

SOLOMON, SUSANNA AND MOSES: LOCATING HANDEL'S LOST LIBRETTIST

ANDREW PINK



A mystery surrounds the identity of Handel's librettist for the 1749 Covent Garden oratorios *Solomon* (HWV67) and *Susanna* (HWV66).¹ There are no known contemporary references to the texts' authorship, whether in wordbooks (published by Tonson and Draper), the composer's autograph, printed scores (published by Walsh), press reports, financial records, correspondence or diaries. Indeed, there is very little contemporary comment of any sort relating to these two works, although we do know that they were profitable in so far as Handel had banked £300 after the first performance of *Solomon* and some £577 after performances of *Susanna*.²

Winton Dean considered the subject of the anonymous librettos in his ground-breaking 1959 book *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*. Noting that Thomas Morell (1703–1784) and Newburgh Hamilton (1691–1761) had been considered possible candidates for the authorship of *Solomon*, Dean argued that neither was credible, not only on stylistic grounds but also for lack of primary sources to link them with the oratorio.³ Now, with the discovery of a new documentary source, we are able to contemplate the possibility that Moses Mendes (c1690–1758), a wealthy London-based Jewish financier-poet, was the anonymous librettist for both *Solomon* and *Susanna*. The source is an irreverent three-verse poem about Mendes contained in the leather-bound notebook of his close friend John Ellis (1698–1791), a London scrivener who was several times Master of the Scriveners Company and himself a poet.⁴

Ellis's notebook is now in the Library and Museum of Freemasonry in London, where it forms part of an extensive permanent loan of manuscript and printed items belonging to the Quatuor Coronati (QC) masonic lodge.⁵ This lodge, which still exists, was founded in 1884 under the jurisdiction of the United Grand Lodge of England expressly to undertake research into the history of freemasonry. The interest of the notebook for the lodge was that it contains poetry and prose by several eighteenth-century literary figures who were freemasons: not only Mendes, who had held high office in the English Grand Lodge as the Grand Steward responsible for underwriting the London freemasons' Grand Feast (annual festival) of 1738, but also men such as John Anstis, younger (1708–1754), Theophilus Cibber (1703–1758), Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707–1751), David Garrick (1717–1779), Lord John Hervey (1696–1743), Philip, Duke of Wharton (1698–1731) and Paul Whitehead (1710–1774).⁶ Apart from these authors' masonic membership, there is nothing else in

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1 Composed 5 May–13 June 1748 and 11 July–24 August 1748.

2 Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959, reprinted 1990), 526 and 546.

3 Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio*, 514.

4 Anne Tarver, 'Ellis, John (1698–1791)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, <www.oxforddnb.com> (30 January 2015)).

5 Shelfmark: 1860 MEN. The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London, is open to scholarly researchers. Its catalogue is online at <www.freemasonry.london.museum>.

6 The Mendes works in the Ellis notebook comprise a series of odes in imitation of Horace, poems on various subjects and some humorous, pseudonymous letters clipped from editions of the *London Daily Advertiser and Literary Gazette* of 1751 and annotated with Mendes's name.



the notebook's contents that connects it directly with freemasonry.⁷ Some time prior to 1905 the notebook was presented to the QC lodge by John Percy Simpson (1861–1938), a London solicitor and a lodge member.⁸ At the same time he wrote an article about Mendes and the notebook, identifying Ellis as the owner.⁹ How the notebook had come into Simpson's possession is not known.

To judge by the various dated entries and the single hand throughout, Ellis filled up the notebook in the period c1743–1755. It contains a variety of items such as anecdotes, literary extracts, song lyrics, poems, classically inspired odes and humorous letters to the press. Often a piece's original author is identified, so we find items attributed not only to 'Mr Mendes' and those already mentioned, but also to John Byrom (1692–1763), Anthony Henley (died 1748), William Kenrick (1729/1730–1779), William King (1685–1763), James Merrick (1720–1769) and Richard Savage (1697/1698–1743). There are also a number of unattributed items that may be by Ellis himself, and one of these is the verse that suggests Mendes wrote *Solomon* (Figure 1). It reads:

My Dear Moses Mendes¹⁰
 A very great friend is,
 To the making oratorio's [*sic*]:
 And has wrote so much stuff in Town,
 About Peggy Woffington¹¹
 That it makes him very notorious.

