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Some Unsung Songs: Andrea Levy's Late, Unpublished Works

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Abstract: This article explores projects which Andrea Levy worked on in her final years but which did not come to light during her lifetime. Drawing extensively on material found in Levy's personal archive, it considers the form, scope, aims, and qualities of these works. It also reflects on some links between them, as well as how they relate to her published oeuvre. In particular, this article highlights the politically engaged nature of much of Levy's late unpublished work. The first part of the article explores material from Levy's archive relating to a possible sixth novel. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the project in which Levy came to be most invested during her final years: a documentary television series on the historical relationship between Britain and the Caribbean. In collaboration with others, Levy developed and pitched this series, ultimately unsuccessfully, to the BBC. This article addresses Levy's intentions for and development of the project itself as well as her subsequent reflections on its rejection. The article then discusses a screenplay that Levy wrote based on Mary Seacole's autobiography. In retelling Seacole's story, Levy's screenplay deftly explores the ways in which that story came to be overshadowed. The last section of the article explores projects that Levy contemplated in the final years of her life but did not significantly develop. It also discusses the short piece "Two," which was found in Levy's archive after her death.

Keywords: Andrea Levy, contemporary literary archives, Caribbean history, Mary Seacole, institutional racism, diversity in broadcasting

I. Preliminary Note and Acknowledgements

This article draws extensively on research conducted into Andrea Levy's personal archive, which was formally acquired by the British Library (BL) in February 2020, a year after Levy's death. My research into this archive is ongoing; its continuation has been made possible by the award of a British Academy/Leverhulme research grant and by the kind support and cooperation of staff at the BL.[1] I am extremely grateful for both. Some of the research informing this article, however, was conducted before the BL formally acquired the Levy archive: with the extremely kind permission of Mr. Bill Mayblin, Levy's widower, I examined Levy's fonds at his home over the course of four separate visits of varying lengths in 2019. At the time of writing, the Levy archive is still in the process of being catalogued by the BL. In this article I have, therefore, not been able to provide scholarly references in the usual way (with the exception of my references to a very small number of items from the archive which have already been digitized and made available online by the BL). Nor have I been able to provide definitive dates for most of the archival material, as the vast majority of it is undated (I have, however, attempted to give approximate dates where possible). Following the formal cataloguing of the archive by the BL, other scholars will, no doubt, locate and make further comments on the material discussed below and will provide references for that material in a way that, at present, I cannot. While my research on the Levy archive continues in its new home at the BL, I am enormously grateful to Mr. Mayblin for allowing me the immense privilege of being the first scholar to see and work on it, and for his very generous hospitality. The four visits that I paid Mr. Mayblin to work on his late wife's archive were, unquestionably, a clear highlight of my academic career, but they were also extremely enjoyable on a more personal level. I will, I am sure, be only the first in a long line of scholars to carry out research on this extraordinary body of literary material, but being the first—and, indeed, being able to do so where much of that material was produced—was quite some privilege.

II. "Number six": Levy's Unrealised Novels

When the BL formally announced its acquisition of Levy's large archive in February 2020, a year after her death, it made seven digitized images of material from the archive available to view publicly online ("Complete Archive of Award-Winning Novelist"). One of these images was of a very brief, undated, handwritten A5 note for something provisionally titled "Number six." The BL's caption to this digitized document describes it as follows: "idea for Andrea Levy's unrealised sixth novel." Indeed, in jotting down ideas for "Number six," Levy does seem to have been considering, if only momentarily, something that could have become *novel* number six in her oeuvre. The note indicates that this sixth novel would have focused on the relationship between a newly married couple: a black woman and a white man. The plot would involve the latter "inherit[ing] something which takes him on a journey into his past," and "this past is in Jamaica, the island where his new wife comes from." Their "stories/histories entwine with the colonial . . . history that they share," and what they discover about their shared history "begins to drive them apart." However, there is a "twist"—"for example, he may find he's black also or she may find something unpalatable"—and this new information ultimately "brings them back together." This novel would be "a book about the British Empire and its impact on the lives of people, both white and black," and about how the relationship between Britain and its colonies "shaped modern Britain." It "should be a tender and sometimes fraught LOVE story" (emphasis in original).

As tantalizing as it is to read Levy's preliminary handwritten notes towards a sixth novel, however, this brief idea remained little more than that. This document is one of a number of such items in her archive. In a 2012 interview, Susan Alice Fischer asked Levy, "are you working on a new novel?" to which Levy replied "Yes" but refused to say any more (Levy, "In Conversation" 132–33). However, Levy did not make serious progress with, or really attempt to develop, any of the ideas that she had for another novel. One ring binder in Levy's archive has the words "Novel: Searching for Grandad" written along its side, and yet it

contains no draft fiction; the documents within it pertain to Levy's own family history (Levy, "Complete Archive"). If Levy considered using them as the basis for a sixth novel, she did so only fleetingly. A separate, undated note from her archive, written all in capitals on a piece of A5 paper torn from one of her many notebooks, is titled "NEXT BOOK IDEA." It refers to a "MIDDLE[-]AGED BLACK WOMAN" who is in a "MIXED[-RACE] RELATIONSHIP" and who is "LOOKING AT HER LIFE" and "COMING TO TERMS WITH" the "BLACK YOUTH CULTURE" that she sees around her. Again, this idea is not developed, or even returned to. Another brief, rough draft for a piece of fiction describes a black woman "in North London" in "the twenty-first century" walking into a café and shocking both its proprietor and its customers (one of whom is the narrator) by asking whether it serves black people. Again, this piece did not go anywhere. Levy crossed out the bulk of it and, in a typically self-critical manner (her archive is full of similarly blunt notes-to-self), wrote above it that the "trouble" with it was that it was too "direct." In another, much earlier note, Levy even jotted down a brief idea for "a novel" that would be "a kind of sequel" to *Small Island*. This note seems to have been written before the publication of *Small Island* itself, quite possibly in 2002 or 2003. Elsewhere in the same notebook there is work towards both *Small Island* (2004) and "Loose Change" (2005), and the note mentions "present[-]day" Michael (who, in *Small Island*, is born in 1948) being, in this "sequel," fifty-four years of age. Michael "has a sister who is 46(?)," and "Gilbert is dead," but "his memory lives on in an aging Hortense." There "are young members of the family," too, aged "20–25," including "white members," and perhaps "another sister with a split family." Michael "finds out that he is not their actual brother," and that his "mother is white." He "tries to trace her and does"; like Hortense, "Queenie is still alive." The novel would tell the story of "a confused 21st[-]century family coming to terms with the world." Again, however, this was a fleeting (yet fascinating) idea to which Levy did not return.

In fact, instead of writing "a kind of sequel" to *Small Island*, in *The Long Song* Levy actually wrote a kind of *prequel* to it. Another brief note from her archive—that, again, has been digitized and made available

online by the BL, but which I found alongside draft material on *The Long Song*—confirms that major characters from *Small Island* and from *The Long Song* are members of the same family. Levy had occasionally hinted that there was a hidden connection between her fourth and fifth novels. For instance, in an interview with Pam Johnson in 2010, Levy referred to this "link" but stated "I'm not going to tell you what it is! I put it in for the careful reader to find! It gave me a great deal of pleasure to have that link between the *The Long Song* and *Small Island*." The handwritten note from Levy's archive, in which she seems to be making sure that her dates work out, confirms the nature of this link. July, the note confirms, is born in 1816, and gives birth to her son Thomas in 1832 (Levy, "Complete Archive"). With his wife Lillian, Thomas has three daughters: Louise, who is born in 1884, and her younger sisters Corinne and May. Louise has two sons: Lester, who is born in 1912, and Gilbert, who is born in 1918. In the novels themselves the connection is subtle although the clues are very much there. In *The Long Song* July mentions her three granddaughters by name on more than one occasion: in the closing pages of the novel, for example, she refers to "those three mischievous girls, Louise, Corinne and May" and states that they are responsible for turning "peace into raucous mayhem" (304). In *Small Island*, Gilbert mentions that his mother was called Louise on two occasions (130, 143) and makes references to "Auntie May" (174) and "Auntie Corinne" (198, 203–04, 213). The latter is the mother of his cousin Elwood, who tries to dissuade him from volunteering to fight for the British. The two novels, thus, exist in the same narrative world; more specifically, *The Long Song*'s July is the great-grandmother of *Small Island*'s Gilbert. In retrospect, perhaps we might even speculate that Gilbert inherited something of his great-grandmother's sense of humour and clear-sighted determination. Moreover, this plot connection between the novels sheds interesting new light on both. For instance, at the end of *The Long Song* July's daughter Emily (Gilbert's great-aunt) is abducted and taken to Britain, presumably to live as "white"; accordingly, when Gilbert arrives in Britain in 1948 he likely already has, unbeknownst to him, "white" British relatives there. I have argued elsewhere ("'Fold the Paper and Pass It On'" and *Contemporary*

