

When Enough Is Enough: Relational Readings of Narrative Enoughing

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ABSTRACT: “Enough” is a slippery signifier—it is never clear enough, or else it always means too much. In this inquiry, we investigate the social and psychic work that “enough” performs. We do so by following an associative series of narrative instantiations that demonstrate how enoughness holds the paradoxical capacity to signal both sufficiency and excess simultaneously. By close reading polyvocal, genre-hybrid texts (from Hélène Cixous reading Sigmund Freud and Clarice Lispector to Maggie Nelson reading Eve Sedgwick), we examine the capacity of enoughness to produce and reproduce psychic violence in the same stroke as it opens up a horizon of recuperative potentiality. As we pan across these intertextual dialogues, Donald Winnicott provides a metaphoric figure for the relative and relational nature of enoughness; from the “good enough mother,” we probe the relational prospects of “a good enough language” and its embodied effects and affects. As a threshold and as a speech act, as a gesture and an imaginary, “enough,” we argue, operates against the capitalist imperative “to have,” while setting and transgressing limits between subjects. Ultimately, the dialectic between sufficiency and excess enables “enough” to express both a boundary and the lack thereof, a finite form and its indefinite expanse. “Enough,” as it were, isn’t enough to anticipate or determine the reach of its own relational effects.

This research was partially supported by an Israel Science Foundation Grant (no. 501/21) awarded to Yael Segalovitz. We would both like to thank Taylor Johnston-Levy for her invaluable feedback on an early draft of this essay.

“And the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!”

—*To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf

“ENOUGH” IS A SLIPPERY SIGNIFIER—it is never clear enough, or else it always means too much. When Mrs. Ramsay declares, for example, upon looking at the sea, that “It is enough!” does she imply that she needs nothing more, that what she has and perceives is sufficient? Or, alternately, does the repetition, with its pointed exclamation mark, convey an ambivalence: the “waves of pure delight” that race through Mrs. Ramsay’s mind are too ecstatic to bear, and she is in fact begging for it to stop—as in, “Enough!”¹ Rather than faulting enoughness for its polarizing modes of meaning-making, in this essay, we propose that the polysemic indeterminacy of “enough” is precisely what charges it with the potential to unsettle the value-laden opposition between sufficiency and excess; its internal tensions demonstrate the extent to which “just right” and “too much” are culturally and politically structured descriptors that continually collapse into one another, revealing their instability. “Enough” functions as a third term, mediating between sufficiency and excess, precisely because it is structurally relational: it produces and is produced by an encounter or comparison between at least two objects or subjects. In what follows, we investigate an associative series of literary instantiations that indicate how enoughness unveils the interplay between sufficiency and excess and what the relational implications are. From these readings, “enough” emerges as capable of producing and reproducing psychic violence in the same stroke that it opens up a horizon of recuperative potentiality.

The most explicitly relational aspect of “enough” is linguistic: the term’s meaning constantly shifts *in relation* to its surrounding semantic field. Although, while as structuralists have shown this is the nature of language per se, “enough” is particularly malleable, which accounts in part for its idiomatic versatility across languages. In fact, as we write this essay, we remain wary of the fact that the ubiquity of “enough” could not only afford play, but could play *us*. On occasion, as in the tautological idiom “enough is enough,” we take the meaning of the term for granted. In this sense, the idiomatic excess of “enough” could lure one into using this term in such a variety of ways that its function—the psychic and social work the term performs, and which we seek to explore—is obscured.

As such, in this essay, we turn to multi-genre texts that mobilize enoughness through literary theory, interpretation, and production. These texts’ own heightened attention to linguistic nuance keeps us attentive to twists and turns in signification. In the first section of the essay, we turn to Hélène Cixous, who reads the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s short story “Felicidade clandestina” (“Covert Joy”) in conversation with an essay by Sigmund Freud, in order to discuss the ability to “have what one has,” or, as we call it, the ability to be “enoughed” by an experience.² The verb form of “enough,” as we go on to discuss, differs from the more conventional “being

¹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2022), 46.

² Hélène Cixous, “Felicidade Clandestina”: The Promise of Having What One Will Have,” in *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, translated and edited by Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 123-42.

satisfied” in that the former acutely emphasizes the subject’s agency and effort. The following sections engage with Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *A Dialogue on Love*. In pivoting from Freud and Lispector to Nelson and Sedgwick, we dedicate a discussion to Donald Winnicott’s psychoanalytic concept of the “good enough mother,” since the figure of the mother intervenes in the conclusion of “Felicidade clandestina” and permeates Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*.³ Winnicott provides a metaphoric figure for the relative and relational nature of enoughness, which we continue to develop in our third section. There, we follow Nelson’s intertextual rewriting of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s own exploration of “enough” in *A Dialogue on Love*. This final section complicates the psychoanalytic terminology of the first two sections, moving from the “good enough mother” to the relational prospect of “a good enough language” and its embodied effects and affects. As the coda conveys, the fact that both *The Argonauts* and *A Dialogue on Love* have been read as “autotheory” (that is, as an American hybridization of autobiography and theory)⁴ has particular implications for the ways in which “enough” signifies when it is uttered in the first person. Although we thread the varying implications of “enough” across these texts, Lispector’s “Covert Joy” becomes central in the sense that it interweaves “enough” through all levels of the text: “enough” advances the plot, textures language, and exerts pressure on the reader.

Circling back to “sufficiency” and “excess,” these dialogical texts suggest that two main clusters of signification encapsulate the varied uses of “enough.” The first centers on the relation between materiality and need. In this case, “enough” allows one to measure and examine whether a given quantity is sufficient to satisfy particular desires, as expressed by such idioms as “more than enough,” “have you had enough?” or “there is enough to go around.” This form of “enoughness” resonates with notions of sufficiency and adequacy, and it coheres in our discussions of Cixous, Freud, and Lispector, each of whom ask, in distinct ways, not only what it *means*, but what it *takes* to experience sufficiency.

The second key form of “enough,” which emerges most emphatically in Nelson’s and Sedgwick’s intertextual and intersubjective dialogue, is more associated with embodiment than resources.⁵ In this context, “enough” refers to setting limits between two subjects. This mode of “enoughness” permits one to declare where their boundaries are, where one stops and the other begins, and if they would like an action or movement that affects them to stop. Such an “enough” functions in a liminal zone, where “I have had enough (of this),” “enough is enough,” or “enough already” come into play. These idioms express ethical, political, and ontological questions pertaining to dependence, agency, and the potential for violence. More specifically, Nelson and Sedgwick, via Winnicott, inquire into the ability of enoughness to demarcate the limits of linguistic meaning production, of states of bodily change, and even of the desire to carry on living.

