 I did expect Papa to take me to your Copenhagen.
 Instead of going the different places I fully intended
 With Papa, I have been obliged to take the sad journey to London
 To see what's left of him buried in Westminster Abbey.
 We had all wreaths of full white flowers
 To lay on his coffin; our Queen sent one too
 From out of her palace with deepest regrets.
 I am the only one of our seed left alive now;
 We shall be threadbare, me and my toy;
 Don't you think flowers are so beautiful,
 Ice-white and wound in a heart –
 The shape of the continent where his lies?

IV

30 Oct. 1874

Back at our industrious Blantyre:
 Papa's two most faithful servants were here last week
 To visit me. Many interesting things they told
 About Papa and one of them, called Chuma, made
 A model grass hut in which he placed my doll
 As an example, to show the position where
 Father knelt and died; and Susi endlessly
 Fussed with the bed to get it exactly correct.
Quack, quack, my dear. What else can I say?
 Susi says they brought his remains back from Ilala
 Only to prove to the consul at Zanzibar no black man
 Poisoned him; he died of his own disease. Tin god.
 You're the one who understands
 And I am your sincere friend.