Fictions of Multiculturalism) that one key characteristic of Levy's work is its *dialogical* quality. It transpires that she intended her fifth novel to be in a kind of dialogue with her fourth.

What Levy did not write, however, and never seriously considered writing, was a sixth novel. As fascinating as the ideas jotted down on some of the documents discussed above unquestionably are, none of them were developed significantly or, seemingly, even returned to after having been noted down. Following the publication of *The Long Song*—which, as discussed below, was completed in extremely difficult circumstances—the only work of prose fiction into which Levy put serious thought or energy was the 2014 short story "Uriah's War." This is not to say that Levy was not productive after 2010; after experiencing what she referred to as a "slump" after completing *The Long Song*, she embarked on one project in particular that, as she put it to oral historian Sarah O'Reilly (see below), "g[ot her] up in the morning" in the way that working on her novels previously had (Levy, "Andrea Levy Interviewed").

III. "Nyaming only needs a beginning": Levy's "slump" after *The Long Song*, and the project that "woke [her] up again"

In late 2014 Levy gave five interviews to O'Reilly as part of the BL's "Author's Lives" project. In total these interviews comprise nearly fifteen hours of material. Levy agreed to them on the condition that they would not be made available until after her death; such a condition would, she told O'Reilly in one of the interviews, mean that she could speak with a kind of candor that she had not felt was possible in other forums (Levy, "Andrea Levy Interviewed" ["AL/SOR"]). The interviews cover Levy's entire life, primarily chronologically, from her childhood through to her diagnosis of terminal cancer and her thoughts on death. Some brief excerpts from these interviews were included in the hour-long radio programme "Andrea Levy: In Her Own Words," which was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in February 2020. However, with the exception of a few short sections of the interviews, which are under restriction until 2059, the full recordings are available onsite at the BL.[2] In the last of these interviews Levy told O'Reilly that, upon finishing her fifth novel, she already "knew" that her career as a writer had come to an

end: "When I finished *The Long Song* I knew that I was finished. I knew that I was done being a writer" ("AL/SOR"). She went on: "I knew that an arc had been made and completed." Levy's diagnosis of breast cancer had come while she was still writing the novel, and she told O'Reilly that, when she was given the diagnosis, her first response was concern over whether she would have the time to finish it. She had invested an enormous amount of time and energy in *The Long Song*, and she worked desperately to complete it while receiving treatment. Fearing that she might run out of time, she even discussed with her husband how she wanted the novel to end if she was unable to finish it herself. Following its completion and publication, try as she might to conceive of another novel, "something had gone," she told O'Reilly, and her "heart wasn't in it." She did briefly start work on another novel (as I mention above), but she felt that she was "trying to contort" what interested her "into the form of a novel." The realization that she would not write a sixth novel put Levy, as she described it, in a "slump." This "slump" period, during which she felt somewhat dejected and directionless, is documented in a handwritten, self-reflective three-page passage found in an A4 notepad in Levy's archive. This passage occurs after two pages of very early, very rough draft work, some of which is described above (the piece in which a black woman walks into a café and causes consternation by asking whether it serves black people). The passage seemingly dates back to 2012, or perhaps early 2013: in addition to the rough draft fiction, there is what seems to be a brief reference to Levy herself being fifty-six at the time of writing. The passage begins as follows: "I no longer have the fire in my belly to write. It's gone. I don't have anything that burns within me that I want to say. I did once. Oh god I did once. It was fierce. Impossible to ignore. It had to be done. Done well. Done diligently[?]. It had to be achieved. But it's gone. I can't kid myself that it hasn't" (Levy, "Complete Archive").[3] Levy writes that her grandmother "used to say about food, 'nyaming [Caribbean creole for eating] only needs a beginning.' Perhaps writing is like that. It only needs a beginning and then you are away. Away! But where is the beginning? Is it an idea that you want to explore? Is it a character? Is it a plot line or story? Is it all these things. Perhaps." The passage goes on to explore the

"intention to write" and suggests that this intention counts for little "without the fire in your belly." It emphasizes the writer's "need to be passionate" about their subject matter, stating that there must be a desire to "expunge, purge yourself of something" that is "desperate to be let out." Levy wonders whether a writer can "make it happen" or whether, instead, "a writer[,] like anything, ha[s] a life expectancy. You work then it dies." Echoing the comments that she would subsequently make to O'Reilly, Levy then writes, "I knew after I had finished TLS [*The Long Song*] that I had written myself out. The end of that book was written in terrible circumstances." Intriguingly, Levy then "inter[r]upt[s]" herself and speculates that her loss of "fire in [the] belly to write" may be related to "being shy at the moment," which "came along with the fear [she] gained from having cancer." She comments on periods of her earlier life during which she was similarly shy, and then interrupts herself again with "[b]ut I was saying—to get back" and describes the "terrible circumstances" in which she completed *The Long Song*. While she was finishing it, "wracked with pain and fear," people "somewhere in Ireland" were "making a dream of [hers] come true" by adapting *Small Island* for the screen. Levy was unable to take up the invitation to visit the set because of her illness. The passage ends with an expression of profound regret over this: "I missed it. I missed seeing them create a set of my book. I missed it. I missed it and I missed it."

In something of a testament to Levy's tenacity, this notebook does not end with this extremely affecting self-reflective passage. On the following page there is a very short "NOTE" for an idea (one that relates back to some of the rough draft work before the self-reflective passage), after which there is considerable work towards "Uriah's War": more than thirty pages of research notes, ideas, and drafts. Following this there are seven pages that appear to be Levy's earliest notes towards a television series—one that would explore the historical relationship between Britain and the Caribbean. Levy writes about what should be covered by such a series and reflects on her motives for wanting to tell this (hi)story. She recalls the ways in which writing *Small Island* and *The Long Song* "brought [her] into contact with that history in a profound way" and how she realized that it is an "incredible history" and an "incredible

story." She affirms, too, that "the history of the Caribbean is the history of Britain." In a note at the top of the very first page of this material, Levy suggests that the project will be driven "not [by] what I know but [by] what I want to know." After this early draft work towards this television series, other pieces appear in this same notebook. There is a draft acceptance speech for the Open University (which awarded Levy an honorary doctorate in March 2014) and then a draft piece about why Levy writes. The latter is, seemingly, the earliest draft of what would eventually become "Back to My Own Country," the titular essay in *Six Stories and an Essay* (2014), in which "Uriah's War" was also included. To some extent, "Back to My Own Country" seems to have developed out of the self-reflective passage described above, the research that Levy was doing for "Uriah's War," and her early thoughts about a possible television series. The notebook ends with drafts of the brief introductions that Levy wrote for the six stories collected in the same volume. Reading through this particular notebook, one gets the sense that the "fire in [the] belly to write" was being rekindled as Levy wrote. In particular, the idea for the television series was growing. As she would subsequently tell O'Reilly in 2014, when Levy conceived of this television project her "slump" ended and she "woke up again" ("AL/SOR"). She had come to a realization: "I know that what I'm interested in, what lights my fire, what really makes me passionate, cannot be done in the novel." Yet the feeling that she got from working on this television project was "exactly the same" as that of working on a novel; "I have boundless energy for it," she told O'Reilly, because "I can feel the same thing, that fire in my belly is back—it's back, because *this* is the project" (emphasis in original). Indeed, an enormous amount of time and energy would be put into this series. "Nyaming only needs a beginning," Levy's grandmother had told her, and it seems that she had been right.