Nearly impossible to disentangle, however, it is the intersection of these two clusters of signification which interests us. As the paradigmatic moment in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* demonstrates, enough is everywhere to be found, not in spite of, but because of, its ambiguity; “enough” enables Woolf to convey two simultaneous yet seemingly contradictory sensations—this is just

³ Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

⁴ For a thorough discussion of the rise of autotheory and its varied and variable genealogies, see, for example, Robyn Wiegman’s “Autotheory Theory,” *Arizona Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2020); and Alex Brostoff and Lauren Fournier’s “Autotheory ASAP! Academia, Decoloniality, and ‘I,’” *ASAP/Journal* 6, no. 3 (September 2021).

⁵ Though beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that embodiment itself has all too often been construed and thus exploited as a capitalist resource.

fine and this is too much—in a single word. In the varied literary instantiations that follow, we encounter the multilayered mechanisms of enough as they function in the context of a psychic and affective experience (e.g., Lispector’s narrative comparison between two girls’ capacity to be affectively and erotically “enoughed” by an object); through enough’s role in the act of reading and interpretation (e.g., Cixous’s and Nelson’s meditations on when language is “good enough”); and finally, in the context of constructing and confounding embodiment (e.g., the way in which Sedgwick links her family’s perception of her body to her later willingness to say “enough” to life). The boundaries of enoughness are rendered particularly visible in the vicinity of nonnormative bodies that are themselves under the constant threat of being read as insufficient: femininized, queered, ill, and, as we discuss, even “fat.” In each of these cases, the dialectic between sufficiency and excess enables “enough” to express both a boundary and the lack thereof, a finite form and its indefinite expanse. “Enough,” as it were, isn’t enough to anticipate or determine the reach of its own relational effects. At times, “enough” draws a border or boundary; in the same stroke, however, it may also transgress the very boundary it has just designated.

While recent scholarly studies of enoughness have focused predominantly on ecology and economy,⁶ our intention is to offer a phenomenological reading of enoughness through the literary lens of interdependency. Given the relationality imbricated in matters of enoughness, this essay simultaneously tills a testing ground for co-writing. The questions such a collaborative practice draws out magnify the thematic issues we explore: How will we decide when one of us has said enough, or too much? How to enable enough space for two voices to be heard, both on the page and in conversation? When and who in the writing process will declare, to echo Sedgwick, “that’s enough, we can stop now?”⁷ To help us navigate and negotiate the challenges endemic to enoughness, we approach texts that are not only genre-hybrid (traversing, for example, literary theory, literary experimentation, and psychoanalysis), but which are also polyvocal: that is, texts that explicitly engage in intertextual conversation with other writing and which center the act of thinking with and through others. We read Cixous, for example, as she is reading enoughness in the works of Freud and Lispector, and we join Nelson as she reads Sedgwick reading Winnicott. But is this too much? Not nearly enough? How else can we sufficiently interrogate and investigate enoughness if not by brushing up against the boundaries of excess?

I. TO BE ENOUGHED: READING CIXOUS READING LISPECTOR AND FREUD

What does it mean “to have”? For H el ene Cixous, this verb doesn’t denote a factual assertion in the sense, for example, of legally owning an object. Instead, “to have” describes a socio-psychic

⁶ By and large, scholars suggest that if the impact of imminent and ongoing climate catastrophe is such that natural resources will fail to be “enough” for the survival of human life in the Anthropocene, then the possibility of change ought to lie in the individual’s capacity (read: neoliberal subject’s capacity) to limit themselves and their use of resources to what is just enough. In this vein, Wolfgang Sachs’s “The Virtue of Enoughness” (*New Perspectives Quarterly* 16, no. 2) and Gabriela Edlinger, Bernhard Ungericht, and Daniel Deimling’s “Enoughness: Exploring the Potentialities of Having and Being Enough” (*Ephemera* 2021) advance the state of “being content with a material ‘enough’” as “enough” to save the world. Well aware of the implications for presentist policy discourse, in *Just Enough: The History, Culture and Politics of Sufficiency* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), Matthew Ingleby and Samuel Randalls diagnose this neoliberal misfire as follows: “In a world of multiple and clashing positionalities, ideologies and cultures, the rhetorical weapon that ‘enough is enough’ could embody is blunted, because what ‘enough’ constitutes itself remains in contest.”

⁷ Sedgwick, *A Dialogue*, 69.

ability that is difficult to obtain. In an essay tellingly titled “Felicidade Clandestina: The Promise of Having What One Will Have,” Cixous suggests that “to have what one has” signifies the ability to sense (on an affective and bodily level) that whatever it is one is holding on to or is experiencing is enough; to not be constantly haunted by the fantasy of more, by the regret of insufficiency, or by the guilt that can accompany having, when compared to others’ imagined or real deficiency.⁸ Cixous’s essay does not explicitly focus on enough; in fact, this word only appears once in the text. But she offers an implicit analysis of enoughness worth underscoring.

While “enough” is generally used as a determiner, pronoun, or adverb, Cixous suggests that it should also be considered as a noun or a verb, one that signifies a specific kind of psychic and bodily experience. Cixous asks: What does it mean to feel *enough*—to be *enoughed* by an event or object—and how does one reach that unique sensation? To feel enough, to be enoughed, Cixous proposes, is bound to the question of having, which she examines in two texts: Sigmund Freud’s 1936 “A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis: An Open Letter to Romain Rolland on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday” and Clarice Lispector’s 1964 “Covert Joy” (in Portuguese, “Felicidade clandestina,” hence Cixous’s title).⁹

As this archive makes evident, Cixous finds literature central to the contemplation of feeling “enough.” The first text she explores is an open letter from Freud addressed to a French author (Romain Rolland) whom he admires. The second is a short story by Clarice Lispector, whose oeuvre Cixous famously considered the ur-example of *écriture féminine*. Aptly, with respect to Lispector’s work, Cixous once declared, “I would never have another seminar if I knew that *enough* people [*un monde* *suffisamment étendu*] read Clarice Lispector . . . you only need to read her, everything is said, it’s perfect.”¹⁰ Indeed, the question of reading—what constitutes it as “enough”—will be essential to Cixous’s discussion.

