little-known documents

What a Performance

ANNA MENDELSSOHN

INTRODUCTION BY SARA CRANGLE

Introduction

FROM THE LATE SEVENTIES UNTIL HER DEATH, BRITISH-BORN WRITER AND ARTIST ANNA MENDELSSOHN (1948–2009) AUTHORED FIFTEEN poetry collections and at least two dozen short fictions and dramas, often publishing under the name Grace Lake. A consummate autodidact, Mendelssohn's passion was international vanguardism, a truth exemplified by the writers she translated: in Turkey in 1969, the poetry of political exile Nâzim Hikmet; from the late nineties, the work of Gisèle Prassinos, the surrealist child prodigy celebrated by André Breton. Mendelssohn's devotion to a modernist legacy situates her within the British Poetry Revival, a label applied to a wave of avant-garde poets that surfaced in the sixties and seventies. Given that she spent her last three decades in Cambridge, Mendelssohn can be further located on the margins of "that most underground of poetic brotherhoods, the Cambridge Poets" (Leslie 28). Mendelssohn's poems appeared in journals receptive to experimentalism, among them *Parataxis*, *Jacket*, *Critical Quarterly*, and *Comparative Criticism*. In the 1990s, Mendelssohn was anthologized in collections released by Virago, Macmillan, and Reality Street. Iain Sinclair included her in his influential *Conductors of Chaos* (Picador, 1996); in 2004, she featured in Rod Mengham and John Kinsella's *Vanishing Points* (Salt Publishing, 2004) alongside John Ashbery and Susan Howe. Her most readily available text remains *Implacable Art* (Salt Publishing, 2000). Increasingly recognized in her later years, Mendelssohn gave poetry readings at the University of Cambridge, London's Southbank Centre, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, among many other venues.

Two legal battles parenthesize Mendelssohn's adult life. The first is the Stoke Newington Eight criminal trial of 1972, then the lengthiest in British history. Mendelssohn was a known radical. She appeared in Jean-Luc Godard's political documentary *British Sounds* (1969); she participated in London squatting and housing lobbies; she wrote for countercultural papers *Strike!* and *Frendz*. Attending the University of Essex from 1967 to 1969, Mendelssohn became one of thousands of students agitating for civil rights and against the Vietnam War. When protest failed to secure observable change, some hundreds of these thousands formed urban guerrilla groups, among them the

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American Weathermen, the Italian Red Brigades, and, in Germany, Baader-Meinhof. Britain's Angry Brigade was one such faction. By comparison with their better-known counterparts, the Angry Brigade revolution was minimal, involving twenty-five small-scale bombings that targeted closed or little-used areas in airports, trade centers, embassies, as well as a deserted BBC van at a Miss World beauty pageant. Mendelssohn's fingerprints were discovered on a page of *Rolling Stone* magazine that was in the same bag as one of these bombs. Of the fourteen sets of prints the bag contained, eleven were never identified. Mendelssohn expertly defended herself in court, pleading innocent. She was convicted of conspiracy to cause explosions on 6 December 1972 and received a decade-long sentence.

In London's Holloway Prison, Mendelssohn founded a union, petitioned for better conditions, taught fellow inmates literacy, and ran dramatic productions, including a 1974 performance of *Peter Pan* in which she was cast as Captain Hook. These efforts facilitated her early parole in 1976, aged 28. Between 1980 and 1985, Mendelssohn had three longed-for children. She enrolled at the University of Cambridge in 1984, determined to raise her family and succeed academically. Poverty and ill health exerted their daily grind, as did the stigma of single parenthood. A couple upon whom Mendelssohn relied heavily for childcare demanded routine, financial assistance, and the involvement of a third party: social services. For a woman who had served time, this authoritative scrutiny was distinctly unwelcome. Still less welcome was the distinct possibility that her past extremist activism might affect appraisals of her parenting. Protracted negotiations took place, legal counsel was sought, and the case went to the Family Division of England's High Court. This second, defining judicial conflict ended in 1988 when Mendelssohn reluctantly gave permission to have her children temporarily fostered; they were never returned to her care.[1] A complex thematic of loss permeates Mendelssohn's late work.

After her death, Mendelssohn's children generously donated her archive to the University of Sussex. This vast collection encompasses nearly eight hundred notebooks of writing and drawing, an estimated minimum of five thousand poems, and a similar quantity of visual art, predominantly in the medium of pen and ink. Cataloging in 2014–15 unearthed an episodic roman à clef begun in the seventies and revised into the nineties, of which *What a Performance* is the most extensive, edited portion. While there are distinct overlaps between this text and other parts of the project, *What a Performance* is a discrete entity: a fulsome, if incomplete, manuscript exists within a 1987 notebook; some segments are drafted three or four times; it is typed, titled, subtitled, and formatted. There is no definitive fair copy, and only three sheets are paginated. The order remains uncertain, but continuities can be discerned through semantics, syntax, and the material properties of paper stock, typeface, and ink. Presented here are extracts that comprise approximately half of the totality; editorial choice is guided by content and the greatest number of available drafts. The entirety is silently edited for typos and minor errors.

Mendelssohn's narrative is not wholly singular: she shares biographical coordinates with Susan Stern of the Weathermen and with Jane Alpert, who belonged to an urban guerrilla cell that bombed government and corporate buildings in New York in 1969. All three were raised in Jewish households, experienced youthful radical awakenings, and spent time behind bars. All articulate their involvement in politicized violence in carefully crafted memoirs. But unlike Stern and Alpert, Mendelssohn is an avant-garde writer who eschews confessional, highly personal, fluid autobiography that appeals to the reader's sympathy. Instead, *What a Performance* is formally disjointed, reflecting the uneasy combination of ambivalence, complicity, and outrage that remained central to Mendelssohn's recollections. Mendelssohn remained in thrall to an irresolvable, overwhelming need to be definitively exculpated as a victim of circumstance, one mitigated by an equal and paralyzing fear of exposure. While the experimentalism of *What a Performance* is first and foremost an aesthetic choice, it also facilitates Mendelssohn's inhabitation of this paradox.

Where Stern likened her legal proceedings to "running a Broadway play" (262), Mendelssohn

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dubbed her 1972 court case "the Show Trial" (*One* 5). Circumnavigating the same event, *What a Performance* similarly foregrounds artifice, presenting individuals as actors, characters, authors. On occasion, Mendelssohn addresses a "scripter" or "scriptress." This figure appears loosely based on Noella Smith, a BAFTA award–winning British screenwriter who befriended Mendelssohn at the University of Essex, and who agreed, nearly twenty years later, to work with her on a screenplay about sixties activism. Mendelssohn's primary motivation was much-needed income. The final page of Smith's film treatment remains in the archive, replete with criticisms in Mendelssohn's hand. The crux of Mendelssohn's resistance arises in an unsent letter to the filmmaker, where she states that Smith overemphasizes her politics, failing to present her "as centrally poetic with Politics as the aggressor, the nuisance, the tragedy" (Letter). In part, *What a Performance* is her solo riposte to this collaboration, which Mendelssohn abandoned midway through 1987. Throughout, "scripter" becomes a cipher for Mendelssohn's vanguard distaste for the creative success and class privilege of her peers.

Mendelssohn's roman à clef is akin to Menippean satire: often scabrous, this mixture of genre and voice details aspects of her northern, aspirant working-class, Jewish upbringing; her activism and prison time; her parenting and the children's foster care. Mendelssohn yearns for a "slow life, free from harm," and demands the legitimation of her ardent creative drive. Allusions are made to Rembrandt, Voltaire, Algernon Swinburne, Simone Weil, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and John Cassavetes, among others; some references are avowedly political, as in assaults on Margaret Thatcher and the use of Agent Orange. Subtitles and unusual formatting highlight the digressive and picaresque elements of this account; occasional stage directions insist on the text's status as a drama; polemic, reportage, and poetry (lyric and prose) surface. Mendelssohn is self-referential in the retrospective collage that results, one that disrupts subjective coherency, chronology, and straightforward causalities. The result is plea, catharsis, and self-mockery, as when Mendelssohn posits herself as the unpredictable, violent revolutionary she was often reduced to by the mainstream press.

