PART I

EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK AS A POET
INTRODUCTION

Bathroom Songs?
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as a Poet

Jason Edwards

An Important Writer of, and on, Poetry?

Waking in the morning, I remember first
I’m grown up. I have some money and a car
and anything I want, to cook and eat,
and (in the horrid, doggerel blank verse
in which I — no, not “think” — but breathe, and represent
continually to my own ear the place
of my unthinkingness) repeats, repeats
some vapid version of a Shakespeare phrase,
“Yet Edmund was beloved.”
Waking alone, yet E- is beloved.
Also: “an important writer of
fiction and poetry,”
of criticism
and poetry, of course, it’s meant to say,
but ‘fiction’, in this empty register,
scans, so “fiction” in my head it always is.

— Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “The Warm Decembers”

Bathroom Songs represents the first study to consider the poetry of one of the most significant literary theorists of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Most renowned for her trilogy of ground-breaking, queer-theoretical texts — *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), and *Tendencies* (1993) — Sedgwick was, from the outset, and always in her mind a poet. For example, as Hal A. Sedgwick documented, all of the entries on his wife’s CV from 1967 to 1975 were prizes for poetry.² In 1977, Sedgwick submitted her first book of poems, *Traceable, Salient, Thirsty*, to various presses, containing key poems from the previous four years; but the volume, bafflingly, failed to find a publisher.

Undeterred, Sedgwick began work, the following year, on her most ambitious poem: ‘The Warm Decembers’ (1978–1986), a meta-Victorian novella that would find a home in *Fat Art, Thin Art* (1994), the only collection of poetry Sedgwick published during her lifetime. The volume was acclaimed as a “work of poetic distinction and indispensable human use” by fellow poet Allen Grossman, and as a “thrilling experience” by literary critic Maud Ellmann, who thought the poems proved Sedgwick one of the “truly innovative” poets of her generation. Richard Howard, meanwhile, located Sedgwick in a tradition of American critic-poets, whose critical and poetical interests were closely entwined.³

In 1999, Sedgwick published a second book of poetry, *A Dialogue on Love* — considered in this volume, in the context of queer therapy, in a deeply informed essay by Monica Pearl. The book represented a haibun memoir of Sedgwick’s psychotherapy with Shannon Van Wey. Employing a seventeenth-century Japanese form, much loved by James Merrill, the volume wove together haiku and prose. The book was also a key companion volume, and partly an autobiographical guide, to *Fat Art, Thin Art*.

³ All cited on the flyleaf to *Fat Art, Thin Art.*
Mindful of such details, *Bathroom Songs* develops, in four ways, our sense of what Hal Sedgwick characterized as his wife’s “complex and changing relation” to poetry, especially her own.4 Firstly, by providing, in this essay, an unusually ‘fat’ — indeed potentially ‘obese’ — introduction to Sedgwick’s collected poetry and writings about poets; one taking advantage of her preference for corpulent aesthetics. The first part of the book then includes six alternately svelte and generously proportioned essays, on *Fat Art, Thin Art* and *A Dialogue on Love*. The second part of the book subsequently includes more than forty of Sedgwick’s previously uncollected poems, ranging from the final narrative poem and lyrics she published before her death in 2009 to the earliest writings of her adolescence. These poems are prefaced and contextualized, in a seventh essay, within the context of Sedgwick’s broader corpus.

**Beyond Novel Gazing: Numerous Poems are Being Read and Written**

In spite of her fame as a novel gazer, Sedgwick wrote repeatedly about the English, European, American, and East Asian poetic canons, penning eleven essays on poetry across her career.5 These included ‘The 1001 Seances’, on Merrill (1975);6 Walt Whitman’s Transatlantic Context: Class, Gender, and Male Homosexual Style’ (1983);7 ‘Swan in Love: The Example of Shakespeare’s Sonnets’ (1985);8 Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *Princess*: One

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In the latter, Sedgwick described how important Cavafy’s “antidepressant” poetry had been to her body and soul, and the “peculiar feelings of tenderness and intimacy” she felt for it “stored-up” and “half-remembered” for decades.16 ‘Confusion

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9 Sedgwick, ‘Tennyson’s Princess: One Bride for Seven Brothers’, *Between Men*, 118–133.
of Tongues’, meanwhile, was published in the play-script style of Sedgwick and Moon’s better-known ‘Divinity’ essay, the essay’s title deriving from a psychoanalytic article that represented a significant source for Sedgwick’s narrative poems: Sándor Ferenczi’s ‘Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child: The Language of Tenderness and of Passion’ (1932). Sedgwick and Moon’s exchange begins with, and often features, their speaking as Whitman without quotation marks. In so doing, the essay consciously follows Louisa Whitman’s epistolary poetics, her lack of “marks of punctuation, except for a rare close parenthesis”; a confusion of tongues that was one of Sedgwick’s favourite poetic idioms, as we shall see, as a means of exploring the play of “intense identifications and dis-identifications” amongst poets, critics, and others.

But poetry, generally, was central to Sedgwick’s literary criticism and too-little-known work as both a poet and fibre artist, with genres of interest including haiku, lyric, and narrative poetry; soliloquies and dramatic monologues; prayers, hymns, and lullabies; grave, votary inscriptions and pseudo-inscriptions; pop and country songs as well as the blues; Bible and bedtime stories as well as bathroom songs; the fictional and factional, autobiographical, and literary critical; as well as the epistolary, novelistic and pornographic. Sedgwick’s texts and textiles are also dappled with the voices of Virgil, Dante, and Chaucer; Wyatt, Shakespeare, Traherne, and Spenser; Gryphius and Milton, Marvel and Lovelace, Pope and Cowper; with Bashō, Ryoho, and Saikuku; Choko, Fusen, and Saiba; Roshu and Kyotara;

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18 Ferenczi, Sándor. ‘Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child’ (1933), in Michael Balint, ed., *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Karnac, 1994), 156–167. The overlapping Ferenczian eroticism of children and adults finds an early articulation in the sonnet ‘To a Swimmer’, which compares the “wet forehead” and “straggling defiant hair” of a post-ejaculatory lover, to a fantasy of that same man as a “shivering schoolboy” just “out of the water” the day he won his school a race.
with Shelley and Keats; Wordsworth and the Lake Poets; von Scheffel, Blake, and Byron; with Rossetti and Bronte; the Brownings and Hopkins; Baudelaire, Swinburne and Tennyson; with Longfellow, Whitman, and Dickinson; with Kipling, Wilde, T.E. Lawrence, and Cavafy; with Yeats and Pound, Stevens and Eliot; Cummings, Auden, Frost and Stein; with Cornford, Plath, Bishop and Sexton; Riche, Gluck and Lorde; Jarrold and Winters; Merrill, Lynch, Gunn, and Fisher; as well as Dr. Seuss and Undermyer, and the lyrics of Folliott S. Pierpoint and Isaac Watts; Lorenz Hart, Yip Harburg, and George Gershwin; June Carter Cash and Loretta Lynn; Bessie Smith, Hank Williams, Woodie Guthrie, and Conway Twithey; with Dionne Warwick, Nina Simone, Carly Simon, and Sheena Easton.

Sedgwick’s most notorious and influential account of poetry is, certainly, ‘A Poem is Being Written’: her mid-eighties meditation on her own poetry. “Part of the motivation behind” the essay, Sedgwick acknowledged, was a “fantasy that readers or hearers would be variously — in anger, identification, pleasure, envy, ‘permission’” and “exclusion” be “stimulated to write accounts ‘like’ this one (whatever that means) of their own and share those”.[20] (The six contributors to Bathroom Songs have taken Sedgwick at her word, the first person looms large in this collection).

‘A Poem is Being Written’ explored examples of Sedgwick’s poetry within the context of her queer autobiography and, in so doing, provided a precedent for A Dialogue on Love. The essay also provided a provocative account of lyric and narrative poetry tout court, that changed the way many readers came to consider the foot, beat, and s/m erotics of meter; the straddling together and pushing apart of enjambment; and the cropped, immobilized tableau of the lyric and dilations of narrative verse. In addition, the essay printed a number of poems not included elsewhere in Sedgwick’s corpus: the now lost ‘Stillborn Child’ (1951) that she had written aged eleven; parts of ‘Lawrence Reads La Morte d’Arthur in the Desert’ (1964), written at thirteen and

included here in full for the first time; and a trio of poems from the mid-1970s, completed as she was finishing her Ph.D. at Yale: ‘Lost Letter’ (1974), ‘The Palimpsest’ (1974), and ‘Everything Always Distracts’ (1975), again printed here for the first time; as well as significant sections of ‘The Warm Decembers’, which she had been working on for the previous seven years.\(^{21}\) ‘The Palimpsest’ was originally published, alongside another uncollected poem reprinted here, ‘Explicit’, in the Winter 1975 issue of *Epoch*.\(^{22}\) At around the same moment, Sedgwick published three other poems, this time in *Poetry Miscellany*: ‘An Essay on the Picture Plane’, which she later included in *Fat Art, Thin Art*; as well as two more previously uncollected poems, collected here: ‘When, in Minute Script’ and ‘Ring of Fire’.\(^{23}\) Two years, earlier, in 1973, Sedgwick published another poem again collected here, ‘A Death by Water’, in the Fall 1973 issue of *Epoch*.\(^{24}\)

This did not, however, represent Sedgwick’s first foray as a published poet. During her undergraduate degree at Cornell (1967–1970), she published two poems in *Trojan Horse*, a student literary magazine. This was the first venue in which readers could access the later republished ‘Ring of Fire’ and an otherwise neglected poem, collected here for the first time: ‘Siegfried Rex von Munthe, Soldier and Poet, Killed December, 1939, on the Graf Spee’, which is one of a number of poems indicating Sedgwick’s interest in German poetry and cultural history, as we shall see.\(^{25}\)


\(^{24}\) Sedgwick, ‘A Death by Water’, *Epoch* 23.3 (Fall 1973), 78–79.

\(^{25}\) For more on Sedgwick’s time at Cornell, see Linda B. Glaser, ‘The College Years of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, A Founder of Queer Theory’, http://as.cornell.edu/college-years-eve-kosofsky-sedgwick-founder-queer-theory. I am grateful to Stuart Taberner for his help with Sedgwick’s German sources.
In addition to ongoing work on ‘The Warm Decembers’, Sedgwick continued to develop her poetic career across the two decades spanning the completion of her doctorate and the publication of *Between Men*. In the Winter of 1979, Salmagundi published ‘Sexual Hum’, a poem later collected in *Fat Art Thin Art.* In March 1980, Sedgwick published, in *Diacritics*, ‘Trace at 46’, a second, novella-length narrative poem. This was again collected in *Fat Art, Thin Art*, but a poem to which Sedgwick had drawn attention in *Between Men*, where she documented that, eight years earlier, she had been at work on a “narrative poem about a musicologist with a writer’s block”.

Whilst at work on *Between Men*, Sedgwick sought to develop her poetic profile further. In Winter 1984, she published ‘Sestina Lente’, in the *Massachusetts Review*, another poem collected into *Fat Art, Thin Art*. In 1986, she published ‘Selections from *The Warm Decembers*’ in the fall issue of *Raritan*. At some point before 1994, Sedgwick also published, on her Duke University homepage, a now-lost online resource, ‘Shame and Mourning: A Dossier’, to “catalyse some thoughts” on the topics of shame, mourning, and pedagogy, in the context of AIDS and “other identity-implicating illnesses”. This contained fifteen lyrics from what would be the first section of *Fat Art, Thin Art*, which was, then, still “forthcoming”; thus, the first appearance of ‘Joy! He’s himself today! He Knows Me!’, ‘Guys Who Were 35 Last Year Are 70 This’, ‘Grave, Never Offering Back The Face of My Dear’, ‘A Vigil’, ‘The Navajo Rug’, ‘The Use of Being Fat’, ‘For Years It Drove Me Crazy’, ‘Not Like The Clownish, Friendly Way You Talk’, ‘How Not To Be There’, ‘Mobility, Speech, Sight’, ‘A Scar, Just a Scar’, ‘Not’, ‘Nicht Mehr Leben’, and ‘Performative (Toronto)’ and ‘Performative (San Francisco)’.

