Université de Montréal

Tainted Love: AIDS, Theory, Ethics, Elegy

par

George Piggford

Département d'études anglaises
Faculté des arts et des sciences

Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du grade de
Philosophiae Doctor (Ph.D.)
en Études anglaises

mai 2000

Université de Montréal
Faculté des études supérieures

Cette thèse intitulée:

Tainted Love: AIDS, Theory, Ethics, Elegy

présentée par

George Piggford

a été évaluée par un jury composé des personnes suivantes:

Thèse acceptée le .....

Abstract

This thesis first examines analyses of the cultural discourses of AIDS by critics and theorists (chapter 1) and then critiques such discourses from the perspective of the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (chapter 2). These surveys of "AIDS theory" and Levinasian ethics are followed by readings of the elegiac tradition in English, particularly in its British and American modernist, then American postmodernist, manifestations, with a particular emphasis on male homoeroticism (chapter 3). Lastly, particular stress is placed on a literary subgenre of the postmodern moment, the AIDS elegy (chapter 4). The purpose of these readings is to put into (literary critical) practice the more abstract theoretical frames that circumscribe my reading of "AIDS." These analyses, prefaced by an examination of the history and conventions of the elegy, are drawn from bodies of work by Paul Monette, Kenny Fries, Thom Gunn, Mark Doty, and others. The poetry of these authors is used to explore the limits of AIDS theory and to posit the necessity of an ethical intervention into the discourses of AIDS.

Résumé de synthèse

Cette thèse examine tout d'abord des analyses de discours culturels du sida, de la part des critiques et des théoriciens (1e chapitre) et ensuite critique ces discours de la perspective de la philosophie éthique d'Emmanuel Lévinas (2e chapitre). Ces survols de la "théorie du sida" et de l'éthique lévinassienne sont suivis de lectures de la tradition de l'élégie anglaise surtout dans ses manifestations modernes et postmodernes des textes américains et britanniques, et avec un intérêt particulier pour l'homoérotisme masculin (3e chapitre). La dernière partie de la thèse regarde l'élégie sidéenne comme un constituant d'un sous genre littéraire du moment postmoderne (4e chapitre). Le but de ces lectures est d'intégrer dans la pratique (surtout littéraire) l'encadrement le plus abstrait pour circonscrire ma lecture du "sida". Ces analyses, introduites par une examen de l'histoire et des conventions de l'élégie, sont tirées entre autres des oeuvres de Paul Monette, Kenny Fries, Thom Gunn et Mark Doty. L'oeuvre poétique de ces auteurs est employée pour explorer les limites de la théorie du sida et pour proposer le besoin d'une intervention éthique aux discours du sida.

Acknowledgements

My first and foremost debt of gratitude is to my parents, Helen Kuzma Piggford and James Wayne Piggford, Jr., without whose unflagging personal, financial, and moral support I could never have graduated even from kindergarten.

Others, in the Levinasian sense, who have provided invaluable assistance include: James W., III., Laura, and James C. Piggford, Teresa and Steven Buchina, Mary Zaken, Cyndi Charles, Patricia Macik, Sally Hartle, George Virostek, Michael Yaksick, William Ogrodowski, Robert J. Doherty, Doug Mitchell, William Reichard. At Duquesne U.: Albert C. Labriola, Mary Smith, Constance and Roland Ramirez, Samuel Tindall, and Linda Kinnahan. In Montréal: Judith Scherer Herz, Tom Waugh, Jay Bochner, William Kinsley, Bill Readings, Liane Moyes, and Steven Bruhm. At Tufts U.: Lee Edelman, Linda Bamber, David O'Leary, Neil Miller, and Jonathan Strong. Scholars elsewhere: Gregory W. Bredbeck, Henry Abelove, Sandra Gilbert, David Jarraway, and Douglas Crimp. More radically other: Mark Koget, Alexis Southard, Mark Long, Charles Watkins, Carrie Hamilton, Ellen Servinis, Justin Edwards, Matthew Ouellette, Gregory Oehler, and Whitney Wilson. Most recently: Dan Kayajan (C.S.C.), my Moreau Housemates, John Reardon, Eileen Toole (R.S.M.), Jane O'Donnell (R.S.M.), Joanne Ennis, Jack Ryan (C.S.C.), Charles Kociolek (C.S.C.), Tom Looney (C.S.C.), and the Provincial and members of the Eastern Province (U.S.A.) of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

Sections of this thesis were presented in earlier versions at: the Sixth Annual Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference (SUNY-Stony Brook, 1993); the Cultural

Studies in Canada Conference (U. of Toronto, 1994); the Poetry and History Conference (U. of Stirling, Scotland, 1996). Deepfelt thanks to commenters and inquisitors at these events.

In addition to the above, three others have impacted, allowed for, and shaped this project in particular and essential ways: Deborah Bowen, James Smithhammer, and Robert K. Martin.

But there, I speak

in human terms--
how else would you allow me
to frame the discussion?

(Doty, Sweet 79-80)

Table of Contents

Introduction

> [T]here is no available discourse on AIDS that is not itself diseased. (Edelman, Homographesis 92)

> It started with sweats in the night and swollen glands. Then the black cancers spread across their faces--as they fought for breath TB and pneumonia hammered at the lungs, and Toxo at the brain. Reflexes scrambled--sweat poured through hair matted like lianas in the tropical forest. Voices slurred--and then were lost forever. My pen chased this story across the page tossed this way and that in the storm. (Jarman 7-8)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s in North America a variety of textual practices emerged that took on the subject of AIDS, variously as signifier, signified, metaphor, and pathology. Literary and cultural critics attempted in this period to intervene in these practices, particularly those employed by the medical establishment, and thereby produced what I will term "AIDS theory," a set of discourses that both critiqued and contributed to what Eric Savoy has called the "spiralling metadiscourses" of the epidemic. Typically writing from a poststructuralist perspective, these theorists have generally argued that anyone willing to engage in a public discourse about AIDS does so at his or her own risk. Unguarded, careless discourse about AIDS is, according to numerous cultural and literary critics, just as dangerous as unprotected sex in the age of AIDS. Since AIDS is

understood primarily as a signifier in most prominent cultural analyses, the job of "AIDS theorists" has been to read the discourses that construct and in a sense are AIDS. Many writers emphasize the fact that AIDS is not a disease but a syndrome. This is significant because while diseases can be contagious and communicable, syndromes cannot. Jan Zita Grover has explored this distinction most thoroughly in her "AIDS: Keywords." A disease represents a deviation from or interruption of the normal functioning of a bodily organ, system, or part. A syndrome, conversely, is "a pattern of symptoms pointing to a 'morbid state' which may or may not be caused by infectious agents"; like a text, a syndrome can be read and interpreted in numerous, sometimes contradictory ways.

This emphasis on discourse, though politically useful as a critique of various dominant cultural assumptions and assertions, is necessarily limited by its theoretical grounding in anti-hermeneutics and deconstruction. Most theorists read "AIDS" as signifier rather than signified--to use Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction; that is, AIDS theory tends to focus on AIDS as a term with potent social, political, and epistemological ramifications, rather than as a "real" disease, or more properly, syndrome. Although the body figures into some theoretical texts that focus on AIDS, it often remains in quotation marks, signalling a "body" that is always already inscribed, a product of what Judith Butler terms "materialization" rather than an empirically "real" entity outside of language. For Butler matter itself, or at least "the notion of matter," is understood as "a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (Butler 9). In much AIDS theory, deconstructive terms such as "differance," "absence," and "trace" point towards a set of assumptions that occlude the body qua body, and thus much of the textual "body," or corpus, of "AIDS theory" does

not allow for an empirical apprehension of or approach to a real body that can be infected with HIV, manifest symptoms of opportunistic infections, and die--except insofar as such process are understood as narratives, series of referents, methods of using discourse. For that reason, a careful analysis of the poststructuralist underpinnings of theoretical writing about AIDS lays bare the insufficiency of strictly deconstructive discourse analysis for explaining the relationship between viewer and body-with-AIDS, reader and text-about-AIDS, particularly as it is manifest in bodies inscribed in literary, specifically for my purposes poetic, texts.