Charging the Angry Brigade with undue faith in revolutionary fictions, Mendelssohn's roman à clef resolutely exposes the duplicities of autobiography, not least by featuring a protagonist who oscillates between an "I" and the third person. Mendelssohn's sense of herself as an ostracized outlaw is a textual refrain; she believed she was forever marked by her subversive past. Hence she becomes "Miranda," a name invoking the American legislation of 1966 that protects an arrested individual's right to remain silent. In an earlier Mendelssohn text, *Inbuilt Flash Nix* (1985), Miranda is aligned with the Japanese camera brand of the same name and turns an exposing lens on assailants. In *What a Performance*, Miranda is expressly aligned with Prospero's daughter in *The Tempest*. Like Shakespeare's Miranda, Mendelssohn's is banished by association, victimized by a Caliban, and in pursuit of a brave new world. But by turns, Miranda is also Ariel, a creative, powerful, magical spirit existing among "airy people" who "float everywhere" (*What a Performance* 39/3).[2]

At the close of *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler encourages humanities scholars to ensure that "oppositional voices are . . . valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform" (151). Butler's terms simultaneously validate the uniqueness of Mendelssohn's voice and recall her own reevaluation of performativity, a mode with the power to constrain and liberate, as Mendelssohn knew all too well. In content and form, *What a Performance* challenges oversimplified, and historically male-dominated, discourse about the persistently ambiguous and expansive term, *terrorism*. Resisting revolutionary fervor and outright condemnation alike, Mendelssohn offers a generative way forward in the increasingly urgent debate about the constitution and consequences of extremism.

Notes

I extend my thanks to Anna Mendelssohn's children for permission to edit and publish *What a Performance* and to the archivist Simon Coleman, who located the roman à

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clef in Mendelssohn's papers. Archivist hire and cataloging were facilitated by my receipt of a Research Development Fund grant from the University of Sussex in 2014.

What a Performance consists of five files in the Anna Mendelssohn Archive, which is held by Special Collections at the University of Sussex (SxMs109/B/1/39/1, 2, 3, 3a, and 4). In the edited text, extracts are separated by a rule and are cited in the endnotes using the last two call numbers, e.g., "39/1." The 1987 notebook containing numerous manuscript drafts of *What a Performance* is filed as SxMs109/4/C/34 and cited as "C/34." When these drafts are referenced, variations between texts should be assumed. In the original, font sizes are uniform.

1. A close friend writes that "just as with those involved in the Angry Brigade trial nearly twenty years before [Mendelssohn's solicitor] was left with an impression of 'fitting up'" (Harries 16–17).

2. Mendelssohn returns to this allusion in a satirical 1997 poem, "Hungary Water," where Miranda's references remain defiant protest and ludic innocence: "miranda's causing riots / murders an old joke / armies armful of leaves / for a detoxifying smoke" (*Tondo Aquatique*).

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What a Performance

"What a Performance"
or (Egg-Stealing Vulture.)

This is a storyfilmplaypoemmusicalcomedy about someone who didn't want to be the person described. It is written for the Pin Ball Wizard.[1]

A young woman is attending an art history lecture where slides are being shown of a virtually random nature of architectural styles; some fine, muted Baroque Roman facades, dazzling Mexican Rococo and an English Prison the features of which were being pointed out with intricacy by the lecturer.

Why Miranda should have been at all disturbed by this latter shot was momentarily beyond her own comprehension. Even during the five years she had spent in a prison not dissimilar to the one on the slide, the actual Reason for what had at the time seemed an incongruous example of beauty, failed to materialize.

Although, on one level it was obvious was it not? One did not mask sadism with beauty. Or wasn't that a sign of civilisation, that one did precisely that?

For the reasons why Strangeways Jail disturbed her in that godforsaken part of Manchester factory land on the van rides back with her father were not factors of plain fear; there was an unquenchable desire to know whether the imprisoned men were really a race apart, and if so, why had she not been told about them before?

NOT factors of plain fear. The first inquiry into her own mind produced worry, hurt and that terrible sense of injustice. No, no, not in the particular, in the general sense. Why

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should those men be behind bars, staring out at Engels' Land?[2]

This beautiful, elegant prison, this palace of dreams, these delicious screams.

The solicitor appeared after three days of isolation in the Police Cells. Albany Street. Just down the road from Euston Station. "Well, this is it. Shall I be too old to have a baby by the time I get out? Might just make it. What can I say? Nothing. Their scene. There is nothing I can say to defend myself without ratting on them, so I'll say nothing." Three days. Footsteps overhead on the pavement. The loo flushing non-stop auto, sit on it or don't sit on it, flush it or not, it just keeps flushing.[3]

Location: A Dark, Freezing Dungeon. England. Late 20th Century.

Political Climate: The Depression.

Prisoner's number: 971226.[4]

flashbacks numerous.

assume dialogue except where obviously otherwise.

Go on write / I can't write / You told me you could write / I could before I told you /
I didn't tell you I could, I told you I /
I can't say anymore, he's armed with credentials and dangerous.[5]

Why bring back torture? Because it is continuing /
[. . .]

Never speak to another poet. Never breathe a word about your plans. Don't be kind. Don't care. They'll only think you want something. If you have style, they'll think you have money. They'll stop you in the street and tell you to get the hell out if you don't have a decent place to live in. They say they are permanently poor but they won't understand why you are not on the phone, why your name isn't in the book. You won't tell other poets because they will be manipulating against you in another way. They will reinforce any old current theory. People with radical pasts are not invited to dinner. People will warn their children against you, and your children, they will also warn your children against you. You do not ask to be born therefore you do not have the right to live. Never voice radical opinions, you may be mistaken for an activist. A poet cannot be an activist. This is England remember. You can be gucci-voiced and you may get away with it, don't jolt, don't drive, don't paint, don't read, don't bear children, don't smile, you act.

Nothing which happened before is still happening. You can fly anywhere in the world. Your old comrades have given you writing work to do.

It's too late now.[6]

The second person pronoun either singular or plural fluctuates in its identity. As the addressee(s) must remain anonymous and are best thought of as "types," the exposition reads as contemporary fiction in one way or another.

The writer slips in and out of the persona of Miranda as she is a virtual prisoner on the island of England. One of the more helpful images which come to mind is, I think, from *Los Caprichos* by Goya, where the bedraggled man has a live figurine dangling on a thread from his mouth.[7]
[. . .]

I do NOT want that woman there
delighting in the social fact of a period of my past.

I do NOT delight in that time
though I HAVE made light of it[8]

She walks blind. She walks in the night. I slept on the concrete floor. I gave her my bed. They had put her in with me for the night because they thought she was on the verge of suicide. She had been in MI5. Special Agent to Russia

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> and China. She was involved in a car accident. In China. She saw the whole of her life flash before her eyes. She had not been killed. But she had been trained to kill. She had had to kill a man. Shot him dead. She was caught up in the horror of this act. She had left MI5. Resigned from her job. Her father was a magistrate in a sleepy Suffolk town. She kept bees & was an expert on wild flowers. She wrote for *Nature* magazine. She had been married to a navy man. It was from the navy that she was transferred to MI5. She voted Conservative. We had fun in the General Election. Was it 1974? Me in my cell, she in hers. Every victory for the Tories she'd rap on the wall. Every victory for Labour I'd rap on mine. Neither of us could vote. Prisoners are barred from voting. I wanted my electoral rights in there. I wanted them like mad. We saw where the suffragettes had been imprisoned. Their cells were even tinier than ours. They were no longer in use. If prisoners were given the vote it might confront the lack of education that most of them suffer from. Lack of education personalises emotion to an obsessive, often petty extent. Badly or poorly educated people become trapped inside their emotions because they lack the intellectual tools which would help them to objectify. This is why there is so much self-mutilation in prison. Women thrust their hands through the glass panes between the bars. They then take a shard or two and slash their arms or their vaginas or both. The authorities call it attention seeking.[9]

And now Miranda turned black. Her fellow female prisoner complained to a Governor that Miranda was mixing with the wrong people. Caliban was a white lecher, who gave her mind penis power. Because His poets were His poets. "Oh yes little poitiss, give us a feel little poitiss, stop weaving in and out of my straight focus with no shoes on."

