

## From H. A. Sedgwick

In October 2005, Eve and I traveled to Dublin at the invitation of Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke. Eve gave a talk at University College Dublin and had informal discussions with Noreen, Michael, and the others in their group. The enthusiasm and vibrancy of that group was impressive. It was clear that they had accomplished a great deal through their creative energy, strong sense of mission, and sheer hard work in an environment that was often less than enthusiastic in its support of queer scholarship.

Michael's and Noreen's commitment to Eve and her work was evident again in the intensive one-day seminar at Independent Colleges, Dublin, that they organized to commemorate her after her death in 2009. At about the same time, Michael began the long process of organizing this book. I am honored to write this brief note and happy to have this chance to express my deep appreciation to him and to everyone else who has worked on this project.

An extended consideration of Eve's work, consisting of three linked panels of papers, took place at the convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in January 2011. The panels were spread over three days of the convention, one each afternoon, and the cumulative effect was, for me at least, very powerful. The nine papers that were presented were very different from one another in style, in approach, and in the aspects of Eve's work that they addressed, yet together they evoked a strong vision of the depth, the power, and the underlying coherence of her work. I'm very happy that all nine of those MLA papers, some in expanded form, are now included in this book. The other papers included here add an even greater variety of approaches and contribute to an even more complex vision of Eve's work.

Surely, much of the diversity of all of these contributions is due to the individuality and creativity of their authors—an impressive indication of the talented friends, students, and colleagues whom Eve attracted, or sought out,

over the years. But the range and variety of the contributions also resonates with the range of Eve's work and the variety of ways that it touches people.

This book's emphasis is on the best-known portions of Eve's work, drawing largely on the middle period of her career, with only a few of the book's essays exploring her earlier or her later work. Most of Eve's work from the last decade or so of her life was in the form of talks that were unpublished when she died and may not have been known to some of the present authors at the time when their papers were written. Much of this work is now available in a collection titled *The Weather in Proust*, edited by Jonathan Goldberg and published in 2011 by Duke University Press.

Understandably, Eve's early writing—from graduate school, from college, and from even earlier—is not much referenced here, most of it being available, until quite recently, only in her archives. Much of her most intense creative energies during that time were devoted to her poetry, which was already highly accomplished, and strikingly queer, when she was thirteen or fourteen. Eve published only one collection of her poetry, *Fat Art, Thin Art* (1994).<sup>1</sup> In 2014, the twentieth anniversary of that book's publication, Jason Edwards organized a conference on Eve's poetry at the University of York, and then in 2017, he published a collection of essays from that conference. The collection, *Bathroom Songs: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as a Poet*, also includes a substantial selection of Eve's previously uncollected poetry, thus making widely available a crucial portion of her work written before *Between Men* (1985).<sup>2</sup>

Eve's earliest attempt at publication that I know of was a letter (now lost) that she wrote to the *Washington Post* when she was twelve protesting the firing of her French teacher for homosexuality. (He was entrapped in a public restroom.) That letter went unpublished because the *Post's* letters editor called to consult her mother, who denied permission to publish it. Melissa Solomon, in her essay here, suggests that even that denial of publication may have had a profound effect. Addressing herself to Eve, Solomon writes about a conversation that she had, after Eve's death, with Eve's mother:

At the time, she understood herself to be rightfully protective of you, still a child, who would be caught in the middle of public debate if such a letter were to be published. Now, she worries that she picked the wrong side of right, especially given your career path and your own intellectual, emotional, and political interests. I suggested the possibility that her prohibition was a kind of foundational turning point without which your future might not have progressed in the direction it did. Did you promise yourself

something in childhood that you made come true in adulthood? Would we have *Epistemology of the Closet* if you had not?

Eve's first successful attempt at publication, as far as I know, was an omnibus book review for *Seventeen* magazine, written about a year later. That review was only rediscovered quite recently; it created a flurry of activity as notice of it circulated around the internet. Whatever spurred Eve's development as a writer, her writing at thirteen is already notably mature. Eve's friend Josh Wilner remarks, "What I enjoy most is the way Eve figures out exactly what the features of a chatty sophisticated literary-review for *Seventeen* are—and nails it."<sup>3</sup>

It is my hope that over time more of Eve's writing—unpublished, obscurely published, or created for specific occasions, such as lecture or course handouts—will find its way into her archive and onto her website at EveKosofskySedgwick.net.

Thus, this book, as many of its authors are quick to acknowledge, surely will not be the final word on Eve and her work. But it is a splendid and very welcome contribution, and I have no doubt that it contains the beginnings of much more that will develop from it.

H. A. Sedgwick

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#### NOTES

- 1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).
- 2 Jason Edwards, ed., *Bathroom Songs: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as a Poet* (New York: Punctum, 2017); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- 3 Personal communication with author. Originally published in "Eve's First Publication?," *Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick* (blog), 2012, <http://evekosofskysedgwick.net/blog/pages/>.