

PENNING

CELEBRATION



OCTOBER 2015

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EDITORS' NOTE

As always, the ways in which the PENning themes inspire contributors intrigue us. Often oblique and always thoughtful, the word suggests a range of shades of celebration.

There is anxiety in the exuberance of Chrys Salt's *Mulberries*, a poem in which the annual ritual of berry-picking – and consumption – is described in sensual detail. Anita John's *In Celebration of Democracy 18-9-2014* is similarly measured, focusing on powerful images from Scotland's natural and domestic landscapes to illuminate the passions raised by the continuing referendum debate. *Am Bradan Allaidh* (The Wild Salmon), a poem by Jim Aitken explores similar emotional territory through intricate images of that brave fish 'as it reaches the shallow waters/reclaiming an ancient heritage/that guarantees continuation'.

Celebration of escape and survival pounds through *Liberty Line 2015* by Mary McCabe. The writing feels powered by current news, footage of people on the move, exiles risking all, seeking a safe haven. Cultures collide but for the most part accommodate each other in *The White Wedding* by Meg de Amasi. An account of Akuyo's big day, the author infuses the story with intergenerational tensions and sibling stress. All their worlds are changing. Every wedding is fraught – but this one is balanced on an even sharper edge than most.

Less restrained is Jenny Daiches' *Season's Greetings* – a witty, breathless, noisily chaotic

canter through Christmas celebrations. Gerda Stevenson's *Late Night Christmas Shopping* chimed with us all – the rituals, the demands, the expectations, our need for it all, when in truth we need none of it.

The Wedding Present is a story that made us laugh out loud. Greg Michaelson regales his readers with the tortuous thought process that led to him sending... No. Let's not spoil it. Read it and find out.

The editorial panel for **PENning Celebration** comprised Linda Cracknell, Lindsey Fraser, Moira McPartlin and Liz Niven and, as always, each submission was considered anonymously thanks to Anne Clarke's meticulous management of the process. Thanks also to Christina Neuwirth for all her support – technological and moral – in ensuring that each edition features on the Scottish PEN website for you to enjoy.

We hope you enjoy reading **PENning Celebration**. Please recommend it as widely as possible to promote Scottish PEN, and as an invitation to take part in the organisation's activities. We will be posting details of the next edition soon, and look forward to receiving submissions from PEN members, and to writers living in Scotland who are seeking asylum, refugees, or individuals for whom English is not their first language.

–Lindsey Fraser

FEATURED



Jonathan Lamy is a multidisciplinary poet and performer. He is also a poetry and performance art critic, and responsible for the videopoetry section of Festival de la poésie de Montréal. He holds an interdisciplinary PhD from University of Quebec at Montreal, has published two collections of poetry at Editions du Noroit, as well as many articles about poetry by Quebecois and First Nations writers. His practice as a performer combines participative reading, sound poetry, poetry-action and intervention in public spaces.

You can listen to the author reading his poetry in French [here](#).

Author photo by Chris Scott.

TRANSLATOR



Rachel McCrum has worked as a poet, performer and promoter in Edinburgh since 2012, arriving via Manchester, Belfast, New Zealand, Oxford and a small seaside town in Northern Ireland. She is Broad of Rally & Broad, winner of the 2012 Callum McDonald Award and the 2015 Writer In Residence for CoastWord, Dunbar. She has performed and taught poetry in Greece, South Africa, Haiti and around the UK. Her second pamphlet *Do Not Alight Here Again* was published in March 2015 by Stewed Rhubarb Press, and in August 2015, she wrote and performed her first solo show at the Edinburgh Fringe, as part of new spoken word collective SHIFT/. In October 2015, she was appointed as the first BBC Scotland Poet in Residence.