The two texts Cixous juxtaposes are distant not only in time and place of publication, but also in genre and theme. Freud’s letter-essay is an introspection at the age of eighty on his visit to the Acropolis thirty years earlier, one which he was unable to enjoy. The experience leads him to the concept of “derealization”—an uncanny sensation that what you perceive with your senses is nevertheless unreal—and to the conclusion that it was his superego and relationship with his father that prevented him from “realizing” his trip to the historical site he so longed to visit. Lispector’s short story, on the other hand, centers a young Brazilian girl, who yearns for a book she cannot afford to purchase. She is then tortured by a classmate, who has the book but intentionally postpones lending it to the protagonist until the classmate’s mother, “horrified” by the “realization of the kind of daughter she had,” intervenes.¹¹

Despite their differences, both Freud’s and Lispector’s narratives revolve around the protagonists’ (un)realized desire. The question, for Cixous, is about the extent to which these

⁸ Cixous, “The Promise of Having,” 123-42.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, “A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis: An Open Letter to Romain Rolland on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 22, 1932–1936, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 237-48; Clarice Lispector, “Felicidade clandestina,” in *Felicidade clandestina*, 4th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1981), 7–11; Clarice Lispector, “Covert Joy,” in *The Complete Stories*, trans. Katrina Dodson, ed. Benjamin Moser (New York: New Directions, 2015), 369–72.

¹⁰ Hélène Cixous, “Extrême fidélité,” *Travessia* 14 (1987): 11-45, quoted in Marta Peixoto, *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 52, emphasis ours.

¹¹ Lispector, “Covert Joy,” 371.

protagonists are able to achieve satisfaction with what they now finally “have” and how this ability is linked to power structures registered on the body. For Cixous, both texts interrogate the act of wanting, failing, and managing to possess. Freud’s text, she claims, is fueled by what she calls “masculine economy,” a psychic, libidinal, and political force that prevents one from sensing “enough.” Lispector’s text, on the other hand, exhibits for Cixous a “feminine economy,” a form that feminizes modes of sexual pleasure that centers prolongation rather than finality. Though Western capitalist logic would exalt Freud’s alleged economy of having (a logic in which to “have” necessarily means that another does not), Cixous applauds Lispector’s protagonist, who is able to be continually, erotically, and psychically enougged by that which is not even fully “hers” (i.e., she is being *lent* a book). Per Cixous, Lispector’s protagonist is capable of being enougged not due to a sense of humbleness (I don’t need much to be happy) but a result of affective and social competence (I am filled to the brim by an experience, and I am thus able to defend myself against forms of social injury).

Of course, to read enoughness through the lens of Cixous’s gendered economies risks a gross reduction and oversimplification such that her rendition of masculinized economy would suggest “never enough,” while feminized economy would signify “more than enough.” Freud’s and Lispector’s texts nevertheless challenge the economizing distinctions that Cixous seeks to delineate vis-à-vis gender. In fact, Lispector’s and Freud’s textual economies focus not on gendering but on notions of “more” and “less,” which they begin by delineating, only to dissolve and unsettle the underlying assumptions.

Freud begins his letter with a lament of his deficiency in comparison to Rolland: “I have made long efforts to find something that might in any way be worthy of you . . . but it was in vain. I am ten years older than you and my powers of production are at an end. All that I can find to offer you is a gift of an impoverished creature, who has ‘seen better days.’”¹² Freud’s melancholic tone conveys an experience of psychic disappointment and bewilderment. However, counterintuitively, it is not his “impoverishment” that brings about Freud’s mental pain, but the very opposite. Although this inconsistency goes unnoticed by Freud, it is his wealth, both economic and intellectual, that causes him to be sorely unable to actually “see” his “better days.” As mentioned above, Freud dedicates the letter to rethinking his visit to Athens. Freud arrives at the Acropolis with his brother, and though in retrospect they both express immense enthusiasm about viewing the Acropolis, prior to and on the occasion itself they are both surprisingly “gloomy.”¹³ As Freud indicates in his letter, they also make various unnecessary geographical detours away from the very location at which they want to arrive, thus deferring arrival in time as well as space. It is this paradox that leads Freud to study the event decades later. Freud recalls that upon visiting the site, he found himself incapable of believing his own eyes: “By the evidence of my senses I am now standing on the Acropolis, but I cannot believe it.”¹⁴ This astonishment is accompanied not by “delight and admiration,” as Freud recalls he had expected, but with dread, as if he encountered nothing less than the “Monster of Loch Ness.”¹⁵

After a thorough self-analysis, Freud figures that he was unable, both perceptually and emotionally, to experience the Acropolis since he was unconsciously burdened by guilt. Freud’s father,

¹² Freud, “Disturbance of Memory,” 239.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 241.

he recounts to his readers, dreamt about traveling the world and to Athens specifically. But unlike his sons, the father was indeed economically “impoverished” and could not afford this excursion. Freud hence feels that he has surpassed his father, a thought which triggers the mechanism of guilt initially produced by what Freud elsewhere conceptualized as the Oedipal complex: “It seems as though the essence of success was to have got further than one’s father, and as though to excel one’s father was still something forbidden.”¹⁶

Cixous examines the letter, and, with Freud’s explanation in the backdrop, she masculinizes an economy of having, or, more precisely, the inability to have as an economy of self-restriction governed by the Name of the Father: “[Freud] did everything not to get there ... all these immense detours, this formidable expenditure to get to a pleasure that will not take place, describes a masculine economy.”¹⁷ According to Cixous, Freud works within this internal logic and hence paradoxically makes a formidable effort to get to the Acropolis while simultaneously and consistently impeding these efforts; in his own words, Freud is “wrecked by success.”¹⁸ What Cixous does not mention is that Freud acts out this unique psychic entanglement in the essay itself, a performance that leads him precisely to the problem of enoughness.

