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Article:

Edwards, Jason orcid.org/0000-0002-5032-4965 (2009) *Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: In the Bardo (2 May 1950-12 April 2009) Tribute*. *Sexualities*. pp. 675-677. ISSN 1461-7382

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460709346107>

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Published paper

Edwards, Jason (2009) *Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: In the Bardo*. *Sexualities*, 12 (6). pp. 675-677.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1363460709346107>

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: In the Bardo

(May 2 1950 – April 12 2009)

Incense sticks, sunshine;
A fat cat sleeping; cool silk
Breeze through the bedroom;

Wind chimes, high blue sky;
A polyp of Indian
Scarves upon my desk.

The news that Eve has died comes, perhaps, twice on Easter Monday. Initially, I don't quite recognise it. I am more present, though, in Michael Snediker's consoling, virtual embrace: a secluded openness I recall from a London hotel, where I laid my sore face on Eve's chest.

As the minutes pass, Facebook flares and flares. People in love with Eve, who similarly imagine that they had been prepared, realise that they are not. It's like one of those photographs of the earth taken from a satellite at night: deep indigo in spite of the birthday-candle glow. Almost instantaneously, I am befriended and friended anew by Cathy Davidson, Claudia Gonson, Lauren Berlant, Mary Baine Campbell, and many other queer-as-folk who Eve loved back, but who will go otherwise unmentioned within the Guardian obituary's normative conventions, where Eve is supposedly 'survived' only by her wonderful husband and biological family; as if no-one else grieved, as though Eve herself had completely died.

A multitude of 'madeleine' moments materialise. I'm inhaling the sudden, piquant fragrance of a bouquet of new, vicarious memories. I'm pouring over a Cornell-box of snapshots of Eve's intelligently open face; her fragile, freckled skin, soft as a rose petal. I quietly unfold one of my own.

Eve is helping me

Take my time, as we walk from

Her apartment to

Union Square: the

Fresh lime-light of summer leaves.

Beyond, the heat's like

Syrup. Under trees,

We pause to receive free hugs

Offered by students.

A vacation pace:

Space to concentrate on bark,

Dusty paths, flowers.

Like the Buddha in

Deer park, birds come close; no-one

Seems to notice that

They're in the presence

Of a person soon to be

A divinity.

On the second day, a dandelion phrase, that had already taken deep root, breaks the soil of my brain. 'Though much is lost, more remains'. This is to say that, even now, in this, paradoxical Eve continues to confound dualities. Though one beloved incarnation begins to wane, others wax, continue to thrive. Eve's death does not take from us her bafflingly neglected first book, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980), or her ground-breaking, life-saving and still powerfully disruptive trilogy of immediately-paradigmatic queer theoretical texts: *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), and *Tendencies* (1993). As we live and breathe, Eve's mostly collected poetry, *Fat Art Thin Art* (1994), and 'haibun' autobiography, *A Dialogue on Love* (1999), continue to

percolate through our intimate, erotic and public, academic and therapeutic, political and writerly lives; whilst her edited and co-edited collections, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995); *Gary In Your Pocket: Stories and Notebooks of Gary Fisher* (1996), and *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (1997), rest on shelves, like generous invitations to the most Proustian of parties, where we can fall in love, again and again, in Eve's shy orbit, with any number of her peers, passions, students and friends.

I take solace in the experience of the bardo articulated at the end of Eve's penultimate book, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), in that fragile, powerful, (peri-)performative space between life and death, which we all inhabit and in which we are, in turn, populated by numberless versions of ourselves and other queer little gods. And I find that it is not the most famous of Eve's personae that seeds within me, that I miss the most. I find that kindest, most intense and sustaining to me is, perhaps, the still-little-known textile artist, who made a home for scraps of orphaned kimonos and other discarded fabrics; offered them up to any number of people fortunate enough to be invited to join Eve and her kitty in her studio. I'm depressively close, too, to the artist whose first show, *Floating Columns/In the Bardo*, comprised a set of Eve-scaled mannequins, without their human extremities, dressed in garments of her own making, who articulate now, with almost unbearable poignancy, all that we have lost; but whose subsequent exhibitions, *Bodhisattva Fractal World* and *Works in Fiber, Paper and Proust*, reparatively take us through the perhaps necessarily glacial journey of a figure fading peacefully into a gorgeous, pale silk ground.

Perhaps closest, though, is my friend, luxuriating opposite me in her apartment. Smiling softly, lovely feet extended towards mine. Sipping iced tea, and endlessly interested in news from 'Jason's world', of allotment gardening, Victoria, Ben, Dylan, Coen and Claws, she is waiting, with true patience, for me to learn the difficult, genuinely useful lesson of her indolence. An open hand, heart, ear, and countenance.

Live feeds of baby

Pandas fill my mind. At the

Time, I couldn't see

Why Eve was so keen

For me to sit with these kind,

Ungainly muses.

Now I understand
The relevance of those blind
Gentle, sleeping forms:

Our bodhisattva
Prepared each of us for her
Next incarnation.

Floating in and out
Of sleep on West Sixteenth Street,
Fine weather at last.

Jason Edwards (University of York)