IV. "I might have to chain myself to some railing somewhere!!": Levy's work on a "major series on TV about the history of the Caribbean"

Levy's archive contains a significant amount of material relating to a proposed television series on the history of the Caribbean. For *The Long*

Song, she had carried out an enormous amount of research into this topic (particularly, but not exclusively, Jamaica during the nineteenth century). Her archive contains, for example, all of the following (and much more): annotated books, articles, and chapters on the history of the Caribbean (some of which are listed in Levy's "Acknowledgements" at the end of *The Long Song*); Levy's own extensive notes on (for example) the experiences of Caribbean slaves; printouts of "Anansi" folk stories; a list of questions to ask people who spent time in the Caribbean before independence; and printouts of various historical documents (including a list of Jamaican manumissions which is dated 1825, and on which Levy highlighted, among others, the names July, Kitty, and Godfrey). Levy's novel about life on a nineteenth-century sugar plantation in Jamaica had, it is clear, been exhaustively researched. For a number of years she immersed herself in the details of her (often harrowing) subject matter. A few years after the publication of that novel, Levy became passionate about the idea of familiarizing people (in Britain and beyond) with five centuries of Caribbean history and of doing so in such a way as to stress the importance of the ongoing legacies of British imperialism not only in the Caribbean but also within Britain. The idea of doing so through the medium of television particularly excited Levy, and not simply because she had (as above) decided that she had already written her final novel; television was, Levy felt, the best way of telling this (hi)story to as many people as possible.

The early development of Levy's ideas for this project are evidenced in another of her notebooks (one which probably dates to 2013; it contains notes on "Uriah's War" as well as some very early notes about a television adaptation of *The Long Song*). Levy refers to the series consisting of six "ambitious, high[-]end historical programmes" that will "cover around 500 years but . . . concentrate on 300 years" ("Complete Archive"). The series would, among other things, "look at the cultivation of sugar, tobacco and other cash crops that were grown under slavery" and "chart . . . how that West Indian money was used to further the industrial revolution in Britain." Levy also writes: "But crucially it would also show what the life of a slave would have been like on the different islands and also over the different periods of time the

series addressed." Clearly, the research that she had done for *The Long Song*, and in particular into what everyday life was like for slaves in the Caribbean, was a significant factor in the emergence of this new project. The "aim" of the series' exploration of slavery, Levy wrote, would be to make it "not just . . . a block of time that everyone seems to want to forget" but, rather, "a real period in British history[.] One that still has its legacy today in modern Britain." The series would also explore "the colonial era," the "fight for independence," "the mass migrations to and then from the islands," "the legacy of that migration," and "the modern Caribbean and how it is faring in a global economy." After this brief description of the series, under the words "Why now?", Levy makes a case for the importance and timeliness of the series. She notes that "people of Caribbean heritage have been in this country [Britain] for over 70 years" and yet few people, "black or white[,] really know the history of those islands in any meaningful detail." In addition, "there is an even greater silence around slavery." While "no history of the US could be written without looking at slavery," the fact that "Britain's slaves were on islands thousands of miles from the metropole" has meant that "many history books skirt over slavery['s] significance"—or they simply "leave it out altogether." Levy states that "our multicultural society now needs to acknowledge more than ever what the history that took place in the Caribbean means to modern Britain." In short, subsequent sections titled "How?" and "Appeal," Levy suggests that the series will "need to be written and researched by a team which includes major Caribbean historians," that it might be "presented by two presenters," and that it will "have huge educational value" and a "broad appeal." Nowhere in these early, handwritten notes is there any reference to the possibility of Levy herself researching, writing, or presenting the series. However, she would subsequently be encouraged to take on such responsibilities.

In a separate document, a Moleskine notebook, Levy writes the following and dates it 2 February 2015:

> This is a diary of the events surrounding three projects that I am involved with. The three projects are:
>
> 1) TV series of the history of the British Caribbean (BBC)

2) TV adaptation of my novel *The Long Song* (BBC)
3) Theatre adaptation of *Small Island* (another of my novels) (National Theatre)

The reason I have decided to keep this journal is because all three of these projects are with national institutions which purport to want to change their practices so that they become more diverse and inclusive of British minority ethnic people.

In keeping this journal I hope that we can see that this aim is being achieved. And/or how the mechanics of institutional racism work in Britain in the early 21st century. So on we go . . .

Levy did not write as much in this "journal" as she initially intended: it contains the first of the three items listed above, but not the second or third. There are, however, numerous other documents in her archive which make it clear that, in the final years of her life, Levy was particularly concerned with identifying, highlighting, and opposing institutional racism within British cultural institutions. She also discussed the topic at some length in her interviews with O'Reilly. For instance, on her reasons for withdrawing from "the literary world" after *The Long Song*, Levy likened this rarefied sphere to a room full of "arbiters" and "gatekeepers" who are "eating canapés and discussing literature"; they believe that "literature is the be-all and end-all of life, and the highest form of art" and that "they are holding within their hands the finest British culture that is known—and of course, [that] British culture is the best in the world" ("AL/SOR"). Levy described the literary establishment as "the place that the British Empire shrank to" and as "the blackhead of the British Empire." These self-important arbiters believe themselves "the saviors of the world: 'we lost the Empire, but by god we've got the literary world.'" Levy also confirmed to O'Reilly that she was "offered . . . an OBE [Order of the British Empire]" but had absolutely no hesitation in turning it down. Indeed, her archive contains a letter from the Cabinet Office informing Levy that the Prime Minister "is recommending that Her Majesty [who Levy met in 2005] may be graciously pleased to approve that you be appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in the Birthday 2011 Honours List." At

the bottom of this document, Levy handwrote the words "No—but thanks for asking!" As she told O'Reilly, she was "very, very happy to turn it down" ("AL/SOR"). Levy also revealed to O'Reilly her views on institutional racism within the Royal Ballet and the BBC and (as below) described her extensive grapples with the latter when attempting to get her television series on the history of the Caribbean made.

Levy's February 2015 journal contains just under ten pages of writing about her proposed series, after which there is a page on which Levy plays around with poetic metre, a page on which she wrote, in capitals, the words "THE END" (and nothing else), and then the short piece "Two" (which is included in this special issue, and discussed below) (Levy, "Complete Archive"). Levy's comments about the proposed television series are instructive. She writes that the project "began in the summer of 2013." She had "wondered why there had never been a major series on TV about the history of the Caribbean."[4] While she "remembered mentioning a history of the Caribbean" to a "(white) woman" who had been "a producer" on "a lot of programmes on India," this producer was "indifferent to the idea" of a series on the Caribbean, and even told Levy "that she didn't think anyone would be interested." Levy does not say where or when this conversation took place, but she writes: "[it] stayed with me." Given that she was "at a loss" in regard to "a new project" and "didn't want to start a new novel," Levy decided to "try and get a project like that off the ground." In collaboration with her husband, Levy wrote a "pitch" for a six-part series (the number of episodes would subsequently be reduced). In due course, this was sent to a production company who, in an initial meeting, confirmed that they were "very keen on the project" and "could see its potential." Of this very positive meeting, Levy writes: "I had thought that I would just go in, give them the idea" and then "leave, waving, wishing them luck and telling them I'd see them at the first screening." However, this was far from the case: "Oh boy was I wrong," she writes. The Chief Executive of the production company was "genuinely perplexed" that Levy "neither wanted to write the series nor present it"; while he "said he would still like to take it on" regardless, he emphasized that Levy "would have to have some role in it as it was [her] idea and [her] passion for it that would

be important." Of this early discussion with the production company, Levy writes: "I left this meeting feeling like I'd just got myself another job. And a big one."