The ethical theory of Emmanuel Levinas, which greatly impacted, even allowed for, French poststructuralism, provides a useful critique of, perhaps a corrective for, deconstruction as it might be applied to texts about AIDS. Levinas, like the poststructuralists, critiques the Western ontological tradition, the tradition of "Being," of God-as-Being. Ethics for Levinas precedes being, even Being; before we are, we are responsible to the other. His reading of the ethical relationship, or face-à-face, allows for an approach to AIDS and AIDS literature that includes an other that might be apprehended, cared for, and eventually mourned for. His philosophy insists on our responsibility to the other, even, and most pertinently for this thesis, the textual other.

A body of literary texts that were written in part as a response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s usefully illustrates the limits of "AIDS theory" and the necessity of an ethical intervention into the discourses of AIDS. Literary texts, particularly the elegiac poems, of this period responded not only to the public discourses that continued to shape and to reshape the epidemic, but also to individual, personal narratives of experience with AIDS. These literary discourses, like the theoretical ones, attempt to read AIDS, but they

focus not on the public, but on the private sphere. Of course, literary texts, themselves published and therefore public discourses, have necessarily contributed to the overdetermined significations of AIDS in late twentieth-century Western culture. From the perspective of Michel Foucault, the public/private distinction is generally, of course, an artificial one (Foucault, Discipline 7). No published literary text can be considered "private," though texts often attempt to reconstruct in language a fictionalized/constructed private sphere. For the queer theorist Lee Edelman any "discourse" of AIDS is "diseased": for him, the illness is manifest in language. But, for a creative writer and filmmaker like Derek Jarman, AIDS is a condition which ravages the body, and it is the writer's job to "chase" the "story" of AIDS "across the page." In short, critical/theoretical writing about AIDS has focused on language, and literary responses use language as a means to attempt to inscribe the HIV infected or AIDS-ravaged body, to set up a Levinasian face-to-face between a reader and an inscribed body-with-AIDS.

Chapter I.

"Just the Facts": AIDS Theory

> Before the advent of civilization, people had only the simplest, most necessary diseases. (Foucault, Birth 16)

Many theorists emphasize the point that there are no incontrovertible facts about AIDS. Even at the turn of the twenty-first century AIDS remains enigmatic, even though medical science is now able to treat more effectively those with HIV and AIDS. Indeed, a number of writers, particularly Andrew Sullivan, appointed themselves by the late 1990s heralds of the imminent "post-AIDS era," optimistic that treatments discussed at the Eleventh International Conference on AIDS (July 7-12, 1996), particularly the use of protease inhibitors along with other drugs, will effectively end the epidemic. Sullivan claims: "a diagnosis of H.I.V. infection is not just different in degree today than say, five years ago. It is different in kind" (54). Many, however, continue at the turn of the century to be more sceptical and are concerned about the toxicity of new treatments and the lack of testing to confirm their long-term efficacy (see, e.g., "A Mixed Report Card"). Should new drug regimes and other advances be successful in transforming AIDS from a life-threatening to a chronic illness, there will be a corresponding change in the ways that AIDS is read in a wide panoply of discourses and contexts. Whatever the future of AIDS, my hope is that the readings provided in this thesis will remain useful as an analysis of the discursive practice of a particular historical moment and its concomitant and often conflicting epistemic assumptions.

Even as early as the mid-1980s, AIDS came to signify for many cultural theorists an arena of competing discourses or referential s/cites that attempted to generate meaning about the syndrome. This arena of discursive conflict that circumscribes the signifier

"AIDS" includes texts by theorists themselves and those authored by numerous others, particularly medical researchers and doctors, news reporters in the popular media, politicians, and well-known personalities--Elizabeth Taylor, Magic Johnson, and Elton John, e.g.--who became self-appointed spokespeople for AIDS. Medical discourse was and continues to be privileged in many discussions of AIDS, particularly because the medical establishment has from the beginning of the epidemic been expected by many to find the eventual "cure" for AIDS, a Holy Grail whose existence remains at the time of my writing by no means certain. Although researchers (notably Robert Gallo) were from the early days of public awareness of the epidemic roundly criticized for a lack of zeal or for failing to communicate the "truth" of AIDS to the larger population, the media, politicians, and figures well known in popular culture continued throughout the 1990s to maintain an almost blind faith in the power of medicine to provide sometime in the future this "cure." As Simon Watney noted in the 1996 preface to Policing Desire, "media coverage continues to dwell on supposed miracle cures" (xv). In response to this over-emphatic and, for Watney, naive shortsightedness, a group of AIDS theorists (including Watney himself) took as their task a close examination of the discourses that construct the signifier "AIDS" in popular culture.

In medical terms and for those who rely on medicine for their ostensible, empirical "truth," AIDS has generally been understood as a physical condition that manifests itself in certain symptoms associated with the syndrome AIDS; in theoretical discourses, "AIDS" tends to suggest an overdetermined set of possible significations. These include: a physical condition (overlapping with the notion of AIDS constructed through medical discourses); an American, politically conservative conspiracy to eliminate homosexuality;

a threat to the singularity and uniqueness of one's own body; an opportunity to reconceptualize the signification of homosexuality and the homosexual community, including relationships between men and women in that community; an opportunity for large pharmaceutical companies to exploit economically those infected with HIV; fear; death; etc. For the medical community, "AIDS" has consistently signified a set of symptoms associated with an epidemic syndrome which needs to be, like any epidemic, understood, taxonomized, eliminated. For theorists, AIDS can signify both physical symptoms and the political, economic, personal, existential, even ontological conditions which circumscribe AIDS-era homosexuality and queerness at the fin de millennium and in the early twenty-first century.

AIDS theorists in the 1980s and 1990s closely associate the discourses of the syndrome with cultural perceptions of homosexuality. AIDS can be seen in many theoretical texts, for example, as the horrifying literalization of the "disease" that homosexuality is already perceived to be in a wide variety of homophobic discourses. As Leo Bersani has pointed out, the rectum has been read historically as a "grave": "Women and gay men spread their legs with an unquenchable appetite for destruction" (211). To be penetrated is to be feminized and thus to bury "the masculine ideal...of proud subjectivity" (222). The assumed connection between HIV infection and anal intercourse in many discourses links "sodomy" and "death" in a fashion not unfamiliar to a medicalized tradition of reading "homosexuality" for "morbidity." This association was made ubiquitously in the early manifestations of both the sexological and psychoanalytic traditions. For an example of the former, one might turn to Havelock Ellis's Sexual Inversion, which defines homosexuality or "inversion" as an "inborn constitutional

abnormality" (1); an exemplary text of the latter is Freud's Dora , which reads the "neurosis" of lesbianism as symptomatic of obsession-compulsion.

While AIDS theory often takes as its task revealing the rhetorical manoeuvres behind such connections, it also frequently points out that the largely North American and European conflation of AIDS and homosexuality both perpetuates homophobia and erases the experiences of people living with AIDS (PLWA's) who are not necessarily male or homosexual. Watney, for example, strenuously contests this conflation by defining AIDS as "a series of unfolding and overlapping epidemics within and between different population groups" (Practices 148), and Cindy Patton examines the predominantly heterosexual AIDS of Africa as a means of rethinking the significations of "AIDS." She argues "The very labelling of 'African AIDS' as a heterosexual disease quiets the Western fear that heterosexual men will need to alter their own sexual practices and identity" ("From Nation" 127). By troping "heterosexual" AIDS as "African AIDS" and thus transferring it to a space of "elsewhere," numerous popular discourses have been able, implicitly and covertly, to reframe and thus reify North American assumptions that "Western AIDS" is a "gay disease," a metaphor, in fact, for the disease of gayness that threatens a larger, presumptively heterosexual population.

The ways that AIDS is sexualized, gendered, racialized, ethnicized, and nationalized are of profound interest to many AIDS theorists. Philip Brian Harper's "Eloquence and Epitaph," for example, elaborates the relationship between black nationalism and homophobia in terms of the 1988 death from AIDS of black television anchorman Max Robinson, whose "initial denial and posthumous acknowledgement" of his seropositivity exemplifies for Harper the fraught issue of black male sexuality in

American culture (171). Theorists such as Paula Treichler and Christine Overall have, as well, focused on the gendered and anti-feminist biases in many popular discourses of AIDS. Treichler points out that discourses of safe sex in the AIDS era often assume an us-versus-them relationship between women and men that elides institutional oppressions and that places the burden of protection upon women and, implicitly, traditional notions of female "virtue" (Treichler, "AIDS, Gender" 197). Likewise, Overall argues that "discussions of AIDS education typically do not recognize that heterosexuality is a social institution, not merely a private and individual sexual preference, that rape is a pervasive male practice, and that much heterosexual activity is coercive" (32). For these writers, the signifier "AIDS" thus can be and has often been deployed to bolster epistemologies and institutions that underlie white, male, heterosexual power in Western societies.