In the theoretical rather than narratological climax of his open letter, Freud makes his signature move by leaving the realm of the personal anecdote for the sake of abstract conceptualization. He delves into the “remarkable phenomena” of derealization, which is how he articulates what occurred to him on the Acropolis, an experience in which “the subject feels either that a piece of reality or that a piece of his own self is strange to him.”¹⁹ In one short paragraph, Freud allows himself to shift from thinking about derealization to musing about a variety of psychic phenomena: he meditates on depersonalization, rethinks the common sensation of “*déjà vu*,” and then pivots to the conceptualization of what he construes as the pathological conditions of “double consciousness” and “split personality.” Freud is on a roll, his tone vivid and free. However, as he nears the end of this paragraph, he is suddenly taken aback by his own soaring. Interrupting his own ascent, Freud is quick to constrict and devalue his speculations. “But all of this,” he writes, “is so obscure and has been so little mastered scientifically that I must refrain from talking about it any more to you.”²⁰

This “impoverished creature,” as Freud referred to himself earlier, is startled not by the “end” of his “powers of production” but by their unrestrained potency. Confronting Romain Rolland as another imaginary father, younger yet just as capable and “worthy” as the one who dreamt of Athens, Freud’s approach and tone shift and he makes a felt effort to open the next paragraph with a deceleration (perhaps even promise?): “It will be enough [*genügt*] for my purposes if I return to two general characteristics of the phenomena of derealization.” Just as in the Acropolis, Freud polices his own success, possession, and sense of accomplishment. Arguably, his is not the continual sensation of “being enoughed” that arises from Cixous’s theorization, but an “enough” that acts as a strict border, a limit, in this case set by the self for the self. In fact, throughout the essay, in both form and content, Freud teeters between a sense of having too much

¹⁶ Ibid., 247. Freud arrived at the idea of the Oedipus complex through his self-analysis and introduced it in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), but first used the term itself only in 1910. See Jean-Bertrand Pontalis and Jean LaPlanche, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1996), 283.

¹⁷ Cixous, “The Promise of Having,” 125.

¹⁸ Freud, “Disturbance of Memory,” 242.

¹⁹ Ibid., 245.

²⁰ Ibid.

(“to excel one’s father”) and having too little (“my powers of production are at an end”). Unable to be “enoughed,” he turns to “genügt” as a form of self-restriction: enough is enough.

As Cixous suggests, Lispector’s “Covert Joy” exhibits an “enough” of a different order. Lispector likewise begins by developing a binary relationship between more and less: “She [the protagonist’s classmate] was fat, short, freckled, and had reddish, excessively frizzy hair. She had a huge bust, while the rest of us were still flat-chested. As if that weren’t enough, she’d fill both pockets of her blouse, over her bust, with candy. But she had what any child devourer of stories would wish for: a father who owned a bookstore.”²¹ Lispector clearly positions the “she” who opens the story on the side of “more.” Her excessive hair, her full figure, her bust, are all narrativized as bodily manifestations of affluence, which is expressed not only in her access to books but in the form of a larger house and economic means. And yet, as Lispector immediately informs readers, “She didn’t take much advantage of it.” The “fat girl,” as Cixous refers to her throughout the essay (and we will return to this problematic appellation via Sedgwick), is on Freud’s side: incapable of having. As Cixous dwells on the opening sentence of the story, she focuses on the chest: “The little fat girl fills the space with candy. What does this mean at the level of absorption and consumption? ... Is she going to eat herself? Her own breasts? ... We leave from the bosom. The differentiation is not made at the sexual level, of who has and who does not have; rather, it is going to reverse itself into what a certain type of having that ‘does not know how to have what it has,’ means.”²² Rather than represent richness or nourishment, the full bosom, Cixous implies, ironically signals the protagonist’s inability to “have” what she has.

And yet, as in Freud’s case, the chest in Lispector’s story leads not only to the problem of having but specifically to the question of “enough,” through a linguistic play that escapes Cixous. The Portuguese “chest”—*busto*—is followed in Lispector’s opening paragraph by a series of onomatopoeias: “As if that weren’t enough (*Como se não bastasse*), she’d fill both pockets of her blouse (*bolsos da blusa*), over her bust (*por cima do busto*), with candy (*com balas*).” The repetitive alliteration acoustically links the girl’s excessive features with the term “enough,” i.e., “basta.” Through a shrewd play of words, then, Lispector associates the richness of body and candy not with “more,” but rather with “not enough”—*não bastasse*. Ostensibly positioned on the side of “more,” the girl is undoubtedly capable of teasing—as Lispector notes “what a talent she had for cruelty”—which accounts for the idiomatic meaning of exhibiting more and more advantages: “as if it wasn’t enough.” But this girl, Lispector also hints, finds it painfully challenging, just like Freud, to experience enoughness as a prolonged, fulfilling sensation; nothing for her would ever be enough. Even more interesting is the fact that Lispector conjugates “enough” as a verb: “*Como se não bastasse*,” an idiomatic subjunctive use of “basta” in Portuguese. This is precisely what we suggest that Cixous is implicitly attempting to do in her essay; namely, she calls attention to “enough” as an ongoing action. The choice, then, to flex the English “enough” into a verb form (what grammarians call “denominalization”) is a result of a triple refraction of “enough:” first through Cixous’s thinking in French, then through Lispector’s use in the Portuguese, and finally through our conceptual and linguistic translation of these ideas into English.

When Lispector’s protagonist finally receives the book, precisely such an act of enoughing transpires. Once she has the “thick” book in her hands, and even prior to having it, she actively “enoughs” her new treasure. As Cixous points out, once the protagonist has the book,

²¹ Lispector, “Covert Joy,” 369.

²² Cixous, “The Promise of Having,” 137.

she continually invents detours from reading or “consuming” the book, deviations aimed not at avoiding pleasure like Freud on the Acropolis, but at prolonging her sense of possession: “When I got home, I didn’t start reading. I pretended not to have it, just so later on I could feel the shock of having it . . . I kept inventing the most contrived obstacles for that covert thing that was joy.”²³ As Cixous puts it, “one could think that it is too classical, a kind of deferred negative, a not wanting to have pleasure. But not at all. It is an extraordinarily forceful leap from a passive waiting to an active waiting. The little girl goes on waiting for what she already has.”²⁴

Cixous concludes that this kind of having—what we have referred to as a continuous enoughing—is first and foremost a kind of reading. If one is capable of being actively “enoughed” by a book, it reveals itself as endless, regenerative; in other words, “we can read it all tranquilly, read again interminably even the smallest of volumes . . . the text opens up. It is a book full of books. That is what a book and reading are all about. Commercially, a book full of books disgruntles readers and editors, who ask for a book consisting of only one book.”²⁵ Cixous extends this reading of Lispector’s two-page short story over twenty pages, opening up the story and joining the protagonist in her process of prolongation. In this essay, we push this prolongation further, and we do so with covert joy.