Levy and the production company waited a number of months for a meeting with representatives from the BBC, during which time Levy, again working with her husband Bill Mayblin, produced "a treatment for a series of four programmes" (it was at this stage that the number of episodes was revised down from six). In Levy's archive there are numerous versions of, and notes towards, this four-part treatment. In the most polished versions, the series itself has the title "The Caribbean: Britain's hidden history," and its four episodes are titled, respectively, "The Small Islands," "A sweet and bitter industry," "Decline and fall," and "Gone with the winds." The series would proceed chronologically. The first episode would tell the story of the Caribbean up to around 1700; it would, for example, discuss the indigenous peoples of the islands, Columbus' arrival, Spanish domination of the Caribbean, the fate of the indigenous peoples, and the emergence of Britain as a force in the region in the seventeenth century. It would consider how, after "English buccaneers harass the superpower Spain," Britain "becomes a confident colonial power and a serious player in the new profitable [A]tlantic economy of slaves, sugar and industry," and how "The Royal Navy grows into a massive enterprise to protect British interests from her imperial rivals." The second episode would then focus on the eighteenth century, the "golden age of Britain's adventure in the Caribbean." By this stage the islands have "become a massive sugar factory worked by armies of slaves supplied now by British ships," and "huge profits are made by plantation owners that contribute to Britain's industrial revolution at home." The third episode would then focus on the nineteenth century: on the decline of the plantation system, the growth of the abolition movement, and the formal end of slavery. "Indentured labour," the treatment notes, "is brought in to prop up an ailing system," and in "British society 'scientific' racism continues to develop and influence the new 'free' labour market economy in the Caribbean." The fourth and final episode would then focus on the twentieth century: on the "gradual change, via two world wars, from loyal colonies to calls for independ[e]nce." While

"white West Indians have mostly gone home" by this stage, "black West Indians begin an economic diaspora of their own," and "their vibrant cultures migrate with them and further influence life in Britain, the US and Canada." Notably, then, the series would end with an account of Caribbean migration to, among other places, Britain. The word "Windrush" is conspicuously absent on this document, but the docking of that particular ship at Tilbury in 1948 has commonly been framed as a foundational moment in British history (one which, of course, Levy had evoked and explored so famously in her fourth novel). This television series, however, would end rather than begin with this diaspora, making its viewers aware of the centuries-long, and frequently brutal, history of British involvement in the Caribbean that *led to* the migratory journeys undertaken by people such as Levy's own parents in the post-War period.

This treatment suggests that the series would have done an exemplary job in terms of fulfilling the BBC's self-described mission to "inform, educate and entertain" its audience ("Mission, values and public purposes"). Speaking to O'Reilly, Levy described the series as "amnesia-breaking" ("AL/SOR"). Unfortunately, however, despite a great deal of work on the part of Levy and others, it would ultimately not come to fruition. The manner in which it was thwarted caused Levy particular frustration and is instructive in regard to problems within British cultural institutions.

Levy had come to recognize institutional racism within the BBC more than two decades earlier. As she told O'Reilly in September 2014, in the 1980s she worked as a wardrobe assistant at the BBC and had been "over the moon" to get her "foot in the door" there ("AL/SOR"). However, the BBC was "openly racist"; in fact, "the most racist place [she]'d ever worked." In events that were fictionalized in *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Levy was sacked from one position "for not walking fast enough"; she "accidently" secured a different position on a three-month contract, but this was never going to be renewed because she had explicitly raised the issue of institutional racism with management ("AL/SOR"). Of leaving the BBC in the 1980s, Levy told O'Reilly: "I swore to God I would be back. . . . It did something to me, that place. I began to get fight in

me. . . . I walked out of that place thinking, 'I'm going to come back here and you're going to be fucking sorry, bastards.' . . . I was just incensed. It's still bad—that's what's so atrocious. . . . I'd got my foot in the door, and it was still shut, that door." In the late 2000s, as a literary celebrity rather than a wardrobe assistant, Levy was again infuriated by the BBC's failings. In regard to the screen adaptation of *Small Island* (2009), the BBC were, she told O'Reilly, "a bunch of shits throughout the whole thing." As well as being "difficult to work with," they apparently moved the broadcast date of *Small Island* a number of times, and on one occasion because they did not want it to coincide with controversy over the vocally racist, far-right politician Nick Griffin appearing on their programme *Question Time*. Speaking to O'Reilly, Levy went as far as to say "I hate the BBC"; specifically, she was angered by "their spinelessness when it comes to race." Levy stated that "practically the entire organization is white" and described it as "an appalling, appalling place, considering it's a public organization." She clarified that she would "die in a ditch for the idea of the BBC, but in practice, it's appalling, and it's not keeping up its remit." It is run by "white Oxbridge elites," Levy stated, and its institutional racism is "a national scandal" that is "only topped" by that of The Royal Ballet, where Levy also worked.

Despite her longstanding anger at the BBC Levy remained, as she put it to O'Reilly, "pragmatic." She was keen for her television series on the history of the Caribbean to be of the highest quality and to be seen by as many people as possible. In her February 2015 journal entry, Levy recalls meeting representatives from BBC2, the most senior of whom was very enthusiastic about the initial pitch but had one major reservation: this person "felt strongly that it [the series] had to be a personal exploration." Levy, however, was skeptical about this. She writes: "I had my reservations, as from the outset I was nervous that it would become an extended 'Who Do You Think You Are,'" a series in which celebrities find out about their own ancestral background. Levy was very reluctant to move in this direction because, as she writes in her journal, "Caribbean history is not personal, just as British history cannot be told only from one person[']s experience" ("Complete Archive"). However, her eagerness to get her series made meant that she "took on [the] ideas"

that had been conveyed in the meeting. She duly started working on a more "personal" version of the project. Again, there are numerous documents in her archive that relate to this later, more personal version of the series. However, Levy remained unsure about this approach. She was, as she wrote in her journal, "getting nervous that it was getting to be too personal a journey." The production company, however, was "adamant that personal [was] good and what the BBC want[ed]." While Levy was working on this revised, more personal treatment, the person at the BBC who had told her in no uncertain terms to make the project more personal moved to a different position. When the new version of the treatment was submitted, it was passed to a different senior figure at the BBC who rejected it for one reason: "IT WAS TOO PERSONAL!!" (emphasis in original). Indeed, Levy's archive contains printouts of email correspondence from July 2014 in which the series is rejected by the BBC because it is too personal to Levy herself. This correspondence even voices concerns that the proposed series would address topics that had already featured in episodes of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, the very programme that Levy had wanted *not* to emulate.

In her final interview with O'Reilly in October 2014, while still working on the project, Levy stated that the BBC had asked her to make the series more personal in the first place for one reason: "Because I'm black. No black person can [be allowed to] tell a universal story. Whenever it comes to having a story that involves black people, it always comes down to a personal thing. . . . I've had this all through my career . . . — you cannot tell a universal story as a black person. . . . It has to be only about a black person, and I've always had that—and so this was happening again" ("AL/SOR"). Levy was, she stated, "getting a bit pissed off with this, because I'm not allowed to tell a universal story—because it's about black people, and who cares?" As she wrote in her journal entry, upon receiving the news that her proposed series had been rejected for being the very thing that she had been asked to make it, Levy "just laughed" ("Complete Archive"). She "found it funny," and yet she "had no intention of giving up on the idea." Indeed, she made this very clear to the Chief Executive of the production company: "I told [him] that my job now was to raise awareness of Caribbean history. He forlornly

asked me how I was going to do that. I said I might have to chain myself to some railing somewhere!!" At this point, Levy received news that the cancer for which she had already received treatment "was now incurable." On receiving this news, she writes: "Laugh? I nearly did. Shit. So that was that, I thought. At least I tried." On two occasions in the O'Reilly interviews, Levy sums up the BBC's longstanding attitude towards diversity by likening it to cartoon character Homer Simpson telling his long-suffering wife Marge that just because he does not care, it does not mean that he does not understand ("AL/SOR").