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30 Sedgwick, ‘Selections from *The Warm Decembers*’, *Raritan* 6.2 (Fall 1986).
Meanwhile, in 1994, the year that *Fat Art, Thin Art* finally came out, Sedgwick published two lyrics excepted from that volume. ‘Our’ was published on September 25, 1994 in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, while ‘Penn Central: New Haven Line’ was printed on October 2 in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, presumably to advertise the publication of *Fat Art, Thin Art*.\(^{32}\)

Sedgwick published just four more poems during her lifetime, all collected here. January 1996 saw the publication of the much-loved queer bedtime-story-cum-performance poem ‘Pandas in Trees’ in *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*.\(^{33}\) A ‘Performing Reparation’ special issue of the same journal was also the place where Sedgwick published her last three poems in July 2006: the Virgilian/Cavafian ‘Forsan et haec olim Meinisse juvabit’ (‘Perhaps this, too, will be a pleasure to look back on one day’), to which we shall return, as well as ‘Death’, and ‘Bathroom Song’, the poem that gives this volume its title.\(^{34}\)

**Fat Art, Thin Art?**

Sedgwick’s first collection of poetry, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, featured three different genres of poems, each prepared for by one of Sedgwick’s essays on poetry. Part I of the book, written during the therapy she subsequently described in *A Dialogue on Love*, is primarily comprised of a form peculiar to her: a kind of loosely-rhymed, thirteen-line, ‘thin’, sonnet-like/sonnet-light, or lost-sonnet form, whose titles, internal line breaks, or blank lines suggest or replace the ascetically missing fourteenth line. A sequence of three ‘fatter’ lyrics, concerned with Sedgwick’s husband and big sister, incorporate a ‘greedy’ fifteenth line. Alternatively, the ‘additional’ line of ‘Little kid at the airport practicing’

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may be a sign that Sedgwick is keen to signal that she is “clumsy with servitude”, like the three-year old described in the poem, who, similarly, can’t quite master form.\textsuperscript{35} ‘In dreams they’re interchangeable’, meanwhile, thematises, in both its sentences and form, a “mauled and mauling” poetic foot,\textsuperscript{36} whilst the fifteenth line of ‘Our’ perhaps marks the emphatic presence, outside the predominant couple logic of the poem itself, of the theatrically included/excluded single person. Sedgwick had prepared her readers for these sonnet-like forms through her earlier essay on Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{37}

Part II of \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art} contained six earlier, pornographic lyrics of the kind Sedgwick prepared her readers for in ‘A Poem is Being Written’. These included the part art-historical, part-literary-theoretical ‘An Essay on the Picture Plane’ (1973), considered in a poignant, autobiographical essay, in this volume, by Angus Brown; and part of a wider intertextual and interdisciplinary practice, across Sedgwick’s work. For example, ‘Penn Central: New Haven Line’ (1972) contains an epigraph from Northrop Frye, which, like the ‘Last Poem of Y*r W*nt*r’s’, collected here for the first time, suggests the intimate relationship between Sedgwick’s lyrics and New Critical theories of close reading.\textsuperscript{38} ‘Everything Always Distracts’ and ‘Sexual Hum’ (both 1975), meanwhile, employ a tercet stanza form, derived from Shelley via Swinburne, which finds an echo in Sedgwick’s earlier ambitious desire to provide an ending for Shelley’s ‘The

\begin{enumerate}
\item Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 31.
\item Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 32.
\item In addition, the first section of \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art} includes a number of even fatter and thinner lyrics: ‘In dreams on which decades of marriage haven’t’ possesses 22 lines; ‘A Vigil’ contains 41 lines; whilst ‘Crushed. Dilapidated’ contains an appropriately compressed eight lines; and ‘When I got so sick it never occurred to me’ a diminished 7. Part I also includes a long, dedicatory poem, ‘Who Fed This Muse?’ considered, in this volume, in breathtaking essays by Kathryn R. Kent and Mary Baine Campbell.
\item For more on Sedgwick in the context of the close reading tradition, see Angus Connell Brown, \textit{Between Lines: Close Reading, Quotation, and Critical Style from Practical Criticism to Queer Theory}, Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 2014.
\end{enumerate}
Triumph of Life’ (1822), reprinted for the first time here. Such poems reveal a career-long preference for various, three-line forms that Sedgwick would return to in the haiku-rich A Dialogue on Love and across her fibre art work.

The two groups of lyrics, which move backwards in queer time from the mid-1990s, in part one of Fat Art, Thin Art, to the mid-1970s, in part two, are woven together with a third genre, another Sedgwick specialty. This is the novella-length narrative poem, in the form of both ‘Trace at 46’, in section II, and ‘The Warm Decembers’, in section III, which Sedgwick had again prepared her readers for in her essay on Tennyson’s narrative poem, The Princess (1847). We turn to these narrative poems next, to explore the close inter-relationship, in Sedgwick’s oeuvre, of poetry and theory.

‘Trace at 46’, or Sedgwick’s Grammatological Poetics

In her afterword to ‘The Warm Decembers’, Sedgwick documented that one of her primary motivations had been to explore the ways in which the “most writerly writing” and “thinkerly thinking” were not “generically alien to each other”. Her two novella-length narrative poems, ‘Trace at 46’ and ‘The Warm Decembers’ are, perhaps, the place where the genres of poetry and theory rub up against each other most fruitfully. For example, it is evident, from its title alone, that there may a relationship between ‘Trace at 46’ and Jacques Derrida’s meditation on the ‘trace’ in De la grammatologie (1967). Indeed, during the time that Sedgwick began working on ‘Trace’, in the mid-1970s,

39 For more on Swinburne’s poetic fascination with s/m, see John Vincent’s ‘Flogging is Fundamental: Applications of Birch in Lesbia Brandon’ in Sedgwick, ed., Novel Gazing, 269–298.


41 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 160.
not only was the English translation of Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* published in 1976, but Derrida took up a post at Yale in 1975, the year in which Sedgwick was appointed to a year-long lectureship in New Haven, having already worked with a number of Yale School deconstructionists, strongly influenced by Derrida, including Paul De Man, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller, who had chaired her doctoral committee.

Given the necessary brevity of this section, it is impossible to trace in full the complex relationship between these two texts, particularly given the emphatically ‘writerly’ writing of Derrida and Sedgwick and that the word ‘trace’ appears more than 200 times in *Of Grammatology*. But a number of broad areas of overlap are worth emphasizing. Both texts are concerned with what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her translator’s preface to the English edition of *Of Grammatology*, calls “the structure of knowing”, and are interested in, but also challenge, what Spivak calls “the self-moving activity of cognition”.

‘Trace’ and *Grammatology* also both want to think about what Derrida calls the dissemination of ideas, idioms, and textures, which open, in others, the possibility of different thoughts. In Sedgwick’s case, this is evident in the diffusion, across Trace’s familial, social and sexual circles of his interest in water, silk, and costume jewellery; “walkiness”, Gamelan music, and French composers Gabriel Faure, and Claude Debussy; and similar osmoses across professional practices including poetry, psychoanalysis, literary criticism, anthropology, musical composition, and musicology.

Indeed, ‘Trace’ and *Of Grammatology* share a particular passion for musical and sonic traces. Trace himself is a musi-
cologist whilst Cissy, one of his lovers, is a composer, and the poem’s interest in translations from musicology to music, from anthropology to composition, and from Javanese to European music, all function as emblems of Derrida’s broad interest in the “sonorous”.45

In addition, “Trace” shares Derrida’s interest in what he calls the “fabric of the trace”,46 with Cissy trying to capture a “lure into texture, a texture not of contingency / or the lapse of other structure”, but the

ubiquity on every surface
of every structure, waiting for the graze
of any tangent of attention, to grow
at once traceable, salient, thirsty[;]47

the last three words giving the title to Sedgwick’s rejected first book of poetry.

‘Trace at 46’, however, adds a more emphatically feminist-relational texture to the precise question of what it means to be in relation to a ‘trace’ and, in the poem, to a person named Trace, who is preoccupied, absent minded, and only more-or-less relationally and ethically motivated.48 As such, the poem’s eponymous hero represents a perverse anthropomorphisation of a Derridean trace, who is, similarly, both there and “not there”; both the thing people think they want and “not that”; and a person with a now more or less vestigial penis, whose body is filling in, “he supposes, / with femaleness”, and so a witty emblem of the (tacitly Lacanian) “lack at the origin” of the Derridean trace.49

Indeed, the poem might be understood as a kind of queer, novella-length exploration of what Spivak calls the “trace-

45 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 65, 123.
46 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 65.
47 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 66.
48 For Derrida’s discussion of the trace and its “immotivation” and “demotivation”, see Of Grammatology, 51. For his discussion of its “presence-absence”, see 71.
49 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 43; Spivak, Of Grammatology, xvii.
structure of expression”, or what Derrida characterizes as “the concept” or “problematic of the trace”; especially as that intersects with the “structure of the relationship with the other” in Trace’s strained relationships with his mother and lovers.

And I say queer because, in addition to Trace booty-calling his mother and addressing her as “Pussy”, like Derrida, Sedgwick is interested in what he calls the “a priori space-time of the trace” in which “there is neither pure activity nor pure passivity”, a space that Sedgwick would later describe as “the middle ranges of agency”.

Finally, tracks, footprints, and furrows recur in both texts, with an anthropological passion for the lines made by various mammals across the landscape. For example, citing Claude Levi-Strauss, Derrida documents that “the furrow is the line, as the plough-man traces it”, and reminds us that “writing is born with agriculture”. ‘Trace’ ends with a scene, supposedly derived from Javanese anthropology, and a sentence “furrowed — trenched, really” in the “rolling grass” visible only to the reader and “a high and distant viewer”: a sentence revealing that a Trace-like male protagonist has been absent-mindedly raped, a “silver” snail-“trail” of semen disseminating from his rectum. In addition, whilst Derrida focuses on a “crude trail”, in Levi-Strauss, “whose ‘track’ is not easily distinguished from the bush”, but a path that was “broken”, “beaten” and “inscribed violently” in the “natural, savage […] forest”, and upon “wood as matter”, towards the end of ‘Trace’, we encounter a further faux-Javanese anthropological scene in which “two sibling mouse-deer” are “each nailed / by [their] hind paws halfway up one tree”;

50 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 68, 70.
51 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 47
52 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 290.
53 For more, see The Weather in Proust, 89–93.
55 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 70–71.
short, characteristic fur ruffled but
not broken, blood tugging against its own
viscosity to mark a trail from nostril or lips
to a stream that runs nearby from which these two tongues
have supped.57

Sedgwick's long, *enjambed* sentence here both articulates the
connectivity of the various *humanimal* traces, and emphati-
cally breaks up the phrase as the deer are themselves rent apart,
scenes of animal abjection explored in this volume, in the con-
text of Sedgwick's ‘The Warm Decembers’, in Ben Westwood's
ethically-important essay.

*Bathroom Songs? Ferenczi and the Urethral Eroticism of ‘The
Warm Decembers’*

No woman knows where
her urethra is, but only some
hot floating place, at other times
imperceptible, somewhere between uterus and clitoris.

— ‘The Warm Decembers’\(^8\)

The title of Sedgwick and Moon’s ‘Confusion of Tongues’ es-
say on Whitman derived, as we have seen, from a 1932 article
by Ferenczi. In ‘A Poem is Being Written’, Sedgwick pointed to
the importance of the essay to ‘Trace’, documenting that she
had been thinking of Ferenczi’s contributions to the “contro-
versy around the seduction theory” during the poem’s composi-
tion, and deriving, from the analyst, a “lot of language”.\(^9\) She
also documented that, eight years earlier, in 1977, she had been
writing a narrative poem that “included a little literary joke: a
fictional psychoanalyst in the poem was writing a fictional es-

57 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 69.
58 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 112.
59 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 198–199. The discussion of Ferenczi in the ‘Confu-
sion of Tongues’ essay is on p. 27.
say for *Thalassa: A (fictional) Journal of Genitality*, on the then-fictional topic of “Sustained Homosexual / Panic and Literary Productiveness” that featured “close readings from *Our Mutual Friend*”. Sedgwick noted that, whilst it “didn’t amount to much of a joke”, it did “record the slightly incredulous beginnings” of her thinking about the “present project, and their inextricability from a reading of late Dickens”.

But if Sedgwick here emphasizes her poetry as the matrix of her later queer literary theory, the passage is significant in another way, particularly in its reference to *Thalassa*; in ‘Trace’ the name of the fictional journal, in reality the name of another Ferenczi text. *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* (1938) focused attention on what Ferenczi characterized as the “urethral individual” and on the “original urethrality” predating the sexual resonance of the genitals. Prioritizing “urethral […] autoeroticism”, Ferenczi characterized the “ejaculation of semen” as a “urethral phenomenon”, and made clear that women could also gain “pleasure from emptying the bladder”.

In ‘Trace’, Sedgwick clearly alluded to Ferenczi’s text, when she had the wittily named Flo attend a “seaside conference organized / by the editors of *Thalassa: A Journal of Genitality*”. Flo, herself, meanwhile, is a character who enjoys a “free-floating attention” that is characterized by “lapses / of meaning and wellings-up / of excess meaning”, as well as “aggressive floodings”, in the aqueous context of St Malo, in Brittany, with its “regular thalassic irrigation, then deletion, of rocks, causeways, / fortifications, outline”.

But Flo isn’t the only character in Sedgwick’s poetic novellas with thalassic interests. ‘Trace’ begins, as we have seen, with the eponymous central character “naked on the toilet”, “brooding over himself / in his mother’s bathroom”.