When he was alone
 He wrote Solomon,
 And robb'd the poor man of his glory,¹²
 If it had not been Handel'd,¹³
 It might have been candl'd,¹⁴
 And the J[e]w beat for spoiling the story.¹⁵

7 Solomon is a recurring figure in eighteenth-century masonic imagery. Indeed, in 1753 an oratorio called *Solomon's Temple*, composed by Dublin-based composer and organist Richard Broadway (died 1760), was performed in Dublin for the 'benefit of sick and distressed freemasons'. See Brian Boydell, *A Dublin Musical Calendar* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1988), 181. The lost music set a libretto by the Dublin poet James Eyre Weeks (died 1754), printed in Laurence Dermott's *Ahiman Rezon: Or, A Help to a Brother; Shewing the Excellency of Secrecy, . . . Together with Solomon's Temple an Oratorio, As it was performed for the Benefit of Free-Masons*. (London: James Bedford, 1756), 225–232. I have found nothing to link the creation and production of Handel's *Solomon* with freemasonry.

8 See Simpson's obituary: Anonymous, 'A Sprig of Acacia: J. P. Simpson. P. A. G. Reg.', *The Freemason's Chronicle* (29 January 1938), 76.

9 John Percy Simpson, 'Brother Moses Mendes, Grand Steward, 1738 (1690–1758)', *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 18 (1905), 104–109.

10 In most of the contemporary autograph sources the family name is spelled 'Mendes', and that is the spelling I adopt here, except where quoted sources use the variant spelling 'Mendez'.

11 The actress Margaret Woffington (1720?–1760). This may refer to the poem 'To Mrs Woffington by Mr Mendes', which is found in the Ellis notebook on pages 184–186. It begins: 'If when the breast is rent with pain, / It be no crime the Nymphs shou'd know it, / O Woffington accept the strain, / Pity tho' you'll not cure the Poet'.

12 The reference is to Matthew 6:28–29: 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these' (King James Bible). See also Luke 12:27. The suggestion in the poem is that Mendes had not done justice to his subject.

13 Taken up by Handel.

14 Based on a mid-nineteenth-century reference, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (<www.oed.com> (30 January 2015)) suggests that 'candl'd' indicates being held up to the light for close scrutiny, but I read the word's presence in the poem—with some poetic licence – to mean being burnt up by a candle.

15 'Jew' refers to Mendes.



1
My Dear Moses Mendes
a very great friend is.

To the making oratorios:
and has wrote so much stuff in Town
about Peggy Woffington
That it makes him very notoriou

2

when he was alone
He wrote Solomony,
and robb'd the poor man of his glory,
If it had not been Handel'd,
It ought t' have been cand'l'd,
and the S. w beats for spoiling the
story

3

Too much hast thou fiddl'd,
Too much hast thou scribbl'd,
Both at Oxford, at London & Micham.
Prate no more of Amours,
For writing on whores,
Is by no means a proof you can
stitch 'em.

Figure 1 (Colour online) 'My Dear Moses Mendes'. The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London, shelfmark 1860 MEN, page 314. Used by permission



Too much hast thou fiddl'd,¹⁶
 Too much hast thou scribbl'd,¹⁷
 Both at Oxford and London and Mitcham,¹⁸
 Prate no more of Amours,
 For writing on Whores
 Is by no means a proof you can stitch 'em.¹⁹

MOSES MENDES

Moses Mendes, shown in [Figure 2](#), was a wealthy City stockjobber from a well-to-do Portuguese-Sephardic Jewish family based in London, with property in the City of London, at Mitcham in Surrey and at Old Buckenham in Norfolk.²⁰ His paternal grandfather was Dr Fernando Mendes (1647–1724), court physician to Catherine of Braganza (1638–1705). He accompanied Catherine to London upon her marriage to Charles II, and attended to Charles during his final illness.²¹ The Mendes family shared marital ties across several generations with two other well-to-do London Jewish families of Iberian origin: the da Costas and the Mendes da Costas. For example, Moses Mendes's father, James, married Anne da Costa, while James's brother Anthony married Rebecca Mendes da Costa.²² [Figure 3](#) provides a simplified genealogy of Moses's immediate family.²³

16 Playing the violin, or wasting time, or wasting time playing the violin. A 'Moses Mendes Esq' was a subscriber to the *Six Solos for a Violin*, Op. 7, by Michael Christian Festing (London: Smith, 1747). A Moses Mendes also subscribed to Handel's *Twelve Grand Concertos*, Op. 6 (London: Walsh, 1740). See David Hunter, 'Georg Frideric Handel and the Jews: Fact, Fiction, and the Tolerances of Scholarship', in *For the Love of Music: Festschrift in Honor of Theodore Front on His 90th Birthday*, ed. Darwin Floyd Scott (Lucca: Antiqua, 2002), 24–25. So far as I can discern, there are no other Handel subscriptions in this name.

17 Spent time writing.

18 Mendes studied at Oxford, and Mitcham was the site of his family home.

19 The *Oxford English Dictionary* (<www.oed.com> (30 January 2015)) gives for 'stitch': 'To stab, pierce; to afflict with a "stitch" or sharp sudden pain'. In other words, Mendes's prattling about his loves and writing about whores does not make him man enough to have sex with them.