Author photo by Chris Scott.

tout ce qu'il y a autour
a une histoire à raconter
plusieurs de ces histoires sont ennuyeuses
mais j'aime les écouter
je ne peux pas parler aux animaux
comme ces Indiens de Walt Disney
mais j'entends tout : les pierres les arbres
les êtres humains les animaux les bouches d'égout
j'écoute mais
je me rappelle de rien
et j'aime cela ainsi
ces histoires passent à travers moi
puis continuent leur chemin
laissant un espace vide
comme sur un fossile

everything around
has a story to tell
many of those stories are boring
but I like to listen to them
I can't speak to animals
like those Walt Disney Indians
but I hear everything: rocks and trees
humans and animals and manholes
I'm listening but I can't
remember anything
and I like it like that
those stories go through me
and continue on their way
leaving a hollow space
as on a fossil

nous sommes des dégâts d'argile
pillés à l'invisible

goutte à goutte
nous prenons forme
dans l'incendie

il nous pousse un sexe fripé
puis deux maigres ailerons
autour d'un cœur
décentré

we are spillages of clay
lifted from the invisible

pinch by pinch

we take shape
in the flames

a wrinkled sex appears
then two skinny appendages
either side of an off centre heart

certaines disent que toute vie sur terre
disparaîtra bientôt ce sera
la fin du monde
mais je te regarde
et je sais
c'est plutôt
tout ce qui n'est pas la vie
qui disparaîtra
et il ne restera que cela
du monde
sept milliards d'êtres humains
et ce n'est pas encore assez

some say that all life on earth
will disappear
soon it will be
the end of the world
but I look at you
and I know rather
it is everything
that is not living
that will vanish
and there will be
only life
seven billion humans
and it's still not enough

POETRY

MARY MCCABE

Born in Glasgow, Mary still lives there. Her publications include: a novel 'Everwinding Times'. A fictionalised account of family scandals 'Stirring the Dust' which was The Herald's Paperback of the Week at its launch. A children's book: 'Die Zauberhafte Reise'. A book about cultural projects: 'Streets Schemes and Stages'. Short stories, poems and articles in English, Scots and Gaelic. One of her poems, 'Merch o the Baby-boomers' is on the short list for the James Hogg Ballad Award to be presented at this year's YES Arts Festival.

She is a member of Scottish PEN and produces its monthly newsletter.

ANITA JOHN

Anita John is a poet, short story writer and creative writing tutor who has run courses for Edinburgh University, the RSPB and Abbotsford House. "Child's Eye," her debut collection of prize-winning fiction and poetry, was published by Biscuit Publishing in 2013. She is a Borders Showcase Poet and a lead poet for the ongoing Scott's Treasures Project (see www.anitajohn.co.uk). She is a member of Scottish PEN.



LIBERTY LINE 2015

A crocodile caravan coming our way
Barred before
Harried behind.
Stumbling, tumbling
Plunging, floating, sinking
Stinking boats, stalled trains, shanks' pony
Shanks long, short, aged, infant
Powerfully pounding the tarmac
Painfully limping the dirt track
Rattling along the rail track
Tottering hopefully into the Hauptbahnhof

Mary McCabe

IN CELEBRATION OF DEMOCRACY

18-9-2014

A year like no other when the cuckoo circled the sheep field,
delivered the hottest of summers with its cry;
when blackthorn hung heavy with star-burst
and flies shimmered above the waters of the Tweed,
their first and last dance;

when the politician's voice foretold
of a once-in-a-lifetime, irreversible choice,
and people twittered and tweeted;
when opinions might be changed
by the counting out of daisy petals;

when the nation rode high as an osprey
over wind turbine and mountain;
when Yes signs appeared
on windows and walls,
No signs in wide-open fields;

when swallows nested for the first time in our garden shed
and we saw the blue-jay wings of the magpie:
a golden green glimmering;
when the land-line yammered for our *first time voter*,
and hares jinked and janked down the Kitleyknowe Road;

when the sun sparked off slate each morning;
when Edinburgh cup cakes sold in their thousands:
the Saltire, the Union Jack and the Don't Knows;
when change was a salt taste in the wind
and temperatures rose to 30 degrees;

when the eyes of Europe followed like a hawk;
when three weeks stretched like a lifetime;
when four million people took to the streets;
when Scotland cast its vote.