Levy's work on the series did not stop here, however. She subsequently brought two other authors into collaboration on the project; both were established writers of historical non-fiction, both had particular expertise on the history of the Caribbean, and both were, when she contacted them about the project, "enthusiastic about it." Levy was excited by the prospect of the series drawing on their expertise. In addition, as she told the production company, even if her own "health [should] not be up to it," the involvement of the other two writers meant that "the programmes could go on anyway." In the autumn of 2014, Levy heard from the production company that the senior figure from the BBC who had previously rejected it "was interested in the series" after all "but wanted something more 'urgent' and ['']in depth'" and was willing to pay for the production company to develop a new treatment but with "a proper development producer" working on it rather than Levy herself. Levy was, she writes, "chuffed to bits at this development." Some time before this, she had agreed with the production company that they "would need a black producer to work on this project" or, failing that, "at the very least . . . a black younger person [would] shadow the producer and learn a real skill from it." A producer was highly recommended by the BBC and was present when the three writers and representatives from the production company met for a "brainstorming session." Levy's journal makes very clear her own sense of excitement at this meeting: "WOW!!!" she wrote of her discussion with the other writers; the three of them "fizzed and popped with ideas." "I knew we really had something here," she continues; "What a series we could put together. Everyone was excited." The only person who did not express any enthusiasm in

the meeting, or even contribute to it, was the producer who had been sent by the BBC. Levy describes him as "dark skinned and probably of Indian origin" and recalls thinking, upon seeing him, "He was potentially the black producer. Fantastic." (Given that she notes that the producer was probably of Indian origin but refers to him as "black," it would seem that Levy is using this term as synonymous with the contemporary acronym BAME [Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic] here.) This producer's first task would be to put together a new treatment of the series that "reflected the fizzle and pop in the brainstorming meeting." Given his silence in this meeting, however, Levy already had some concerns over his apparent lack of enthusiasm for the project. She and the production company discussed these concerns but decided to give him time to see what he would deliver. Ultimately, however, "the treatment he produced was dull and ordinary" and simply "did not reflect the meeting." Levy describes this as a "horrible situation" and writes: "I did not want to lose a black [BAME] producer but it was obvious to me that the man was a time server, probably used to being the only black [BAME] man in a room at the BBC. But he had no passion or spark." Reflecting on the situation, Levy laments the fact that the "pool" of BAME people working in broadcasting in Britain is so small that "it's more like a puddle," and she states that "some real mechanism needs to be put in place so that BAME producers can come up through the ranks quickly and be well trained and good at their jobs." She speculates that "probably it will take years of affirmative action to right the wrongs of so many years of discrimination (unwitting or otherwise)." The production company subsequently started work on yet another treatment of the series, and there are, again, documents in Levy's archive that demonstrate that she continued to invest considerable time and energy in the project. It had, unquestionably, become something for which Levy had "fire in [her] belly."

There can be no question that institutional failings at the BBC were a major factor in Levy's proposed television series never making it to the screen: in its early stages the project was staunchly pushed in one direction by one senior figure, only to be subsequently rejected by another for having gone in that very direction. However, the arbitrary whims

of television executives were not the only reason for the project being thwarted. Levy's 2015 journal entry suggests that, at a subsequent stage, a BAME producer was attached to the project by the BBC not because he was a good fit for it or had any enthusiasm for its subject matter but because of the simple lack of availability of other BAME producers. Unsurprisingly, that producer went on to do a poor job of representing the project and, as a result, yet more time and energy was wasted. In something of a bitter irony, then, lack of diversity at the BBC significantly impeded the development of Levy's proposed series, which would have made a key contribution to the diversification of subject matter covered by the BBC in its mission to educate, inform, and entertain its diverse audience.

V. *The Adventures of Mrs Seacole*

The proposed BBC series on the history of the Caribbean was, unquestionably, the television project into which Levy put the most work and energy after 2010. It was not, however, the only such project. Notably, Levy wrote a screenplay adaptation of *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, the 1857 autobiography of Mary Seacole. My fellow co-editors and I are delighted to be able to include excerpts from this screenplay in this special issue. In what follows, I will make some comments about the screenplay as a whole but will make particularly detailed reference to the excerpts provided. While Levy was not as invested in this screenplay as she would subsequently become in the Caribbean history series, it was nevertheless a project into which she put notable work, as evidenced by numerous documents in her archive. The completed typescript of Levy's screenplay is dated "20 July 2012," suggesting that she conceived of, researched, and completed this project after *The Long Song* but before coming to feel that she was in a "slump," and certainly before conceiving of the Caribbean history series. There are, of course, notable intersections between the two projects; in particular, both aimed to make contemporary audiences (more) aware of often-overlooked aspects of British-Caribbean history. Levy's screenplay has not, at the time of writing, been televised or optioned, although this may yet change. In the twenty-first century Seacole has

started to receive some of the recognition which was denied her for so much of the twentieth (she was, of course, quite a celebrity during the late nineteenth). A second edition of her autobiography did not appear until 1984, nearly a hundred and thirty years after the first; it is this edition of Seacole's book that Levy used as the basis for her screenplay (her archive contains a heavily annotated copy of it). In 2004 a "survey to celebrate the UK's black heritage" named Seacole the "greatest black Briton" (Taylor), and in 2005 her prominence grew significantly: her autobiography was republished as a Penguin Classics edition, and Jane Robinson's *Mary Seacole*— "the first full-length biography" of her (Robinson, back cover)—was also published (Levy's archive contains an annotated copy of the latter). Also in 2005, the one-hour docudrama *Mary Seacole: The Real Angel of the Crimea* was shown in Britain on Channel 4. In 2016, a statue of Seacole was unveiled at St Thomas' Hospital in Lambeth, South London ("Mary Seacole Statue"). In 2020, following the opening of seven temporary National Health Service (NHS) Nightingale Hospitals for the critical care of COVID-19 patients, a temporary NHS Seacole Centre was opened in Surrey for patients recovering from the same disease ("First Seacole Centre Opens"). Apparently, a biopic of Seacole (one that is entirely separate to Levy's screenplay) is currently in post-production ("Seacole"). Perhaps Levy's screenplay will, in due course, also make its way to the screen and contribute to the growing public awareness of this nineteenth-century luminary.

Levy's screenplay opens with Seacole arriving at the British military hospital at Scutari, near Istanbul, in 1855. Seacole herself does not describe this event until around halfway through her (mostly chronological) autobiography, yet her account of it suggests that this was a key moment in her life. Having applied to the War Office in London to join the nursing contingent famously led by Florence Nightingale, Seacole was rejected—she suggests, and is very likely right, because of racism—but decided to make her own way there nevertheless. As is the custom of the genre, in her autobiography Seacole writes of her experiences in the past tense, and yet in her description of her arrival at Scutari she drifts occasionally into the present tense. For instance, of an "old

acquaintance" on the wards there who recognized her from Kingston and who shouted out "Mother Seacole! Mother Seacole!", she writes: "I sit by his side, and try and cheer him with talk about the future" (Seacole 133). Of walking through other wards, Seacole writes: "I cannot resist the temptation of lending a helping hand here and there" (134). Of meeting the famous English nurse who had arrived at Scutari the previous year, Seacole writes that Florence Nightingale "has read" her (Seacole's) letter of introduction, "which lies on the table by her [Nightingale's] side," and that Nightingale then "asks, in her gentle but eminently practical and business-like way" (136), what it is that Seacole wants. The idiosyncratic slippage into present-tense narration in this section of Seacole's autobiography implies that her arrival at Scutari in 1855 was a defining moment in her life. In turn, in her screenplay Levy takes this moment as a dramatic present, using it as an entry point into, and a means of framing, Seacole's life and character more generally.