20 'Stockjobber' indicates a wholesale dealer or principal on a stock exchange (especially the London Stock Exchange) who buys and sells stocks for his or her own account: the *Oxford English Dictionary* (<www.oed.com> (30 January 2015)). Unless otherwise stated, biographical information about Mendes is taken from Thomas N. McGeary, 'Mendez [Mendes], Moses (1690?–1758), playwright and poet', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <www.oxforddnb.com> (30 January 2015). The family home in Mitcham, called Eagle House, was built by Fernando Mendes in 1705; see Malcolm Brown, 'Anglo-Jewish Country Houses from the Resettlement to 1800', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of Great Britain* 28 (1981/1982), 22. The house still stands and is owned by the London Borough of Merton. The house in Norfolk, Old Buckenham Hall, was destroyed by fire in 1952.

21 Vivian David Lipman, 'Mendes (Mendez)', in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum, second edition (Detroit and London: Macmillan, 2007), volume 14, 41–42. See also J. H., 'Familiae Mendesianae & Costianae', *The Gentleman's Magazine* 82 (January 1812), 21–24, based on material in the *Common-place Book of Emanuel Mendes da Costa*, British Library, Add. MS 29867.

22 J. H., 'Familiae Mendesianae', 21–24. In the first decades of the eighteenth century the families of Mendes and da Costa shared – and massively extended – Highgate House (now Cromwell House) in Highgate, London. See Brown, 'Country Houses', 21.

23 Information in [Figure 3](#) is taken from 'Familiae Mendesianae', except in the case of Alvaro Mendes. He is identified as the son of Fernando Mendes in a court case of 1733 heard in the House of Lords: 'Joseph Cortisos, gent. appellant. Anthony Mendes, James Mendes, and Lewis Mendes, the three surviving sons and executors of Dr. Fernando Mendes' (London, 1733). His wife and children are identified in the 1753 will of his brother Lewis (London, Public Record Office, 11/800/63).