Anita John



CHRYSS SALT

Chrys Salt has published four full collections and four pamphlet collections. Work has been performed on Radio 3 and 4, UK wide, in the USA, Canada, France, Germany and Finland, translated into several languages. The Burning was selected for the Best Scottish Poems 2012. In 2014 Weaver of Grass (Hattericks House) was shortlisted for the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award and she has an MBE for Services to The Arts. Chrys is Artistic Director of the Bakehouse the flourishing Arts venue in Dumfries and Galloway and Convenes BIG LIT, a four day literature festival in the region.

JENNI DAICHES

Has lived in South Queensferry over 30 years. Has published around 20 books on literary and historical subjects as Jenni Calder, poetry and fiction as Jenni Daiches. Most recent book is a novel, Forgive, 2015. Past president of Scottish PEN.

MULBERRIES

Mulberries...

mulberries in the communal garden
pendulant, succulent
grass squashed black with them
branches loaded, offering them up
and you, gorging your vampire mouth
a child of eight – not eighty.

We eat with much more 'politesse'
each careful berry twisted from
its stalk, intact, in case it bleeds
and spoils a shirt or dress.

But you, greedy for mulberries
stained to the careless core
with ruby juice eat more and more
bloody rivers run
down fingers, teeth, chin, cuff
as if you supped on glorious maidenhood
and there could never be enough
of your uncomplicated feasting.
Nothing between your hunger and the tree;
the impulse and the eating.

Chrys Salt

For Bernard Kops on his 80th Birthday



SEASON'S GREETINGS

This morning's sun lights up the Christmas tree
and my neighbours'
frosted roofs are cut
like crystal
and by happenstance Segovia
on the radio
plays Villa Lobos and the hot guitar
strangely echoes the sparkle of the cold sky
while I prepare
for a journey and picture my arrival,
lights in the window,
food on the table,
wine by the fire,
and how happy it makes me
to think of people I love, to imagine their voices –
when will she come?
this bright room empty,
while I'm on the road
with Villa Lobos
or some other magical music
and my neighbours' roofs
are crystal and the dogs
will hurtle to meet me as soon
as they hear
the nearing of wheels through the dark
and celebration begins.

Jenni Daiches

GERDA STEVENSON

Gerda Stevenson is an award-winning actor, writer, director, singer/songwriter. Her poetry, drama and prose have been published, staged and broadcast throughout Britain and abroad. Her play *Federer versus Murray* (runner-up for the Best Scottish Contribution to Drama on the Edinburgh Fringe, 2011), toured to New York in 2012, published there by the Salmagundi. Her poetry collection *If This Were Real* was published by Smokestack Books, 2013, and she was winner of the YES Arts Festival Poetry Challenge, 2013. Currently writing her second poetry collection, an acclaimed album of her own songs, *Night Touches Day*, was released in 2014. www.gerdastevenson.co.uk

JIM AITKEN

Jim Aitken was formerly an English teacher who now tutors in Scottish Cultural Studies in Edinburgh. His last collection of poems was a CD *'Our Foolish Ways,'* produced by First Reel Target in 2013. Last year his play *'Letters From Area C'* was produced by Spartaki and they will also be producing and presenting his new play *'Leaving George'*, a drama where the main players in last year's independence referendum meet up on a chat show, at this year's Leith Festival in June. He is a member of Scottish PEN.

LATE NIGHT CHRISTMAS SHOPPING



“Anything last minute you still need?”
I ask my mother, well aware that need
can’t be in it; and, to avoid the crowds,
delay till the eleventh hour, then drive through sleet
beneath a racing moon -
swoop of owl past my windscreen -
five miles to the nearest town,
where Tesco stamps itself red on the night.