II. GOOD ENOUGH MOTHERING

The matter of reading as a means of continuous enoughing, we’ve shown, appears at the end of Lispector’s short story and opens up through Cixous’s reading of it. But the association between reading, relationality, and enough can also be seen elsewhere in Lispector’s story through the lens of Donald Winnicott’s psychoanalytic approach. While the father appears in the opening lines of “Covert Joy” as the enabler of an excess that remains unfortunately inaccessible to his daughter, the mother later enters the narrative as an agent of possible change. If sides are to be taken, at the outset the mother seems to be on the side of the protagonist. When she appears at the doorstep to mediate between the two girls, the mother encourages the protagonist to keep the book in her possession “for as long as [she] liked,” a promise that not only terminates a cycle of seemingly endless waiting but also produces intense happiness. “Do you understand?” the protagonist asks, “It was worth more than giving me the book: ‘for as long as I liked’ is all that a person, big or small, could ever dare wish for.”²⁶

But this liminal moment is also one of transformation for the mother and for her relationship with her daughter. At first, the mother is unable, or simply refuses, to understand the situation: “There was a silent commotion, interrupted by words that didn’t clarify much. The lady found it increasingly strange that she wasn’t understanding.”²⁷ A moment later, the mother grasps the situation. Only then is she characterized as “good”: “Until that good mother (*essa mãe boa*) understood. She turned to her daughter and with enormous surprise exclaimed: But that book never left the house and you didn’t even want to read it!”²⁸ Ostensibly, the woman is perceived as “good” by the protagonist-narrator since she lends her the book for perpetuity. But the diction

²³ Lispector, “Covert Joy,” 372.

²⁴ Cixous, “The Promise of Having,” 139.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 141–42.

²⁶ Lispector, “Covert Joy,” 371.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

indicates that this figure appears on the scene not simply as a person, but as a “mother” specifically, which alludes to her relations with her daughter rather than with the protagonist. To what, then, does that mother’s so-called “goodness” refer? At the door, she is deeply disturbed by what she learns of her daughter: “She eyed us in silence: the power of perversity in the daughter she didn’t know.”²⁹ And hence, she forces her daughter to act against the latter’s wishes. In what sense can these actions imply “good” mothering, if at all?

Given the context, one cannot help but think of Winnicott’s conceptualization of the “good enough mother,” which the British psychoanalyst first coined a decade prior to the publication of Lispector’s story.³⁰ As Winnicott puts it as early as 1953, “The good enough ‘mother’ (not necessarily the infant’s birth mother) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant’s needs, and active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant’s growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration.”³¹ Winnicott’s concept encompasses what we have suggested are the two foundational meanings of “enough” (i.e., as both sufficiency and as excess, as a boundary and as its transgression). Per Winnicott, the good enough mother—who exhibits what he calls “ordinary devotion”—gradually sets boundaries between her subjectivity and that of the child, conveying the message that there is a limit to her adaptation and care.³² The mother figure signals that there is a place where the child stops and she begins. This limit-setting, if done in sync with the child’s growing capacity for frustration, plays a constructive role in the child’s emotional and cognitive development as an autonomous subject. The mother’s active behavioral borders are “enough,” Winnicott contends, and this is precisely what the child needs; it is exactly “enough” for them in the material sense of meeting their needs. As Jessica Benjamin describes it, “Gradually the child begins to identify with the mother’s subjective experience and realizes that ‘I could miss you as you miss me,’ and therefore, that ‘I know that you could wish to have your own life as I wish to have mine.’”³³ For this mutual “enoughing” to take place, there must be a reciprocal gaze: the mother attending to the child’s changing abilities and the child attuning themselves to the mother’s increasing autonomy.

Against this backdrop, the scene at the door could be read as a metaphorical threshold moment in which good enough mothering emerges. In Cixous’s terms, the “fat girl,” despite her affluence and privilege, is incapable of having what one has, and is thus in a constant state of “pure vengeance.” By Winnicott’s logic, however, a modification in this state of affairs may occur if the mother recognizes the child’s ineptitude, and if the child acknowledges the mother’s recognition. Only then will a renewed cycle of an “active adaptation to the infant’s needs” and a subsequent lessening of this adjustment be possible. Is Lispector’s story, then, not only about the protagonist’s ability to experience the book as enough, but also about her rival’s ensuing development of that ability? Does “Covert Joy” also covertly point to the mother’s growing acknowledgment of her child’s turmoil and at her child’s subsequent potential to have what she has?

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Donald W. Winnicott, “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: A Study of the First Not-Me Possession,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34, no. 2 (1953): 89–97.

³¹ Ibid., 94.

³² Winnicott writes, “Success in infant-care depends on the fact of devotion, not on cleverness or intellectual enlightenment,” “Transitional Objects,” 94.

³³ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 40.

The so-called “fat girl” is in no way the protagonist of Lispector’s story, and her interaction with the mother is marginal to the protagonist’s covert, readerly joy; but if we “open up” the story and “read again interminably,” as Cixous invites, then the encounter at the door illustrates the recuperative potentiality of enough. The mother takes on the role of the reader, revisiting the “story” between the two young girls. In this capacity, the mother offers her daughter a gaze that actively adapts to her needs, to paraphrase Winnicott. The “fat girl” is finally seen—her cruelty acknowledged with care. The mother’s gaze, then, as a boundary (signaling to her daughter: “that’s enough”) opens up the possibility for her daughter to be “enoughed” by what she has, finally letting go of her want, which could never be fulfilled.

III. GOOD ENOUGH LANGUAGE? READING NELSON READING WINNICOTT AND SEDGWICK

Winnicott’s “good enough mother,” we have suggested, encapsulates two forms of enoughness: (1) that of experiencing material sufficiency and (2) that of embodied boundaries that demarcate interdependency and intersubjectivity. In this section, we complicate these forms with questions of language—rather than the mother—as “good enough.” To do so, we turn to Maggie Nelson’s intertextual dialogue with Winnicott. Interestingly, a recent resurgence in representations of Winnicott’s “good enough mother” suggests that not enough has been said about its reach, relevance, and portability. Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015) is not only a central player in this resurgence but also reflects on the phenomenon itself. Nelson writes, “You can find it [Winnicott’s “good enough mother”] everywhere from mommy blogs to Alison Bechdel’s graphic novel *Are You My Mother?* to reams of critical theory. (One of this book’s titles, in an alternate universe: *Why Winnicott Now?*).”³⁴ *The Argonauts* positions Nelson’s pregnancy alongside her partner’s FTM transition and juxtaposes the birth of a child with the death of a parent.³⁵ And yet, despite a marked interest in “family drama” and family relations,³⁶ as well as in the specificity of mother-child symbiosis,³⁷ Nelson’s mobilization of “enough” does not solely pertain to the figure of the mother or caretaker.