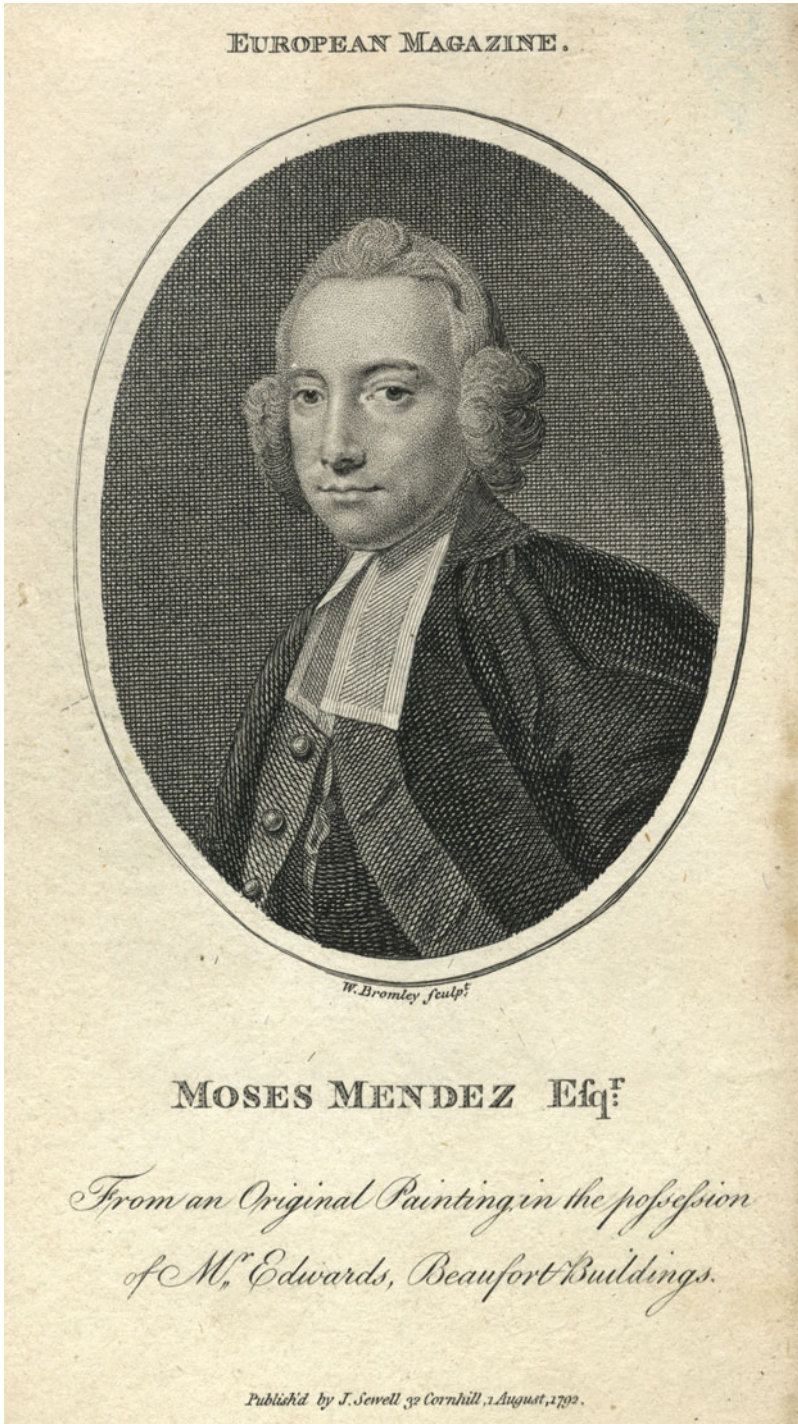


Figure 2 (Colour online) *Moses Mendez Esq.: From an Original Painting in the Possession of Mr Edwards, Beaufort Buildings*, published in the *European Magazine and London Review*, October 1792. The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London, 2015. Used by permission