A policeman whistled Mary Hopkin's (only?) hit, "Those were the Days my Friend." He was hired for the occasion. At a stretch of the imagination I could have been back, cross legged, on an outcrop of the Lodore Falls, listening to Pan pipe, with the loos flushing, and him whistling. Miranda slept, curled up as Fuchsia hiding from Lord Sepulchrave in the castle of her life.[10]

DAGGERS, he looked at her DAGGERS. "Just reduce her to an imbecile. She's too bright. Make her FEEL like a copper." No conception of the woman poet, see? So the guilt-guard which reads "she read our books" is a downright lie.[11]

I want a slow life, free from harm, free from people screaming at me to join armies and movements. Free from being asked my opinion on political situations I am neither responsible for nor experienced enough to declaim upon. If I feel something in my gut, I know it's real. But I refused to manufacture emotion, or set myself up as a militant revolutionary, because war frightens me. When I say I have never made a bomb from an instruction manual I am telling the truth.[12] When I say I was pushed into a time warp I am hardly ever given the chance to recover from, I do not lie. I loved my university because I love book learning. I get sick of creeping around rich friends because I do NOT take more than I can give. And I get sick of being treated as a leper. But when you are young and the doors slam in their hundreds behind you, when you have been a person who was satisfied with a sunny day and a good book, when you have never been allowed to ask for money or help because there was never any money or help available, it's a bit much to have professionalism shoved at you, it's a bit hard to have sociologists and criminologists having a field day over you, it's a bit confusing not to be able to feel open when people ask you about your past, it's a bit sadistic to be lectured at and moralized to by people who purport to be your friends, even when you have struggled with all your might to run from anyone who wished you harm, you only seem to fall into the prey of someone else who has to make you wicked in some way or another.

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I wish I could grasp the enormity of it all. This life they call love who are Christians or Jews or Atheists. Atheists who delight in saying "Bugger" with babies' ears close. Atheists who are supposed to be educated yet whose atheism often seems bent on destroying other people. Christians who get a bee in their bonnets about telling children the truth about their mother, when they don't even know the first thing about anything which happened. To make little children suffer. Very Christian. Is it any wonder I walk another way?

I sit in the sea and smoke. I sit in the sun and sink.

Neither of these two sentences are true. They are pieces of poetry.

[. . .] The hatred of the old for the young can go deep. Maybe that's what my friend from the north meant when she told me that the likes of me don't know what love is. I do know that comfort brings with it a massive amount of emotional investment. The luxury of love. The denial of The punishment. Wasting time being sensual when you could be doing something more useful. Make yourself useful, don't sit there daydreaming. That is the refrain of my youth. No wonder I wanted to get lost.[13]

Return Home

Aged 28 she walked in the front door. No-one hugged her. They are probably afraid she is not the same person as the one who walked out. (MY oh MY how we love ourselves.) She is going to describe herself. In one sentence. She rang the doorbell back from Turkey. Recalled. Summonsed from a life. Escaping the parents. She was shoeless. It was a hot day though. She is barred from uttering the first person pronoun here. Her mother: You will NOT. They maintained their authority through the years. She was much safer away from them.

"If you wanted me dead why didn't you say? You know you only had to ask."

They sat staring at the Television. Something had definitely gone wrong in that house. As usual she puts fight and spirit back into them.

How can you be sensitive with size 8 feet? How can you feel love with opinions like your father's? Your love is theoretical.

"Stop acting."[14]

Chorus.

The new girlfriends prompted them. We want to know exactly what you have done. No you can't give a talk at college about long-term imprisonment. No you can't go back to your old university the one you stopped from getting bombed, the one you stopped from giving confidential talks to an exclusive number of physicists on the qualities and advantages of chemical and biological weapons.[15] Join agent orange join agent orange, there was no organisation by the name of agent orange before you started the rumpus over government patency of napalm, no matter that you read coleridge ed dorn philip lamantia richard brautigan tristan tzara arp huelsenbeck camus sartre simone weil anne waldman sang arias made us smile talked us through our boyfriend troubles kept our secrets were devastated at the news of Stuart's death in the crash, was brutally assaulted by the mad ginger the next day, didn't know where on earth you were nor why he suddenly took against you, you, our zen, our café poet who had too much imagination to live alone, who was pursued through windows, followed in the street, who wanted to be mousy with size four feet, why did you not STOP yourself loving people?[16] We were told to stop loving you so that you too would stop loving people. We have heard that in your dreams you agree to having committed all the crimes that humanity has ever been accused of: adultery, violence, treachery, treason, betrayal, incest, murder, suicide, picking roses to stick in your hair, refusing to be intimate with anyone, . . what are you afraid of? That you will become someone's

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subject instead of their equal? You can't keep going around moaning about the bourgeoisie you know. It just is NOT done. Why didn't you understand that it was actually YOU who was standing in the dock on trial with seven other people. You were NOT Alice in Wonderland.[17]
[. . .]

INTERLUDE

It's very silly to believe that there is any such body as the bourgeoisie. It is a word which needs to be eradicated from our language, and from French too, because it sounds very similar in French. It's GREED really which makes the materially deprived hanker after perfume by Patou, it's obnoxiousness which makes them want to dissolve in mid-air when someone who might be a friend says "Hi. I'm dashing to catch the plane to a skiing holiday, should see me through Easter." It's BORING to know anyone who doesn't do EXCITING things. Socially Functioning people must guard their Image. You may as well know that Socially Functioning people are working hard at producing the ultimate version of proletarian ardour, and it SINGS with HOLES in it.[18]

I don't have a friend whom I love, besides you, so I send you these, this and these, knowing you must be up to your neck in work, marking, etc., they only want pretty poems you know, they don't like to think life can be really ugly, if it's really ugly they say it can't be poetry, "it shouldn't have been printed." Of course not. I don't have a friend whom I love, besides you.

O pretty things.
pretty things,
this is a poem o
of pretty things,
pretty lives,
pretty moments,
pretty prettiness,
prettiness loved
pretty loves,
& pretty pretty things
my son floating down the river on his back
alive not dead,
his two sisters floating after him,
giggling & pretty,
he protecting them from thugs, brutes &
bruisers,
not very pretty things,
these are the poets blowing bubble gum,
lazing on the banks,
chewing, their shirts' necks open to the sun,
here are their wives, pretty things, fetching
tarts
& cool beer, smoothing brows wrinkled
with chewing,
laughing prettily when chivvied for reading
serious things,
these are pretty unpublishable things.[19]

There's enough to read now, don't have to write anymore.

(menacing voice over:)

"You act little for a change little girl. You act as little as you can possibly act."

It's my birthday today & I'm here watching you stir up petrol bombs on the gas cooker.

"Right. That's it. Let's kill her."

You act as though you were a fly on the wall, a speck in the eye, a mulberry tree.

"DON'T think of that tree."

"Only poets are not mysterious any more. Welcome to the Supreme Rationalist. Whipped. WELL, we'll just get her & whip her a bit MORE, until we KNOW that there is NOTHING we don't KNOW ABOUT left inside her."

Don't tell me. Please don't tell me. Don't tell me anything about your personal life. I prefer not to know. Read me some poetry or play the piano. Learn some Tibetan or Greek but

The women who don't write, gurgle low. It's sexual and emotional distrust. They see a face bite the dust: "NO use to us. No use to us."

Find out from the dimensions. Window disappearing from frame by man with outstretched

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arm & grim strain on his lips, & a car driving into an unknown life.

You accused me of 90 per cent possession and 1 per cent love. Do you not think that was a crime?

"You greatly overestimate yourself as a poet."[20]

As she was led away from Amherst (sic) Road she distinctly remembers the thought going through her brain, as she cast a retrospective mild regard:

"What a performance."[21]

Projection Forward

Miranda found Rembrandt's "Woman Taken in Adultery." She has been left in a cellar which is too dark in the daytime for reading and writing without the electric light being on. As she was on a pittance in comparison with the other people in the house, she lived in the cold and the dark as much as possible so as not to add to the fuel bills.

This is strange. Having transcended emotion with ardent, concentrated effort meeting a non-transcendent. Time seems too short: therefore being human, yet retaining consciousness of wasted effort. Having practised a holy way of life in the dungeons begins to regard Christ as her only friend. On the human level. Because, as far as we know, Christ did not write.

