

Anna Mendelssohn obituary (Peter Riley, The Guardian 16-12-2009)

Anna Mendelssohn, also known as Grace Lake, who has died aged 61 of a brain tumour, was principally a poet, and a poet like no other, but was also a painter, musician, actor and, earlier in her life, a political activist. She came from what she described as "a very strict working-class socialistic Jewish background" in Stockport, Cheshire. But what impelled her throughout her life was a 1960s spirit of radical revolt. At first it was political but, after a great turning point in her life, it was artistic.

She was educated at Stockport high school and studied literature at Essex University (1967-69), at both a brilliant and unruly pupil. In the early 1970s she had opportunities to go into film, but her fighting spirit drove her to become involved with the Angry Brigade. The exact nature of her involvement is unclear – her own account contradicts that of others. But she was one of the "Stoke Newington Eight" who were in 1972 brought to trial accused of conspiracy to cause explosions, and she received a 10-year prison sentence, of which she served five. She always maintained that this was a gross miscarriage of justice. Her impassioned and eloquent self-defence at the Old Bailey is still remembered with pride by her then comrades.

In about 1985 she settled in Cambridge, by which time she had three children. She studied at St Edmund's College, Cambridge, but most of her work was done independently. She now devoted herself increasingly to poetry and art as the central and exclusive sphere of her existence. All her judgments were founded on art and poetry, from her fierce contempt for technology and all forms of rationalism, down to the small practicalities of daily life, which she virtually ignored. At odds with society, and unable to establish a bohemian artistic circle around herself, she developed an increasingly hermetic way of life.

Her poetry ranged widely in manner but was fundamentally ecstatic and expostulatory, often in an angry tone concerning the harms that had been done to her, but also outrageously ludic in the surrealist line. She accumulated several thousand handwritten poems and probably a greater number of ink drawings. She showed little interest in publication, but one book appeared through the efforts of others – *Implacable Art* (2000) – as well as five locally produced pamphlets.

Anna's legacy, apart from a room heaped to the ceiling with books, poetry manuscripts and drawings, lies in her unique artistic temperament, beholden to no cultural dictates, fiercely reclaiming her rights as a woman and a Jew, but partaking equally in art as a theatre of linguistic and visual delight.

She is survived by her three children, Poppy, Emerald and George



Anna's collection of poetry, *Implacable Art*, is available from Amazon – http://www.amazon.co.uk/Implacable-Art-Salt-Modern-Poets/dp/1876857005/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1261129122&sr=8-3