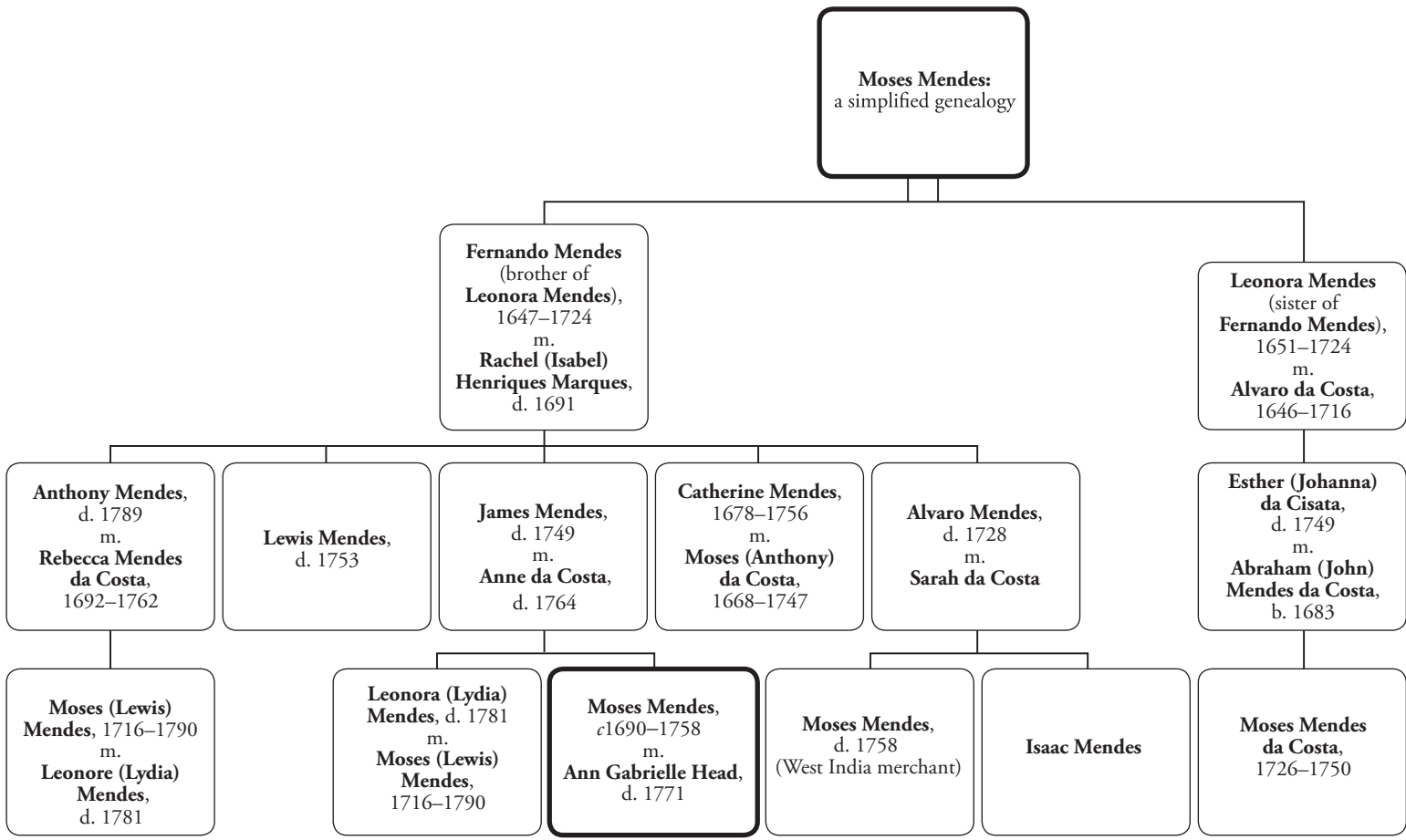


Figure 3 The Mendes family: a simplified genealogy



As a young man, Mendes studied at St Mary Hall, Oxford, a university college headed by the high-Tory and Jacobite sympathizer William King, during most of whose tenure (1719–1763) the college itself had a reputation for Jacobitism.²⁴ Mendes, as a Jew, was barred from receiving any degree, since the award of English university degrees was then restricted to members of the Church of England. He was eventually awarded an Oxford MA on 19 June 1750;²⁵ the Oxford University register noted that he had recently converted to Christianity.²⁶

Although Mendes followed in his father's footsteps as a City financier, he had a passion for writing poetry, which came to preoccupy his later life, with some success. Among his many literary friends were the poet and publisher Robert Dodsley (1704–1764), the poets James Thomson (1700–1748) and Richard Savage, and the actor–manager David Garrick.²⁷ Mendes's literary reputation today, albeit faint, is based largely on his poetic imitations of Edmund Spenser, including *The Blatant Beast; a Poem, in Spenser's Style* (c1749, published posthumously in 1792), *The Seasons, in imitation of Spenser* (published anonymously in 1751) and *The Squire of Dames. A Poem. In Spenser's Stile* (published anonymously in 1755).²⁸

Mendes also wrote the librettos for four Drury Lane stage works performed between 1746 and 1751. The first of these was a short farce with songs called *The Double Disappointment or the Fortune Hunters* (1746, composer unknown), 'whose stage Irishman Phelim O'Blunder brought the house down.'²⁹ It was the most profitable work Garrick inherited when he took over Drury Lane in 1747, and so it is no surprise that Garrick would turn to Mendes for similar works.³⁰ This resulted in three all-verse librettos for afterpieces called 'musical entertainments', effectively one-act English operas with bucolic settings. The first of these was *The Chaplet* (1749), with music by William Boyce. Its 'deftly managed comedy'³¹ dealt with the amorous intrigues of English shepherds and shepherdesses, and of swains and their lasses. The work was an immediate and long-running success, published in full score by Walsh, and was perhaps the most frequently performed afterpiece of the century, even reaching America.³² Among its first cast were tenor John Beard (1716–1791) and soprano Catherine 'Kitty' Clive (1711–1785). The second musical entertainment was *Robin Hood* (1750), with music by Charles Burney (1726–1814), of which only three songs survive.³³ This too is a tale of an imagined England, and has a distinct love theme. Its first cast included bass Henry Reinhold (1690–1751)

24 Richard Sharpe, 'King, William (1685–1763), college head and Jacobite sympathizer', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <www.oxforddnb.com> (30 January 2015).

25 Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715–1886*, volume 3 (London: Parker, 1891), 942.

26 Robert J. Bruce, 'Introduction', in William Boyce, *The Shepherd's Lottery* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1990), xi, note 27.

27 It is worth noting that *The British Magazine and Review* (London: Harrison, 1782) published, in a series called 'Original Letters by Eminent Persons Deceased', six letters to a Solomon Mendes whom I have been unable to identify. Some of the letters are dated, and some are addressed to him at Clapton, near Hackney (London). They are from: 1. Richard Savage, from Ham, 26 May 1737 (174); 2. James Thomson, from Ham, 21 July 1737 (174–175); 3. James Thomson, 30 June 1741 (258–259); 4. James Thomson, 8 November 1744 (259); 5. the physician and poet John Armstrong (1709–1779) (334); 6. Robert Dodsley (334–335). This Solomon, whose correspondents are uncannily close to Moses Mendes's own literary circle of friends, has been described by Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews in England*, third edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 209, as 'a kinsman' of Moses Mendes. Roth offers no corroborative evidence for this assertion.

28 'Moses Mendez', in *Spenser and the Tradition: English Poetry 1570–1830*, ed. David Hill Radcliffe, <www.lib.vt.edu/find/databases/S/spenser-and-the-tradition-english-poetry-1579-1830.html> (30 March 2015).

29 Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 213–214.

30 Fiske, *English Theatre Music*, 214.

31 Ian Bartlett and Robert J. Bruce, *William Boyce: A Tercentenary Sourcebook and Compendium* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 68.