Out of guilt and anxiety Miranda can quite naturally take on the dilemmas of other people. If this is a way in which suffering can be shared, then so be it. But the extent to which she does it, frightens herself. One day she left the cellar to visit a homeless hostel. She paints some murals to relieve the monotony of the bare walls for the homeless people. One man remains indelible in her memory. He was about fifty years of age, Irish, quietly spoken and self-contained. He told her that yes, he had children, but they lived with his wife who was far more qualified to look after them than he was. I asked him why and he told her that his wife was a teacher.[22]

She thought that by the age of twenty-eight she had the right to start looking after her own mind. As soon as this decision had been made, she was inundated with objections. "Who is going to put on plays?" "Who is going to sing?" "You should be working with people worse off than yourself." She imagined her writing lined her socks. "Don't wear those ridiculous socks." She imagined her writing lined her stockings. "Why don't you wear some with seams up the back?" It CAN be that ridiculous.

You see, you never QUITE know whether you are saying the right or the wrong thing, it is NOT pretentious for ME to be raising philosophical questions but when it is a matter of raising them with those who have the official right to know, it may well sound as though I am just SAYING something to SOUND clever.

If what "goes" is a body of poetry which is built on other poetry withOUT acknowledgement or obvious declaration of derivation are we being asked to bow down before the poet to worship Poetry? I would say the latter.

But I do know that I have used unpremeditated forms in which I have written certain truths about my life which I cannot write about in any other way. And I know that there are still things I want to write which I cannot, in any shape, form or content. Because there are ethical dilemmas. Jesus did not condemn the woman who had been taken in adultery. What did he say about the man who had taken her?[23]

It is pointless people who have taught or who teach in prison however strongly they sympathize with prisoners, and some of them do sympathize, imagining that their lives are as hard as the prisoners'. It is a well-known adage that prison workers complain about how they have done a life sentence too. They

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have not. The prisoners are their instruments of survival, their machine parts. Miranda's prison has been bulldozed out of existence.[24] Her professor destroyed or lost or retained without her permission a large and detailed drawing she had made out of one of the only two trees in the place, a sycamore which was a very good friend of hers, viewed from a turret room window, drawn sitting on a chair placed on a table so that she could see it. It was not the first drawing she had made. Nor was it the last. But it won the first prize for drawing from the Arthur Koestler Award and it won her one half day out after four years of being locked up, when she was taken with two escorts to the Tate on her own request, to view the Blake drawings.[25] A wild and drunk debutante type flew into the gallery as she was being marched round "The River of Life" etc. and at the top of her voice uttered the telling words: "A robin red-breast in a cage / Puts all of Heaven in a rage." Miranda has admired drunken debutantes ever since.
[. . .]

But her admiration of drunken debutantes can no-wise match that fleeting occurrence. To find that moment again in time is impossible [. . .] Miranda's grandfather [was a White Russian]. How they despised the revolution, those people. Even her grandmother railed against the Russians, any Russians, communists and Tzars alike, forgetting that her own father had been kidnapped by the Cossacks and given a helmet and a horse, swept off the street of the shtetl one glimmering deserted afternoon. And fine habits the Cossacks had taught him. For he gambled and kicked his daughter as she scrubbed his house on her hands and knees. And oh what a great man was he with all the leaders of the Manchester Jewish Community, the male-only secret societies.[26]

A Question of Liberty.

> Next "door," her fellow prisoner had screamed herself hoarse. Kicking and thumping at the door.[27] Miranda had pleaded, begged and prayed for her to stop. Then fallen asleep.
>
> "Don't pick up the baby every time she cries."
>
> The crying brought back the helpless crying. She couldn't react after the sentence had been passed. She didn't want to react. She would go on, into the maelstrom. She would not break down. After three years she cried in public when they came again to look through her books and papers but that was out of indignation. There is a deeper cry than that. She cried one Christmas Day when they . . . and another day when they brought her in from the sun. The women would cry from the time they were locked in (banged up the expression went) into tiny cubicles. Changing rooms at the swimming baths.[28] But no swimming baths. This is my Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Belsen journey. This is as far as I can go to assure you that my soul, spirit, heart, mind and body were always in utter sympathy with every human being who suffered at the hands of the Gestapo, all the communists, the Jews and the Gypsies.
>
> If it was up to society I would never be allowed to breed. There was no point in asking. My daughter will let you know that I have never raised a hand to her, and hardly ever a voice.

She is saving up her pocket money to take her mummy to disneyland.

she is reckoning on the age of eleven to be about
the time
when she will have collected sufficient.
her mummy hesitates to tell her daughter that
there's no
point in her raising her hopes about taking her
daughter to disneyland
unless we were to sneak through one of the borders
it's not a question of ego or self-image it's just the
plain truth.

Dear Mum,

Yes. I am being VERY lazy. I am reading a Long Book. It is called *The Devils* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. I am sorry you are feeling lonely and that Dad keeps falling asleep in his chair. I am now living in a town you have never heard of. I am worse off than myself so I see no point in

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going to see people who are worse off than me. Don't regret a thing. You are not indispensable.
Ever obedient, A. Drape.[29]

Margie That.

This is the Dolly we give you to punch. When your friends are getting you down and your kids are moaning for taxis instead of walking through the noisy city streets and you are being told off for cajoling a whinge/er when it's simply that you cannot keep taking taxis and your voice won't come out because it's weary beyond reckoning and you are approached by a poet who tells you how well she brought up her child (with his continuing care) DON'T breathe a word of vengeance, spit at her, instead spit at That, but don't Do it in Fact because you'll only get another Year.

Don't you dare preach to us. Don't you dare get us to justify our intelligence. You are Tricks. Trying to prove how delightful working class existence is. How can you stand it? Even if the working class cannot. "I don't wish to sound like Edmund Burke" you prefaced. . . .

I too rose at 5 each morning whilst the house was quiet. In my slip of space I sat by the window, text book on knee and learnt Latin thoroughly enjoying myself until they came clattering and arguing their way down the stairs at 7.30.[30]

---

such airy people, we float everywhere,
walk out we knocked you out
LITERALLY
walk into thin air
so emphatic,
such a heave,
indicating,
intelligibly
waves watery
tears aflow
retaining on the sea
stay There
lover of graveyards,
prays to the afterglow
we would have hired a boat
but they had all
been taken out.

apartment block
renovated
Action is concentrated in one apartment.
2 rooms.
Hair shining. groomed. teeth good.
apartment above: people are resting alcove.
Could be Moscow.
no revelation of dramatic occurrences.

I am in fact very pleased that myparents
like the people
who are looking after/bringing up . . . Peace,
Justice and Equality.[31]

Agent Orange.

so earthly, it gets in our mouths & our ears.
up our noses, in our hair,
down our jumpers,
inside our shoes,
such earthy people.

you can hear a gaggle of voices?
it's the poor—waiting in the wings
for their entrance,

we built the stage, though,
in our minds,
they were only the hands
which moulded our ideas,
Let them wait,
we have talking to do.[32]

Introductory Address to the Comparative Literature faculty.

"Any Questions?"

"Why is it a rule to write essays in three paragraphs? Why paragraph?"