To date, scholars have focused on Sedgwick’s anality, and the poem that lends this volume its title, Sedgwick’s last lyric, ‘Bathroom Song’, depicts just

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63 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 43.
that: with the poet sending her shit down the toilet, to Grandma and, tacitly, to grandpa, the aptly named Poopie,\textsuperscript{64} as part of a meditation on dispensing with (parts of) the self, as death approaches. But, if focused on the more difficult task of “Letting go of Number Two”, the poem is not oblivious to Number One. It acknowledges that, at an earlier age than she could defecate on cue, Sedgwick could “tinkle in the loo”, even if she found shitting in the bathroom, rather than in her “potty” or “pyjama” a “wee bit more forbidding”\textsuperscript{65} And Sedgwick’s pun on “wee”, a Scottish colloquialism meaning ‘a little’, reminds us of a related idiom in \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, when Sedgwick revealed how she loved

to be sealed with my
favourite pronoun: the dear
first person plural.

Indeed, it “never surprised” Sedgwick that \textit{Oui} “in French, means yes”, and, “even in adulthood”, she was “addicted to the word”. The chapter climaxes with a haiku on the subject of we/e that was, not so secretly, “a matter of pride” to Sedgwick:

\begin{quote}
Promiscuous we!
Me, plus anybody else.
Permeable we!\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

The haiku, perhaps tangentially, but wittily, refers back to a seventeenth-century poem by Sedgwick’s most prestigious predecessor in the form, Bashō, who, in \textit{The Narrow Road to the Deep North}, documented that

\begin{quote}
Bitten by flies and lice,
I slept in a bed,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{64} For more on Poopie, see Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 209.
\textsuperscript{65} Sedgwick, \textit{The Weather in Proust}, xv.
\textsuperscript{66} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 106.
A horse urinating all the time
Close to my pillow.67

With such texts in mind, Between Men is, perhaps, most notorious for insisting that “Our Mutual Friend is the only English novel that everyone says is about excrement in order that they may forget that it is about anality”.68 But Sedgwick’s oeuvre may be the only queer theoretical corpus that everyone says is about anality because they have not spotted that it’s also about urethrality.

For example, in ‘The Warm Decembers’, Sedgwick’s alter ego, Beatrix Protheroe, escaping from a boarding house owned by her uncle, and, running through the fens, is forced to urinate in public at night. Here, “over the finally cool”, “never thirsty enough clay”, and having held her urine in throughout a long day during which “the current of will” was “so little tolerant / of control”, Beatrix finally lets her urethral sphincter lapse, and “the burning, banked-up piss” splits the “uneven ground”, as the sound reverberates around the surrounding “sloppy landscape”.69 Beatrix’s nocturnal piss is deeply humiliating. “Never respectable”, she loses more respectability by the day, and “too shy (of course) to urinate in the light”, the painful sensation of her urine is the sign of an oncoming, crazy-making, urinary tract infection, which finally causes her to black out, only to awake back where she started: “undelirious” at home in Great Yarmouth. This causes Sedgwick to ponder if any women in the nineteenth century knew where their urethras were except as some “hot

67 Matsuo Bashō, The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches, ed. and trans. Nobuyuki Yuasa (London: Penguin, 1966), 120. See also Bashō’s account of a baby pissing (Narrow Road, 18). Sedgwick documents that her friend Josh Wilner was reading Bashō whilst she was writing Dialogue and that the two discussed his haibun and haiku projects (Dialogue, 194).
68 Sedgwick, Between Men, 164.
69 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 110–111.
floating place, at other times / imperceptible”, somewhere between “uterus and clitoris”.

Later in the poem, Sedgwick offers a second thalassic scene. In a passage recalling the painful, earlier Ferenczian scene of a child loving an adult, we are invited to imagine a

child wetting its bed
(and say the family’s poor, the beds are shared,
the washing’s done in buckets and by hand,
the drying sheet smothers the attic room)
whose crazy father then decides:
This is a child who ‘must not’ be given water.
Or, that it’s dangerous to let this child sleep,

the “parching child” waking to “violence or the expensive wet that makes violence”. Somehow, this child “survives / and finds, somewhere, an art”. Which is to say, that this child’s road widens, and, somewhere, not quite over the rainbow, but certainly away from Great Yarmouth and London, in Beatrix’s case — and, from Dayton Ohio and Washington D.C., in Sedgwick’s — the child finds poetry, a golden treasure in relation to which the author has a bladder-like “vacant, distended, paper-light globe / called ‘gratitude’”, which “fills up the inner space / (gratitude as it were for water and for sleep)”.

Taken together, these scenes recall one of Sedgwick’s most evocative pieces of fibre art: ‘I borrow moonlight for this jour-

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70 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 110–113. The passage recalls the moment, in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856), when Marian Erle’s similar attempt to escape her own painful family situation results in her fainting, only to wake up the following morning, “ware / Of heavy tumbling motions, creaking wheels”, and with the “cruel yellow morning” similarly “peck[ing] at her”, except that, in spite of the “oozing” cruel yellow, it is Marian’s *heart*, rather than her *bladder*, which, the night before had, “Kept swelling, swelling, till it swelled so big / It seemed to fill her body” and then “burst, / And overflowed the world, and swamped the light” (Book III, lines 1082–1105). I am grateful to Ben Westwood and Carolyn Williams for drawing my attention to parallels with Barrett Browning.

ney of one million miles’, which combines the text of a Japanese death poem with the moonlight of Beatrix’s moonlit flit, and the familiar, traumatizing, spreading yellow of urine across a child’s bed-sheet. But Sedgwick’s work includes paranoid and reparative thalassic scenes.

For example, *The Warm Decembers* documents the painful, interruptive scene of the “fire hose in the Alabama town” pissing all over the “glistening offal” of its black citizens protesting their civil rights, the “water’s eye / washing itself away”, and the “wrenching pulses” of “the current, / in a beheaded coil, waver-\[\ldots\]g and swollen” able to “pull your legs from under you like / the running noose” of a lynching. But the poem is also responsive to the solitary, melancholy, but aesthetic and corporeal pleasures of pissing and of the body and landscape’s water cycles.\textsuperscript{72} Chapter 2 depicts the now grown-up Beatrix taking photographs of a twilight, equinoctial, December landscape where “mud silt in a slow river” is “alimenting some passage of countryside”\textsuperscript{73} whilst the poem later conjures a landscape in which a “puddle of night in a hollow / of bright lawn, all day anxiously deforming” is eccentric toward the grassy lip at dawn, then shrinking southward and into the roots, and then, at noon, like mercury, dissembled to winking atoms, bridling in the afternoons one little knob, brimming from that up every grass to where the golden shield of the evening crushed it level — this plot of striving shadow, daily rolled around the grassy mouth, never could reach it over those shallow hummock lips; no, not by the breadth of one fine blade; never, until

\[\ldots\]


\textsuperscript{73} Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 95.
there leapt across the spread of grass and air
writ large, the earth’s shadow, darkness, that had
no shadow, but washing downward embraced
the pool that leapt up into it.74

The poem’s landscape is, of course, suggestively feminine and
bodily. Fluids emerge from a urethral “little knob” and flow
over “grassy”, “hummock lips”, filling and overflowing from a
vulnerable, vaginal space—“no, not by the breadth” recalling
the anguished, but resilient cry of the three little pigs threatened
by the wolf at their door: “no, not by hairs on my chinny chin”.
But, if the threat of rape is never far from the women in
the poem, the landscape scene also recalls a happier, queerer,
all-male watering hole. That is the one depicted in the final,
detumescent, post-coital lines of the famous bathing scene in
chapter 12 of E.M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (1908), when
“that evening and all that night the water ran away” and when,
“On the morrow the pool had shrunk to its old size and lost its
glory”. Anticipating Sedgwick’s description of Beatrix’s “current
of will so little tolerant / of control, will so local”, Forster’s pool
had also formerly been a “call to the blood and to the relaxed
will, / a passing benediction where influence did not pass, / a
holiness, a spell, a momentary chalice for youth”.75

Having now considered some of the key forms and themes
of Sedgwick’s first book of poetry, we turn, in the next section,
to her second.

**The Haiku Book, or, *A Dialogue*, with Merrill and Others, on
Love**

Five years after the publication of *Fat Art, Thin Art*, Sedgwick’s
adopts a haibun form: the part-prose, part-haiku genre popu-
larized, in melancholy and mournful travel narratives, by Bashō,

into implosions
of starlike density or
radiance, then out

into a prose that’s never quite not the poetry”. Before Merrill, she confessed, she had “never really got haiku as a short form”, finding it “precious, insipid”. But Merrill’s haibun felt “so different”, where “sweeping into and through” his “arias” were “silent impasses” and “the fat, buttery condensations and inky dribbles of the mind’s laden brush”; a delicious description recalling the repeated comparisons, in Bashō, of his haiku with traditional Japanese forms of painting, which the poet practiced.

Talking to Wilner about Merrill’s haibun, Sedgwick thought of it as a “possible form” for documenting her therapy. It was a way to evoke her intimate, inter-subjective relation with Van Wey that was more appropriate than the “bathetic” form of the complaint or the “triumphalis[t]” genre of the “fixated” case history, offering instead something combining the novelistic, “where you needn’t know in advance what the subject” would

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66 For examples by Bashō, see The Narrow Road; for Merrill’s ’Prose of Departure’, see Collected Poems (New York: Knopf, 2002), 541–560.
67 Sedgwick, A Dialogue on Love, 194. The word “spangle” echoes Sedgwick’s ‘1001 Seances’ essay which described how Ephraim’s “small capitals […] spangle the printed poem” (459). The word “spangle” also appears in The Book of Ephraim in the discussion of Ellen’s “spangled, spotlit twin” (cited in Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 469).
be; and the lyric, with its “melody” and “white space”.\(^79\) Indeed, *A Dialogue on Love* makes belatedly clear how important how the “narrative space of therapy” and its “transferenceal stuff” had been to Sedgwick’s poetic project all along,\(^80\) and especially to the novella poems, that had already featured free associations, accounts of dreams, Freudian slips, the practice of looking back at old family photographs, and deeply inter-subjective relationships, as we have seen, as well, in the case of the uncollected poem, ‘Die Sommernacht hat mir’s angethan’, an addressee called ‘Tim’, a repeated interlocutor in Sedgwick’s later memoir.\(^81\)

Like many genres Sedgwick explored, the haibun aesthetic she adopted in *A Dialogue on Love* is mostly, but never entirely, systematic. Unlike Merrill, Sedgwick did not feel constrained to rhyme the first and third lines of her haiku. Thus, whilst she referred to *Dialogue* as her “POETRY BOOK” and “haiku book”,\(^82\) and although she was committed to the haiku form, she repeatedly bent it to her own ends. For instance, in Chapter 4, Sedgwick maintained the 17-syllable pattern of the traditional haiku, but dispensed with its three-line construction, employing a characteristic *enjambment* to split and pause the second line. Explaining to Van Wey how much she had been through, she noted that there was “only one phrase I want to hear”:

> ‘That’s enough. You can stop now.
> Stop: living, that is.
> And *enough*: hurting.\(^83\)

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\(^81\) For addresses to Tim, see *A Dialogue on Love*, 103, 118–120, 125–126. In giving this title to the poem, I follow the 1853 German original by Joseph Viktor von Scheffel. Sedgwick’s handwritten manuscript has the slightly variant ‘Die Sommer Nacht hat mir’s angethan’, whilst the title of the typed version is ‘Die Sommer Nacht Hat Mir’s Angethan’. I am grateful to Hal A. Sedgwick for establishing the precise composition history of the poem.
Then, immediately afterwards, in the next section, whilst continuing to meditate on the same phrase, Sedgwick included a haiku-like, three-line form, but with each line representing a complete, multi-, but not necessarily 17-syllable, sentence:

At least, it means that in my native land.
Five miles across the border, phrasebooks say, it’s different.
There, it’s a way that parents calm their kids.  

Similar moments occur in Chapter 10, where Sedgwick emphasized the prose, rather than poetry-like form of her overall text, by inserting a paragraph tab-length break into the last stanza of her haiku sequence:

I tell Shannon — like
he couldn’t guess — that Buddhism’s
conscious love of
rest, death, nonbeing,
are more congenial to
me than the Western
heroic thrust for
individuation and
survival (which seems
plain phony to me).
I like the explanation
Robert Thurman gives […].

Across the gutter of the page, meanwhile, Sedgwick employed a second moment of pausing *enjambment* when, having just received the diagnosis that her cancer had metastasized, she described

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Phones just outside the
Clinic door.