What has gone largely unnoticed in scholarship is the way in which Nelson mobilizes “enough” to deliberate and interrogate the structure and function of language. Whether words are good enough is the problem encountered in the opening scenes of *The Argonauts*, when Nelson and Harry first sleep together and dispute the nominative properties of language, its ability to exalt and corrode, feed or murder. The first few pages of the text teem with the term “good enough.” Harry is “devoted to the conviction that words are not good enough. Not only

³⁴ Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 19.

³⁵ Given queer theory’s historical antagonisms with psychoanalysis, Nelson’s investment in Winnicott, to the point of toying with titling her book after his work, is anything but expected. *The Argonauts*, as scholars have shown, takes an overt interest in intersubjectivity, a view underlying the School of Object Relations to which Winnicott belonged. For more on this, see Constance M. Furey, “Eros and the Argonauts,” *Theology & Sexuality* 22, no. 3 (2016): 155–64; Teagan Bradway, “Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form,” *PMLA* 136, no. 5 (2021): 711–27; Max Cavitch, “Everybody’s Autotheory,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2022): 81–116.

³⁶ Carolyn Laubender, “Speak for Your Self: Psychoanalysis, Autotheory, and the Plural Self,” *Arizona Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2020): 39–64.

³⁷ Mollie Ann Kervick, “Embracing Maternal Eroticism: Queer Experiences of Pleasure in Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*,” *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 3, no. 1-2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/5914>.

not good enough, but corrosive to all that is good, all that is real, all that is flow,” whereas Nelson insists, following Wittgenstein, that words possess reparative potentiality, since “the inexpressible is contained–inexpressibly!–in the expressed.”³⁸ By the time the good enough mother appears on the scene, “ordinary devotion” is anchored to (if not upstaged by) Nelson’s aside that “Winnicott is a writer for whom ordinary words are good enough.”³⁹ In Nelson’s conception of language as good enough, then, a resemblance to Lispector’s protagonist emerges: both are able to identify plentitude (and the potential pleasure therein), even where paucity seems to be situated. Lispector’s protagonist experiences the book as enough by hiding it, making it invisible, only to then “discover” it momentarily, thus prolonging its pleasure. Nelson experiences language as enough where Harry finds it inadequate (and at worst, violent) through an embrace of its ability to implicitly express the inexpressible.

Across history and geography, this perspective resonates with Lispector’s conception of language as enough, expressed, for example, in the short *crônica* “The Miraculous Catching of Fish” (*A pesca milagrosa*), where she compares the art of writing to that of reading:⁴⁰

Writing, therefore, is the use of a word as bait: the word fishes for what is not a word. Once this non-word takes the bait, something has been written. And when the between-the-lines has been caught, the word can be thrown away with relief. But this is where the analogy breaks off: the non-word, when taking the bait, incorporates it.⁴¹

For Lispector, what matters most in language is “the between-the-lines.” If this is the case, one might think that the “lines” themselves (that is, “the word” on the page) become disposable at the moment of writing. The problem, however, is that “the non-word, when taking the bait, incorporates it.” Articulated otherwise, the inexpressible is inextricable from the expressible; the two are mutually incorporated in each other. Per Lispector, if we are to approximate the “non-word,” we must “digest” the materiality of language itself, its inscribed signs. Language, per Lispector, its faults notwithstanding, is enough for signification to transpire if only one keeps a readerly eye out for the non-word.

Nelson, in a move not unlike Lispector’s, aligns herself with the notion of language as “good enough” — perhaps not perfect, but sufficient for the work it ought to perform. While Harry distrusts “the cookie-cutter function of our minds,” faulting the categorical nature of language for forever transfiguring that which it names, Nelson takes categories to be a precondition of their own undoing: though the category itself nominally remains the same, its meaning constantly changes. This is why Nelson names the text (a title she borrows from Barthes’s *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*) after the metaphoric and mythological *Argo*, a ship whose parts have been replaced and yet remains the same. Language, for Nelson, remains malleable, a quality that saves it from ossification and makes it just “enough,” in spite of its faults. However, like Lispector, Nelson also suggests that the reader must play an active role for language to be “enough;” that is, for language to expose the instability of its own operations of categorization. After all, the title of her work isn’t *The Argo* but *The Argonauts*, the voyagers who repeatedly perform these acts of

³⁸ Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 4, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁰ The *crônica* is a largely journalistic Brazilian genre which combines creative nonfiction, short story, and essayistic form.

⁴¹ Clarice Lispector, *A legião estrangeira* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1983), 143, translation ours.

renewal.⁴² *The Argonauts'* emphasis is not, therefore, language as an object of enoughing, but rather, subjects—those agents of enoughing who imbue language with meaning, those readers who push against language's categorical borders. Language and its murderous effects of nomination, in other words, remain good enough only when kept vivid; that is, "renewed by each use."⁴³

In a recent interview, when Nelson is asked what triggered her interest in Winnicott, she recounts her first encounter with his work in a graduate seminar on non-Oedipal models of psychology taught at City University of New York by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In an oft-quoted moment in *The Argonauts*, Nelson even refers to Sedgwick as one of the "many-gendered mothers of my heart."⁴⁴ But when she engages Sedgwick on the issue of enoughness, it is not simply Winnicott's "good enough mother" that appears on the scene, but rather questions of finitude, pain, death, and, of course, language. Nelson refers specifically to Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love* (1999), which anticipates *The Argonauts* both in its engagement with psychoanalysis and in its autotheoretical form. *A Dialogue* follows Sedgwick's sessions with her psychoanalyst, Shannon, as she faces late-stage breast cancer. The book alternates between Sedgwick's depiction of and reflections on these meetings, the analyst's notes, and vignettes in verse. *A Dialogue's* deployment of enoughness not only reemerges in citation in *The Argonauts*, but also provokes an uncanny return to, and rereading of, "Felicidade clandestina" and its cruel depiction of the "fat girl."

In one particular session, Sedgwick describes "the fact of my having survived" a family that consistently made "clear to me that every single thing about my body was unacceptable."⁴⁵ As a child, this devaluing gaze not only manifests in "the fat stuff," but in imperatives to get braces and contact lenses, a perception that signals how "they [Sedgwick's family] saw me as infinitely malleable—as some perfectible thing-putty."⁴⁶ When Sedgwick admits to the rage triggered by this perception of bodily perfectibility, a paragraph break pans out to an associative meditation on when pain, whether emotional and/or bodily, becomes too much. When Sedgwick experiences acute pain, she longs to hear:

'That's enough. You can
Stop now.'