While a range of categories in addition to homosexuality impacts and inflects much AIDS theory, many--though by no means all--theorists are self-identified gay men, just as much literature that has taken AIDS as a theme is also gay male literature. The fact that gay men have been and continue to be deeply concerned about AIDS testifies to the devastating impact of AIDS on gay and queer communities; this situation does not however nullify or, at least intentionally, marginalize the experiences of other communities with AIDS. This body of theory attempts to produce a counterdiscourse that neither denies the impact of AIDS on gay men nor conflates "AIDS" and "homosexuality." AIDS theory speaks, in many ways, for a cultural minority, made up of gay men and others, who have lost their "faith" in medical science. If, as Foucault has argued, "Clinical experience--the opening up of the concrete individual...to the language of rationality" was "a major event in the relationship of man to himself and of language to things" (Birth xiv), then the

breakdown of the ability of medical science to make rational the body and "explain" its relationship to the syndrome AIDS must also be a significant moment in the relationship between humans and their bodies and between language and things.

An encounter with medical authority will serve to illustrate this relationship between medicine and theory. In 1994 I participated in a seminar at McGill University entitled "AIDS and Representation." In it "Richard," an M.D., sought to provide his audience with an "authority" able to provide "medical facts" concerning AIDS. Richard explained the process of HIV infection as follows: First, he drew a cell featuring a small circle--a cell's nucleus--surrounded by a larger circle--its wall. Then he explained that the master genetic code of the cell, its DNA, is located exclusively in the nucleus of the cell, and that the nucleus, like a photocopy machine, replicates DNA in the form of RNA. The RNA, sent--or "faxed"--into the cell itself from the nucleus, directly controls all cellular activity. HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus), which "invades" cells upon entering a person's bloodstream, contains a piece of RNA. He next informed us that what makes HIV a retrovirus is that the RNA in HIV catalyzes the "reverse transcription" of DNA onto the viral RNA "template"; that "infected" DNA can then be grafted into cellular DNA. That is, HIV's RNA--which can metaphorically be understood as a "copy"--attaches itself to a cell's DNA, the metaphoric "original" from which copies are made. Viruses, Richard revealed to us, are not supposed to be able to make an original from a copy. Stated in an elementary way, the mystery of HIV infection from the perspective of medical research is this enigmatic ability to "rewrite" a cell's DNA.

Richard's presentation, read as an example of a simplified medical discourse of AIDS aimed at a lay audience, contains two particularly striking features. The first feature,

typical of medical discourses of AIDS, is that his explanation assumes that facts exist concerning HIV infection as a generalizable process and that those facts are closely related to a general syndrome termed AIDS. Importantly, HIV infection and AIDS are not the same. HIV infection seems to be directly related to the syndrome AIDS, but the connection between the two has still not been clearly defined (see Grover 144). The second is that Richard's sketch of HIV infection utilizes highly metaphoric language in order to make the process comprehensible. His presentation can be summed up as an attempt to "read" HIV infection and its effects in/on bodies synecdochically through the example of one "typical" cell.

Steven Kruger and John Nguyet Erni, among others, have carefully analyzed the importance of tropes in biomedical discourses of AIDS. Kruger, for example, emphasizes the importance of "the metaphors of 'coding' and 'reading' in discussions of HIV infection" (8). And Erni notes that both "the media and biomedical discourses...frequently invok[e] familiar characters in science fiction and detective stories" (41). Richard's talk, although in many ways compromised by analogy and extended conceit, was importantly delivered by a practitioner who has worked with HIV infected individuals, and whose primary interest remained pointing towards "actual" cells in bodies of "real" people. Like Richard, AIDS theorists and others are engaged in a project of reading AIDS; however, for most of them AIDS is primarily a cultural text rather than a biological phenomenon. They examine the signifier "AIDS" and explore its dissemination in cultural discourses.

Theorists of AIDS tend to be suspicious of medical discourses and of the medical establishment in general. In 1987 Douglas Crimp warned: "Blind faith in science, as if it were entirely neutral and uncontaminated by politics, is naïve and dangerous" (6). Some,

like Simon Watney and Cindy Patton, formed by the early 1990s an often uncomfortable alliance with the medical establishment. Their readings presuppose the reliability of medical facts and focus on the communication of those facts to people at risk and to PLWA's. Watney defines the problem that these theorists have attempted to overcome: "the most fundamental facts concerning HIV and AIDS remain all but universally misunderstood" (Policing 46-47). Implicit in his statement is the assumption that fundamental facts about AIDS are potentially understandable if they are communicated properly. Watney asserts that his writing "provides information; it counters lies" (Practices 256) and that we "now [in 1992] know far more about the microchemistry and natural history of HIV, than we do about the infinitely complex, unpredictable political, social, and psychological consequences of the epidemic" (Practices 259). Watney argues that his responsibility is to communicate the "truth" of AIDS, which for him is related to medical research, specifically the "isolation of the HIV retrovirus" responsible for the syndrome (Practices 46). This association was at least until the early 1990s by no means universally accepted by AIDS researchers. Jan Zita Grover noted in 1990 that "there is no unanimity among scientists and physicians on the significance of HIV antibody seropositivity: it may signal inactive infection or the body's successful fight against infection" (146).

Watney's writing, rather than questioning the authority of medical discourse, critiques the "cultural agenda that is as medically misinformed as it is socially misleading and politically motivated" (Practices 47). This cultural agenda (promoted by the government of his native Great Britain and powerfully present elsewhere in Europe and North America) emphasizes both "gloating over the fate of those deemed responsible for their own misfortune"--gay men--and planning for the "real" epidemic that threatens the

general population (Practices 47). His criticism of cultural discourses of AIDS is based on their homophobia and obsession with protecting the putative "innocence" of the traditional heterosexual family (Practices 209). Watney uses the term "anti-Freudian" to describe the social project which takes as its goal the preservation of the family as a "private," innocent space, since this notion of family ignores disruptive sexual drives exhibited by individual family members within this private space (Practices 209). He argues that these political agendas interfere with the communication of AIDS information to people at risk, and thus that careful attention should be focused on the best methods of providing such information: "All discussion of AIDS should proceed from the known facts concerning the modes of transmission of HIV in relation to lay perceptions of health and disease that mediate and 'handle' this information" (Practices 49). Evident here is Watney's understanding of language--inscribed "perceptions"--as a mediating force rather than the opaque absence or "difference" that one finds in more poststructuralist AIDS theory (see below).

At least some of Patton's analysis of AIDS is based on assumptions similar to Watney's. In critiquing the Western media discourse of "African AIDS," for example, she argues that the invention of a particularly African "Pattern Two" AIDS epidemic as opposed to a Western "Pattern One" version relies on racial stereotypes which construct all Africans as primarily "Others" ("From Nation" 129-31). The World Health Organization has labelled Western AIDS "Pattern One," encompassing "epidemiologic scenarios where 'homosexual behavior' and 'drug injection' are considered the primary means of HIV transmission" ("From Nation" 129). "Pattern Two" has been associated with Africa and a primarily heterosexual method of transmission ("From Nation" 129-30).

Like Watney, Patton asserts that political and cultural assumptions obscure the "truth" about AIDS. Popular discourses presuppose that AIDS has spread quickly in certain heterosexual African communities because Africans are in general more promiscuous than Westerners; therefore, health workers in Africa attempt to instil the values of the "safe" bourgeois family into African cultures where such a notion has never existed (Patton, "From Nation" 128). This project is counterproductive to halting the spread of AIDS in Africa because it diverts energies away from safe-sex education. It also gives Western heterosexuals a dangerous and false sense of security since "Euro-American heterosexuality is [understood to be] 'not at risk' as long as local AIDS is identified as homosexual and heterosexual AIDS remains distant" (Patton, "From Nation" 130). In this way, the popular method of distinguishing between "our" (Western) AIDS and "their" (African) AIDS "inverts the crucial epidemiologic issues" (Patton, "From Nation" 130). Patton's critique of popular discourses puts a certain amount of faith in Western medicine, taking for granted its understanding of the way AIDS is spread. For Patton, as for Watney, the crucial issue is to demystify the "facts" about AIDS by critiquing politically motivated cultural discourses that obscure its "true" epidemiology.