“What time do you close?”
I ask a lonely shelf-stacker
down a deserted aisle. “We don’t,”
he laments, “God knows why –
hardly anyone’s buying, and I’m on till 7.”
But he musters a smile in fluorescent glare,
directing me to pickled walnuts and marzipan.

I’m relieved to find such things are there,
in spite of hunger and carnage
under the same moon, and my place
in their terrible chain; glad that my mother’s hands,
after long years of sustaining us all,
will place on her table, once again,
her annual offerings at tomorrow’s feast.

Gerda Stevenson



AM BRADAN ALLAIDH

(THE WILD SALMON)

Riverrun, not Anna Livia
but a highland torrent of whisky
golden brown from bracken, heather, peat
off to the ocean distillery
where all things merge in the global sea
all's the same though the moods may differ
uniformity blended by salt
no more fresh water, dancing river
following the flow and the current
going the way all things are going
the triumph of mediocrity
the victory of late reaction
in the sea of globalisation
we are all so pretty in pink now
farmed salmon in overcrowded tanks
swallowing all the pellets they throw
tamed, memories eradicated
of deep pools, jagged rocks, waterfalls
heroic journeys against the flow
spawning at the very source of things
so get back to where you once belonged
cast off the flabbiness, captive state

and rediscover muscle and flesh
the spirit that once made you alive
observe our own bradan allaidh
leaping and pounding the Falls of Shin
a silver sword shining through the spray
disdainful of any obstacle
watch it glide like a hawk through water
informed by an instinct we once knew
that said such sacrifice was worth it
constant glorification a sham
no mere consumer this gallant fish
as it reaches the shallow waters
reclaiming an ancient heritage
that guarantees continuation
no goldfish in a murky, glass bowl
no inert, bored version all tanked up
a truly free individual
truly a revolutionary
and truly one we should emulate
ignoring the water's empty rage
the foolish flow to fathomless grief
for the silent solace of belief.

Jim Aitken

SHORT STORIES

MEG AKUSIKA DE AMASI

Meg is a retired Midwife. Author; Butterflies, Tears and Flowers, The Roots and Fruits of the Matter, Verses, Senses and Beyond and The Talking Drums-Echo from Slavery to Freedom. She contributed to the Maryhill Writers' Group booklet to commemorate the 200th Year of the Abolition of Slavery. Founder, ACWA, CeSAU and Meridian. Award winning campaigner on Sickle Cell Disease in Scotland, the "Take Action" Campaign Awards 2013 -Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMK) Sponsored by Age UK. Stirling Provost's Civic Award 2014 for her contribution to communities in Stirling. She is a mother/ mentor to several young people in the UK and Ghana. Owed Charity - TLC-Life Academy for young women and children in Ghana. She enjoys gardening.

GREG MICHAELSON

Greg lives in Edinburgh and has been publishing fiction since 2001, mainly short stories. His first novel "The Wave Singer" (Argyll, 2008) was shortlisted for a Scottish Arts Council/Scottish Mortgage Trust First Book Award.

On a happy note, the Saturday of the wedding was a bright day with clear blue skies. Every household had woken up early even before the first cock crow to start cooking and pounding noises could be heard everywhere. It was going to be a long day and stomachs must be filled. People were told to come in their best outfit, some like the foolish virgins in the Bible would be disappointed as Adzoama the seamstress was overwhelmed with requests to sew outfits befitting a white wedding she had not seen before.

On the day of the wedding, the church bell signalled the first call and service started promptly with the fourth bell. Any late comer stayed outside until the first sermon was over. This was a special day and the church overflowed beyond its confines. By default, the queue formed a guard of honour. The bride by instruction was late for nearly half an hour to the irritation of the guests who were used to being prompt, killing the myth of African Time, that people were perpetually late for occasions. Akuyo arrived on the arms of her father in a full flowing white taffeta gown looking radiant. People gasped in admiration. Every woman jostled to feel the shiny dress and shoes. They were novelties. "Get away from my sister this is a wedding and not a market display!" Her brother Sasa shouted for them to stay clear, but his plea fell on deaf ears. Cautiously, the bride and her father negotiated the stairs leading down to the church to spontaneous applause. Some mothers started to cry for the joy of the day. The chief himself wore a broad smile. It was an historic and proud moment for a parent. He added colour to the occasion clad in hand-woven kente cloth draped round his left shoulder over a white cotton shirt complemented with gold adorned leather sandals.