Stop: living, that is.
And enough: hurting.

Like, 'I didn't realize how hard it was for you; you've done well; you've been through plenty;
you're excused.'⁴⁷

As a speech act that grants permission by drawing a bodily boundary, "enough" is, as it turns out, just "enough" for Sedgwick. But who would be the utterer of such a speech act—the enoughing

⁴² Alex Brostoff, "An Autotheory of Intertextual Kinship: Ambivalent Bodies in the Work of Maggie Nelson and Paul B. Preciado," *Dissident Self-Narratives: Radical and Queer Life Writing, Synthesis: An Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies* 14 (2022): 91-115.

⁴³ Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 5.

⁴⁴ Yael Segalovitz and Anneleen Masschelein, "How Shoshana Felman Blew My Mind: Interview with Maggie Nelson," April 2021, *Psychoanaliterature*, podcast, accessed September 30, 2022, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6PW7O2yMrrAGsSeLczRgpg?si=60afaf21cf114765>; Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 105.

⁴⁵ Sedgwick, *A Dialogue*, 68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

that would end illness and pain, releasing the addressee from living and hurting? Rather than frame such a wish in the aggressive destruction impelled by the death drive, Sedgwick describes this relational release as intersubjective recognition. Her wish is to be empathetically and emphatically granted permission to “*Stop: living, that is*” by another. To hear the phrase “you *can* stop now” is a gesture of “enough” that signals recognition, much like that granted by the mother in Lispector’s story: “I didn’t realize how hard it was for you” articulates an acknowledgment that Sedgwick’s family consistently refused in the context of bodily being and belonging. Here, then, “enough” enacts a limit not by the subject herself (e.g., Mrs. Ramsay’s “It is enough!”), but by the linguistic and affective recognition of an other, who declares, for Sedgwick, “*enough: hurting.*” This enougthing is overtly interrelational. And for Sedgwick and Nelson in particular, relationality manifests formally; that is, through citational acts of conjuring and conversing with others.⁴⁸

That Sedgwick’s longing appears in verse performs a typographic break in her prose, making space for the expression of the very hurt that “enough” would seek to stop. “*That’s enough, you can stop now*” is then repeated in prose italics after a paragraph break, the extra white space like a pause gone on too long. The Japanese *haibun*, which interweaves prose with haiku and through which Sedgwick fashions *A Dialogue*, mirrors the ebb and flow of her and Shannon’s dialogue. As Anne Rügge-meier and Maren Scheurer describe it, “The line breaks and the opening of the narrative for poetic reflection allows Sedgwick ‘to express affect without a subject to channel its feelings.’ In other words, she leaves the task of making sense of these passages to someone else. Thus, readers are forced to become co-creators in Sedgwick’s narrative, just as she has already woven her therapist’s perspective into her book.”⁴⁹ In other words, not only are Sedgwick and Shannon rendered the subjects of intersubjectivity in dialogue, since they are both explicitly constituted through each other, but Sedgwick also recruits readers into co-creating an intersubjective scene. To be blunt, these line breaks ask the reader to take the position of the speaker who would then grant Sedgwick permission to die. Ironically, of course, were Sedgwick’s wish to “enough” herself out of pain to come true, it would result in the death of the author. Instead, however, readers must contend with the pain of the impossibility of granting an end to Sedgwick’s pain, such that affect metaphorically remains suspended in verse. Here, enoughness becomes a palliative imaginary, a promise that there could be a limit to pain, and that it could be met.

When Nelson cites the moment in which Sedgwick concedes, “that’s enough, you can stop now,” Nelson draws on Sedgwick’s own conceptualization of her work as “fat” (as in the poetry collection *Fat Art, Thin Art*). In *The Argonauts*, a trailing parenthetical anaphora then pushes against the limits, bodily and otherwise, of enoughness:⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For more on the ways in which formal gestures of citation perform acts of kin-fostering in autotheory, see Alex Brostoff’s “An Autotheory of Intertextual Kinship: Ambivalent Bodies in the Work of Maggie Nelson and Paul Preciado,” *Synthesis*, 2022.

⁴⁹ Anne Rügge-meier and Maren Scheurer, “Autobiography and|as Narcissism? Psychoanalysis and Self-Reflexive Life-Writing in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *A Dialogue on Love* and Alison Bechdel’s *Are You My Mother?*” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 34, no. 2 (2019): 178.

⁵⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Fat Art, Thin Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). In this book, too, Sedgwick binds the personal with the theoretical, conceptualizing her poetic and intellectual approach as “fat” through the lens of her fraught relationship with her “thin” sister. Although it ranges beyond the parameters of this inquiry, we would be eager to engage an interrogation of the intersections between Sedgwick’s *Fat Art, Thin Art* and Lispector’s “*Felicidade clandestina*” through the lens of fat studies.

Sedgwick was a famous pluralizer, an instinctive maximalist who named and celebrated her predilection for production as “fat art.” I celebrate this art, even if in practice I am more of a serial minimalist—an employee, however productive, of the condensery [...]

That’s enough. You can stop now: the phrase Sedgwick said she longed to hear whenever she was suffering. (Enough hurting, enough showing off, enough achieving, enough talking, enough trying, enough writing, enough living.)

The *capaciousness* of growing a baby. The way a baby literally *makes space* where there wasn’t space before.⁵¹

Enough’s relative and relational signification, we have argued, renders it unstable and in constant motion. *The Argonauts* opens by positioning Nelson on the side of “more” with regard to the expressibility of language by contrast to Harry’s resistance to it. As we’ve described, in response to Harry’s argument against naming altogether (“Once we name something, you said, we can never see it the same way again”), Nelson calls “for plethora, for kaleidoscopic shifting, for excess. I insisted that words did more than nominate.”⁵² And yet, when confronted with Sedgwick’s celebrated pluralization, as cited above, Nelson shifts, now presenting “condensery” rather than excess as good enough. The tension between too much and just enough continues a moment after Nelson declares herself a minimalist, when she moves to flesh out Sedgwick’s words. In Sedgwick’s original *A Dialogue*, “That’s enough. You can/ stop now” appears on the side of condensation, orthographically taking the minimalist form of the *haibun* verse. *The Argonauts*, on the other hand, multiplies Sedgwick’s “enough” by seven and proliferates the single “Enough: hurting” into “enough showing off,” “enough achieving,” “enough talking,” “enough trying,” “enough writing,” “enough living.” This proliferation spills across the paragraph break into a new vignette, in which Nelson relays the transgressive growth of her own bodily limits. “The *capaciousness* of growing a baby,” she notes, “The way a baby literally *makes space* where there wasn’t space before.” Nelson, it would now appear, wants language to signify in both directions: both too much and too little to mobilize the very oppositional movements of enoughness itself. Like Winnicott and Lispector, Nelson’s work with “enough” demonstrates this concept’s constant fluctuation between sufficiency and excess.