32 Bartlett and Bruce, *William Boyce*, 69.

33 These are, as given in COPAC (<www.copac.ac.uk> (30 January 2015)), 'As blyth as the linnet sings in the green wood', 'I'll sing you a song that shall suit you all round' and 'To an arbor of woodbine ye both shall be led'.



along with Beard and Clive.³⁴ Finally, *The Shepherd's Lottery* (1751), once again with Beard and Clive in leading roles, appears to have been an attempt to recreate the success of *The Chaplet*, with another score by Boyce (also published by Walsh) and a plot concerning the amorous adventures of English shepherds and swains. Although well received, and even performed under Boyce's direction at the Three Choirs Festival in 1754, *The Shepherd's Lottery* failed to achieve the same enduring popularity as *The Chaplet*, remaining in the Drury Lane repertoire for just three seasons.³⁵ All three works appeared without the author's name, since Mendes maintained a strict anonymity in print throughout his life, with the exception of his 1743 edition of *Novellas exemplares* by Miguel de Cervantes.³⁶ It was only after his death that his name came to be associated with the Drury Lane stage works and his poetry.

In 1751 we find Mendes listed as a Perpetual Governor of the lying-in hospital for married women, in Brownlow Street, Long Acre. He later lived in nearby King Street in Covent Garden,³⁷ in a house he leased until 1757.³⁸ On 14 July 1753 he married Ann Gabrielle Head (died 1771) of Rathbone Place,³⁹ second daughter of Sir Francis Head (c1693–1768), by whom he had two sons.⁴⁰ Mendes died at his country home, 'St Andrews' at Old Buckenham, Norfolk, on 4 February 1758 and was buried there. It was said in 1782 that 'He was, what poets rarely are, extremely rich, being supposed to be at the time of his death . . . worth one hundred thousand pounds'.⁴¹

JOHN ELLIS

John Ellis had some status in City life, being three times the Master of the Scriveners Company (1736, 1773 and 1784), and was a common councilman for Broad Street Ward in the heart of the City's financial district, where he lived.⁴² Professionally Ellis, like Mendes, was a denizen of the Royal Exchange and surrounding streets, the traditional haunts of scribes and stockjobbers. Also like Mendes, Ellis inhabited London literary circles. Dr Johnson knew Ellis well and remarked that the most literary conversation he ever enjoyed 'was at the table of Jack Ellis, a money-scriber behind the Royal Exchange, with whom I at one period used to dine generally once a week'.⁴³ Here Johnson refers to the informal Friday-night poetry society that Ellis hosted at the Cock Tavern, near the Royal Exchange, and to which Mendes belonged. In Ellis's notebook we find a poem about this club, written in eight light-hearted verses and called 'A Song by Mr Mendes'. It is addressed to Ellis and was added to the notebook about 1755, to judge from adjacent dated material. In it Mendes

34 All three singers also appeared in Handel's oratorios, Reinhold in *Solomon* and *Susanna*.

35 Fiske, *English Theatre Music*, 218.

36 Miguel Cervantes, *Novellas Exemplares . . . A new edition: revised and compared with the original by Mr. Mendez*, ed. Moses Mendes (London: Hitch, 1743).

37 Anonymous, *An account of the rise and progress of the Lying-In-Hospital for Married Women, in Brownlow-Street, Long-Acre* (London, 1751). In Mendes's father-in-law's will of 1756 (London, Public Record Office, PROB 11/945/329, 'Sir Francis Head of Hermitage, Higham, baronet') he is identified as 'Moses Mendes Esq. of St Paul Covent Garden, Mdx, Esq'.

38 F. H. W. Sheppard, ed., *Survey of London*, volume 36: *Covent Garden* (London: London County Council, 1970). Online version at British History Online <www.british-history.ac.uk> (30 January 2015).

39 John H. Chapman, ed., *The Register Book of Marriages Belonging to the Parish of St. George, Hanover Square*, volume 1: 1725–1787 (London: The Harleian Society, 1886), 48.

40 Charles Mosley, ed., *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage*, one hundred and seventh edition, volume 2 (Wilmington: Burke's Peerage (Genealogical Books), 2003), 1848.

41 David Erskine Baker, 'Moses Mendez', in *Biographia Dramatica; or, A Companion to the Playhouse*, volume 1 (London: Rivington, 1782), 311.

42 Brian Brookes and Cecil Humphrey Smith, 'Appendix III: Wardens and Masters', in *A History of the Worshipful Company of Scriveners of London*, volume 2 (Chichester: Phillimore, 2001), 79. Scriveners drew up legal documents, were moneylenders and arranged property transactions.

43 Tarver, 'Ellis'.



praises those Friday night meetings at the Cock Tavern, while criticizing other nearby taverns – the Pope’s Head, the King’s Arms, the Black Swan and the Fountain. The ‘song’ begins and ends as follows:

When to Ellis I write
 I in verse must indite,
 Come Phoebus, & give me a knock,
 For on Fryday at eight
 All behind the Change gate,
 Master Ellis will be at the Cock.

...