In other work Patton is more suspicious of medicine. For example, she argues in Inventing AIDS: "the impression that what we know is most importantly based in science forecloses the exchange of crucial forms of information about transmission interruption both within and between these communities" (54). For her, medical science should not be the final arbiter of AIDS knowledge. Patton does, however, focus here on the "transmission" of medical knowledge rather than on that knowledge itself. She clarifies this by noting, "I want to challenge here the basis of the cultural acceptance of science's

claims, not the results of its work" (Inventing 55). Science remains for her, then, an important, if not the only, authority over AIDS knowledge. In her later Fatal Advice, Patton turns from an interest in medical discourses to an examination of the discourses of "safe sex," particularly in the 1980s. She argues that queer theory might provide a solution to the difficulties of sex educators by enabling a reconceptualization of both the body and its sexuality.

Helpful discussions of queer theory are found in Eve Sedgwick's "Queer and Now," which focuses on the pluralism and connotativeness of queerness, and Judith Butler's Bodies That Matter, which emphasizes the importance of transgressive performance as a crucial element of both queer theoretics and action. Sedgwick's definition of "queer" is now justifiably famous: "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, or anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 8). Here Sedgwick provides an open-ended, basically connotative notion of queerness that focuses on spaces between--"gaps," "lapses"--and language, that is, the struggles and failures of signification. In addition to putting forward the (implicitly postmodern) amorphousness of the term, she does acknowledge that queer can also mean "same-sex object choice, lesbian or gay" (Sedgwick 8). Thus for Sedgwick "queer" is a kind of both/and: both homosexuality as it has generally been understood in the twentieth century and that which terms like "homosexual," "gay," and "lesbian" omit or occlude. Queer theory thus attempts to take into account those modes of being (or even resisting being, in the sense of identity) that have traditionally fallen through linguistic and epistemological cracks.

Butler's queer theory is more explicitly poststructuralist and Derridian than Sedgwick's. It is, for example, deeply rooted in the notion of Derridian "citationality" (Butler 13; see below). Her work does, however, have much in common with Sedgwick's discussion. Echoing Sedgwick, the "queer" in Bodies that Matter is understood as a discursive "abject," a figure who inhabits "those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (Butler 3). That is, the queer is that radical other to the subject that allows the subject him or herself to emerge in culture and history, to be constructed in language, to "materialize" (Butler 2). The value of the term "queer" to designate this space beyond subjectivity is for Butler that it represents "a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance" (230). As in Sedgwick, "queer" is a useful term here because its meaning cannot be contained or fixed. To claim that there are "abjects" who are neither subject nor objects is to begin a process of systematic deconstruction of categories ranging from sexual identity to gender to the body itself, and such pulling down and pulling apart of "common sense" assumptions about what it means to be human, effect for Butler a profound critique of Western culture and the ways that it defines identity, whether homosexual or heterosexual, diseased or healthy.

Such a project, shared by Sedgwick, Butler, and Patton, is particularly helpful in the context of AIDS, as Sedgwick notes: being a queer means "surviving into threat, stigma, the spiralling violence of gay- and lesbian-bashing and (in the AIDS emergency) the omnipresence of somatic fear and wrenching loss" (Sedgwick 3). To be a queer means to face "violence...fear and...loss," to confront the multilayered complexities of

reading and responding to a situation such as the "AIDS emergency," at least in language, at least in terms of signification. Patton, building on the work of queer theory, asserts: "Queer codes define as a space the linkage between interlocutors who recognize that they know and share a particular sexual vernacular" (Fatal 151). This model of queer coding suggests an alliance between activists and theorists in the "spaces" between self and other. For Patton, the proper response to AIDS in the register of queerness is an assault on the "New Right"; this project "must unite 'academics' and 'activists'" (Fatal 154). Such an alliance might indeed produce--and on occasion has produced--both discursive and political practices that intensify interest in AIDS discourses, medical research, and most importantly the plight of those living with AIDS. I would however add to this list 'creative writers' who have taken AIDS as a subject, including fiction writers, memoirists, dramatists, performance artists, poets.

Watney and Patton, whatever the commitment to or knowledge of queer theory, share a similar goal for their AIDS theorizing: an end to AIDS. For this end, they are, at least in certain discourses, willing to put some trust in medical research and its assertions about the characteristics of the syndrome AIDS. Donald Morton takes this trust to an extreme, contending that "AIDS has to be understood not with moral passion and ethical exuberance but politically as a question of the distribution of economic resources (research funds, etc.) in relation to the health needs of all citizens" (142). Morton's reduction of the issue of AIDS to one of the allocation of "research funds, etc." suggests a naïve trust in Western medical institutions to find a "cure" for AIDS just as it might for any "disease." Morton implies that the AIDS epidemic should end, but not at the expense of "curing" "breast cancer, malnutrition, sickle-cell anemia..." (142). While all of these

goals are laudable, his reading of AIDS represents a leap of faith in medical science, and ignores the importance of the constructedness of "AIDS" in cultural discourses, an importance not ignored by Watney and Patton. Patton for example has noted that AIDS is more than an epidemiological condition that can be eliminated through appropriate research funds; AIDS is also "a cultural metaphor" (Sex 11).

Most theorists are much more wary of the medial establishment than either Watney or Patton, and the watershed figure in this regard is Susan Sontag. Sontag's 1964 "Against Interpretation" introduced to a large American audience many of the arguments of poststructuralist theorists associated with the French, and later Yale, schools of deconstruction associated with Paul deMan and Jacques Derrida. Like many poststructuralists, Sontag begins her attack on hermeneutics by returning to Plato and Aristotle, arguing that their theoretics of art as mimetic and representational over-emphasize the importance of "content" (Against 4), representation, what Saussure calls the "signified." "Interpretation," Sontag argues, "based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories" (Against 10). Her well-known credo is also relevant here: "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" (Against 14). Here she foreshadows arguments of poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes in The Pleasure of the Text, who claims: "The text you write must prove to me that it desires me. This proof exists: it is writing. Writing is: the science of the various blisses of language, its Kama Sutra" (6). Sontag's critique indeed might be extended to language or even the body; poststructuralism argues against the hermeneutics of the

former and Sontag herself takes on the latter, in Illness as Metaphor (1978) and the later AIDS and Its Metaphors (1989).

Sontag's most important contribution to discussions of disease and its significations is the connection that she makes between illness and morality, not unlike the link between "the rectum" and "the grave" that Bersani exploits. Sontag asserts in Illness as Metaphor: "Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious" (Illness 6). She illustrates her argument in this text through discussions of tuberculosis and cancer, syphilis and insanity. According to Sontag, plagues generally have been read throughout history in terms of morality, either as forms of divine retribution or with stress laid on "the moral corruption made manifest by the diseases's spread" (Illness 41). In addition, Sontag points out that Thucydides, writing about a 430 BCE plague in Athens, records not only "disorder and lawlessness" but also the corruption of "language itself" (Illness 41). All of these readings are relevant to AIDS, of course, a "plague" that would be attributed to both God and homosexual promiscuity and would lay bare the confusions and ambiguities of language itself in the postmodern moment.