Sedgwick too, as Nelson recounts, wanted it both ways. The “it,” in Sedgwick’s case, however, was queerness: at once in constant motion while also anchored to the material history of sexual prohibition:

She [Sedgwick] wanted the term to be a perpetual excitement, a kind of placeholder—a nominative, like Argo, willing to designate molten or shifting parts, a means of asserting while also giving the slip. That is what reclaimed terms do—they retain, they insist on retaining, a sense of the fugitive.

At the same time, Sedgwick argued that “given the historical and contemporary force of the prohibitions against every same-sex sexual expression, for anyone to disavow those meanings, or to displace them from the term [queer]’s definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself.”⁵³

⁵¹ Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 102-3; emphasis in the original.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 29.

As Nelson insists that “the inexpressible is contained—inexpressibly!—within the expressed,” so too does Sedgwick contend that “queerness” is capacious enough to encompass referential proliferation without evacuating its own historical fugitivity. When language is good enough, is it both too little or too much? Is the expressible “enough” and the inexpressible, then, both an excess of possibility (i.e., “perpetual excitement . . . molten or shifting parts”) and an absence that haunts the articulation (i.e., “giving the slip . . . a sense of the fugitive”)? “There is much to be learned,” Nelson writes, “from wanting something both ways.”⁵⁴ Acts of enoughing, in this sense, run counter to binary opposition in their embrace of “both ways.” “Both,” after all, implies a dyadic formation.

This dyadic formation brings us from language’s limits back to those limits demarcated by and within relationships. Sedgwick’s associative consideration of “enough” and its shifting subjects and objects does not end with language but touches on the figure of the mother as well. Sedgwick continues questioning (as do we) what else “enough” enables:

I’m trying to think of other things that “that’s enough, you can stop now” could have meant—aside from, yes, you don’t have to live anymore. I come to a scenario: a kid getting a bit hyper, showing off, talking loud, acting funny or something, who is—no, not told to cut it out—but, instead, rebuked (deliberately or absent-mindedly) by being, after a certain point, ignored. So the kid is somehow stuck in this behavior without having anyone to let them know: that’s enough, you can stop now.

The link between pain, childish behavior, body size, recognition, and the gesture of “enough” calls to mind Lispector’s depiction of the “fat girl,” who, as we have suggested, also faces a moment of enoughing when her mother recognizes her deceptive refusal to share what she has (the book, that is), which is in fact a manifestation of pain. This parental acknowledgment is expressed by a gesture of enoughness; the mother terminates her child’s torture of the protagonist, telling her, in what Sedgwick would identify as an acknowledgment: “that’s enough, you can stop now.” Through the lens of Sedgwick’s meditation on enoughness, then, the narratological gaze, amplified by Cixous’s reading of it, that labels the girl “fat” reveals itself as phobic and violent (“what a talent she had for cruelty,” readers are told about one of the girls only). In this context, “Felicidade clandestina” flips, and the drama of enough, which Cixous attributes to the protagonist, becomes that of the anti-hero. Lispector’s “fat girl” turns out to be the one treated with cruelty by the narration itself and as undergoing an experience of enough—both as a limit and as a lesson in how to have—with her mother. The narrative cruelty risks obscuring its own brutality, for the expressible words on the page are not enough. These texts deliberately present themselves as not enough, inviting readers to make more of them through a gaze that would activate their recuperative potentiality.

IV. YOU CAN STOP NOW: A CODA

Such a gaze, one which grants a good enough reading, then raises the question: In writing this essay together, were we able to see each other? To signal in collaboration where enough is enough, and where words are just enough to work well? Our own writing dyad must concede a kind of rupture at the moment in which one of us wishes to cite the other’s work. In “‘That Listening Mien’: Queer and Psychoanalytic Intersubjectivity in Sedgwick’s Autotheory,” Yael lauds Sedgwick’s

⁵⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

“both/and thinking” as indicative of the intersection between queerness and psychoanalysis; that is, as a reading of how psychoanalysis is always already queered by its insistence on “you” and “I”:

The basic assumption underlying any intersubjective perspective is that the subject is always both/and, both “I” and “you,” since subjectivity is taken to be constituted and inhabited by significant others (“objects” in psychoanalytic terminology). . . . Sedgwick’s both/and thinking is *both* a product of intersubjectivity *and* a tool for overcoming harmful intersubjective exchanges.⁵⁵

As a mode of both/and thinking, acts of enoughing, we have argued, are “*both* a product of intersubjectivity *and* a tool for overcoming harmful intersubjective exchanges.” For Lispector’s “little girl,” to be enoughed by a book is *both* a product of reading as endless *and* a tool for overcoming intersubjective refusal. For Nelson, to be enoughed by language is *both* a product of mutual understanding *and* a tool for overcoming the potential violence inflicted by intersubjective discord. For Sedgwick, as for Lispector’s so-called “fat girl,” “enough” is *both* a product of intersubjective recognition *and* a means to supersede the pain of holding on to what one has (whether it be a book or life itself). For Yael and Alex, to co-write about enoughness is *both* a product of our intersubjective dialogue *and* a tool for addressing our intellectual debates about the effects, affects, and implications of enoughness itself.

It has not been our intention to idealize enoughness. Although we have argued that its very ambiguity and ambivalence open up liminal space between sufficiency and excess, the capacity for violence persists. As a threshold and as a speech act, as a gesture and an imaginary, “enough” works against the capitalist imperative “to have” while setting and transgressing limits between subjects.

The relational limits of enoughness, however, rear their heads at the moment of conclusion, for being “good enough” also suggests being able to see where one’s own limits are. As co-writers, the onus of our struggle with enoughness has been a problem with and in language, a kind of intersubjective both/and thinking which is both our object of study and a practice in which we are engaged. This writing is thus precisely enough and not enough. And yet, in order to be perceived, it must have a limit—such that we might hear echoes of

That’s enough. You can
stop now.

Stop: writing, that is.

□

⁵⁵ Yael Segalovitz, “‘That Listening Mien’: Psycho-Queer Relationality in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *A Dialogue on Love*,” *American Review of Books* 43, no. 2 (2022).