Commas had come, commas had gone, lampposts are exclamation marks. You threw me out of my sentences, hurled me over to the State who ruled my lines and wrote me.[33] You do know I was never a me girl, and if I was it was only as a joke, I had not a sprinkling of self. The Mind? Where Mind? I mind. I mind

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my lovers alive or dead, but they didn't mind me, they bodied me, then they whored me, then they left me for dead. A dead body is a dead body. It may have been mummified for a while but the bandages started to devolve of their own accord. Inert maybe, but breathing. Listen. Slightly.[34]

Don't ask. Don't ask for a book instead of an apple a day, or a book shelf, don't say anything. Suffer. Don't say anything about printing. He is a Great Man you are an aconite.[35]

The laughing foxes

but behind—the dark.
Vision of Dionysus, thyrsus in hand
gold masqued; beautiful. sinister.

for the sake of appearances?

peribleptos. from all sides:
what was a surrounding attack,
armies moving in towards,
the virgin, good girl, moved into the sphere
of serious devotion

to demand beauty! to be seized by its force
convulsed in adoration of its power
the secret of the source, unwillingness to harm
guilt at perfection, coursing perfection
in the passage from guilt to harmlessness
the plain, astute facts,
it hardly seems fair to talk where there are
those who are mute
or to fall in love, to feel the pull. the pitch.
having been told to dismiss all thoughts of
happiness for ever
working hard to deny, self-mutilate, self-detest,
so much negation, the power of intellect
subverted
by an every otherwise nihilism of self,
in order not to offend,
others sound so much better, more Fit,
& in the end a lowering of this soul head
bowed
hand outstretched momentarily clasped but
lightly
as the lapping backwaters of a still, reedy calm
guarding hearts of the babies from prejudice
how, on earth, can I be superior to another?
But sometimes thinking it is volition, fate,
to blame one self, safe, for others' ills,
their quick thinking, an unpopular social
realm,
it is only that I do not understand
the scorn and the hatred
yet when I was dying on my feet
from my incapacity to give my offspring a life
fit
for their merry souls
how could I say I deserved their love?

there is no-one looking now.
no one checking my brain.
no one trusting my thoughts.
the danger of the public voice
no one demanding a performance now.
no one threatening each time I open my mouth
so the urge to utter which drove underground
to mock itself for its former sense of duty
built on not what it wanted to be speaking
about
but what it had to

a strict house and a wayward world

so it must seem, to the rich,
that the poor are old-fashioned, lame,
so it must seem, that lullabies
don't meet their refrain,

phrases can't occur again,
that one has happened—Siena! now
we cannot return in the same vein,
cosmic tapester,
it makes no difference? rich or poor
except when doubt
is thrown at the right of the poor
to proclaim *cosmic tapester*
show us your tickets, your snapshots, your
Proof,
your footprints on Everest, your chip of
Krakatoa
show us exactly the exact itinerary
cosmic tapester,
you must be joking,
(she prays, believes, the poor must)

my heaving sank,
the words, concepts, joy in developing ongoing
thinking
disintegrated, broke apart,

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language which fell on uncomprehending ears
was quickly reorganised into simpler fare,
it was unfair to fox those poor people
with words as foxing it would have been
to outline my own superiority. . . . .[36]

That it doesn't matter what you say, the deed is done.
That only with complicated arrangements can there be any release,
& then only for a day perhaps, unless you live like a street fox
or rat, & then for how long?
The point at issue was pieces of paper.[37]
Are you not afraid of dying?
"There is no such thing as death."
Do you, in your maturity, mix up time sequences?
Did you not somehow settle down for a while in your life?
Which gave you a start, one way or another?

I immediately get reprimanded. Think of those worse off than yourself.
But I have to put up with abuse. Which is not to assume that you do not.
Your children have fathers. Even if you don't live with them.
They don't get hassled at school for not knowing who their fathers are,
Or where they are.

Their mother may be a prostitute therefore. Which may be all right if she were, but she is not.
Then successful women, whom I KNOW have worked hard, hold onto their second husband's company car, that's the fighting spirit, and charge the woman extortionate rent for a couple of weeks' stay in their additional self-contained attic flat, because it's on the cards,
show us your bank account before you enter our doors,
poetry is naff, painting is the cut, agents, lovers, curse their wives,
charge in, deconstruct, ship veers into ship, prows clash,
take a peep in the freezer, the FREEZER, packed, mother lays
twelve grand on daughter, hang on to that neutrality,
be ASKED to condemn, BEG me I can't be bothered to wage a battle
I was not witness to, on the tale end of news, sorry for both of you,
You should have paid me for sitting for you,
Delacroix paid his models, I did too much for free,
Couldn't be bothered demanding money, now it's money with menaces I
suppose, well you know you are lying even if no-one else does.

Walk on, cat.

the heaps of moralizing, reprimanding, cutting,
sneering successful women of the late
twentieth century are good at not giving a
damn, but moralize, reprimand, accuse,
suspect, and congratulate each other on
their hard won professionalism.

like men do. I just don't want to be in it
but don't know how to survive.

how i resent it
how i can't talk it
how could you know?
who close your doors
against me.

there is no point in pretending
in pretending
i am persona grata

that this is not the person
I ever was,
nor wanted to be.

stare down that hole
your hero dug for me
because my face
smiled at the sun
and the rain.

Don't think I want
to be This,
racked,
for you spat
so you could
smile habitually.

Or pretend
that you were
divorced
from life

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when you were
actually
divorced from
love.

but i, i was divorced from both.
Black as the night of Cain.
Do you think I am in
Competition with you?

You acted as though I was.
Assert. Assert.
96 years I'm telling you.

That's what your friends
colluded with.
96 years because the
State has no discretion
and I can add up.

10 years to be discreet,
96 years in fact.
What you have learnt
you throw at me,
hard,
and I tremble with fear
at your further judging
& marking

my children would have hated me.
don't you see?
troubled & haunted.
I do not understand you
as you cannot me.[38]

In the vernacular.

Half the time you (meaning the voice here) are starting from such a basic position you might almost be reiterating your father's voice. Day in and day out, that is all we heard. It was either this or that. That's the pain. You go so low defending those worse off than yourself, refusing chance after chance because he refused to move, it was the lowest rung of the ladder for him, out of principle, and you thought you were obeying a commandment to stay at the bottom too. You hated yourself every time there was a cause for celebration. You became a misery guts, just like him. You were arrested without a pair of shoes to your name. You owned one dress. They hated each other too, after their arrest: The Baader-Meinhof.[39] This is not helping. "Get it out of you," she said. "You NEED to get it out."

"But there's no-where I can get it out to." [. . .] And on it goes. You met women who had been charged with child murder in there. You saw the terror in the eyes of one. You taught the other how to read and to write. She used to come up to you and stroke your sleeve. It gave you the creeps, but you could not say anything, just move your arm away. It just should not be that your child sees you crying. Lorca understood that, hugging and holding the child so close, afraid for them. Belief in fate is a terrible thing. It wishes the worst on people. I was lucky, I liked my children immediately.
[. . .]

Obedience

Forbidden to swear at one's mother and father. When they are driving you so crazy you run away to hide and they come after you like mad folk, you can hear them calling your name and you keep very still as though they were the enemy who might ride by too quickly to notice you with your back flat against the nook in the wall. You have only to open your mouth for them to jump down it full force. Time may not be linear although conversation often is. With practice you can visualize the words which are coming out of someone's mouth, this takes away the pain of what they are saying and in an odd way, depersonalizes it.

You had to do exactly what she said the moment she asked it. Action was her panacea.

Explain this: it is true that I feared Hitler was still alive and would one night put his hand on the inside of the transit window, carefully lift the handle and open the main window. This fear materialized itself in another direction. I dreamt of my father dressed as a pirate stealing in through the opposite window which was always locked.

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Northern City

Older mother visits daughter and baby living in one room.
"I don't see anything wrong with living in the back streets. I was brought up in the back streets of Liverpool. Had a lovely time. Didn't do me any harm."
Crossing worlds.
"Yes, but you didn't have a mother who kept picking up a pen and getting words in her head until it was fit to burst, did you?"
You didn't have to listen to swearing and cursing. There's relatively little that's sane about single parenthood unless you are prepared to remould yourself, give up. But Miranda gave up a lot anyway. She pushed the pushchair through the long, deserted city streets of factory land. Dirty, filthy factory buildings (they think they are so picturesque) cracked glass, disused sheds, grey corrugated and rusted iron for long stretches of oblivion. Singing at the top of her voice. Cheering both herself and the baby. Making her laugh. ("You can stretch anything out.")

That's what they don't understand about certain sorts of cheerfulness. It's bravery and determination. Instead they say, "It was easier for you than it was for her. You were used to baked beans. She missed her avocado pears."

There was a row over Pat Barker's *Union Street*.

She was supposed to defend the merits of working class life. Get it? The girl in that book had been raped on her way home.[40] Miranda's mother had been chased by a man in Sefton Park. She had been tripping back home. He was waiting in the shadows. Exposed himself there and then in front of her. She ran. He ran. After her. Didn't dare tell her mother. Great life. Wrote "June, the Queen of Months." Headmaster cared. No money. Father out of work. Mother sewed. Had to leave school at 14.[41] Hair fell out. Stopped doing illuminated script. Crying every night on her return from work. Mother showed no pity. Didn't dare to.