Indeed, what Sontag writes about cancer in 1978 is directly pertinent to cultural reactions to AIDS in the next decade:

> Our views about cancer, and the metaphors we have imposed on it, are so much a vehicle for the large insufficiencies of this culture: for our shallow attitude toward death, for our anxieties about feeling, for our reckless improvident responses to our real "problems of growth," for our inability to construct an advanced industrial society that properly regulates

> consumption, and for our justified fears of the increasingly violent course of history. (Illness 87)

AIDS, like cancer, has been understood as a synonym for death (cancer = death, AIDS = death). It has, like cancer, reasserted the importance of the melodramatic death-bed scene in American culture as a replacement for "real" emotion (the film Dying Young and the telefilm An Early Frost might both be read as examples of cancer and AIDS melodramas, respectively). Both cancer and AIDS might be seen as Malthusian come-uppence--extravagant prices paid for Promethean technological, industrial, social advances. Both involve metaphors of improper consumption and reproduction--particularly on the cellular, but also in the case of AIDS on the human, level. And cancer and AIDS each resonate apocalyptically, both have been figured as the end of medical science, its ultimate challenge (see Dellamora, Apocalyptic 154-191). A crucial difference is the homosexualization of AIDS from its earliest manifestations as "GRID" (Gay-Related Immuno-Deficiency). Unlike cancer, the problem with AIDS is not culture generally, but a specific minority within it--first homosexuals, then the three other infamous H's: Haitians, heroin addicts, and hemophiliacs.

Turning her attention to AIDS in AIDS and Its Metaphors, Sontag continues and expands upon much of her argument in the earlier study of disease. She explains the title of this study as follows: "By metaphor I meant nothing more or less than the earliest and most succinct definition I know, which is Aristotle's, in his Poetics (1475b). 'Metaphor,' Aristotle wrote, 'consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else'" (Illness 93). Here, as in "Against Interpretation," Sontag views the ancient Greeks and their tradition of representation, mimesis, and metaphorics, as epistemologically dubious.

Not that we can "think without metaphors," she is quick to add, but there are "some metaphors we might well abstain from or try to retire" (Illness 93)--these include the body as "temple" (96) and the body as "fortress" (96).

For Sontag, the problem with these metaphors, particularly the body-as-fortress, is that

> wars against diseases are not just calls for more zeal, and more money to be spent on research. The metaphor implements the way particularly dreaded diseases are envisaged as an alien 'other,' as enemies are in modern war; and the move from the demonization of the illness to the attribution of fault to the patient is an inevitable one, no matter if the patients are thought of as victims. Victims suggest innocence. And innocence, by the inexorable logic that governs all relational terms, suggests guilt. (Illness 99)

Hence by the mid-1980s a group of "innocent victims" of AIDS had emerged--children and haemophiliacs--opposed to a second group that was implicitly guilty--mainly homosexuals. These scapegoats could be and were blamed for their own suffering and for that of whom they had "infected." As Sontag notes, "The unsafe behavior that produces AIDS is judged to be more than just weakness. It is indulgence, delinquency--addictions to chemicals that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant" (Illness 113). The phantasmatic and allegorical beginning of this metaphoric chain was, according to Randy Shilts in And the Band Played On, Gaetan Dugas, a Quebecois flight attendant, a "Patient Zero" who transferred AIDS somehow from that perennial "heart of darkness," Africa. From there he vengefully passed it--mediated through one of North America's linguistic

and cultural others within, Quebec--to the urban and thus gay centers of this continent: San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York (on Dugas's "lethal movement," see Nunokawa, "All" 2-3). This myth allowed blame to be placed not just on sexual others--gay men--but also on racial others--Africans, whose continent, like AIDS, even now remains in the North American imagination something mysterious, disruptive, and dangerous.

In many ways, AIDS has posed the greatest danger to the medical establishment, its reputation, stature, and most importantly, authority. Sontag perceptively points out that "AIDS is a clinical construction, an inference" (Illness 108), something cobbled together through its manifestations, or "opportunistic infections." She further asserts that "AIDS marks a turning point in current attitudes toward illness and medicine" (Illness 160). According to Sontag, AIDS has shaken our faith in the Western medicine--"AIDS reinstates something like a premodern experience of illness" (Illness 122), an experience based on fear and uncertainty that is traditionally associated with "[o]utlawry" (in this case sexual outlawry) and "[e]xcommunication" (or, in the case of AIDS, divine retribution) (Illness 123). Further, the "premodern" threat of AIDS is not only epidemiological or social, but economic as well: "risk-free sexuality is an inevitable reinvention of the culture of capitalism, and was guaranteed by medicine as well" (Illness 165). AIDS at least potentially reposits disease in the realm of fear rather than under the purview of reason and authority; it simultaneously lays bare the limits of consumption, or at the very least its dangers.

One might argue that the threat that AIDS has posed to Western authoritative structures at the end of the twentieth century might be read in terms of that critique of the

modernist project that is most often labelled postmodernism. Sontag links AIDS with "repudiations of difficult modernism in the arts" (Illness 166). Following Sontag, Eric Savoy has more recently associated AIDS with a premodern, "apprehensive" (70) rather than comprehensive, experience of disease and he has also argued for the "postmodernity of the invention of AIDS" (69). That is, not only is AIDS incomprehensible (its premodern aspect), it is simultaneously centrally textual (its postmodernity). The association of AIDS with "spiralling metadiscourses" and what Savoy terms "the dismantling of the 'identified' subject" (69) points directly towards its postmodern aspect. For most AIDS theorists whose work has its roots in both Sontag's anti-hermeneutics and in French deconstruction, the terms "uncertainty," "textuality," and "AIDS" become synonymous; the uncertainty associated with AIDS is played out in various cultural discourses, representing various attempts to claim ownership of and authority over a "disease" which remains incomprehensible.

Ultimately for some theorists, readings that assume that anything can be determined for certain about a signified AIDS have misunderstood the ways in which the signifier AIDS is deployed culturally. This perception of AIDS underlies Jan Zita Grover's comment in "AIDS: Keywords" that AIDS is "one of our culture's profoundest confusions of a signifier for a sign." She continues: "We keep pushing the signifying chain toward that ultimate sign--our collective mortality" (145). For Grover the significations of AIDS are terminally compromised by the apocalyptic fantasies and concomitant death drive that characterize late twentieth-century Western culture. It is also for her, as for Savoy, a distinctly postmodern epidemic: "AIDS is not simply a physical malady; it is also an artifact of social and sexual transgression, violated taboo, fractured identity--political

and personal projections" (143). AIDS mirrors, therefore, the collapse of unified identity associated with the postmodern moment by, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in texts such as Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus.

Likewise, for Paula Treichler, in her 1987 essay "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Significations," AIDS can be understood primarily as "an epidemic of meanings, or signification" (32). She astutely sums up the dilemma posed at the end of the 1980s by the linguistic and cultural phenomenon termed AIDS:

> In multiple, fragmentary, and often contradictory ways we struggle to achieve some sort of understanding of AIDS, a reality that is frightening, widely publicized, and yet finally neither directly nor fully knowable. AIDS is no different in this respect from other linguistic constructions, which, in the common-sense view of language, are thought to transmit preexisting ideas and represent real-world entities and yet, in fact, do neither. ("AIDS, Homophobia" 31)

From this generally deconstructive perspective, Treichler insists that the relationship between "AIDS" and the "body" is inherently unstable, fluid, even unknowable. We thus "cannot therefore look 'through' language to determine what AIDS 'really' is. Rather we must explore the site where such determinations really occur and intervene at the point where meaning is created: in language" ("AIDS, Homophobia" 31). This site is simultaneously a cite or citation: "AIDS" as signifier refers for Treichler not to underlying meanings or empirically apprehendible, diseased bodies, but to other signifiers and an infinite, and implicitly Derridian, chain of significations.

Indeed, underlying statements such as Treichler's is Jacques Derrida's famous definition of citationality in "Signature Event Context" (1971):

> Every sign, linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotations marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. (185)

Thus for Derrida signifiers possess no inherent, absolute, or transhistorical meaning. Signification emerges in terms of particular sets of contexts, associations of one discourse with another, but none of these associations point towards a signified that is inherent or essential. As Derrida puts it, "What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?" ("Signature" 186). "AIDS" functions and means in terms of such processes of citationality; this signifier, as indeed all others, marks a discursive terrain that is indeterminate, dynamic, and most importantly for theorists such as Treichler, contested. The only political intervention available to AIDS theorists from the perspective of Derridian citationality is to gain at least temporary authority over the various discourses that constitute AIDS, to insist on certain contextual links and sever others. This, according to Treichler, is the best hope for a cure of the "epidemic of...signification" marked "AIDS."