In her autobiography Seacole states that it "was afternoon" when she arrived at Scutari (132) but that the time she spent meeting various old acquaintances and "lending a helping hand" meant that, before long, it "was growing late" (134). In Levy's screenplay, however, it is night when Seacole arrives and "there is barely any light" (295). The literal darkness of Levy's opening scene has, of course, figurative qualities: Seacole is in the shadows in more ways than one, unseen and unsung. She also remains silent: she does not reply to the soldier's exclamation, "This is a woman's hand!" (295) (a line of dialogue which Levy actually relocates from a slightly later section of Seacole's autobiography, when she has left Scutari and is treating patients at Balaclava). Moreover, Levy's stage directions suggest Seacole's face is withheld from the camera; the audience actually sees Nightingale, and Nightingale sees Seacole, before the audience sees Seacole. Nightingale arrives with her famous lamp in hand, too, looking "just as you would imagine her from your school books—slight, pale but with a hard face" (296). Levy clearly intends Nightingale to be a decidedly familiar figure to the audience, and yet at the same time she wants to challenge received notions of Nightingale. Levy is also, of course, taking issue with Seacole never being included in the "school books" from which Nightingale is so familiar. This description

of Nightingale is based on Seacole's own but departs from it in notable ways: in her autobiography, Seacole describes Nightingale as "a slight figure . . . with a pale, gentle, and withal firm face" (136). Levy's removal of "gentle" and her decision to replace "firm" with "hard" are telling. The symbolism of the famous lamp is arguably refigured here, too: Levy's Nightingale is not so much shining light into the darkness as simply illuminating herself. When the audience finally sees Seacole, the contrast between the two women could not be clearer: Seacole is "plump, dark-skinned, open-faced and smiling" (296), and dressed in extremely bright clothing. Indeed, in Levy's screenplay, Nightingale may still be the one holding the legendary lamp, but it casts, as noted in the following scene's directions, only a "thin" light (296). Seacole, on the other hand, is—both visually and, of course, *historically*—a burst of vibrant colour waiting to be discovered in the shadows.

Seacole's actual meeting with Nightingale happened somewhat differently. A doctor at Scutari whom Seacole had, again, known in Jamaica suggested that she should present herself, and her letter of recommendation, to Selina Bracegirdle, a colleague and companion of Nightingale's. Bracegirdle told Seacole that she did "not think that any vacancy" existed, but Seacole interrupted Bracegirdle to tell her that she was "bound for the front in a few days" regardless (Seacole 135). Some half an hour later, Seacole met with Nightingale herself. She describes Nightingale as having a "countenance [that has] a keen inquiring expression, which is rather marked" and which shows "sign[s] of impatience" when she asks Seacole what it is that she wants (136). This is as pejorative a comment on Nightingale as Seacole ever makes. Nightingale, however, made some extremely pejorative comments about Seacole. As Sara Salih notes in her introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Seacole's autobiography, "Seacole's hagiographic portrayal of Nightingale was not reciprocated"; Salih refers, in particular, to "an unpublished manuscript-letter headed with the instruction '*Burn*', [in which] Nightingale gives a negative account of Seacole and her activities in the Crimea" (Salih xxxi). In this letter, Nightingale states that it would be "absolutely out of the question" for Seacole to associate with her nurses (xxxii). Robinson—whose book, as stated above, Levy read and drew on—notes that Seacole's

autobiography was written "when Florence was at the height of her hagiographic fame" and, moreover, that it was aimed at "an audience who adored Florence Nightingale" (103). She suggests that "Mary knew which side her bread was buttered" and, thus, "always spoke of Florence in terms of great respect, obsequiousness, even—when she spoke of her at all" (103). She notes that "what Florence thought of Mrs Seacole on first meeting her is, regrettably, unknown" but that the former was "uncompromisingly candid in her comments about Mary after the war" (103); that, although she was "not quite courageous enough—or perhaps too canny—to denigrate Mary in public, Florence spat venom in private" (124) and "obviously despised" her (126). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Levy's portrayal of Nightingale is far less complimentary than is Seacole's. In a stage direction that may well have been influenced by Robinson's comment that Nightingale "abhorred people who didn't recognize their place in society" (122), Levy states that "Miss Nightingale has never had a conversation with an inferior in her life and is not about to start now" (297). Indeed, Levy's Nightingale asks Seacole what she wants "with a sigh" (297). Levy finds a way, too, in which to emphasize visually the power differential between the two women: while Nightingale is already seated, Seacole must request permission to sit in a chair that is far too small for her (this is a contrivance: Seacole's autobiography makes no reference to this and actually states that Nightingale was "standing" during this brief conversation [Seacole 136]). While ostensibly "based on" Seacole's autobiography, then, Levy's screenplay offers a far less complimentary portrayal of Nightingale than does its primary source (that said, it is not as disparaging of Nightingale as Nightingale was of Seacole). Like Robinson, Levy may well have felt that she was simply reading between the lines of Seacole's text and that Seacole likely had a far less favourable opinion of Nightingale than she was prepared to admit publicly.

Seacole was given a bed for the night at Scutari in "the hospital washerwomen's quarters," where she and one particularly friendly washerwoman "spen[t] some hours of the night talking over [their] adventures, and giving one another scraps of [their] respective biographies" (Seacole 136). Levy uses this detail from Seacole's autobiography as a dramatic

device through which to present her backstory, which occupies roughly a third of the screenplay. Seacole tells the washerwoman about her background in Jamaica, her exploits in Panama, and her failed attempts in London to get recruited as one of Florence Nightingale's nurses in the Crimea. Throughout this section of the screenplay Mary's words to the washerwoman are used in voiceover, and there are numerous cuts back and forth between these flashback sequences and the dramatic present of Scutari; the washerwoman, who serves as an auditor here, is "enthralled" by what she hears. Levy sticks fairly closely to her source material, cutting and condensing for concision. In the screenplay, particular attention is paid, as it is in her autobiography, to Seacole's exploits in Panama, where her brother had established the Independent Hotel and where Seacole then created her own establishment, the British Hotel. It was in Panama that she met (and treated) Thomas Day, a distant relative of her late husband. In Levy's screenplay, when Seacole gets to London she is not just politely rejected by the War Office but is laughed out of one department and physically ushered out of another. (The scene is somewhat reminiscent of the racism that *Small Island*'s Hortense experiences when she presents herself at the office of the Education Authority and tells them that she intends to continue her career as a teacher in Britain.) When Seacole attempts to join the troupe of nurses led by Nightingale, the nurse who listens to Seacole does so as if "she has got a nasty smell under her nose," after which she "shakes her head and puts her handkerchief to her nose." Thrice rejected, Seacole then encounters Day again and tells him of her plan to travel to the Crimea regardless. He tells her that he also intends to travel there, and they begin to make arrangements to become business partners. It is implied that Day agrees to this because he is romantically interested in her, and here Levy departs from her source material: neither Seacole's autobiography nor Robinson's biography contains any suggestion that Day had a romantic interest in Seacole. After the telling of Seacole's backstory, the screenplay then returns to its dramatic present: Seacole leaves the washerwoman sleeping in the darkness and travels to Balaclava, where she begins tending to the wounded and the sick. She meets up with Day and, at a place they call Spring Hill, they open their "British Hotel."