Impermanence
Arrives so quickly!\textsuperscript{86}

Like a number of Sedgwick’s works, and like Bashō’s travel narratives, that frequently cite and allude to the haikus of past poets and present travelling companions,\textsuperscript{87} \textit{A Dialogue on Love} is effectively co-authored, with Van Wey’s notes increasingly taking centre stage, although unlike \textit{Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader} (1996), Sedgwick’s co-author’s name, does not appear on the spine, just as Bashō’s poetic interlocutors do not appear on his.\textsuperscript{88} Nevertheless, like many of Sedgwick’s poems, and especially the novella-length narratives, the book stands as a testament to her relationality, and emphasises ideas of inter-subjectivity;\textsuperscript{89} an idea succinctly captured when Van Wey, ventriloquizing Sedgwick, documents that “THE NOTES ARE TOLD MOSTLY FROM MY POINT OF VIEW”\textsuperscript{90}

But, as in Bashō’s account, a number of poetic forerunners haunt and accompany Sedgwick on her therapeutic journey. In addition to Merrill, we find Sedgwick translating Virgil,\textsuperscript{91} as she would do again in ‘Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit’. Readers find Sedgwick recalling the hymns of Watts and Pierpoint;\textsuperscript{92} remembering, with sadness, Cornford’s cruel 1910 poem, ‘To a Fat Lady Seen from the Train’;\textsuperscript{93} and citing Wyatt’s

\textsuperscript{86} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 209. For further examples, see \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 211, 217–218.
\textsuperscript{87} For example, see Bashō, \textit{The Narrow Road}, 68–70, 81–84, 94–95, 101, 116, 130, 138.
\textsuperscript{89} In \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, Sedgwick documented her desire to leave behind “A SENSE OF HER RELATIONALITY”, even as she was afraid that reading Van Wey’s notes risked ruining their actual relationship (198, 200).
\textsuperscript{90} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 200.
\textsuperscript{91} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 217–218.
\textsuperscript{92} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 16, 37.
\textsuperscript{93} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 193.
'I Find No Peace' (1557), in an indented, unrhymed, two-line couplet that again breaks with *Dialogue's* haibun form. In addition, Sedgwick warns her shrink not to reduce her language to psychoanalytic clichés. Thinking, perhaps, about the Biblical Saul or T.E. Lawrence, speakers of two of her previously uncollected dramatic monologues, Sedgwick frets that she will “have to thirst” again in the “stony / desert of the self”.

But if Sedgwick engages closely with Bashō’s haiku form, and with a wide variety of poets in her memoir, it is, perhaps, Merrill who she most channelled there.

**1001 Seances or The Book of Merrill**

Like *A Dialogue on Love*, Sedgwick’s earliest written, and most recently published, essay on poetry, ‘The 1001 Seances’, primarily concerns Merrill. Published in 2011 in a memorial issue of *GLQ* devoted to Sedgwick, the essay dates from c. 1976–1977, the period in which she was hard at work on ‘Trace’, and examines Merrill’s then-recently published narrative poem, *The Book of Ephraim* (1976). Like Sedgwick’s later volume of poems, *Traceable, Salient, Thirsty*, the essay was, bafflingly, declined when it was submitted to the journal *Salmagundi* in June 1977, but, undeterred, Sedgwick sent the essay to Merrill himself, who politely acknowledged its receipt.

The essay, however, represented only the first gambit in what Hal A. Sedgwick described as his wife’s sustained “interest in writing about Merrill over at least a twenty-year period from 1976–1996”. Like many of her essays on poetry, we might read ‘The 1001 Seances’ as a guide to the kind of poetry Sedgwick would write in the following decade. For example, there is a suggestive relationship between the ‘lost’ novel Merrill alludes to in *Book of Ephraim* and an uncollected Sedgwick poem collected here. The former concerns, in Sedgwick’s words, “the fate of a

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95 For more on the biographical context of the poem, see Sedgwick, ‘A Note’, 452.
river and waterfall in the south-western landscape whose flow is to be interrupted by the building of a power damn”, whilst Sedgwick’s ‘Another Poem from the Creaking Bed’, collected here, begins

    When the first white man rolled into Owens Valley
    Before Los Angeles needed the water, it was very green;
    and within even memory you drove by yourself
    in a truck over Westguard Pass from Bishop
    back to deep Springs.
    We can never, in the future, enter the valleys like that.

Another Merrill poem Sedgwick cites, to conclude the essay, ‘From the Cupola’, featuring “an intercalated novel”, an “intercalated typographic differential”, and “intrusions from the gods”, similarly haunts one of her later, collected poems. The end of Merrill’s poem describes how, in typing out his verse,

    My hands move. An intense,
    Slow-paced, erratic dance goes on below.
    I have received from whom I do not know
    These letters. Show me, light, if they make sense.97

Similarly, at the end of Sedgwick’s ‘A Vigil’, which commemorates the dying Fisher, and which concludes by citing his, rather than her, words, she focuses on how “the dance” of Fisher’s hands

    … begins again
    so elegant, and he specifies,
    “Inimitable.
    The dance is inimitable

because it is so refined
and it is going on at every level, all the time”.

Thus, just as Sedgwick thinks *The Book of Ephraim* “sounds autobiographical in Merrill’s characteristic way”, so does ‘The 1001 Seances’ vibrate with Sedgwick’s self-revelation, and thrills with her prospective, poetic ambition. For example, anticipating the emphatic white spaces of *A Dialogue on Love*, Sedgwick characterized *The Book of Ephraim* as “a spacing machine”; a poem that “provides spacing” by “writing the letters in the pointed-at order” and “by introducing spaces between groups of letters, making words”.

Similarly, just as Sedgwick expressed, towards the end of *Dialogue*, her wish to generate “a texture book” that “wouldn’t need a first person at all, any more than weaving itself does”, so ‘1001 Seances’ praises Ephraim’s “pure pointing in the absence of either a pointing subject (the cup stands in) or a pointed to object (the alphabet stands in)”.

Mostly, however, the essay anticipates the forms of Sedgwick’s two “poetic roman fleuve” novellas, ‘Trace at 46’ and ‘The Warm Decembers’.

Like *The Book of Ephraim*, both feature “two intercalated type cases”. Both play with forms of dialogue and inter-subjectivity in the absence of quotation marks, a characteristic Sedgwick concern as we have seen, making such language “formally distinct but not entirely self-contained”, “less conventional in import and more permeable to the contagion of surrounding tones

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100 Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 459–460. Later in the essay, Sedgwick defined the difference between the novelistic and poetic as a “highly charged interface between currents that differ not in their elements but in their spacing” (478).
102 Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 459. For a discussion of the deconstructive, as well as proto-Buddhist, sources of this desire, see Kent, ‘Surprising Recognition’, 503.
103 Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 479.
and grammars”.\(^{105}\) In addition, and like Sedgwick’s essay, which concerns *Ephraim* and two earlier novels by Merrill, both interleave “novelistic” and “poetic incident”;\(^ {106}\) narrative and lyric; more sociably “novelistic” and self-referentially “masturbatory” voices that “attempt to ‘do’ the same ‘subject matter’”, but also “interrupt one another”. And we know the former to be masturbatory and orgasmic because of the way such scenes are often followed by a more-or-less dreamy and “instant surrender to sleep”,\(^ {107}\) as at the free-associative end of Chapter 5 of *The Warm Decembers*.

However, if Sedgwick admired the way in which Merrill’s poetry articulated his “waxing and waning concentration”, as well as his polarities of “gassy expansion and succinct collapse”;\(^ {109}\) she also acknowledged that the “flow of his writing” could be both “awesome” and “awful”, and that its “real drama” occurred in moments of “arrest”.\(^ {110}\) Indeed, she specifically praised Merrill’s “explicit effort to stop the flow of the poem for an instant in order to give an account of it”, thinking that this was when his verse sounded best: “the instants when some resistance sends him back over the ground he has just covered, arresting the fluency of which he is rightly a little suspicious”.\(^ {111}\) In saying so, ‘1001 Seances’ provided a useful pointer to a number of Sedgwick’s uncollected poems, in which, like Merrill, Sedgwick was unafraid of employing language that is “remarkable for its weight and repetitiousness”, and whose “more than ordinarily” repetitive texture is designed to stop reader and writer from getting “carried away”, beyond the scene of poetic representation and of genre.\(^ {112}\) In addition, just as *Ephraim*’s ‘lost’ novel

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111 Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 475.
includes a character called Ellen,\textsuperscript{113} so is there is an Ellen in \textit{Uncle Miles}, the fictional novel within \textit{The Warm Decembers}; and, like Beatrix’s mother, in that same poem, Merrill’s Ellen “can neither reach nor exorcise” her husband.\textsuperscript{114}

Indeed, if ‘1001 Seances’ acknowledges a vanilla “queasiness in writing about intelligent pornography”,\textsuperscript{115} the essay nevertheless anticipates ‘A Poem is Being Written’ in a number of ways: in its concern with masturbation, castration, and urination; with the sexual “thrust” of poetic lines and the queer resonances of the “structural issues” of verse; and with tableau of punishment, centred on the protagonist, reader and writer’s temporal “expectancy” and spatial “attention” being “caught & held by 1000 details of the scene”.\textsuperscript{116}

Given this career-long identification with Merrill, it is no wonder that Sedgwick was delighted to discover, twenty years later, that she shared, with Van Wey, her love of a poet whose \textit{Ephraim} she often quoted in the sessions.\textsuperscript{117} The pair explicitly discussed Merrill’s death on February 7, 1995, when Van Wey, in Ephraim’s small-capitals script, documented Sedgwick’s sadness at the fact that “MERRILL DIED YESTERDAY”. Sedgwick then read

\begin{itemize}
  \item Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 469.
  \item Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 469.
  \item Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 465.\textsuperscript{116}
  \item Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 462–465, 473. For example, as \textit{Ephraim} makes clear, Sedgwick shared with Merrill her interest in the potential sadomasochistic implications of poetic rhythm, with Merrill describing how “Rod upon mild silver rod, like meter” was “broken in fleet cahoots with subject matter”. Like Sedgwick, Merrill is prone to urinary aesthetics, as “when the urge / Comes to make water, a thin brass-hot stream / Sails out into the updraft, spattering / One impotent old tree that shakes its claws. / The droplets atomise, evaporate” (\textit{The Changing Light at Sandover}, 20). Looking back on a sadomasochistic scene, meanwhile, one of Merrill’s characters reflects: “That orgy must never be repeated! — as with a moistened cloth I dab primly at my mind, where there are telltale signs” (cited in Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 464). This brings to mind Sedgwick’s discussion, in \textit{Epistemology of the Closet}, of how the “chalky rag of gender” was “pulled across the blackboard of sexuality” and the “chalky rag of sexuality across the blackboard of gender”, leaving a “cloudy space” from which to speak (239).
  \item Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 137. The passage she quotes can be found in \textit{The Changing Light}, 59–60.
\end{itemize}
part of Merrill’s poem ‘The Kimono’, from the same 1976 collection, *The Divine Comedies*, that contained *Ephraim*, particularly the three haiku-like lines which encourage them both to

Keep talking while I change into  
The pattern of a stream  
Bordered with rushes white on blue.\textsuperscript{118}

In the midst of what Lynch called “these waves of dying friends”,\textsuperscript{119} or what Sedgwick, in a related more Spenserian idiom, described as the “great, upwelling flux of mutability” attendant upon the illnesses and deaths of so many of her poetic peers, Sedgwick’s poetry “had returned”, and she was emerging “a different person”, which is the title of Merrill’s own 1993 psychoanalytic memoir, to which we shall return.\textsuperscript{120} Indeed, one might read *A Dialogue on Love* as a book-length equivalent, for Merrill, of the famous ‘White Glasses’ obituary Sedgwick wrote for Lynch, or as a kind of parallel necromancy, of Merrill, akin to the poet and his lover David Jackson’s raising from the dead Ephraim, W.H. Auden, and others. Or, with *Ephraim* in mind, we might choose to read *Dialogue* as offering its readers what Merrill describes there as his “executive privilege vis-à-vis / Transcripts of certain private hours with E”, where E, for Merrill, is the medium Ephraim, but where E, in *A Dialogue*, is Van Wey’s shorthand for Eve.\textsuperscript{121}

Indeed, Sedgwick tacitly gives not just Van Wey but, through him, Merrill, the last word in *Dialogue*. On the final page, Van Wey recalls Sedgwick telling him earlier how she waited, throughout

\textsuperscript{118} Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love*, 188–189.  
\textsuperscript{120} Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love*, 136. Merrill himself uses the phrase repeatedly in his memoir. For examples, see *A Different Person*, 460 and 537,  
\textsuperscript{121} Merrill, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, 41. Just as Van Wey gives Sedgwick access to his session notes, so, in *Ephraim*, “D lets me have the notes he made”, while Merrill “went to [his] ex-shrink / With the whole story” (*The Changing Light at Sandover*, 27, 29). Similarly just as Van Wey warms to Sedgwick’s “talents” (*The Changing Light at Sandover*, 72), so Ephraim warms to those of Merrill and Jackson (cited in Sedgwick, ‘1001 Nights’, 460).
her life, for someone to tell her she can “STOP NOW — E.G. DIE”. She increasingly imagines him “DOING THIS SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE” and she “TALKS ABOUT HAVING COME TO BE ABLE TO HEAR A VOICE LIKE [HIS] VOICE INSIDE HERSELF WHEN IT IS QUIET THAT SHE CAN TRUST AND HAVE CONFIDENCE IN”. In the final sentence of the book, Shannon “CAN IMAGINE THE VOICE TELLING HER SHE CAN STOP”. In both of their minds, however, that voice cannot just be Sedgwick’s, or Van Wey’s. It must also be Merrill’s. After all, in Ephraim, hadn’t Merrill asked his medium “Can we stop now please?” before his queer-little-god replied, with a reassuringly tacit yes: “U DID WELL JM.”