The great Oxford Marxist moaned. Lads from Ruskin. "What we find is that they can't get up in the mornings." Too whacked from going down the mines, MATE.[42]

---

we know it is wrong to talk
about imprisonment. the predominant theory is
still that people have more right to complain
for example about the imprisonment of the
woman in marriage, or the imprisonment by
harsh social conditions even when the
person has done nothing wrong. Because
there is such little chance to explain how
an individual can undergo severe punishment
which can extend beyond the more acceptable
forms of social punishment into the realms
of more socially unacceptable forms of social
punishment, I think that I might be justified
in writing down some of my perceptions.[43]
They are disorganised and scattered. Some
are uninteresting to write, they are not
what I consider to be, in any way, imaginative.
They tell a story whose end is inevitably
tied to its beginning. There is a horrendous
resentment and caution in responses to
an imaginative treatment of Time. Having been
brought up by Orthodox Jews and Freemasons,
I have never understood why esoteric knowledge
should be man's domain. I was forbidden to
learn the tonal inflections which are marked
in the Torah, yet I received first prize
in the last year I was allowed to learn Hebrew
from the Chief Rabbi, as the most promising
Hebrew scholar. People mess you about. There
are plenty of stupid rules. If people who
criticise me don't have the guts to criticise
some of the rules extant they can't expect
my appraisal. If they insist on using one
official interpretation of my past against me,
all I can think is that they are sadists who
delight in the thought of my death. Women
who hang out together like so many giggly
school girls, did they never have a chance to
be in a gang? Why aren't one or two serious
friends enough for them? Do they really think
they are making good use of their time by
analysing for the umpteenth time stupid
women's magazines? Images and images: fit
for collage which shows the contradictions

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and the CRUELTY of judging on the grounds of Appearance. The shirt swallowed the rose.[44]

Peace Picnic.

Pregnant woman with daughter and son on the grass. Being peaceful.

"Come with me mummy to speak to that girl from my school." "You go and say hello. It's O.K. I'll watch from here." (Too heavy with pregnancy to spring to her feet.) "I don't want to go on my own." "It's O.K." (Little son has fallen asleep on lap.) "I'm not going to move. You stand on your own two feet. I'll watch you."

Woman: "Don't talk to the child like that. This is a peace picnic."

Pregnant woman (Also worries that her daughter will become over-dependent. Notices 45-year-old men with their mothers in the doctor's surgery) gets up, cross. Tearful, picks up sleeping boy, goes over with little girl to speak to her school friends, then leaves Peace Picnic, walks up to school fête pushing the youngest in the pushchair. Gives her daughter the answer to how many dried peas in this jar competition. Daughter wins a metre-long tube of sweets, walks all the way back to the house on the other side of town proudly sharing the carrying of the unwieldy object with mother. Next day we divide up tube into parcels of sweets for all the children in her class, they are handed out as special treats, teeth in mind.

The lawyer lands on top of her.[45]

It was with regret and a sense of democratic justice that I rejected the offer of the main female part in the French director's film. It is still incomprehensible to the majority of former friends whose lives today are far more prosperous than my own, as to what my motives were in doing that. Why did I call a meeting and put the question of star to the vote? I spread my hands openly on the table. It is up to you, I said. And I meant it.[46] But why torture me with self-image and self-interest now? Do you think that I chatted casually about my life in prison to people whom I hardly knew? To people who, often, I thought that I would not have chosen to know, had there been a choice.

I was the only girl who stood up in calculated protest against the Porton Down physicist.[47] I WAS very afraid when I was asked to participate. I KNEW I was throwing away my career. I HAD been reading Hegel, in depth, when I was so rudely interrupted. This instant in time IS important to understand, if you, as a writer, want to understand me.

It would not happen now. I am nearly twenty years older. [. . .] Because of my loyalty to creation, I was not satisfied with the compromise Godard had to make over the film. He had to reorganise his plan because of my decision to put it to the vote. That's probably why we had to sit around like lemons rewriting the lyrics to "Revolution." But listen to something I say in that film. "OUR position is tragic." That was ersatz "Honey Pie." I meant it. When the men had been expelled and people became concerned, I was very worried that a large number of undergraduates were turning into sheep. It was so obvious that we needed an education. Our teachers did not take control of the situation at that point. They SHOULD have done.[48]

I could not expect them to wait until I recovered from an exhausting period of incarceration. Their enquiries met with little response. I became a prisoner of this island. [. . .] The narrow-minded, opportunistic, avaricious, paranoid, won. Some women are permitted male friends, some are not. Women ganged up on me. As you. Never mind. My opinions are worthless. Know prison for one who lost every single friend she ever had. Who did I hurt? Who?[49]

There was no maid brought to court. No cleaner appeared as a witness. No-one who

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had suffered an injury appeared before the judge. Tell me why? Had there been anyone injured it would have been a main pin to the prosecution case.[50]

Na, don't bother. I carried the can with big man anyway. It was ALL my fault, says I. Like the coalman in the French Revolution killing himself laughing as the queen's head hit a split in the cobbles. Or the Mexican revolutionary smoking his cigar with his back to the wall as he faced the firing squad.[51]

Oh god, scripter, no more flying visits to Jessica in New Orleans. Poor Audrey, empty freezer.[52] It just depends on which side you fall out on. The reason why I feel sorry for the bourgeoisie is that they have a choice. The likes of me have no choice.

She loads her revolver. The whole street is writhing in agony ten minutes later. Babies rolling around bloodied. Women twirling out of existence. Men doing their best to make out that they are still alive.

So. She deserved to die. Didn't she?

And the audience spruce themselves up attaching C.N.D. badges to one another's lapels.[53]

They are on their way to another Messianic Production.

S.G.L. Lake.
c/o Union of Socialist Surrealist International
Situationists
P.O. Box . . .
Cambridge
England.[54]

I would barter my poems for paint,
for music I would barter my poems,
for a piano which played a softer tone,
for a lute and a room with high windows.

I would barter my poems for milk once a week.
I would barter my poems for poems.
I would barter and barter my poems for trees,
for water in a garden I would barter a poem.

I would barter my poems for my children to be
loved
as young poems, I would barter them to be drawn
to the trees, to the trees, to the water to the trees,
I would barter my shoes for my poems, I would
not be tempted to despair in a money economy,
I would scroll my poems I would sandscrub
my floor, I would whitewash my walls in my
hut for my children to be quietly occupied in
brushing shapes into wood, I would
barter my poems for a goat and a beautiful
slow cow, I would sprinkle my cabbages for
a couple of collages from a lad in Tibet with
a head dress.[55]

Editor's Notes

1. This first extract combines two title pages and elides an authorial attribution credited to "Lake. S. G. L." (39/2). Mendelssohn's given name was Anne Mendleson. In 1983, she legally became Sylvia Grace Louise Lake; in 1997, she reverted to her original name, again legally, but altered the spelling of her surname (Changes of Name, SxMs109/1/G/1). From 2000, her work is almost exclusively published under the name Anna Mendelssohn.

"Pin Ball Wizard" is the hit song from the Who's 1969 rock opera, *Tommy*; it describes the game-playing expertise of the psychosomatically isolated, eponymous protagonist. Mendelssohn may relate to this combination of prowess and alienation. Or, more comically, she may be recalling how she stood for election to the University of Essex student council on an antipinball platform. Mendelssohn argued that the machines should be banned from campus, as they distracted from the proper work of study (Smith).

2. Now HM Prison Manchester, Strangeways Jail was built in 1868. In a portion of her roman à clef titled "no spoof." (1984–85), Mendelssohn describes a similar scene. In this variant, she is more attentive to the father-daughter relationship and to the details of the prisoners' expressions: "those shrunken isolated faces . . . making slight movements" ("no spoof."). Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) focuses on Manchester's poor. Mendelssohn grew up in nearby Stockport.

3. This typescript page reiterates the title of *What a Performance* and the authorial attribution, "by / Grace Lake." (39/1).

4. In a typescript portion of her roman à clef written in 1986, Mendelssohn writes that after prison, "she wanted to stay in the dark, ask for nothing from people outside. live in the hell, with no outside visitors" (Untitled portions, SxMs109/1/B/1/31).