’Tis time to be gone
 For the Change has struck one
 O ’tis an impertinent clock!
 For with Ellis I’d stay
 From September to May
 I’ll stick by my Friend, & the Cock!⁴⁴

The ‘My Dear Moses Mendes’ poem appears in the notebook just a few pages after ‘A Song by Mr Mendes’, and it gives the very clear impression that the entire collection of anecdotes, literary extracts, song lyrics, poems and poetical translations is representative of the literary fare shared by Ellis and his boon companions during their Friday-night gatherings. Ellis was probably the author of ‘My Dear Moses Mendes’, since he was clearly a very dear friend to Mendes (‘Of his poetical friends . . . Moses Mendes Esq. appears to have been the most intimate with him’),⁴⁵ and Ellis acted as a witness to Mendes’s will.⁴⁶

In his own will of December 1788 Ellis bequeathed all his poetical works in print and manuscript, along with the copyright of them, to the bookseller John Sewell (died 1802), who traded at 32 Cornhill and published the *European Magazine and London Review* from 1782 to 1802; Sewell was also the executor of Ellis’s will.⁴⁷ This explains the first publication by the *European Magazine and London Review* of some Mendes poems from the Ellis notebook, such as ‘To the Well Conceited Maister [*sic*] John Ellis’ in February 1792 to accompany a biography of Ellis.⁴⁸ A biography of Mendes himself, ‘Some Account of Moses Mendez Esq.’, appeared in the October 1792 issue.⁴⁹

THE HANDEL LIBRETTOS

The link explored here between Handel’s *Solomon* and the works of Moses Mendes is strengthened by the extensive use in both of natural imagery. Ruth Smith reinforces this point with regard to the oratorio libretto when speaking of *Solomon* as ‘an English pastoral. The limpid brook, the shepherd, the hundred different flowers in the balmy, fertile pastures form an idyllic picture of the English countryside . . . an Arcadian version of the audience’s own landscape.’⁵⁰ The Drury Lane librettos that Mendes created for Burney and Boyce in the years immediately following *Solomon* are also rich in natural imagery in bucolic English settings, and likewise deal with themes of love and virtue, albeit more light-heartedly. And Mendes made much of the English countryside and of nature generally in his poetic works, a preference remarked upon by John Percy

44 Ellis notebook, 301–302.

45 ‘An Account of Mr John Ellis’, *European Magazine and London Review* 4 (January 1793), 3–4.

46 [Will of] ‘Moses Mendes’. London, Public Record Office, PROB 11/837/170.

47 Simpson, ‘Brother Moses Mendez’, 108.

48 *European Magazine* (February 1792), 128–130.

49 *European Magazine* (October 1792), 251.

50 Ruth Smith, ‘Ideal and Reality’, notes to *Solomon* (Deutsche Grammophon 459–688–2, 1999).



Simpson: 'Many of the most graceful and pleasing lines in the . . . poems of Mendez relate to the Thames, and the beauties of its scenery, particularly in the neighbourhood of Richmond and Ham . . . and descriptive of scenes on the Thames, from Richmond to Oxford.'⁵¹ Dwight L. Durling subsequently called attention to Mendes's 'genuine taste for nature and pleasure in observing the life of the country'.⁵² A sense of this natural scene-setting is provided by the opening of Mendes's poem 'To the Well Conceited Maister John Ellis', urging Ellis to visit Mendes at Ham:⁵³

Close to his door the double wall-flow'r blows,
 And the full bush is fraught with many a rose.
 'Tis here I taste the beauties of the Spring,
 For me each woodland songster plumes his wing;
 The sober bird, at Cynthia's paler glow,
 For me renews her elegies of woe;
 While the brisk Fairies active measures tread,
 And Mab reposes on a cowslip bed.
 Come, come, my ELLIS, haste from smoke and noise
 To purer air and more substantial joys,

Winton Dean suggested that *Solomon* and *Susanna* were both the work of the same author, arriving at this conclusion after noticing strong stylistic similarities between the two librettos. He was particularly struck by their extensive use of natural imagery (with some images and phrases found in both librettos) and inclusion of the unusual rhyme scheme AAAB–CCCB.⁵⁴ Dean's position has subsequently been adopted by a number of Handel scholars.⁵⁵ If he is correct, then Mendes is possibly the librettist of both *Solomon* and *Susanna*. Following Dean's premise that distinctive nature references in *Solomon* and *Susanna* are key authorial traits, I have matched them in [Table 1](#) against Mendes's three Drury Lane musical entertainments, these being closer to the oratorio librettos in form than Mendes's poetry.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of a contemporary poem identifying Moses Mendes as the author of the libretto for Handel's *Solomon* is intriguing. Because the notebook containing the poem is of the same period and from Mendes's own literary coterie, the claim of authorship is highly credible. And if Dean and his followers are correct that the regularly recurring use of natural imagery in both *Solomon* and *Susanna* indicates they shared the same author, then Mendes may have been responsible for both librettos. Certainly there is a strong congruence with regard to natural imagery in Mendes's three Drury Lane librettos and poetic output. But the discovery requires additional scrutiny: an expert literary analysis of Mendes's style and working method would prove most useful in pursuing Dean's statements about the oratorio librettos' vocabulary, rhyme and metre, while

51 Simpson, 'Brother Moses Mendez', 103.

52 Dwight L. Durling, *Georgic Tradition in English Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 136.

53 In the Ellis notebook the poem is dated June 1754, and was first published under Mendes's name by *The European Magazine and London Review* 21 (February 1792), 128.