But Ephraim does not just echo across Dialogue. It reverberates across Sedgwick’s narrative poetry. In ‘The Warm Decembers’, there is a further parallel between the moment, in Ephraim, where Merrill, alluding to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s 1850 poem, hopes that he and his lover, David Jackson, will “both be reborn” which “at least spares one / Dressing up as the Blessed Damozel / At Heaven’s Bar to intervene”; and the moment in Uncle Miles where Ellen, thinking of her now dead uncle and his then mistress, wonders “Was this woman, that woman? / Companion to the bulky, handsome man / got up as the Blessed Damozel…?” Indeed, one might see Ephraim as the urtext of both ‘The Warm Decembers’ and ‘Trace at 46’s interest in forms which, in Sedgwick’s words, focus on “ontological thresholds” between “a person alive and dead; a person and a photograph; a sister and a sister; a present and a past; a person child and adult; people with the same name; a happening and the dream of it; a writer (or a

123 Merrill, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, 43. The passage in which “Whatev-er E imagined”, Merrill’s novel “didn’t / Press back enough, or pressed back against him” (66) also speaks to the moment when Sedgwick more successfully “push[es] Van Wey] backward” (*A Dialogue on Love*, 93–94). Sedgwick also wonders of one of her own characters, “What did I once think these two would feel”, noting that Merrill has an identical question at an “analogous juncture” (*Fat Art, Thin Art*, 154; *The Changing Light at Sandover*, 84; and as quoted by Sedgwick, ‘1001 Seances’, 474).
125 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 127.
model) and a character; an I and a she or he”, and the “perverse, desiring energies that alone can move across them”; especially since Ephraim asks its interlocutors to “Trace me back to some loud, shallow, chill, / Underlying motive’s overspill”.

Before completing our exploration of Merrill’s repeated haunting of Sedgwick’s corpus, however, we need to explore one last, to-date unattributed Merrill intertext for Dialogue: his 1993 memoir, A Different Person, a phrase Sedgwick explicitly employed, as we have seen, in her autobiography.

A Succulent Mouse to Lay at My Master’s Door? A Dialogue on Love as Merrillian Memoir

Like the earlier Book of Ephraim, Merrill remained interested, in A Different Person, his later autobiography, in employing various fonts to signal different narrative voices, with each chapter composed of regular type for the main story, and italics to signal his present-tense reflections and addresses to the reader.

In addition, Merrill intermittently employed capitalised fonts, when conveying headlines — “RECITANO BAUDELAIRE VESTITI DA COWBOYS” — and when describing the sign of a shop he’d never “found open, its dark window dingily lettered in gold: LUST’S BAKERY”.

127 Merrill, The Changing Light at Sandover, 33. In addition, the poem wonders “what / Traces, if any” a character “will then transmit / To her own offspring” when she reaches puberty (The Changing Light at Sandover, 18). Another spirit’s “gibbous moans”, meanwhile, anticipate the “gibbous belly” of the punakawan that ends “Trace at 46” (Fat Art, Thin Art, 67).
128 Sedgwick, ’The 1001 Seances’, 480. As Merrill explains early in the memoir, he would employ a “different typeface for the person I became”; a person who “will break in at chapter’s end with glimpses beyond my time frame”. Later, he notes that being “italicised” was a response to feeling “more elegantly slanted now, more emphatically set upon the world’s page, than the blunt type of a year or two earlier” (‘A Different Person: A Memoir’ [1993], in J.D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, eds., Collected Prose [New York: Knopf, 2004], 467, 665–666).
129 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 460, 482.
Like *A Dialogue on Love*, *A Different Person* is also the account of a productive psychoanalysis with a therapist who initially seems under-skilled. Just as Sedgwick criticized Van Wey for wondering where the metaphor “Fasten your seatbelt” came from and judged him for “mispronounc[ing] / folie a deux”;\(^{130}\) so Merrill “silently congratulat[e]s Dr Detre on having returning from his seaside holiday with a metaphor” and describes his relation to Ephraim as a “folie a deux”.\(^{131}\) Again like *Dialogue*, Merrill’s memoir is the product of an encounter with mortality — in Merrill’s case, his diagnosis with HIV, in Sedgwick’s with breast and spine cancer — and both ponder what Merrill calls the “slow erosion” of a “once military spine to a fragile question mark”.\(^{132}\) In addition, just as *Dialogue* details Sedgwick’s painful writer’s block and results in the return of her muse, *A Different Person* leads to Merrill’s renewed ability to write.\(^{133}\)

Indeed, there are so many moments of dialogue between Merrill and Sedgwick that *A Different Person* sometimes seems to be addressed to her. Merrill more than once employs the phrase *Between Men*, suggesting he might have read her book.\(^{134}\) Like Sedgwick, in ‘A Poem is Being Written’, Merrill discusses his own poetic schooling in “Louis Untermeyer’s anthology”.\(^{135}\) The pair share a fondness for the “finger’s-breadth” as a unit of measurement;\(^{136}\) a tendency to find themselves in Faure;\(^{137}\)

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\(^{130}\) Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 21.

\(^{131}\) Merrill, *A Different Person*, 659; *The Changing Light at Sandover*, 30.

\(^{132}\) Merrill, *A Different Person*, 597.

\(^{133}\) Merrill, *A Different Person*, 555, 669.

\(^{134}\) For example, see *A Different Person*, 567, where physical intimacy is “of course [...] unthinkable between men”; and Dr. Detre’s account of how “sex between men is by its character frustrating”, since “[t]he anus is full of shit; the mouth is a well of flattery and untruth” and “the honest penis is left with no reliable place to go” (640).

\(^{135}\) Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 181–182, 208; Merrill, *A Different Person*, 468.

\(^{136}\) See Merrill’s description of a “finger’s-breadth of wine” (*A Different Person*, 548) and Sedgwick’s of “the finger’s-breadth by finger’s-breadth / dearly bought knowledge / of the body’s lived humiliations, / dependencies, vicarities / that are stitched into the book / of The Sexualities, wasteful / and value-making specificity” (*Fat Art, Thin Art*, 149).

an interest in popular T-shirt culture;\textsuperscript{138} a passion for Randell Jarrell;\textsuperscript{139} and an aversion to injections;\textsuperscript{140} as well as a predilection towards the aesthetics of the fat, the thin, and the flat.\textsuperscript{141} Sedgwick and Merrill also both describe their experience of spanking as children,\textsuperscript{142} and their strict, premature toilet training regime, with Merrill describing how he had been “so strictly trained in childhood to perform ‘number two’ each day or face the consequences (enemas, laxatives)” that he dragged himself “each morning to the toilet across the hall, where Herculean labours produced a few blood-smeared votive pellets”. Later, when bowel troubles emerge, Merrill is confronted by a doctor who “asked his one question (‘Avez-vous fait quelque chose ce matin?’)”. The poet is “able to answer with a feeble but proud ‘Oui’”, a resonant word for Sedgwick, as we have seen.\textsuperscript{143} In addition, like Sedgwick, Merrill is interested in medicalised, coerced-consent scenes where he is forced to “drop [… his] pants”, as, for example, when he suffers from haemorrhoids.\textsuperscript{144}

Both Sedgwick and Merrill are also preoccupied with family photographs in the context of their therapies. Merrill notices that “Snapshots from years before” his parents’ “divorce tell how something had already turned one brave, unlettered little boy astride a gigantic stallion into a sissy of six, posed, hands folded and ankles crossed, at the slide’s foot”.\textsuperscript{145} In addition, in phrases that precisely anticipate Sedgwick’s account of her photographer

\textsuperscript{138} Sedgwick, \textit{Tendencies}, xi; Merrill, \textit{A Different Person}, 585, which describes how a family member “must have sported a \textit{born to shop} T-shirt”.

\textsuperscript{139} Merrill, ‘\textit{A Different Person}’, 509; Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 21, 113; \textit{Touching Feeling}, 27.

\textsuperscript{140} Merrill, ‘\textit{A Different Person}’, 478; Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 29.

\textsuperscript{141} For example, Merrill compares “a fat, richly stamped letter” with a “flat parcel from Holland” (\textit{A Different Person}, 681).

\textsuperscript{142} Merrill, ‘\textit{A Different Person}’, 492.

\textsuperscript{143} Merrill, ‘\textit{A Different Person}’, 478.

\textsuperscript{144} Merrill, ‘\textit{A Different Person}’, 483. \textit{Cf. A Dialogue on Love}, 176, where Sedgwick confesses her erotic fondness for the phrase “pull down your pants” (176).

\textsuperscript{145} Merrill, ‘\textit{A Different Person}’, 574. “Snapshot” is also a resonant word in Sedgwick’s vocabulary, with one of her collected poems entitled ‘\textit{Snapsh}’. 
father, Merrill describes how “to anyone with identity problems”, the camera was a “godsend, each shot proving (if nothing else)” that the photographer had “composed himself for the split second needed to press the shutter”, and was also a “way to make quick raids on life while keeping it at arm’s length” since you “look at things no longer quietly, for their own sake, but greedily, for the images they yield”. Similarly, like the Sedgwick who chose a rose-tinted image of herself for the cover of Fat Art, Thin Art, Merrill, too, purchased a “tinted monocle” for his camera. And like the Sedgwick taking pictures at the bedside of her friends dying of AIDS, as in the lyric ‘Grave, never offering back the face of my dear’, Merrill describes the photographs he took of the “beautiful head” of a sick friend “gazing mysteriously up from the hospital pillows”.

Perhaps the most direct relationship between A Dialogue on Love and A Different Person, however, comes in a metaphor of human–feline relationality. Whilst Sedgwick described, to Van Wey, the dream of having sex with her father as a particularly “succulent mouse to lay / at my master’s door”, Merrill noted that “before entering analysis”, he fancied dreams to be the “very meat on which patient and doctor breakfasted insatiably together”. “Each night”, he therefore “set off in catlike pursuit of a new one, and next day proudly laid the dead mouse at Dr. De-tré’s feet”. Finally, at the end of each poet’s memoir, and partly through a shared encounter with Buddhism, there is a realisa-

146 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 491. For more on Sedgwick’s father as a photographer, see A Dialogue on Love, 19–22.
147 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 523. For other examples, see A Different Person, 578, which describes Merrill’s mother as “too often blurred by excessive closeness if not by the trembling of the handheld camera” and the “tinted oval photograph” described on p. 597.
148 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 10.
149 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 611.
150 Sedgwick, A Dialogue on Love, 42.
151 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 609.
152 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 648. In The Changing Light at Sandover, the later séances are accompanied by a “bodhisattva / Green with age” (40), and there is a straining after “the elate / Burst of satori” (91).
tion that, in Merrill’s words, whilst “Freedom to be oneself is all very well; the greater freedom is not to be oneself”, and that the “different person” both meant to become would be “more receptive to others” than they had been thus far, and “more conscious of their needs than greedy for [their] own fulfillment”.153 Indeed, I could never not hear, as a direct address to Sedgwick, as well as a description of a particular evening, Merrill’s phrase “On Easter Eve we attended Parsifal at the Graz Opera”.154

As with Derrida and Ferenczi, however, it is clear that Merrill and Sedgwick also differed in some ways. If Merrill repeatedly employed the phrase Between Men, he would have had little time for the Epistemology of the Closet, since he made light of his parents’ “expressions of mid-twentieth-century prejudice” as “harmless enough”, and no different from “hundreds of thousands of parents” who “spent the forties and fifties urging secrecy and repression upon their queer sons”. Merrill also sets himself at a significant distance, in 1993, from the politics of shame that powerfully motivated Sedgwick’s queer theory and activism,155 when he reported that he was “surprised to hear from Jerl”, a “young, politically correct friend who digs me like an archaeological trench of outmoded notions”, that “he and his ‘support group’ view[ed]” Merrill’s parents’ prejudices as a “form of verbal sexual abuse”. “He has to be joking!” Merrill assumed, “But no”, Jerl assured him: “a single shame-producing word” could be as “traumatic as an incestuous caress”.156

But Sedgwick’s deep admiration for Merrill should not distract us, as Katie Kent’s essay in this volume further reminds us, from doing justice to some of Sedgwick’s female muses. And, in the next two sections, I want to consider two: Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein.