Angels and fairies did not exist in the imagination of Ayotsu people. The wedding dress and the wedding itself could not be compared to a fairy tale or angelic visitation, except to say that everything was pure magic.

People were intrigued. Some mesmerised. The hard core were scornful and made a mockery of the event. They claimed that the so called Christians were no different from the

THE WHITE WEDDING

BY MEG AKUSIKA DE AMASI

fetish priests and priestesses. They wore white for their initiation ceremonies too.

The church service started with hymns and prayers, after the second hymn, David was called forth. He was asked to stand on the right hand side of the German officiating at the wedding. The bride was called out to stand beside the groom, but before she did, a young woman teacher from one of the big towns rushed out and demanded that the bride's face be covered. The groom was not supposed to see her face until they were pronounced man and wife. This added to the mysteries of the white wedding. While the congregation waited for the veil to be retrieved, all sorts of ideas were being conjured up in the minds of the congregation- a fetish marriage? Soon to be confirmed when vows were pronounced and the couple had to kneel down to receive blessings. "Do you David take Akuyo as your wedded wife?"

"Yes I do"

"Do you Akuyo take David as your wedded husband?"

"Yes I do"

The congregation waited with bated breath for what would come next. Plain silver wedding rings were exchanged and David was asked to kiss the bride. David lifted the veil off his bride's face and attempted to plant a kiss, but Akuyo refused bluntly, of course, no one had prepared her for this public act of initiation. People just did not kiss in private let alone in public. The embarrassment was too much for David who gently whispered into his wife's ear to explain the idea behind a man kissing his bride in public. When the private talk failed, he explained to the congregation that kissing the bride was a show of affection and a seal of their marriage vows. He added that if it was accepted by the white man, then it was alright for him. The act of kissing was alien to Ayotsu. As far as the people were concerned David was attempting to do a blood sucking ritual on his bride, turning a beautiful wedding into a voodoo ritual left a bad taste in people's mouths.

David too was bent on kissing his bride. He lifted the veil again to try, but without any warning, the brother of the bride strode in and pulled him aside.

"You blood sucking bat, stay off my sister!"

The occasion had developed into a farce. People began murmuring and scattering. Hearing the commotion, the overflow surged into the small church to witness what had happened. People were trampled upon. Akuyo, the new bride started to cry, "Mama, Papa help me!" People were lost for words and Akuyo's mother sobbed with embarrassment.

It took Unansa Emorti to calm the troubled waters.

"Agoo! lo!"

It was a serious matter when the "Lo" was added. There was instant silence.

Unansa Emorti pleaded with the people to settle down. He asked for a recess for the couple to sort things out and for David to explain why kissing the bride was important at all.

"It better be good and quick David" He warned.

People were sent out of the church. Once outside, opinions flared again. The chief should not have allowed his daughter to marry David. A delegation should have been sent to Lome to seek out his family,

background and religious practices.