Levy's depiction of Seacole's exploits in the Crimea itself sticks, for the most part, relatively closely to Seacole's own accounts of them and to those given in Robinson's biography. Levy invents a character called William Laidlaw, a British army officer who knows Seacole from Jamaica and who greatly admires her. Laidlaw serves in Levy's screenplay as a kind of dramatic distillation of the many soldiers who idolized Seacole and referred to her as a mother figure (Laidlaw calls Seacole "Mami" throughout). He is subsequently killed in battle; Seacole tries to treat him but "hardly knows where to touch him as he has so many wounds." She cannot save him. There is also a scene in which Seacole treats a Captain Cox of the 97th Regiment—he has been shot in the hand in the Battle of the Great Redan. In her autobiography, Seacole herself states on numerous occasions that she was particularly well acquainted with the 97th Regiment, who had been stationed in Jamaica from 1848 to 1851; she even claims that "there were few officers of the 97th to whom Mother Seacole was not well known" (Seacole 62). She does not refer, however, to a Captain Cox; like Laidlaw, Cox is an invention of Levy's screenplay and comes to play an important role in it. Levy continues to hint that Day has romantic feelings towards Seacole, and indeed, after the two of them return, impoverished, to London following the conclusion of the war, he asks her to marry him and accompany him to Australia. Again, this seems to be Levy's own contrivance: Day did go to Australia, but there is no indication in Seacole's autobiography nor Robinson's biography that he asked Seacole to go with him, let alone asked for her hand in marriage.

The second extract from Levy's screenplay that is reproduced in this special issue finds Seacole back in London, destitute; she is about to receive (in a scene not reproduced here) Day's proposal of marriage. Walking through Covent Garden, she "is caught by a shop window that has a display in tribute to the army of the Crimea," at "the heart" of which "is a picture of Florence Nightingale and the words 'Florence Nightingale, the Lady with the lamp, a ministering angel'" (300). This hagiographic celebration of Nightingale is one of the "many" that Seacole has seen. She enters the shop and finds the women inside singing Nightingale's praises; she attempts to tell them of her connection to

the famous nurse, and of her own exploits in the Crimea, but they "take in her dusky skin and worn clothing and view her with disdain" (301). Seacole's attempts to be recruited as a nurse in the war were, of course, thwarted by racism. Having made her own way to the Crimea nevertheless, having nursed the sick and wounded there, having been (unlike Nightingale) "under fire," and having been the first woman to enter Sebastopol after the allied siege of the city, she now returns to London to find that her efforts to achieve recognition are, similarly, thwarted by racism. Robinson notes that, in London, Seacole "saw Florence revered for her work in the Crimea, invited to Balmoral to stay with the Queen, offered royal jewels and virtually canonized by the press, and that was all fine" because Nightingale "deserved it," yet "Mary deserved something too" (158). Bankruptcy was imminent and "was a bleak prospect" (Robinson 159). While Levy's scene certainly captures Seacole's sense of despondency at this particular moment in 1856, to some extent the women in the shop also serve as dramatic embodiments of a widespread failure and/or refusal during the twentieth century to acknowledge Seacole's contributions.

Into this desolation steps Captain Cox, who, upon learning of Seacole's financial troubles, takes it upon himself to write to *The Times* requesting that a subscription fund be set up, to which he himself gives £20 (an amount of money equivalent to more than one hundred times that figure now). The letter that Cox writes to *The Times* is, almost (but not quite) verbatim, a reproduction of an actual letter that was published in that newspaper in November 1856, and which was signed "Da Meritis" (qtd. in Robinson 161). It was the first of a number of such letters of support, and a "running correspondence was soon established" (162); "pledges of money . . . came rattling in," and "Mary must have glowed: her sons were coming good, just as she knew they would" (163). In early December, Seacole was "delighted" when "the hugely popular periodical *Punch* . . . publish[ed] 'A Stir for Seacole', to be sung to the nursery-rhyme tune of 'Old King Cole'" (163). In Levy's screenplay, Seacole (gently) turns down Day's proposal, and Cox encourages her to write her autobiography; she is unsure about this until he tells her that "Miss Nightingale is writing something similar." The screenplay ends

with Seacole watching fireworks at a concert organized for her benefit. Cox tells her it is "All in praise of you, Mami!" to which she replies, "In praise of me?" and then, after a beat, "But I only wished to be of use." This final line of dialogue in Levy's screenplay is, of course, a reprisal of what Seacole told Nightingale when she arrived at Scutari. Given that its narrative comes full circle in this way, and indeed concludes with the image of fireworks and a sense of defiance and triumph against (racist) adversity, to some extent the ending of Levy's screenplay has echoes of the ending of *Fruit of the Lemon*. An on-screen caption informs the audience that, following her death in 1881, "Mary Seacole's name, far from ranking alongside Florence Nightingale's, was lost" but that "her extraordinary life was re-discovered" in the 1980s.

Levy's screenplay is, much like its subject, full of drama, humour, and wit. It could perhaps be accused of being somewhat hagiographic, yet at the same time it is *knowingly*, even *playfully* so: as the excerpts provided in this special issue make clear, it marks a conscious attempt to counter the canonization of Nightingale, whose lamp has so often confined Seacole to the shadows of history. Like the Caribbean history series on which Levy subsequently worked, *The Adventures of Mrs Seacole* seeks to make audiences familiar with, and care about, all-too-often forgotten aspects of (British-Caribbean) history. Indeed, both projects were historically but also *politically* engaged; like Levy's published oeuvre, they take issue with the "whitewashed, sanitised version of the British past" (Olusoga) that remains so prevalent in British educational and cultural institutions. They assert the centrality of black history to British history.

VI. Selected Other Nascent Projects: "Two"

In addition to completing her Seacole screenplay and putting considerable work into her proposed Caribbean history series, in the final decade of her life Levy also toyed with the idea of creating a TV drama series. Levy noted down a few possible titles for this series: "Lorna," "Going Under," "Get Help," and—what appears to have become her favoured title—"The Talking Cure" (Levy, "Complete Archive"). The series would, Levy's notes suggest, be "set in a very busy mental health clinic" and

its protagonist would be Lorna, a middle-aged, black British, widowed mother of two who works as "a leader of one of the teams of therapists." Each episode would explore Lorna's life but also the lives of her clients, who suffer from a wide range of mental health problems. Levy's notes suggest that "each week the story [would offer] a rich picture of people's interweaving lives in modern multi-cultural Britain." Levy conceived of writing the first episode(s) herself but then taking more of a backseat role. After some early handwritten notes towards characters and plotlines, Levy writes what she titles a "[n]ote on diversity in screenwriting[:] what's keeping us back." In it, she asks why "there aren't many/ any mature scriptwriters of colour." In answer to this question, she states that "commissioners think writers of colour have to write about people/ issues of colour" and wonders if this means that "they aren't encouraged through the usual channels(?)." She also notes that BAME scriptwriters "suffer from the disturbances of institutional racism," which is "demoralizing and a real challenge." Notably, under the words "IDEA for small interjection," Levy envisages using "The Talking Cure" as a means of addressing this problem: "We take a really promising young BAME writer now" and "work with her during the treatment process"; Levy notes that such a writer "would have to be 100% up for the project we're proposing." Levy then wrote, and highlighted and asterisked, the question "Could we find some money for a young writer to work with us at this stage?" Ultimately, "The Talking Cure" did not develop beyond rough sketches and some informal discussions with potential collaborators. It is notable, however, that Levy conceived of the series not just as something that might engage audiences but as a project that might, in however small a way, help counteract institutional racism within the British media. Again, the politically engaged nature of Levy's late unpublished work is evident here; she was acutely aware of institutional racism and sought to oppose it in whatever way she could.