154 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 620.
155 Sedgwick, Shame and its Sisters, 35–66; Touching Feeling, 93–122.
156 Merrill, ‘A Different Person’, 532.
Dash It! Or “The Effect of the Horizontal Stroke”: Channelling Emily Dickinson

Although there is no Sedgwick essay devoted to Dickinson, the poet frequently embossed Sedgwick’s prose. In *Between Men*, Dickinson’s ‘Our journey had advanced — / Our feet were almost come / ’To that odd Fork in Being’s Road’ provided the epigraph for the coda.\(^{157}\) In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick employed Dickinson’s ‘The Fox fits the Hound’ as a way of characterizing the relationship of Henry James’ characters May Bartram and John Marcher.\(^{158}\) In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick drew on Dickinson’s “Hope” is the thing with feathers — / ‘That perches on the soul’ as part of her theorization of the close relationship of hope and anxiety,\(^ {159}\) whilst Part 3 of the 1975 poem, ‘Sexual Hum’ employed, as a mantra, Dickinson’s poem 822 as an “excellent chant” to distract the anxious poet in the “dentist’s chair”.

It is, however, in *Tendencies* where Dickinson loomed largest. The volume commenced with a photomontage of Sedgwick and Lynch leaning on Dickinson’s grave, to which we shall return. In ‘Queer and Now’, marvelling at the miraculous queer survival of her “adult friends and colleagues doing lesbian and gay work”, Sedgwick cited Dickinson’s

— an outgrown anguish
   Remembered, as the Mile

   Our panting Ankle barely passed —
   When Night devoured the Road —
   But we — stood whispering in the House —
   And all we said — was ‘Saved’!\(^ {160}\)

\(^{157}\) Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 201.
\(^{159}\) Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 151.
\(^{160}\) Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 1.
And the characteristic Bauhaus slant of Sedgwick’s prose, on the first pages of each chapter, might owe something to Dickinson’s ‘There’s a Certain Slant of Light’, with its themes of the differences left by Death, even in the absence of a visible scar, especially since Dickinson reappears in ‘White Glasses’, Sedgwick’s ‘memorial’ essay for Lynch. There, Sedgwick revealed that Dickinson was of the pair’s “most durable” points of shared reference, leading to “tokens, readings”, “impersonations”, and “pilgrimages”, including one to Dickinson’s house in Amherst, the place Sedgwick lived and taught between 1984 and 1988, and fought to get Dickinson onto the curriculum.161


Sedgwick was also inspired, in A Dialogue on Love, by Dickinson’s idiomatic use of punctuation. For example, readers might notice the way in which, like Dickinson, both Sedgwick and Van Wey repeatedly employed dashes. Each sub-section of the book is marked by a horizontal line of dashes; and Van Wey employed one, two or three horizontal lines, in his notes, to mark changes of topic in his otherwise under-punctuated prose. The evocatively Dickinsonian appearance of A Dialogue on Love can, perhaps, best be seen in the extract below:

161 Sedgwick, Tendencies, 257, 259. For more on Sedgwick’s time at Amherst, see the ‘Amherst’ section of the Sedgwick biography at http://www.evekosofksycedgwick.net.
162 Sedgwick, Tendencies, 94.
How they’re intertwined —
his permanence in me — my
permanence in him –

How, when I suppose
him to be forgetting or
dropping me — somehow —

from his mind — I lose
the Daedalian thread of
Shannon in my mind —

Here, as in Dickinson’s poetry, Sedgwick used dashes to generate a number of effects. Whilst she was not much drawn in her textile practice to embroidery, the dashes of various lengths, both framing and within the trio of haikus, conjure the idea of threads “intertwined” in the first line and lost in the last stanza. The specifically fraying character of hope and anxiety that I alluded to earlier is also present here, in all those loose threads to be tied up together. The dashes additionally function as a kind of Sedgwickian *enjambment* marker, both separating out and connecting the various phrases, just as the passage explores the pain of being held close and pushed away, dropped, and let go. In so doing, the dashes affirm the silent and nonverbal, the spaces between words. They also resist stasis, the psychoanalytic idea of fixation that Sedgwick was so averse to in *Dialogue*, instead emphasizing the unfolding of time. While necessarily slowing down the given sentences, the dashes give little indication of the length of any pause between dis/connected thoughts that a more regular form of punctuation might have indicated. Readers have only the regular 5–7–5 haiku metre to stabilize their sense of rhythm, as if that stands in for the regularity of therapeutic sessions, if not their relational ebb and flow. The final dash also

signals the difficulty of ending each session, a difficulty that pre-occupied Sedgwick at this time, as her poem ‘The 58 ½ Minute Hour’ testified.¹⁶⁵

Many of the meanings of the phrase ‘to dash’ are also relevant here, particularly given Sedgwick’s emphasis, in ‘A Poem is Being Written’, of the sexualized violence located at the heart of poetic genres. For example, as Kamilla Denman reminds us, to dash is “to strike with violence so as to break into fragments”, a punctuation mark, therefore, signaling the pains and pleasures of the therapeutic deconstruction of the self, in Dialogue, particularly if we think of a dash as a “horizontal stroke”, a language of whipping central to Sedgwick’s broader poetics and one that Sedgwick brought into relation to “the effect of the horizontal stroke” through ‘deleted’ words in Merrill, as Katie Kent has pointed out,¹⁶⁶ and employed in her own verse, such as ‘An Essay on The Picture Plane’, where “The canvas dissolves at a horizontal stroke” and “at a stroke it is a canvas about distance”.¹⁶⁷

In addition, to dash is to “drive impetuously forth or out”, to “cause to rush together” and to “destroy, ruin, confound, frustrate, spoil”, signaling the strong positive and negative effects tying together this particular therapeutic couple and prying them apart. Dashes, along with dots, also form a key part of Morse code with three dashes making up the middle letter of the cry for help, s.o.s., here signaling perhaps both that international Mayday, and the exclamatory Romantic “O”, in the form of both an ejaculation of pleasure and a cry of woe, especially since Sedgwick employs just such an ‘O’ in her uncollected poem, ‘Epilogue: Teachers and Lovers’. Critics have also interpreted Dickinson’s use of dashes as “the result of great stress and intense emotion, as the indication of a mental breakdown”, another context appropriate to this therapeutic scene.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 26.
¹⁶⁷ Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 72.
¹⁶⁸ My thoughts on Dickinson’s punctuation are indebted to Kamilla Denman, ‘Emily Dickinson’s Volcanic Punctuation’, The Emily Dickinson Journal 2.1 (Spring 1993), 22–46.
But if Sedgwick was excited by the idea of Dickinson’s dashes and her loaded clitorial gun, we should also recall the potential centrality to Sedgwick’s poetry of another lesbian syntactic and clitoral muse, Gertrude Stein, and, in particular, her Tender Buttons of 1914.

The Masturbating Girls With Buttons or Tending Gertrude Stein

In Chapter 4 of ‘The Warm Decembers’, ‘The Girls with Buttons’, we hear about “a real snapshot” showing

two girls, one fair, one dark,
[As Jarrell begins his beautiful poem]\(^{169}\)
in identical outfits of — 1952,
say. The dark girl, who might be six, wears hers invigoratedly. The fair girl, half her age, is being chafed under the armpits by the waistband of her jumper, by wads of sweater sleeve. The dark child is heads-up. Her slender jaunty legs are crossed, knees cocked, to make a lap in plaid for the display of a big-headed round kitten. [Indeed, handwriting on the back that’s slightly like mine names this composition: “The girls with Buttons”.] The three-year-old — no neck, the crossed legs only stubs — sans pussy, what has she held in her plaid lap? Her hands. Which hold each other and her gaze as if they were anything but hers. The fictitious absorption of that gaze! The little squinch of brow, shielding her eyes from sunlight coarse as straw that animals

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\(^{169}\) The poem is ‘The Lost Children’, The Lost World (1948; New York: Macmillan, 1966), 28–30. Sedgwick again refers to the volume at the end of her poem ‘Sh’, where when “it’s Jarrell I need”, Van Wey “reaches to the bookcase” and “has it, The Lost World” (Fat Art, Thin Art, 21). That volume also contains ‘Hope’ (32–40), the poem Sedgwick employs to introduce in ‘Interlude, Pedagogic’, as we have seen.
have been curled up on and disarranged, the rounding of shoulders saying no to a coltish red wagon near the gravel driveway, the patience with harsh grass where her skirt is not pulled smoothly up under her — how slavishly it all is, yet, at the same time, it is independent.170

Later, we learn that the two girls here described, Sedgwick and her sister Nina, originally had two cats: Nina had her Buttons, while Eve, who “had the same colouring as her cat”, had her Butterscotch. That was until Butterscotch was sent away, not because Eve was “too young”, but because her parents, who, inappropriately enough, call one another “Lovekitten”, thought “two cats were two too many”.171 Their phraseology recalls Old Father Time, in Thomas Hardy’s Jude the Obscure (1895), at the equally misguided Malthusian moment in which he murders his siblings, because they are also “too menny”.172

Why, though, bring Stein into the discussion here? The answer is because the scene Sedgwick invites us to contemplate is one in which she both is, and is not, able to tend to her Buttons. On the one hand, she is “sans pussy”, holding only “her hands” in her “lap”. Her diminutive knees are not “cocked”, unlike her big sister’s, and she is forced to endure the “harsh grass / where her skirt is not pulled smoothly up / under her”. In addition, the Kosofsky sisters have only “one Buttons between them”. On the other hand, as in Stein’s Tender Buttons, whose relevance is signalled, perhaps, in Sedgwick’s italicized “but”, the imagery is suggestively masochistic, masturbatory, anal and clitoral. Sedgwick’s sister’s “legs are crossed” together, closed to the outside world, but, as Luce Irigaray reminds us, her lips are adjacent to each other.173 In Nina’s lap, is a “big-headed round kitten” keen to be stroked. Sedgwick herself, meanwhile, suggestively,

170 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 113.
171 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 123.
172 Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (London: Harper and Brothers, 1895), 399.
has “only stubs” for legs, and has her hands between her legs. That the Sedgwick sisters can, therefore, be seen to tend their Buttons invites Stein to the scene, especially since, as Kent has documented, she and Sedgwick revelled over the “injunction to ‘tend her butt’” that Stein “embedded within the title of her long prose poem”, and Sedgwick encouraged Kent to write an essay on Stein’s clitoral poetics, and her sexual and textual practice of tending her button.\textsuperscript{174}

Particularly relevant, in the context of “The Girls with Buttons’, was Stein’s playful meditation, in \textit{Tender Buttons}, on the erotic relations between a “sister and sister” and “a single set of sisters” with “no blisters”, rather than on a “sister” and a “mister”; as well as Stein’s interest in an owner and a “timely working cat”, for whom it is an “occasion to be so purred”. In addition, and again anticipating Sedgwick’s vocabulary, Stein pondered the “sight of no pussy cat” and she suggested that “a plain lap, any plain lap shows that sign, it shows that there is not so much extension as there would be if there were more choice in everything”.\textsuperscript{175}

The scene of Sedgwick tending her Buttons also inspired the cover of this book. Like \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, I selected a photograph from Sedgwick’s childhood. The front cover of \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art} depicted a “SLENDER, DISCRETE, RESOLUTE, SELF-CONTAINED GIRL”, with “LONG HAIR”, “JUST BEFORE ALL OF THE TURMOIL OF BECOMING GENDERED HAS COME DOWN ON HER”. It also represented a Sedgwick already “WITH ONE BREAST”,\textsuperscript{176} and thus an image signalling the breast cancer that formed such an underlying motive for \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, and the explicit subject


\textsuperscript{175} For more, see Gertrude Stein, \textit{Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms} (1914; New York: Dover, 1997), 17, 28, 37, 44, 49, 51–52, and passim. Sedgwick and Frank documented how the rhythms of Tomkins’ paragraphs reminded them of Stein, “another writer who certainly knows the pleasures of lists” (\textit{Touching, Feeling}, 96; \textit{Shame and its Sisters}, 3).

\textsuperscript{176} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 193.
of at least three poems in the book’s first section. The reparative cover of Bathroom Songs, by contrast, self-consciously depicts a younger, beaming Sedgwick, her pussy safely and happily in her hands and lap.

**A Dialogue on Love or A Reader’s Guide to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Poet**

If ‘A Poem is Being Written’ represented a reader’s guide to Sedgwick’s then-unpublished verse, *A Dialogue on Love* provided an only more inclusive primer. For example, the comparative difficulties of losing her hair during chemotherapy and a breast after her mastectomy are the subject of a conversation with Van Wey and ‘Mobility, speech, sight’, a poem in the first section of *Fat Art, Thin Art*. *A Dialogue on Love* reveals the person to whom ‘When I got so sick it never occurred to me’ is addressed is Sedgwick’s former friend Benj. The retrospectively “warm”, “golden”, and “intoxicating” institutional S/M fantasy scene of ‘A scar, just a scar’, looked back upon, through rose-tinted or “WHITE GLASSES”, the subject of repeated discussions between Sedgwick and Van Wey.