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5. At the Stoke Newington Eight trial, the charges were ultimately limited to bombings to which the Angry Brigade had laid express claim in a series of communiqués that began in December 1970 (Weir 34; Carr 176). This scene may refer to Mendelssohn's contribution to Angry Brigade communiqué 12, which, as she acknowledged in court, consisted of three lines demanding that the British ruling classes leave Northern Ireland (Opening Speech 2). In her correspondence and life writings, Mendelssohn frequently states that she undertook some Angry Brigade activities under duress, a claim that may be alluded to here and again in the subsection of *What a Performance* entitled *There's enough to read now, don't have to write anymore.*

6. 39/1.

7. Of the eighty prints that Francisco Goya produced under the title *Los Caprichos* (1797–98), none precisely fit Mendelssohn's tentative recollection. She may have conflated images from Goya's series, which includes numerous live figures being devoured, strung up, or hanged.

8. In full, this typescript page appears to be addressed to "scripter," discusses Mendelssohn's background, and offers a rationale for embarking on a film script (39/2; now embargoed). These couplets appear in C/34.

9. Built in 1852, London's HM Holloway Prison became female-only in 1903. The Pankhurst suffragettes were among its most famous inmates. The description of the blind woman is longer in the original and exists in typescript and manuscript (39/1; 39/4).

10. Fuchsia and Sepulchrave are characters in Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy (1946–59). Elsewhere in *What a Performance*, Mendelssohn describes how the solicitor assigned to Miranda brought volume one, *Titus Groan*, with him on their first meeting in prison (39/3). Fuchsia is sister to Titus, the seventy-seventh earl of Gormenghast, a castle haunted by the ghost of the seventy-sixth, Lord Sepulchrave.

11. There are two draft passages beginning "And now Miranda turned black" (39/1). Both are linked to a "Caliban," who, in one variant, visits Mendelssohn's interned protagonist and tells her, "Prison suits you." Though furious, Miranda is pleased by his gift: the works of Emily Dickinson and music books.

Mendelssohn was part of the first generation of Jews assimilated into white culture after World War II, a position that remained ambiguous within the highly racialized counterculture (Third 119–29). A childhood recipient of anti-Semitic slurs, Mendelssohn found little respite from racist abuse among her activist peers. In prison in 1974–75, she writes: "It is very hard to keep your head intact when you are continually subjected to ingratiating treatment. I understand the dry bitter taste of Black, Refugee, Jew of the past. . . . From the instant I step *into* the arena of relationship with authority I am a victim" (Exercise Book, Dec. 1974–Dec. 1975). Later, borrowing from Aimé Césaire, Mendelssohn claims that her life with her children was perceived as "poverty and negritude" (C/34).

12. The caveat "from an instruction manual" is significant. In a portion of her roman à clef subtitled "living levels." and dated circa 1987, Mendelssohn depicts a female figure inexpertly constructing a bomb under the aggressive directives of an unidentified man. Mendelssohn stops midway through her narration, switches to first person, states that she cannot continue, and asserts her identity as "a devoted and devout pacifist" ("living levels."). Mendelssohn's account is consistent with urban guerrilla practices whereby group participation in illegal activities is enforced so that culpability is shared. At her trial, Mendelssohn articulated her resistance to bombing on the grounds that it was too violent and politically ineffectual (Closing Speech 6).

13. There are two typescripts of passages beginning "I want a slow life" in file 1. Mendelssohn repeats the lines: "I sit in the sea and smoke. I sit in the sun and sink. / Neither of these two sentences is true. They are pieces of poetry." Given here is the full-page draft in file 1 (39/1).

14. Longer in the original, this passage refers to two homecomings: from prison in 1976 and from Turkey in 1969 (39/1). In 1969, Mendelssohn taught English and French to Turkish elementary school students and may have had a relationship with a member of a leftist movement pursuing improved democracy and independence. This figure is described elsewhere in *What a Performance* as "a true Turkish National Liberationist" who was not involved in guerilla tactics (39/1). Quotation marks after "ask" and before "Stop" are not in the original.

15. Founded in 1964, Essex quickly became a notoriously radical university, and in May 1968 was shut down by an escalating student protest against a scientist visiting from Porton Down, Britain's renowned military research institute and a key locus of chemical and biological weapons testing (Opening Speech 4). Essex alumnus Chris Ratcliffe recalls Mendelssohn being highly involved in anti–Vietnam War campaigns, during which the Americans' use of the herbicide Agent Orange as a defoliant and weapon became a cogent symbol of their inhumane treatment of the Vietnamese.

16. "Stuart" was a friend of Mendelssohn's at the University of Essex. Mendelssohn credits his sudden death and at least one physical assault with emotionally unmooring her when she moved to London in 1970.

17. The shared responsibility for the events leading up to the Stoke Newington Eight trial recurs in the conclusion of Smith's film treatment, which reads: "She was not without blame, but we were all guilty" (39/1). In a notebook draft, Mendelssohn charges a figure akin to the "scripter" of *What a Performance* with writing "Alice Identity," rather than the truth of Mendelssohn's experience (C/34).

18. This extract appears on two typescript pages numbered 3 and 4 respectively in Mendelssohn's hand (39/1).

19. David Bowie's "Oh! You Pretty Things" was released on the album *Hunky Dory* in 1971; Mendelssohn deploys popular culture in this satire of gender stereotypes,

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homing in on male poets (39/1; C/34). In related manuscript notes filed with *What a Performance*, Mendelssohn writes that suffering generates "unpalliative" poetry, even as those who suffer need prettiness most (39/4).

20. Longer in the original, this passage indicts those who have undermined Mendelssohn's identity as a poet: members of the Angry Brigade, women who do not write, and one of the foster parents of Mendelssohn's children (39/3; 39/4).

21. "Amherst" should be Amhurst; the "(sic)" is Mendelssohn's own, and may gesture to Emily Dickinson. This extract refers to Mendelssohn's arrest at Stoke Newington on 20 August 1971 (39/1; now embargoed). Mendelssohn's first known use of the expression "what a performance" arises in an untitled portion of her roman à clef written circa 1980 (Untitled portions, SxMs109/1/B/1/11). In 1986, she writes that when she was arrested, "she didn't mind them stripping her of her self, she was more intent on studying what it meant in terms of self-consciousness" (Untitled portions, SxMs109/1/B/1/31).

Elsewhere in *What a Performance*, Mendelssohn describes how she and a member of the Angry Brigade—both aspirant writers—rented a flat on Amhurst Road under the names Mr. and Mrs. George Buchanan, "to keep our literary identities clear" (39/3). The sixteenth-century Scots author and humanist Buchanan was tried and imprisoned as a dissenting Protestant.

22. At her trial, Mendelssohn describes becoming involved in a London squatting campaign in the spring of 1970; additionally, she discussed how the underground journal *Strike!* that she cofounded in February 1971 was envisioned as "a national newspaper" that would facilitate communication between community groups and tenants' associations (Opening Speech 7, 9). Numbered 0, the single issue of *Strike!* has an article on the Notting Hill Gate People's Association in London. Dedicated to feminist issues, the women's issue of the countercultural London newspaper *Frendz* includes writing on squatters in Notting Hill and Paddington and was guest edited by, among others, "The female Brigade." In her opening speech, Mendelssohn spoke freely about her involvement in its gestation and production (Opening Speech 9).

23. 39/3.

24. Prison reform was a persistent concern of *Frendz*, and the women's issue that Mendelssohn guest edited includes a two-page spread on the on-site reconstruction of HM Prison Holloway that began in 1971 and continued until 1985. These refurbishments involved the bulldozing of the original Victorian buildings to create green space and new facilities, among them, electroconvulsive therapy and disciplinary units ("Women Imprisoned").

25. The writer Arthur Koestler campaigned against capital punishment, which was abolished in Great Britain in 1965. In 1962, he established the Koestler Trust to foster the artistic creativity of the incarcerated. The trust holds scant records of its earliest years, but the minutes of a March 1973 Holloway "wing meeting" cite a recent visit from Koestler (Exercise Book, 24 Feb.–2 May 1973). These meetings were organized by Mendelssohn and others to improve prisoners' facilities and agitate for greater recognition of their rights.