The discursive malaise that is signified by "AIDS" for Treichler and others needs to be explored, read carefully and critiqued or deconstructed. Treichler, in a curious turn of phrase, allows for the fact that "AIDS is a real disease syndrome, damaging and killing real human beings," but calls her reader's attention primarily to the epidemic in language ("AIDS, Homophobia" 32) that mirrors, even produces or "create[s]" ("AIDS,

Homophobia" 31), AIDS the "real" syndrome. Like most other AIDS theorists, she is highly sceptical of the medical establishment, whose traditions of rationalistic, empirical enquiry "may disguise contradiction and irrationality" ("AIDS, Homophobia" 37). Typically for this line of argument, Treichler insists that scientific conceptions of AIDS are not objective truths upon which, or solely upon which, AIDS activism should be based. The intersection of medical and scientific discourses with other, mainly popular, discourses provides for her the location of a linguistic site or node at which political forces might gather to undermine AIDS activism. That is why, for her, AIDS theory must lay bare the linguistic apparata that allow for homophobic and--literally, figuratively, and actually--killing discourses about AIDS that proliferated in the late 80s and early 90s in both medical and popular media venues. To bring to bear deconstructive and postmodern analysis on discussions of the syndrome thus becomes for Treichler paramount, as a way to gain some authority over the place in which AIDS "really" exists: "at a point where many entrenched narratives intersect, each with its own problematic and context in which AIDS acquires meaning" ("AIDS, Homophobia" 63).

Here Treichler takes her cues from postmodernists such as Jean-François Lyotard, who in The Postmodern Condition argues that "scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse. And it is fair to say that for the last forty years the 'leading' sciences and technologies have had to do with language" (3). His well-known argument that the postmodern moment is the moment of the collapse of all-informing, over-arching grand narratives, that is metanarratives, such as those associated with religion (in the Middle Ages) and science (in modernism), is directly relevant to the AIDS theory posited by Savoy, Grover, and Treichler, in addition to even more strict poststructuralists such as

Thomas Yingling and Lee Edelman (see Lyotard 31-39). The discourse-based analysis of postmodern theory, in addition to the theoretics of Derridian citationality, is pertinent to AIDS theory because, as Treichler asserts, "AIDS is and will remain a provisional and deeply problematic signifier" ("AIDS, Homophobia" 70).

AIDS is for Thomas Yingling

> the signifier through which we understand the cancer of being, the oncology of ontology--not only in its threat to our being, its announcement that we are moving towards non-being, indeed are already inscribed with it, in it. But also that it is itself deeply non-identical, never quite the same, appearing under different guises, none of which is a disguise, following circuitous routes into visibility and action. It is the disease [sic] that announces the end of identity. (AIDS 15)

"AIDS" is thus for Yingling the term that epitomizes the deconstructive and postmodern critique of extradiscursive identities and material bodies. The human corps and its concomitant identity are here flushed out of the textual corpus, like excrement expelled through the colon: "the whole problem of a disappearing body, of a body quite literally shitting itself away. That is AIDS" (AIDS 16). The move here is not just from life to death but more fundamentally from being to non-being; AIDS is therefore a wholesale assault on the very category of the ontological. The discursive epidemic of AIDS in its anti-ontological capacity is further for Yingling "almost literally unthinkable in its mathematical defeat of cognitive desire" (Yingling, AIDS 38). It is "almost" the end of desire and knowledge, the end of the human being, situated in "a true incommensurability of discursive universes" (45).

Lee Edelman has articulated this theoretical position of "incommensurability" and the inherent risks in reading the signifier "AIDS" more radically than any other theorist. He contends that "AIDS" "resists any attempt to inscribe it as a manageable subject of writing....to the extent that..it has itself taken shape (has been given shape) as that which writes or articulates another subject altogether" (Homographesis 9). That displaced subject refers both to the multifarious medical conditions which "AIDS" represents and to its association with male homosexuality, but it is not limited to either of these referents: "The discursive field of 'AIDS' thus unfolds as a landscape of displacements, and given those displacements and the slipperiness of the subject, every attempt to resist ideological enforcement in one place carries with it the threat of resowing the seeds of ideological coercion in another" (Homographesis 94). Edelman argues that discourses of AIDS are in Derrida's sense citations, that are perpetually displaced from their unknowable subject. Expanding on this position in a separate essay, he further contends that HIV infection functions as "a version of metaphoric substitution" (Homographesis 90). As Richard the M.D. explained at his seminar, HIV somehow convinces a cell's DNA that it is a part of that cell's genetic code, just as metaphor asserts that something is something else. As in metaphoric substitution, the "other" becomes indistinguishable from the "self" in the process of HIV infection on a cellular level.

The difficulty for the production of an ethically motivated AIDS theory using this exclusively discursive model has been recognized by Edelman himself: "some readers [of his essays] will be dismayed, infuriated, or bored" (Homographesis xvi). "Some readers," particularly, one might infer, those activists who speak the "language of the street," will reject Edelman's analyses because they employ "jargonistic code" (Homographesis xvi-

xvii). But Edelman argues convincingly that his use of "jargon" is seen by conservative politicians as part of a leftist, subversive political project, and that theory and practice should inform, even enlighten, each other (Homographesis xvii-xviii). One might argue, however, that the main impediment to an informed, useful, and lively exchange between theory and activism has to do with their often widely divergent assumptions. From an activist, common-sensical perspective, there is a material body outside of language that can be infected with the retrovirus HIV and that can die of AIDS. In Edelman's theory, the "body" is constructed through discourses; it is a discursive "cite" rather than a material "site." Further, rhetorical analysis will reveal its various significations.

Edelman's deployment of the signifier "AIDS" references Derrida's discussion of the "pharmakon" in "Plato's Pharmacy"; both terms unfold as "a landscape of displacements," what Derrida terms "a chain of significations" (Dissemination 95). Derrida's interest in this term emerges from his reading of Plato and indeed the dissemination of the term pharmakon in the Platonic corpus. Often translated as "remedy," "a beneficent drug" (Dissemination 97), pharmakon means as well "poison": "the effectiveness of the pharmakon can be reversed: it can worsen the ill instead of remedy it" (Dissemination 97). This, in Derrida's reading of Plato, is writing, whether theoretical, scientific, or literary: "writing is proposed as a pharmakon. Contrary to life, writing--or, if you will, the pharmakon--can only displace or even aggravate the ill....: under the pretext of supplementing memory, writing makes one even more forgetful; far from increasing knowledge, it diminishes it" (Dissemination 100). This, too, is Edelman's basic point. To write about AIDS, even in ways that are meant to lay bare prejudice and improve the lot of those who suffer, is to perpetuate the epidemic, even to risk worsening

it. That is, to write about AIDS is to become infected by and spread the "epidemic of signification" that is AIDS for Edelman. Language in this case is not cure but pharmakon and medicine that is always inevitably a poison as well.

Eric Savoy has summarized the danger inherent to strictly deconstructive AIDS theory such as Edelman's: "the distinction between the body and text tends to blur" (73). Particularly for those who apprehend AIDS on their own or others' bodies, Edelman's "intellectual arabesques" (Edelman, Homographesis 92) seem to ignore the importance of an empirical body in the construction of AIDS, the fact that it is not just language that suffers in the plague labelled "AIDS." Edelman himself acknowledges the "gravity" of the fact that his theories inscribe "the horrors experienced by my own community, along with other communities in America and abroad...within the neutralizing conventions of literary criticism" (Homographesis 92). But in the context of perceived human suffering closely associated with AIDS, poststructuralist discourse analysis seems to provide an incomplete reading of the significations of AIDS. One is able to deconstruct "AIDS," flattening its material/biological "reality" and materiality itself onto a depthless field of immanent discursivity. But an activist might argue that people are dying in this "plague of discourse," this language game; these deaths are linked to institutional oppressions of social groups perceived as "other." For Edelman, "AIDS" signifies a syndrome whose associations are not limited to, but at least include, the homosexual male as constructed through popular discourses and a particular pattern of symptoms related to diseases which are themselves constructs of language. However, AIDS certainly seems real enough to subjects treating it--like Richard--and those coping with, living with, dying from it.