‘Performative (Toronto)’ and ‘Performative (San Francisco)’, the topic of an extraordinarily moving essay by Meg Boulton in this volume, are also brought to mind by a passage in *Dialogue*. This described Sedgwick being sat on a runway at the Canadian airport, “anti-icing fluid […] suddenly running pink down the window” beside her, “looking like Pepto-Bismol” and coming on her “sight like horror”. The moment recalled something she

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177 See ‘Mobility, speech, sight’, ‘A scar, just a scar’, and ‘When I got sick it never occurred to me’, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 28–30.
178 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 28; *A Dialogue on Love*, 64.
180 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 29; *A Dialogue on Love*, 45, 47–49, 172, 175–176, 192. With its account of “someone’s soft tears / and a far murmur that only barely / wasn’t my imagination, ‘spread your legs’” (*Fat Art, Thin Art*, 29), the poem also resonates with Merrill’s ‘Sanctum’, of five years earlier, in which “someone — myself perhaps — tries vainly // to hold back a queer / sob” (555).
“hadn’t thought of from that day to this”: the “bloody discharge from tubes in the week or so after surgery”. As a “matter of fact”, it was the anniversary of her diagnosis, but the larger tacit context of the passage included her farewell to Lynch, who had died of AIDS in the same city, and the end of ‘Performative (San Francisco)’, with its “horror in the taxi” and suddenly “unstanchable”, “clotted gouts of blood” when a tragic pedestrian, in antiquity, picks a flower at a roadside.\footnote{Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 17–18; \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 88.}

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Sedgwick’s particular relation to Van Wey echoes across the memoir and a number of poems in \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, as well as in one previously uncollected poem, ‘Valentine’, about the therapist included here. Like the thirteen-line, interrupted-sonnet form of ‘The 58 ½ minute hour’, that we have already briefly mentioned, many of the memoir passages negotiated formal strategies for dealing with the random, “awful stopping places”, and the “histrionics of the dropped / patient” when the pair “have to stop now” at the hour’s end.\footnote{Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 26; \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 50, 120.} A second \textit{Fat Art} lyric, ‘Crushed. Dilapidated’, with its description of the morning “after a near tornado”, also anticipate passages in \textit{Dialogue}, where Sedgwick, after some difficult sessions, characterised herself as resembling a “big, loose footprint / like a messy hurricane” that “churns up the space” but maybe also “keeps / things aerated and fertile”, although, there, Sedgwick, by contrast, welcomed “SOMETHING OF THE CALM AFTER THE STORM”.\footnote{Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 25; \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 140, 166. Other collected poems about Van Wey include ‘Not like the clownish, friendly way you talk’, ‘Sh’, ‘I can tune my mind today’, ‘All I know is I woke up thinking’; and ‘Snapsh’.}

A third category of poems from \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art} that find their resonance in \textit{A Dialogue on Love} are those final lyrics from the first section addressed, jointly, to Sedgwick’s husband and sister. For example, where \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art} documents that ‘In dreams they’re interchangeable — my husband, / my big sister’; the title of one poem; on her sister’s return to Sedgwick’s life,
she reports to Van Wey the curious “SENSE OF BEING UNABLE TO TELL HER SIS AND HAL APART” and her feeling that “HAL WAS MY SISTER”. In addition, we learn that the title of the volume as a whole, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, resonates in this context, one in which, when facing her sister for her first time, after years of being estranged, Nina looking “so very thin”, Sedgwick “so very fat”, they both grasp at

once that through eighteen years’ separation, each girl must have looked in the

mirror every morning to see, fearfully, the other’s body.\(^{184}\)

Sedgwick’s memoir also reveals as deeply autobiographical the kinds of body parts, actions, and contexts that make up the *mise-en-scène* of a number of her thrillingly pornographic early poems, from part II of *Fat Art, Thin Art*, with their related scenes of “butts, assholes” and “women’s genitals”, “institutional or quasi-institutional setting”, “relation of witness or overhearing”, “waiting with dread”, “speech or action of coerced consent from the person being punished”, and their beating metric rhythms.\(^{185}\) In particular, a number of Sedgwick’s poems return to the scene of a traumatic visit to the dentist. For example, in Part 3 of ‘Sexual Hum’, as we have seen, the speaker employs a Dickinson poem as a mantra to distract herself from the pain-

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\(^{185}\) Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love*, 172. For examples, see *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 72–85.
 ful, frightening work going on inside her jaws, whilst the astronaut, in the previously uncollected ‘Ring of Fire,’ sensing his own impending death, is imagined to be

like a dentist who has crushed a tooth

that lies along the gum in rosy shards,
but must to the gagged child whisper from the height
of a taught fatherly vision, firmly, ‘You’re all right.’

Dialogue brings two explanatory contexts to these painful dental scenes. The first is Sedgwick having failed her orals in graduate school. The second is a “PARTICULARLY TRAUMATIC”, “EXHAUSTING AND VERY PAINFUL” visit to the dentist Sedgwick had when she was seven or eight, when she had “SEVERAL FILLINGS DONE IN ONE AFTERNOON”. “UNABLE TO GET AWAY, AND PERHAPS UNABLE TO PROTEST”, Sedgwick experienced the visit as “SIMILAR TO A CONCEPT OF RAPE”, to her “MASOCHISTIC FANTASIES”, and to her father’s repeated scenes of taking a topic Sedgwick was interested in, and absorbing it, along with its accompanying energy, into himself, leaving her depleted. This paternal context reveals, perhaps, a phantasmatic, parricidal violence as a subtext to ‘Ring of Fire’, given that Sedgwick’s father, a NASA lunar photographer, like the astronaut in the poem, couldn’t have guessed “what harm his desire to see the moon had done”.

Perhaps because of Van Wey’s own sci-fi interests, meanwhile, the single most returned to lyric, in Fat Art, Thin Art, is ‘Not’, with its thematics of a child protesting to its parents that it “didn’t put in for a transfer to this planet”. The poem is echoed

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186 Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 77–78.
187 Sedgwick, A Dialogue on Love, 64.
188 For Sedgwick senior’s photographs, see The Moon as Viewed by Lunar Orbiter (Washington, DC: NASA, 1970). Sedgwick’s father may also haunt ‘Artery’, with its discussion of how “planets may bear life” but “not she, her delicate continent / held rock and supported nothing / that moved from within itself”; and ‘Lullaby’, where the speaker seeks her beloved’s gaze as the earth turns toward the “waning moon”.
some five times in the memoir’s insistence that Sedgwick was an “exceptional” kid whose parents were the “emperor and empress of Mars”; Sedgwick’s sister describing her as if she were “FROM ANOTHER PLANET”; Van Wey describing Sedgwick’s “OUTER-SPACE-LOOKING NECK BRACE”; and when Sedgwick’s parents might have thought that she was “really the exiled // daughter of the king / and queen of Mars”, but Sedgwick herself did not know it and just longed “to be // their own, peasant child”.\textsuperscript{189}

In addition, \textit{A Dialogue on Love} provides crucial context for a number of Sedgwick’s uncollected poems. We learn that Sedgwick’s “embarrassing” early poem ‘Stillborn Child’, cited, in ‘A Poem is Being Written’, as an example of “angry self-pity” and “genuine morbidity”, as well as of a “certain resistance and heroism”,\textsuperscript{190} documents a key scene otherwise edited out of the Kosofsky family album, since Sedgwick’s mother had earlier had “a miscarriage or a still birth” between the birth of Sedgwick and her little brother, David. This was a baby who was, otherwise, not much mourned.\textsuperscript{191} When thinking of the predominance of death as a theme in much of her juvenilia, Sedgwick again later acknowledged, in ‘A Poem is Being Written’, that she was a “morbid, / sentimental kid”, for whom the “thought // of dying young was / a good friend”, and to whom “to think of death / brought . . . a sense of safety”, “rest” and “being held”.\textsuperscript{192} But, by contrast, \textit{A Dialogue on Love} points to a number of genuinely tragic substrates beneath two further undergraduate poems. ‘Two P.O.W. Suicides’ invokes the “voice of a friend / young a couple of years back when he died / from a landmine in a programme of foreign aid”, while \textit{A Dialogue on Love} documents that, in 1970, the best friend of Sedgwick’s husband had been “blown up in a landmine in Vietnam”, aged twenty, a “very […]

\textsuperscript{189} Sedgwick, \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, 36; \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 102, 136, 152–153, 155, 212.

\textsuperscript{190} Sedgwick, \textit{Tendencies}, 184–185.

\textsuperscript{191} For more, see \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 61, 192.

\textsuperscript{192} Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 16. Compare also her later account of the “sadness and morbidity inside me as a child” (62).
shocking” event because it was so “out of the blue”.\textsuperscript{193} ‘A Death by Water’ probably recalls the death, in 1971, of the couple’s friend and father figure, Frank Rosenblatt, who had “died in a boating accident” that year.\textsuperscript{194} Elsewhere in her memoir, Sedgwick documented that she had cut her thumb whilst whittling soap at girl scout camp aged 12,\textsuperscript{195} a scene resonant with the start of the uncollected poem ‘Artery’ (which, “Like Plath”, begins “with a finger sliced”) and the scout camp Sedgwick described in ‘Who Fed This Muse’, where, like “generations of baby lesbians”, Sedgwick was happy.\textsuperscript{196}

In \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, we also learn more about the cosmopolitan Monsieur O, subject of ‘A Poem is Being Written’ and of the uncollected poem ‘Epilogue: Teachers and Lovers’, the seventh-grade French tutor who so caught Sedgwick’s imagination, and the revelation of whose homosexuality led, in some meaningful sense, to her identity as a poet and a paranoid reader.\textsuperscript{197} In addition, in that context Sedgwick’s admission that, “except for English”, she was “awful at languages”,\textsuperscript{198} makes more resonant the bid for the cosmopolitanism of the young Eve Kosofsky in a number of her uncollected poems, given her pointed citation

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 63.
\item Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 63.
\item Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 73.
\item For example, Sedgwick described how, following the revelation of Monsieur O’s entrapment, she “BEGAN READING INSATIABLY” about male homosexuality, the “INTENSITY” of her investment “PROPELLED” by “HER CHAGRIN AT HAVING MISREAD THE FRENCH TEACHER SO COMPLETELY — HER PERCEPTUAL ACUMEN HAVING FAILED HER”, but her “FASCINATION WITH IMPLICIT THEMES” subsequently “ENGAGED AND SHARPENED” (\textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 74–75). For more on paranoid and reparative readings, see \textit{Touching Feeling}, 123–152.
\item Sedgwick, \textit{A Dialogue on Love}, 74.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
from a range of German, as well as French and Latin, language poets.\textsuperscript{199}

**Our Favourite Poet and Dear Daughter, Eve: A Portrait of the Artist as a Newly Middle-Aged Poet**

In addition to helpfully contextualising many of Sedgwick’s poems, *A Dialogue on Love* documents the specific moment when her first poem comes after years of writer’s block. This was a “mild and rainy” spring day, when Sedgwick was nervously looking forward to her next session with Van Wey, a little anxious she’d be able to “get centred and at home with him properly” and about whether she’d generate some interesting content for them to process together, but mostly thinking about the “strange form of address” between them: “the unmistakable one that’s somewhere between talking to myself and talking to another person”. Then, “invoking Shannon’s wide sheltered room” in a “wet, calm outdoor space” that had so often been a scene of her past poetry\textsuperscript{200} and finding herself centred, she heard a “quiet inside voice” noting, in a four-line, non-haiku stanza,

\begin{verbatim}
I can tune my mind today
to the story I think I want to tell you;
I can tune my eyes
already to your face, listening.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{199} ‘When in Minute Script’ addresses Aristotle; ‘Falling in Love over The Seven Pillars’ invokes Sophocles; ‘Calling Overseas’ sings of Virgil and of Abelard and Heloise; ‘Epilogue: Teachers and Lovers’ quotes Baudelaire, in the original French, while ‘Die Sommernacht hat mir’s angethan’ alludes to a poem by von Scheffel, as we have seen. ‘The Warm Decembers’ quotes, again in the original German, Andrew Gryphius, whilst the later poem, ‘Nicht Mehr Leben’, again presumes readers fluent in German (*Fat Art, Thin Art*, 37, 109). Sedgwick’s father spoke German.