54 Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios*, 311, 514 and 537–538.

55 Donald Burrows, *Handel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 295: 'Both may have been the work of the same author.' Anthony Hicks, 'Handel and the Idea of an Oratorio', in *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 160: '*Susanna* and *Solomon* . . . appear to have the same anonymous author.' David Ross Hurley, 'Solomon', in *The Cambridge Handel Encyclopaedia*, ed. Annette Landgraf and David Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 596: 'The librettist [of *Solomon*] is unknown but it may be the same anonymous author who wrote *Susanna*.'

Table 1 Nature imagery in the librettos of *Susanna*, *Solomon*, *The Chaplet*, *Robin Hood* and *The Shepherd's Lottery*

Work	Plants	Animals	Settings	Atmosphere
<i>Susanna</i>	citron, corn, cypress, holm-tree, jasmine, laurel, lentisk, lily, oak, osier, pine, poplar, rose, vine	crocodile, curs, cygnet, dove, eagle, kids, lark, linnet, roe, vulture, wolf	flowery banks, flowery dales, forests, mossy fount and grot, balmy groves, verdant hills, mountains, flowery plain, distant plains, gloomy shade, sequestered shade, crystal streams, torrents	balmy breezes, clouds, the dog-star, frost, gales, winter's hoar, lightning, mildew, snow, bright sun, tempest's might
<i>Solomon</i>	cedar, fig, herb and flower, lily, myrtle, rose, fragrant spices, vine	dove, eagle, nightingale	sacred dome, flowery glade, cedar grove, myrtle grove, hills, unsheltered moor, the Nile, barren plain, murmuring rill, fig tree's shade, spicy shores, through the skies	vernal air, dawn, golden day, morning dew, hoary main, tossing main, rosy shade, eastern skies, opening skies, brightest star, rolling surges, tempest, zephyrs
<i>The Chaplet</i>	cypress, grass, lily, nettle, pine, poplars, rose, willow	ass, bee, doves, hawks, kids, lambs, linnet, nightingale, ox, thrush	yon bank, the dale, dusky dell, from flower to flower, a grove, nodding grove, the lea, rolling plains, clear river, rocks, foaming sea, rolling streams, from tree to tree	vernal breezes, heat of day, rising day, eve, pallid moon, gloomy shade, morning star, tempests, cool tide, flying wind
<i>Robin Hood</i>	cypress, flowers, soft leaves, lily, myrtle, may, opening bud, pine, blooming posies, rose, sloe, willow, woodbine	butterfly, cats, crow, fallow deer, dove, eagle, horses, linnet, nightingale, ox, oyster, parrot, raven, sparrow, squirrel	regions of air, fair forest, Sherwood Forest, fountains, grottos, grove, fallow land, native main, raging main, the mountains, the plain, rills, the sea, dashing torrent, the wood, green wood, green-wood shade, harbour of woodbine	lightning, purple moon, morn, night, rain, snow, spring, noon-day sun, tempest
<i>The Shepherd's Lottery</i>	berry, cherry, chestnut, cowslip, generous corn, cypress, daisy, flowers, grass, ivy, jessamin, silver lily, may, olive, palms, pear, rose, rose-bud, shrubs, snow-drop, thorn, willow, fragrant woodbine	bear, bee, birds, cygnets, doves, finch, flocks, hawk, lambs, lark with dewy wings, nightingale, ox, sheep, swallow, thrush, tiger	the dale, fields, harvest fields, verdant fields, the glade, the green, mossy grot, the ground, grove, lonely grove, blasted heath, hill, hillocks, the plain, plains, <i>Faunus'</i> spring, the vale	breezes, clouds dispelled, crystal flood, may-morning, the moon, clear light of the moon, morning, night, gloom of night, night's awful noon, the planets, the rain, balmy scents, rosy shade, thick shade, the spheres, blooming spring, summer's day, the sun, sunshine, foul weather



a thoroughly researched biography of Mendes might move us closer to determining whether he and Handel could have worked together. Certainly the tantalizing appearance in Handel subscription lists of a Moses Mendes and various other members of the intermarried Mendes, da Costa and Mendes da Costa families suggests that the paths of the two men were not so very far apart.