Judging from this survey of AIDS theory, it seems clear that anyone who attempts to discuss AIDS must contend with at least two epidemics, both of which are featured in the "authoritative" medical explanation of AIDS summarized at the beginning of this chapter. The first, AIDS as "an epidemic of signification" (Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia" 31), Edelman's "plague of discourse," is demonstrated through Richard's use of suspiciously discursive metaphors in order to "make sense" of HIV infection. Richard's language indicates the inherent representationality of any discourse about AIDS. His use of the metaphor of photocopying in order to explain the process of infection with HIV contextualizes and emphasizes the analogical function of a specifically medical term like "reverse transcriptase," a technical term which functions as a metaphoric label for a process shrouded in mystery. Medical science does not comprehend the function of this enzyme, and is therefore powerless to prevent HIV infection. Because the activity of reverse transcriptase can be apprehended, however, it can be labelled and classified. This naming obscures the fact the signification of "reverse transcriptase" is precisely synonymous with "uncertainty." The second epidemic, which certainly seems more real from the perspective of "common sense," is the one that Western medical research is attempting to cure. We must trust the medical establishment in order to believe that this one exists, since it can only be constructed through the medium of language. But this is what is commonly referred to as the "actual" epidemic--the one that is associated typically with HIV-seropositivity, Kaposi's sarcoma, pneumocytosis, and until recently led almost invariably to death.

From the vantage of Lee Edelman's deconstructive reading, the first epidemic is the only one that "really" exists, but in the subjectivities of those for whom AIDS signifies

an everyday struggle, the second seems much more real. The former, constructed through popular discourses and critiqued in theoretical discourses, I would like to term (albeit artificially) the discursive epidemic of AIDS, which privileges "AIDS" the signifier or metaphor, which regards "AIDS" as a node of overlapping meanings and failures to mean. The latter, apprehendible on the bodies of people living with AIDS, I would like to term the empirical epidemic, which assumes AIDS is "extra-discursive" and exists in physical bodies. Of course this second epidemic is, like the first, accessible only through discourse--it might be understood as a way of using language that assumes the existence of something(s) outside of that language, the body qua body. Further, I would like to employ a mode of reading AIDS which includes both; discourse analysis, characterized by an attempt to define or at least to comprehend AIDS, should be contextualized within an attempt to apprehend AIDS as an object of empirical study whose material manifestations can be read on--and in--bodies of PLWA's.

Thomas Yingling asserts that "the gap between the apprehension and the comprehension of the disease [sic] is...an asymptotic space where allegory persistently finds itself at play" (AIDS 38). Rather than reading the representations which construct AIDS at the expense of its material manifestations, or apprehending its material effects without attempting to comprehend its multitudinous functions and malfunctions within the discursive register, I seek to explore that "asymptotic space" which exists between the discourses and empirical manifestations of AIDS. The proper arena for this sort of AIDS reading is, I would like to argue, literature--literary texts can inscribe both discourses in an attempt to make sense of AIDS in a way that is not strictly scientific, theoretical, or rationalistic. That is, literature is inevitably ethical, as Emmanuel Levinas employs that

term. The writing of literature, as a "creative" or "imaginative" endeavor, can attempt to inscribe what is often unwritable in more strictly organized and limited forms of discourse like the medical text or the theoretical inquiry. It can teach us both what it means to be human and the limits of humanism, our responsibility to the other and the other's inescapable and pervasive alterity. In this way, literature provides a context in which one might attempt to read that which is otherwise illegible.

Before turning to literary texts, it is necessary to supplement the generally poststructuralist and deconstructive readings presented by many AIDS theorists with a mode of analysis and exegesis that provides more room for an other that is not strictly an effect of language, at least as "language" is typically understood. Such a mode has been helpfully put forward by Levinas, in a body of writing that spans about half a century. In texts such as Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being, Levinas provides a method that emphasizes the ethical in ways that both anticipate and move beyond deconstructive, materialist, and queer analyses. My goal in a thorough exploration of his philosophical principles is to allow for a reading of AIDS literature in the "asymptotic" space that a number of AIDS theorists point towards but insufficiently theorize and characterize. I seek to ground the readings of AIDS elegies found in the fourth section of this thesis in a model of Levinasian "excendence" that makes available modes of meaning (and unmeaning), locatable exclusively neither in the empirical tradition nor in (at least classic) deconstructive modes of reading.

Chapter II.

"A Rupture of Being": AIDS and Excendence

> Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality. (Levinas, Totality 21)

> [W]e will be incoherent, but without systematically resigning ourselves to incoherence. (Derrida, Writing 84)

A. "Excendance," "Differance," and AIDS

If the "space" between trope and description, comprehension and apprehension, textual being and "real," human being, is the proper arena for a discussion of AIDS, then before reading the literature of AIDS and the traditions that inform it, one must contend with a primordial issue in the field of rhetoric: mimesis. What does it mean to represent the world, particularly humans in the world? What is the relationship between text and reader? How might one characterize the distinction between (putatively human) self and discursive other? Here the crucial figure, particularly in regards to AIDS theory and literature, is the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). Levinas's project might be labelled an "ultra-ontology," an attempt to move beyond being, towards what he terms in the early essay Of Evasion (1935) "excendance" (L'évasion 73), or in English "excendence"--something "other" or beyond transcendence or immanence, at least as these terms are traditionally understood. Levinas attempts to overcome the binary of self and other, "reality" and mimesis, reader and text by concentrating on the space or "absence" (Levinas, "Meaning" 36) between them and characterizing it as an overflow,

"the idea of the Infinite" ("Meaning" 55) that exceeds the terms, rules, and assumptions of any discourse and produces the ethical.

"AIDS" and the discourses that cluster around it, by calling our attention to the disjunction between the empirical and the metaphoric, point directly to the locus of the "ethical" as Levinas understands that term. In addition, Levinas's post-phenomenological work in large part set the stage for the poststructuralist turn in Continental philosophy, particularly as represented by Derrida's positing of an anti-metaphysics of linguistic immanence or "differance" (see "Differance" 414). Derrida's assumptions and critique of Levinas--at least until his writing of the 1990s--in turn undergird the AIDS theory of figures such as Paula Treichler and Lee Edelman. By stepping back, as it were, from the generally deconstructive mode of much AIDS theory, from Derridian differance to Levinasian excendence, one might discover a useful supplement to deconstruction as it has been applied to texts about AIDS. Both Levinas and Derrida turn from the Western philosophical tradition of transcendent "Being," but Levinas's theories, unlike Derrida's classical formulation of "differance," allow for some-thing, or really some-beyond-thing, outside of the realm of the immanent and the discursive. And that is both the physical, material, embodied "other" (autrui)--synecdochically the "face" ("Meaning" 53)--in addition to the other as an absolute, something like the Judeo-Christian notion of God ("Meaning" 51). What Levinas will eventually find in excendence is the transcendence of transcendence, that which is beyond the category of transcendent Being.

Even Derrida has recently been reconsidering these concepts in specifically Levinasian ways, as when he commended Levinas in a 1995 eulogy "à-Dieu," to God, "who greets the other beyond being" ("Adieu" 340). Here Derrida points towards

Levinas's notion that ethics precedes and contextualizes being, even Being. The latter philosopher's understanding of our responsibility to the other, the ethical relationship, or face-to-face, permits a reading of "AIDS" and AIDS literature, particularly poetry, that acknowledges and reverences a body that might be empirically perceived and cared for, particularly in Heidegger's sense (274). Finally, the loss of this corporeal entity might, as well, be mourned, as in Derrida's "Adieu, Emmanuel" ("Adieu" 340). The philosophy of Levinas requires that its reader take (total) responsibility for the other, even, and most pertinently for this thesis, the textual other, and for my specific purposes the other-with-AIDS.

B. Mimesis: Aristotle and Plato

Traditionally, and most famously in Aristotle's Poetics, the relationship between human and text is comprehended in terms of a process of mimesis, Greek for, roughly, "imitation." For Aristotle, "imitation is natural to man" (Basic 1457). This natural inclination serves the ends of pleasure (hedone) and knowledge (episteme), and teaches us particularly about both the reality and the figure of death:

> though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of...dead bodies. The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it; the

> reason of the delight in seeing a picture is that one is at the same time learning. (Basic 1457)

This mimetic function, basic to representation, is relevant for Aristotle to all of the arts, including, and especially, the poetic.