26. As this passage continues, Mendelssohn switches into the first person and discusses facets of her adolescence, among them, working for a British children's camp and a journey to Israel in 1964. She concludes with a utopian vision—"I would still leave everything tomorrow to build a new city on the Yorkshire Moors"—which is juxtaposed against her dissatisfaction with "militant revolutionaries" who believe they "have the right to force people's destiny upon them" (39/3).

27. The first sentence is located just before "*Projection Forward*"; the second appears under "*A Question of Liberty*." (39/3). The two sentences are combined in another typescript, which reads: "Next 'door,' her fellow female prisoner had screamed herself hoarse, kicking and thumping at the door" (39/1).

28. The typescript reads: "Changing room size at the swimming baths" (39/3). The sentence used is from an alternate typescript (39/1).

29. Maternal resistance to Mendelssohn's intellectuality recurs in 39/1. "Drape" is slang for rebel; in northern England, it means to cull or draft, usually with reference to a sheep or cow fatted for slaughter. Females unable to nurse their young are often draped (39/3; C/34).

30. Based on similarities of type and paper stock, this episode is preceded by a page of writing on Mendelssohn's past associates and her outrage about the bourgeoisie, monopoly capital, nuclear warfare, and the respect afforded Margaret Thatcher, who Mendelssohn describes as "a disgrace to the human race" (39/3; C/34).

31. The first initials of Mendelssohn's children are *P*, *J*, and *E*. This is a rare moment of positivity about their foster parents.

32. In its entirety, this extract is a typescript in 39/3. With minor variations, a complete manuscript of the poem "Agent Orange" is located in 39/1.

33. In the poem beginning "digne." in *Implacable Art*, Mendelssohn writes: "Serve your own sentences. / In future. / I collect sentences. / I used to have a set of my own" (54).

34. As a single parent, Mendelssohn was labeled a prostitute by at least one associate, a charge alluded to in *What a Performance* when she points out that when children are fatherless, people assume their mother is a prostitute (see also Untitled portions, SxMs109/1/B/1/17). British tabloids reduced Mendelssohn's radicalism to salaciousness; in a typical example, the *Daily Express* described her as "dark-haired [and] bosomy." Under her bed was said to be "a frightening cache of arms"; on it, she and her fellow militants "made permissive love together while planning their vengeance on society" (Lat-

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cham and Wright). In her poetry collection *Bernache Nonnette*, Mendelssohn titles a poem: "How Power has reared its ugly head & defined a lumpen proletarian / By the Force it has used to cessate the education of writers & artists / By conflating us with the residents of Brothels." Hence, perhaps, the vengeful riposte to unidentified authority figures in "*Margie That*.": "You are tricks."

35. This passage is preceded by a narrative about visits to a poet and printshops, one of which takes place while Mendelssohn's protagonist is on bail and "[h]er life was a nightmare in dream." There is further speculation about how Miranda, an otherwise fiercely independent figure, found herself "join[ing] a bunch of fascists" who "had kidnapped her" (39/3).

36. "Tapester" or "tapister" are corruptions of *tapisser*, the Anglo-Norman term for a weaver or tapestry maker ("Tapester"). A typescript of this poem can be found in 39/3, and a manuscript exists on pages torn from a 1982 diary that are inserted into Mendelssohn's 1987 notebook (C/34).

37. The piece of paper from *Rolling Stone* magazine that incriminated Mendelssohn was said to have been found in the same bag as a bomb that was discovered by the Manchester police on 9 October 1970. The two officers who located the bag immediately recorded statements that made no mention of this sheet. The first report of a page from *Rolling Stone* was recorded by the police nearly a year later, in September 1971, or a month after Mendelssohn's arrest on 20 August 1971. Mendelssohn carefully detailed this chronology at her trial (Closing Speech 1–2).

38. Edited in the same pen as "*The laughing foxes*" (39/3), this typescript appears to begin in medias res; the manuscript starts identically (39/4). The addressees are successful middle-class female associates, some of whom supported Mendelssohn after prison. In the roman à clef she is keen to point out that she assisted them in turn, usually by babysitting, rather than portrait sitting (39/1; C/34). Feminism, particularly liberal feminism, persistently vexes Mendelssohn.

In a 1987 notebook, Mendelssohn calculates her sentence as consecutively ninety-six years, concurrently ten (see SxMs109/4/C/36). Although there exists no authoritative history of the Angry Brigade, evidence suggests that Mendelssohn was in fact given a ten-year sentence for conspiracy that was to be served concurrently with four additional sentences of eight, three, two, and two years for possession of explosives, submachine guns, a pistol, and ammunition respectively (Carr 177).

39. Mendelssohn was particularly preoccupied by Ulrike Meinhof, the cofounder of Germany's Red Army Faction, also known as Baader-Meinhof. A writer, editor, parent, and leftist militant, Meinhof was arrested in 1972. In an early nineties epistolary extract of her roman à clef, Mendelssohn insists upon distinguishing herself from Meinhof, pointing out that, unlike her German counterpart, she was never "[i]nvolved in gun running or drug dealing" or "flirtatious . . . towards violence" (SxMs109/1/B/1/45). But in C/34, she recalls being at Holloway in 1976 and hearing that Meinhof was found dead in prison: "I thanked god or whatever that I was still alive. I felt her death very keenly."

40. Pat Barker's *Union Street* (Virago, 1982) is an interlinked account of seven working-class girls and women; Mendelssohn refers to the first portrait, "Kelly Brown." The grim hopelessness of Barker's text may have sparked debate between Mendelssohn and leftist associates.

41. In the opening speech at her trial, Mendelssohn stated: "[F]rom the beginning [it was] my parents who encouraged me and who wanted me to have an education for the very reason that they themselves had never had that opportunity, had never had that chance. They were both working from the age of 13 or 14" (Opening Speech 2).

42. Ruskin College, Oxford, was established in 1899 with a mandate to educate working-class men. The 1984–85 miners' strike severely weakened British unions and the coal industry and, for Mendelssohn, remains emblematic of working-class struggle (39/1).

43. "[S]ocially unacceptable" is "socially acceptable" in the original.

44. 39/1.

45. The typescript "*Peace Picnic*." is preceded by a recalled conversation between Mendelssohn's protagonist and scripter, as well as a response to charges of inadequate parenting by a child minder (39/3; 39/1 [manuscript]). "The lawyer lands on top of her" recurs as the first line on a page detailing a lawyer's proclivity for sexual harassment (39/3).

46. A member of an Essex theater arts society, Mendelssohn was introduced to Jean-Luc Godard when he embarked on a film about English radicalism. She claims that he wanted her to star and that she requested that the decision be put to a student vote. According to Mendelssohn, when Godard was voted down, *British Sounds* (1969) took on an episodic structure in which no individual took the lead. Sporting a broad-brimmed orange hat and playing a kazoo, Mendelssohn appears at the end among a group of Essex students recomposing the Beatles's "Revolution."

47. See note 15.

48. A song from the Beatles's *White Album* (1968), "Honey Pie" centers on a working-class northern girl who achieves celebrity in the United States. The besotted singer considers his position tragic; Mendelssohn argues that she twisted the lyrics to critique herself and her fellow activists.

49. This page opens with a paragraph on those who are intelligent and poor. Mendelssohn asserts that in order to "render themselves acceptable," they have to choose between feigning stupidity or being misperceived as actors (39/3).

50. Given that their politics centered on the redistribution of wealth, it is an unfortunate irony that the only

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person injured by an Angry Brigade bomb was a member of the working class: Elizabeth Wilson. Wilson was the housekeeper for the neighbors of John Davies, the secretary of state for trade and industry, during the passage of the controversial Industrial Relations Act in 1971. On 31 July that year, a package was left outside the Davies's residence, and, knowing they were away for a few days, Wilson retrieved it from their doorstep. She suffered superficial injuries when it exploded (Carr 97).

51. French Revolution is "french rev."; "Mexican revolutionary" is "mexican rev," and Mendelssohn penciled what appears to be a "y" above the latter short form.

52. Jessica and Audrey are mutual associates of Smith and Mendelssohn's (Smith).

53. Throughout the fifties and sixties, members of the English Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) protested at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston; Mendelssohn's family attended at least one of these marches. In *What a Performance* Mendelssohn nods to this legacy, noting: "We worry about the Bomb because it is Big and it doesn't just Bounce" (39/3).

54. "International" is "internation" in original (39/3).

55. 39/3a.

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