In the final decade of her life, then, after five novels and numerous short stories, Levy conceived of a number of different projects for television. As above, even if she perhaps did not admit it to herself immediately, upon finishing *The Long Song* she "knew" (as she subsequently put it to O'Reilly) that her career as a novelist was over. Exhausted and

shaken by her diagnosis of and treatment for breast cancer, she had neither the energy nor the inclination to embark upon a sixth novel. Working on projects for the screen, however, was a very different, altogether more attractive prospect: more manageable, more collaborative, and less solitary than novel writing. That said, the turn away from long-form prose fiction and towards televisual projects in the final decade of Levy's life should not be read as her straightforwardly "resorting to" a "less demanding" medium. On the contrary, as she often made clear, television had always been extremely important to Levy, and she had a great intimacy with and affection for it long before she cared in the slightest for literary fiction. As she told Jenni Murray in 2005, Levy did not read a novel until the age of twenty-three and her "storytelling came from Crossroads and Coronation Street" rather than from literary works (Levy, "What I Owe"). Her archive contains handwritten work towards a piece called "Writers as Readers" that expands on this (Levy, "Complete Archive"). It appears to be a draft speech, and while it is undated, it was clearly written after 2010 as it makes reference to *The Long Song* being Levy's "latest novel." In it, Levy states that she "feel[s] a bit of a fraud talking about childhood literary influences" precisely because she did not read any literature whatsoever until adulthood (she was supposed to read *Middlemarch* at school, she writes, but "just read the 'Pass notes' instead"—and "still passed"). Later in the same document, Levy states, "I write in scenes and see them run usually in my head" and then adds "I try to inhabit my characters as if I were an actor thinking myself into the part." She continues: "shocking though it may be, all those television watchings [*sic*] years have been the clearest influence on the way I tell stories and write." In fact, Levy's archive also contains some (rather amusing) fragments from those years. In a school report of 1972, her English teacher makes these (ironically solecistic) comments: "Andrea is progressing satisfactorily, although her attitude is still unnervily [*sic*] slapdash." In a subsequent report, also dated 1972, Levy's History and Geography teachers disagree over whether her progress is being held back by poor writing or lack of knowledge—while the former states, "her factual knowledge is good, but is let down by her failure to express herself well," the latter states, "Andrea writes clearly and logically, but

she has rarely learnt enough facts to achieve a satisfactory standard." Aside from being amusing miscellanea in Levy's archive, these documents offer a glimpse into a period in her life during which she had no interest whatsoever in reading literary fiction, let alone in writing it. Teenaged Levy was, however, certainly well acquainted with television. This offers, perhaps, an interesting way in which to frame her turn to televisual projects in the final decade of her life: rather than being simply a matter of convenience and practicality because of illness, it arguably marked a (re)turn to the medium with which Levy had most strongly identified in her formative years.

Other projects which Levy conceived of in her final years, but did not develop significantly, included a memoir. In one of her many notebooks, under the title "Memoir," Levy wrote two and a half pages of notes towards such a text. They begin: "I thought I'd write a memoir about my life. As soon as I had the idea my mind began to buzz. Unfortunately it did not buzz with ideas about the memoir but with a hundred voices telling me . . . 'A memoir! You! Who the bloody hell do you think you are[?]'" These voices continue to chide Levy, asking her why "anyone on earth would want to read a memoir of [her] life" and telling her: "People who've done something with their life write memoirs. Not people like you. You're a working class girl from Highbury[;] what could you possibly put in a memoir that would be any good? Are you kidding? You haven't even been to Oxbridge. Don't fool yourself that people are impressed [by] you because they're not." Levy could, she writes, "fill a book" just with these objections. Then, however, she "heard a little voice say But you've lived through an incredible changing time"; this voice goes on to remind Levy that she is "a black working class girl. Daughter of immigrants (some of the first from Jamaica) and you became a bestselling author and middle class to boot. I think there maybe [*sic*] something in that experience worth reflecting on." Voices of objection are raised in response, after which Levy states, "Anyway. I am doing it. So there." There are very few actual notes towards the content or the approach of the proposed memoir itself, but what is striking is the dialogic form of this account of Levy's conflicted feelings about embarking on such a project.

Also written in a dialogic form is "Two," which is most likely the last piece of imaginative writing that Levy produced. As with the extracts from her Seacole screenplay, my co-editors and I are delighted to be able to publish "Two" as part of this special issue. A year after Levy's death, in February 2020, "Two" was performed by actors as part of the abovementioned BBC Radio 4 broadcast, as well as quoted from and discussed by Gary Younge in his piece "Andrea Levy, My Brilliant Friend" (which also mentions Levy's "memoir" draft). "Two" is, however, published in full in print for the first time here. Levy wrote it in the same Moleskine notebook as her "journal" of the Caribbean history series, after (as mentioned above) the words, in capitals, "THE END." It is impossible to know to what exactly these words pertain—whether Levy intended simply to mark the end of this particular "journal" or whether she was contemplating something altogether more existential (or, perhaps, both). "Two" was undiscovered until after Levy's death, when Mayblin came across it in this notebook. I had the privilege of being the second person to see it and can well remember the extremely affecting experience of finding and reading it. As Mayblin notes in this special issue, "Two" takes the form of a discussion between two "entities" who might be described as "bureaucrats somewhere in the offices of the Grim Reaper, whose responsibility is to process the details of those mortals who are scheduled to die" (311). Indeed, these entities are unsettlingly ethereal, and even the piece's title seems to hint at this: "Two" . . . *what*? Or might "Two" refer to something that comes after "THE END" of something else? Either way, as Mayblin notes, the particular "case" being discussed by these two entities is clearly that of Levy herself. The tone of tedium—and, at times, sneering mockery—with which they discuss this case is extremely disconcerting. In the opening line the subject of their dialogue is referred to as "something/someone" (313), raising the question of whether these entities are, as far as they are concerned, discussing a human being or a thing. The possibility that they might feel emotion towards mortals does seem to exist—apparently "something stirs" (314) in one of them when the person dying is young and has children—but such emotion is an obstacle to them fulfilling their duties. There is little sense of anything

like salvation or divinity being evoked; notably, the word "God" occurs twice, but on both occasions it is used as profanity. Death must be administered, processed, formalized. Death is a certainty, too: these entities laugh out loud at people desperately trying to avoid it. Yet as Mayblin notes, there is, apparently, little time for sympathy or laughter when an unspecified "they" are "listening" (315) on this case, and seemingly want it hurried along so that others can be processed.

To Mayblin's insightful comments on "Two" I would add that, in a sense, Levy's final piece of imaginative writing sees her work come full circle. Levy started writing around the time her father died. At the centre of *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, her first novel, there is an almost unbearable tension between narrator Angela Jacobs' feelings of terror, anger, and helplessness as she watches the progression of her father's terminal cancer and the utter indifference with which the state handles (yet another) incurable illness and death. Levy's first novel addresses a key paradox of human existence: how it is possible for death to be both all-consuming and yet utterly banal. This is, it seems to me, a paradox to which Levy returns, decades later, in "Two" as she contemplates her own death.

In her final piece of imaginative writing, Levy positions herself as the subject of a discussion between bored otherworldly administrators. Whether or not she really understood or appreciated it, however, the impact of her work has been momentous; Levy will, it is clear, be the subject of a great many engaged and enthusiastic discussions for many years to come.

Notes

1 I am particularly grateful to Helen Melody for helping me gain access to this uncatalogued archival material.

2 I am very grateful to staff at the BL for making these recordings available to me for the purposes of my research. In particular, Mary Stewart has been extremely helpful.

3 My sense from studying Levy's handwritten document was that the word here was "diligently." However, legibility was an issue in this instance, and I could not be entirely certain that was the case.

4 Levy knew and admired Stuart Hall's 1991 mini-series *Redemption Song*; however, when she came to consider her own project, she had something more extensive and more mainstream in mind.

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