\textsuperscript{200} For example, see “the sloppy landscape” of Norfolk and the “extensive and steamily beautiful / wetland view” of New Hartford in “The Warm Decembers”, the latter where Sedgwick sits, “a notebook open, its loose-leaves spread” (*Fat Art, Thin Art*, 111–112).
As she walks along, Sedgwick finds that her “little smile is enfolding a new thought”. When she gets inside, maybe she will “put these words on a scrap of paper and see whether they look (as they sort of sound to me) like the possible start of a poem”; acknowledging that it had been years since she had “tasted this particular mild, speculative smile”. And, with a few small revisions and nine more lines, that thought became one of the collected poems: ‘I can tune my mind today’. And, with a few small revisions and nine more lines, that thought became one of the collected poems: ‘I can tune my mind today’.\(^{201}\) And, with a few small revisions and nine more lines, that thought became one of the collected poems: ‘I can tune my mind today’.\(^{202}\) A Dialogue on Love, then, documents the very moment in which Sedgwick’s poetry returned and “with it, and with Shannon’s escort”, “some of the long-ago life of the girl whose first passion it was”. But the poetry was not just a therapeutic blast from the past or life raft in the midst of so many of her friends and family dying. It was a harbinger of a different future, in which Sedgwick would emerge “a different person”; a person with a crucial new identity as a fibre artist.\(^{203}\)

Making Poetic Things, Practicing Emptiness, or How to Do Things With Poems

In the same period in which she was writing A Dialogue on Love, poetry proved increasingly important to Sedgwick’s emerging practice as a fibre artist, and, in a late essay ‘Making Things, Practicing Emptiness’ (2007), she described the emergence of a “distinct artistic practice involving textiles”. As in A Dialogue on Love, although to a lesser extent, Sedgwick partly emphasised the non-verbal aspects of that practice. She described how her textile practice had “little aptitude for being put into words”. She emphasized the textural specificity of her “very material

\(^{201}\) Sedgwick, A Dialogue on Love, 123–124.
\(^{202}\) Sedgwick, Fat Art, Thin Art, 22. In the published version, Sedgwick tunes her “eye” singular, rather than “eyes”; and there is a lesser, comma- rather than semi-colon-length, pause at the end of the second line. The “mild and rainy” spring day, of the memoir, becomes, in the second stanza of the poem, “the rain of today, / which will rain all afternoon”.
\(^{203}\) Sedgwick, A Dialogue on Love, 136.
\(^{204}\) Sedgwick, A Dialogue on Love, 136.
and pressing” textile practice, and she documented how the iconography of “hands and handiwork” were central to her textile projects, as well as the “deep inherent relationality of touch and texture”. In addition, Sedgwick followed F. David Peat’s account of the fascinating “dimensionality of string”, with its simultaneous, multiple existences at different scales, as a “single thread”, a “twisted line”, “long cylinder”, or “three-dimensional figure”, and as composed of “individual fibers, tiny twisting lines”, emphasizing the importance, in her own works, of “hypervisible […] dangling bits of thread”.205

And yet, Sedgwick’s account of fibres as “tiny twisting lines”, often “dangling”, recalls her poetic predilection for multi-clausal, parenthetical sentences and enjambment. And, later in the essay, Sedgwick emphasized that her “sluttish”, “easy”, and “funky” textile practice did not represent a complete “change of identity” from her former persona as a “literary critic” and “poet”. Taking Sedgwick’s cue, we can hear a connection, in the highly sexualized language of “sluttishness” and her description of how her textiles were the result of a “Buddhist penetration”, the clear overlap with her former queer theoretical interests. Her fondness for the “enfoldment” offered by fabrics, meanwhile, brought to mind her c. 1993 poem, ‘The Use of Being Fat’, which described how, in the context of the AIDS epidemic — and with an allusion to Thom Gunn’s then-recently-published The Man With Night Sweats (1992) — she had a

superstition that
there was this use of being fat:
no one I loved could come to harm
enfolded in my touch —
that lot of me would blot it up,
the rattling chill, night sweat or terror.206

In addition, Sedgwick’s description of how her “mushrooming array of ‘arts and craft’ projects and supplies” were “pinning [her] to the table” evokes precisely the sadomasochistic lyric tableau of ‘A Poem is Being Written’. Her account of the ways in which her hands were “very hungry” for fabrics recalls the digestive aesthetics of *Fat Art, Thin Art*. Her description of her interest in the “fractional”, “dimensional betweenness” of shibori, often “left in a kind of springy, elastic state”, in the context of the similar two-and-a-half dimensions of the perspectival “picture plane”, recall her career-long interest in the “between” and specifically ‘An Essay on the Picture Plane’.

Towards the end of the essay, Sedgwick emphasized that an interest in the “texture and materiality” of language “obviously animated a lot of [her] work as well”, with the result that “the complete exclusion of language from [her] art was never in the cards”. After all, “that exclusion would have consolidated the dualism” between word and image that she could have never countenanced. Sedgwick also documented how important to her had been a number of Japanese death poems from the seventeenth to the early twentieth whilst she was at work on her exhibition, *Bodhisattva Fractal World*, shown at John Hopkins University in 2002, before moving on to Dartmouth College in 2003. She found this particular form of haiku evocative because while such poems often had a first person, it wasn’t her first person, and it was a “first person at the very edge of its decomposition”. She also had an ongoing “sense of urgency” to try to discover “what it feels like to die” or “a way it can feel to die, if you’ve got your mind properly wrapped around the reality of the process”, a preoccupation also in evidence in Sedgwick’s fascination with Merrill’s *Ephraim*, as we have seen, and in her earlier poems ‘A Ring of Fire’ and ‘The Last Poem of ‘Yv*r Wintr’s’, contained in this volume.

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In the essay, Sedgwick reproduced four such works inspired by Japanese death poems. These were Choko’s c.1731 haiku “This Final scene I’ll not see / to the end — my dream / is fraying’; Sai-kuku’s c. 1730 ‘I borrow moonlight / for this journey of a million miles’; Shagai’s c. 1795 ‘Reality is flowerlike: / cold clouds sinking through / the dusk’; and Bashō’s c. 1692–1694 ‘While sweeping the yard / it forgets about the snow / a broom’. In addition, Sedgwick generated other works drawing on related material, including Ryoho’s c. 1669 ‘Now I understand how / the third verse of moon and flowers is interwoven’; Fusen’s c. 1777 ‘Today, then, is the day / the melting snowman is a real man’; Saiba’s c. 1858 ‘I shift my pillow / closer to the / full moon’; Roshu’s c. 1899 ‘Time to go … / they say the journey is a long one: / change of robes’; and Kyotaro’s c. 1928 ‘Tender winds above the snow / melt many kinds / of suffering’. Sedgwick also explored Ariwara no Narihara’s c. 825–880 ‘I have always known that I would take this path, but yesterday I did not know it would be today’.


210 For more, see Hoffmann, Japanese Death Poems, 164–165, 237–238, 267, 272, 278.

211 Whilst this is not the precise translation Sedgwick employs, for more see Ariwara no Narihara, Tales of Ise (trans. Henry Harris; Boston: Tuttle, 1972), 158. Whilst commentators, including Sedgwick, have often pointed to the importance of Merrill’s ‘Prose of Departure’, and, behind it, Bashō’s haibun, to A Dialogue on Love, that Sedgwick employed the final poem from the ninth-century Japanese text indicates the potential importance of this text to Dialogue. Like both Merrill and Bashō’s source texts, The Tales of Ise is composed of episodic narrative prose interspersed with lyric verse. In Narihara’s case, this is in the form of uta, a 31-syllable (5–7–5–7–7) form closely related to haiku. In addition, unlike both Bashō and Merrill’s source texts, The Tales of Ise is composed primarily of the dialogues between two crossgender lovers, in which, as Harris notes, the poetic and relational effects “rise unmistakably as much from the spaces between the short sentences as from the sentences themselves” (The Tales of Ise, 12). Sedgwick’s lines occur in the final section of the poem, which tells how “Long ago a man fell gravely ill”, who “always knew” in “his heart that he was to die”, but “yesterday or today … / no! never had I thought it” (158).
In 2007, Sedgwick described *Japanese Death Poems* as having been “recently published”. In fact, Yoel Hoffmann’s edition of *Japanese Death Poems Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death* had been published more than twenty years earlier in 1986. This is the first instance of a curiously queer temporality present in the essay, and one that points further to the significant overlap, in Sedgwick’s idiom, of her practice as a poet and textile artist. For example, Sedgwick located the emergence of her interest in textiles “almost a dozen years ago” from 2007, so around late 1995. Later in the essay, however, Sedgwick suggested that both “textiles” and “Buddhism” came “bounding into [her] life” sometime “about eleven years ago”, so 1996, along with a “stamp of mortality” derived from the “diagnosis in 1996” that her breast cancer had metastasized to her spine. It was also around “age forty-six”, thus in 1996, that Sedgwick gave up the “pretext of self-ornamentation” in favour of a more abstract, pictorial textile practice. The poem that Sedgwick tacitly evokes here is clear. ‘Trace at 46’ similarly begins with a “middle-age” transformation and one already enamoured of textiles, as Sedgwick depicts Trace delighting fondling “handsome / individu-
able wovens” in “desaturated beige, / a lovely champagne” that call to mind Sedgwick’s later weaving practice: “folded money-
purses in dry pouchy kid” that speak to Sedgwick’s later delight in textiles of “enfoldment”; “silk cords, thick and thin ones, in blues and greens” that anticipate Sedgwick’s later use of “rolled up bundles of silk and paper” to be “dyed in indigo”; and a “scarf / stained with feathery mauve-and-azure waves (‘Marbled by Hand’), like endpapers” that anticipates Sedgwick’s later shi-
bori marbling techniques.212

Poetry was also central to Sedgwick’s practice as the maker of artist’s books and, in particular, to a c. 2007 altered book that collaged together an illustrated edition of Edward Bulwer-

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212 Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, 43, 47–49. 46 represented an unusually over-
determined age for Sedgwick, since it was also at aged “forty-six or forty-
seven” that Sedgwick’s brother in law, Stan, developed metastatic cancer (*A Dialogue on Love*, 126).
Lytton’s *Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) and excerpts from 22 poems by Cavafy. 213 This explored, in a parallel visual idiom, what Sedgwick described, in her Cavafy essay, as the Greek poet’s interest in the “relations of selection and quotation”, “the intimate spatio-tality of the shrine”, and the aesthetics of “a little house within a house”, “one oriented towards its missing fourth wall, like a doll-house, a diorama, a hearth, or puppet theatre”. 214

Finally, poets and poetry were central to Sedgwick’s practice as a photo-collage artist, a fact we might have anticipated from her c. 1993 poem, ‘Grave, never offering back the face of my dear’. This described Sedgwick taking photographs from a “dramatic low angle by the footstool” at the hospital bedside of one of her male friends dying of AIDS, as we have seen, before taking the film to the “1-Hr. prints”, so that she can assemble a “big pseudo-David Hockney photo collage”. 215

Four of Sedgwick’s photo-collages depict poets. *Jacket Night at the ID450 Collective* (July 1988) captures various members of the feminist writing collective Sedgwick was a part of, that also included acclaimed poet Mary Baine Campbell, who contributes a key essay to this volume. 216 *Listening to Dionne* (April 1992) depicts Gary Fisher, at Sedgwick’s then house in Durham. 217 ‘Terrible Scrabble’ (February 1988) documents Michael Lynch playing scrabble with his son Stephen and Sedgwick’s husband, and ‘Eternity’s White Flag’, employed on the dedication page to *Tendencies*, depicts, as we have seen, Sedgwick and Lynch tenderly interlocked over Dickinson’s grave in Amherst.

216 For more, see ID450 Collective, ‘Writing the Plural: Sexual Fantasies’, 293–307 which may contain an otherwise unattributed poem by Sedgwick, there read by Campbell, ‘Marcel looked as virile as he was able’ (301–302). For Campbell’s poetic work, see *The World, The Flesh and Angels* (Beacon, 1989) and *Trouble* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2003).
217 For more, see Sedgwick, *Gary in Your Pocket*. In spite of the title, Fisher was also a poet, and the volume includes a number of his poems. For examples, see 6, 17–18, 23, 32–36, 45–48, 62, 68, 90.
each wearing a pair of Lynch’s signature white glasses. The collage, of course, takes its title from the last lines of Dickinson’s ‘Our Journey Had Advanced’:\footnote{218 Sedgwick, \textit{Tendencies}, 252–266.}

Our journey had advanced  
Our feet were almost come  
To that odd fork in Being’s road  
Eternity by term.

Our pace took sudden awe  
Our feet reluctant led.  
Before were cities, but between  
The forest of the dead.

Retreat was out of hope  
Behind, a sealed route,  
Eternity’s white flag before  
And God at every gate.

\textbf{Eternity’s White Flags or The Melancholy Poetics of The Long Goodbye}

In her remarkable, poignant essay in this volume on Sedgwick’s two ‘Performative’ poems from \textit{Fat Art, Thin Art}, Meg Boulton considers the idea of saying goodbye to the people that we love as an impossible, unhappy performative, one that we hope will never be truly necessary. Questions of “saying goodbye” also come to the fore in the final sentences of Sedgwick’s last essay on poetry: ‘Proust, Cavafy and the Queer Little Gods. \textit{Bathroom Songs} exists very much in that vulnerable, stubbornly resistant space of Boulton’s refused goodbye to Sedgwick, in its unwillingness to accept that there will be no more new poems by Sedgwick found, and no more new books by or about Sedgwick, even though she, through the voice of Cavafy, asked her readers not to “mourn […] uselessly” and had “long prepared” us,
as best she could, so that, “graced with courage”, we could “say goodbye to her”. I can’t quite do that yet. Instead, let’s “listen with deep emotion”, in what I am confident will not be “our final delectation, to the voices” and “exquisite music” of Sedgwick’s uncollected poetry and, first, to the voices of our six commentators upon her collected verse.219