Those defending David didn't allow the so called 'pagans' to win the argument. David has been in their midst for years. He would have been found out if he was a voodoo practitioner. Some said he was misguided in adopting the white man's culture without serious thoughts. Others said that David was a good man and should be respected for his beliefs. Freedom of speech in practice long before it was famous in the world! As people stood arguing, the bridal party emerged from the church all smiles, the incidence forgotten. Home grown white rice was showered over them for blessings and good wishes. The day was fast spent. Hunger was playing with people's stomachs and children were restless and crying. In order to maintain the momentum of the occasion, the Germans announced that the ordination of David was postponed for a week and after the honeymoon. Honey was in abundance at Ayotsu, but as no one had ever heard or seen a 'honeymoon' this announcement too provoked a lot of discussions. What was honeymoon? Were the couple travelling to the moon with a scoop of honey in their palms? If yes, how would they get there? Would they travel by projection, sitting in a calabash or on a witch's broom? People attested that they saw a couple on the moon and the woman carried a bunch of wood on her head and carried a baby on her back. Her husband carried a gun. This was never questioned before, but now everyone wanted to know how the couple got there. Unansa Igor believed that the full moon always settled on Gemi Mountain and concluded that David and Akuyo could get to the moon with a pot of honey if they could reach its peak. Unansa Igor received big applause and a pat on the back for good thinking. Life was all about finding solutions to a problem, but the honeymoon issue was not over yet.

"Ridiculous, these white witches continue to make a fool of us" Mimi Ako was heard complaining furiously- she had become fed up with anything to do with the white witches- the Germans. They spoke nonsense most of the time and many people agreed with her. The word honeymoon had to be explained further,

but the reception couldn't be delayed anymore and the crowd was encouraged to move on to the chief's compound ten minutes' walk up the hill. The Christian community were not very pleased, but tradition demanded that such events took place at the bride father's compound, Christian or not.

The Church forbade all cultural activities. Only church hymns were allowed. In spite of this, the Borborbor dance group had already assembled at the boundary between Mission Kpodzi and the main town to welcome the wedding party in the traditional way. The rhythm reached a fever pitch when the bride and bridegroom arrived. The Kantata dance group too were ready with white handkerchiefs in hand. They turned and twirled to the beats of the drums. The noise was deafening, but the Germans held their peace because they had entered the main town, only the chief had control.

At the chief's palace, food was plentiful and palm wine flowed freely, even some Christians indulged themselves on the day without fear. Both black and white mixed and danced away. A call came for the bridegroom to give a speech. David had expected it, but it was not something the natives did. Marriage ceremonies were for merry making, all talks were done in private between the two families at the knocking and engagement ceremonies. Public celebrations that followed were to seal arrangements agreed in private. These occasions were left for women and sometimes the bridegroom might not even be present. Christianity had arrived and its influence was being felt. David calmly stood up and called for attention fondly eyeing his wife.

"Agoo!"

"Ameneva" "My fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and our honourable guests, I welcome you to this memorable event in my life..."

David spoke of his humble beginning and how he became a Christian and a teacher. He relished the opportunity to make Ayotsu his home and most importantly, the honour to be married to the most beautiful woman on earth.

As the speech progressed, David lost the tempo and calmness gave way to nervousness. He could see the distraction from the corner of his eyes. The 'Ananvia' or clan flag bearers were mimicking monkey gestures. It was an indication that, enough was enough. The young men shouted;

"Lucky monkey, we know she is beautiful and that's why you couldn't afford the tobacco and bride price... shame!"

David should have paid a heavy bride price coming from a different town and tribe, but this was waived because of his special relationship with the chief. This infuriated the Ananvia and they were determined to make a big fuss in public to embarrass David. They demanded that David made good the bride price otherwise the wife was staying home with her parents. Confusion arose and the Germans demanded to know the cause of the disruption. Money had to be found, the amount of compensation was ten times higher than what he would have paid initially. David didn't have the means and had to be bailed out by the Germans.

"Azorko!" The flag bearers shouted with joy. They had preserved the dignity of the bride and the clan. David was permitted to return to his seat beside the wife. He felt the heat of the moment and was relieved that his troubles were over- thanks to the Germans.

The celebration resumed, bride and bridegroom were called to take the floor for their first dance to the irritation of Ayotsu people. Where was the honour of the father of the bride, he should have been asked to dance and the women would have surrounded him with songs of adoration. The white man's culture had turned the rules upside down. "Typical!" said a frustrated guest. "I say this wedding is voodoo worshipping... I bet they will be dispatched into the fetish hut to consummate the marriage any moment!"

The man's protest was drowned in the vibrant beat of the drums. "Borborbor, Borborbor, eya bosue!"

It was infectious and everyone including the guests continued their indulgence until the small hours of the morning. The so called honeymoon would wait another day. The dispute about the bride price aside, the wedding was hugely successful and well acclaimed. There may never be one like this in years to come.

Meg De Amasi

Notes:

Agoo means attention or excuse me

Ananvia means flag bearers or coffin bearers

Ameneva means Amen or permission to enter/proceed

Azorko means now then

I have just learned that my friend ND, who lives in Ghana, was married last August. I am doubly pleased: not only has my friend found a soul mate, but her name is Nancy, as is my partner's. Curiously, two other friends are also married to Nancys; further evidence of the extraordinary coincidences that bind like minded people together.


I wish to send my friend a wedding present but this is proving a surprisingly complicated task. It is tempting to dispatch money, or a voucher for a major store or on-line shopping site, but this seems both soulless and too easy. A wedding present should be a statement about one's feelings for the recipient rather than a reflex gesture. Besides, such a gift might seem patronising, further emphasising that I am a wealthy person in a wealthy country and he is not. As I live in Scotland, I have considered sending something Scottish, perhaps an ornamental set of bagpipes for my friend's mantelpiece. But I have no idea whether or not houses in Accra have mantelpieces. Also, I know that my friend is very busy. Perhaps he won't have time to learn to play the bagpipes. Perhaps his wife might object if he did. And it is wrong to send a present to a married couple that is intended solely for one of them. Perhaps his wife would also like to play the bagpipes, so I should send a matched pair. But their mantelpiece, if they have one, may not be large enough for two sets.

Instead, I have extensively researched West African wedding practices and have learned that a gift of cattle is customary in such circumstances. Accordingly, I would very much like to send my friend a fine Aberdeen Angus bull, but the cost of transportation seems prohibitive, and Scottish cattle may not be best suited to an equatorial climate. Perhaps I could have the bull cut into small portions and send the frozen meat, but my friend may not have enough refrigerator capacity in his house.

My colleague Peter's father used to deal in bull semen, which might well be easier to transport. However, my friend would then incur the expense of acquiring a cow. And I do not know if houses in Accra have gardens large enough to accommodate cattle. I see from photographs that the University of Ghana,

THE WEDDING PRESENT

BY GREG MICHAELSON



where my friend works, has a well appointed campus. Perhaps my friend could house his cow and her calves on one of the ornamental lawns and employ an impecunious undergraduate student to tend them. However, it would be wholly wrong to commit someone to such a substantial undertaking without first consulting them, and I wish the present to be a surprise.

On reflection, I feel that a wedding present is largely symbolic. Therefore, there is no need to send actual cattle but rather something that betokens cattleness. Thus, I have been to a nearby toy shop and purchased one hundred and forty seven small plastic cows. I have also purchased several pairs of small plastic African animals: zebras, giraffes, elephants, lions, antelopes, crocodiles, tigers and so on, as I think my friend might appreciate the Biblical allusion. However, my Nancy has gently pointed out that there are no tigers in Africa, and that the elephants have relatively small ears and so, in all likelihood, are Indian. Perhaps it would be best not to send these additional animals.

I understand that the Ghanaian postal service is not wholly reliable, and that there is some possibility that my gift might go astray. Hence, I have decided to send each of the cows individually, to maximise the probability that at least some of them will arrive. Regrettably, the cows do not accord with standard Royal Mail postal sizes and will require additional postage charges. I think that, in this instance, these will prove well worth it. I have now finished wrapping and stamping the cows, and am about to leave on my bicycle to deposit them in as many different post boxes as I can visit before lunch, to stagger the collection times and hence the delivery times. With each cow, I have included a short explanation of the intention behind them, which begins "I have just learned that my friend ND, who lives in Ghana, was married last August...".

Greg Michaelson

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