In this work Aristotle at least in part seeks to challenge the assertions made in The Republic by his teacher Plato about the derivativeness and danger of mimesis: "the imitator knows nothing worth mentioning about what he imitates; imitation is a kind of play and not serious; and those who take up tragic poetry in iambs and in epics are all imitators of the highest possible degree." These are "concerned with something that is third from the truth" (Republic 285)--removed both from the idea of Truth and truth in the material world that reflects the perfect, ideal world of Truth as Form. Plato is thus "justified in not admitting him [the imitator] into a city that is going to be under good laws"--utopia, the Republic--because the imitator's craft "destroys the calculating part" of the soul, its rational faculty (Republic 289).

The danger, as Plato perceives it, is summed up helpfully by Henry Staten: "Poetic mimesis is thus most dangerous because in a badly regulated city it could set off an epidemic of uncontrolled grief" (224). Plato argues that poetry distracts us from Being in the realm of ideas, and, as founder of the ontological tradition (in Levinas's reading), he thus insists on the exclusion of mimesis as a threat to the stability of the very category of the ontological as transcendence, as the privileged "real." For Levinas, "the poets of mimesis are driven" from the Republic because their "language...does not function to lead toward meanings preexisting their expression and eternal; it is not a pure account of these ideas" ("Meaning" 43). Mimesis, as a challenge to the category of being, its potential site

of "rupture," is exactly that process which troubles traditional (Greek, Platonic) notions of being that rely on the eminent existence (ontology) of the transcendent. Poets "allow themselves to be drawn into the becoming of the particularities, peculiarities, and oddities from which the expressed thoughts would not be separable for the poets of the mimesis (and for many moderns)" ("Meaning" 43). That is, poets point their readers' attention to fissures and spaces in the logic of being. The threat they pose is the threat of the fall into language, not only into the logic of the intellect but also the illogic of representation, of metaphor, of a being-towards-death.

C. Heidegger and Ontology

And this is exactly the insight provided to Levinas, albeit inadvertently, by his teacher Martin Heidegger, the thinker with whom he begins and ultimately from whom he must diverge in order to enact an (attempted) escape from what the Levinasian John Llewelyn has termed "ontological claustrophobia" (9). For Heidegger both language and death contextualize, inform, even in a sense produce both being generally and human--that is, critical, philosophical, skeptical--being. The latter is termed "Dasein" or "being-there" in what is the seminal work for him, Being and Time (1926). Heidegger's Dasein is "[a] being that questions Being by first questioning its own Sein," or Being (Steiner 82). The point of departure for Heidegger (and, indeed, Levinas) is thus the Cartesian notion of the self and its "cogito ergo sum." The concepts of both language and death cluster around this thinking-being self, which has bare, corporeal being and which speaks until silenced permanently by death. In addition to "being-there," however, Dasein is also understood

by Heidegger as a "being-with," or "Mitsein." Humans are speaking entities and social ones, which amounts to about the same thing: with no dialogue, with no other, there would be no need for monologue, conversation with an other within. Thus for Heidegger, dying is private and individual, an experience undergone by a discrete human being, and at the same time it is communal, as Edith Wyschogrod has pointed out: "If the self is genuinely its social relations then what comes to an end is a system of relations" (Spirit 172). Hence death is both corporeal, something that happens to discrete bodies, and discursive, a rupture in systems of relating and communicating.

In an important sense, death and being-towards-death are what make human being human being, Dasein Dasein; as Heidegger puts it, "Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is" (289). The end of Dasein and indeed of a particular human being is not death for Heidegger; rather, Being-towards-death or "Being-towards-the-end" (289) is an essential aspect of existence. To die is not to exit from being, from the regime of Dasein; it is in fact "the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein" (294), a possibility that is relevant only from the perspective of being, particularly Being-there. So: "death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility--non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein's end, in the Being of this entity towards death" (303). Death is not the opposite of Being; it is rather that existential category against which Being is defined. It is for Heidegger irrelevant for the dead, in fact, and only for those of us who are is the certainty of death (309) an object of angst.

In this sense, death is not centrally about the self and its end, its being-towards-the-end, but about the other, about Being-with, and the loss of the other to something

other than Being. That is why, in Piotr Hoffman's words, "Heidegger attributes to death the power of both totalizing and individualizing Dasein" (199). From the perspective of Dasein, death is the ultimately alienating event: we all die alone, which is why "[n]o one can take the Other's dying away from him" (Heidegger 284; see also Steiner 104). But if Dasein is always (paradoxically) also Mitsein, a Being-with, then no mode of existence is ever solitary, and death then becomes about a reshuffling of human relations and a disruption, space, or silence in human communication. Heidegger notes that "Death does indeed reveal itself as a loss, but a loss such as is experienced by those who remain" (282). Insofar as Dasein can be "represented" by others, it points towards not just our individuated existence but to our "Being-with-one-another in the world" (283). And death as well, always inevitably represented and spoken about by the other, never by the dead self, might thus be defined by its representability, its ability to be articulated. Here death is both empirical and figural, the demise of another's body troped as my own potential demise.

In Being and Time Heidegger uses two words to point towards the importance of speech and textuality for Dasein and, implicitly, its relationship with death: discourse (Rede) and language (Sprache). Discourse, which is "constitutive for Dasein's existence" (204), "is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding" (203). That is, discourse and thought come to be together; one cannot exist without the other. Language, the systematization of discourse, is derivative: "The existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk" (203). Language is the expression of the primal category of discourse (204). To talk is to talk about something, to employ language. The shortcomings of this linguistic theory are clear from the perspective of

poststructuralism and even, in fact, to the older Heidegger (see Olafson 114): in Being and Time Heidegger assumes that language is transparent, "a modality of uncovering entities as entities" (Olafson 114). There is here no space, or perhaps a negligible space, between thought and articulation, language and the reality of being. Thus, particularly from the perspective of Levinas, Heidegger provides no room for something other than the ontological: bodies, thought, words are all presences, beings. One might say that nothing is missing from Heidegger's totalizing theory; no existential spaces are left unfilled, all absences, including death, are constituents of a larger whole. As Levinas puts it, for Heidegger "[t]he whole human being is ontology" ("Ontology" 3).

D. Heidegger and Levinas

In order to understand Levinas's indebtedness to and critique of Heidegger, particularly Being and Time, it is necessary to provide some background on the personal and professional relationship between the two men. Levinas, born into the large Jewish community in and near Kovno, Lithuania, moved to Strasbourg in 1923, where he eventually obtained a licence in philosophy. Struck by Edmund Husserl's Logical Investigations, he chose to write a dissertation on Husserlian phenomenology. Levinas thus transferred to Freiburg-in-Bresgau during the academic year 1928-29, where he participated in one of Husserl's very last seminars. More importantly, he there met Heidegger, with whom Levinas was greatly impressed. Levinas felt that he had found in him something like a kindred spirit. Heidegger's philosophy, particularly as articulated in Being and Time, suggested at least a potential escape from the tyranny of ontology, even

if, as Levinas would articulate again and again, Heidegger's philosophy finally serves the interests of the ontological, that is, Greek, tradition. In his discussion of "care," Heidegger seems momentarily to query ontology via ethics: as he puts it, "as Being-with [Mitsein], Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of others" [emphasis mine] (160). But this moment is fleeting, and the primacy and privilege of individual, heroic, critical being, or Dasein, is constantly reasserted throughout Sein und Zeit. Thus his project was for Levinas crucially compromised by the very (ontological) tradition that he was seeking to contest. Eventually, in fact, Derrida would make a similar accusation against Levinas (see below).

At the time during which Levinas was at Freiburg, phenomenology was all but unknown in France, and it is Levinas who is usually credited with introducing the modes and methods of Heidegger and Husserl to his adopted countrymen, including key figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre. Levinas became a French citizen and an instructor at the Alliance Israélite Universelle (in Paris) in 1930, and it was during this period that he began to build a reputation as a noted phenomenologist, signalled by the publication of his doctoral dissertation, Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénomenologie de Husserl (1930), and, with Gabrielle Peiffer, a translation into French of Husserl's Cartesian Mediations (1931). It was also at this time that Levinas's crucial personal and philosophical break with Heidegger occurred.

Like many other philosophers, both Jewish and not, Levinas was appalled by the address that Heidegger made upon becoming rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933. In it, he argues for a new society for Germany, organized upon generally National Socialist principles. He calls for a return to the beginnings of philosophy, particularly

Plato, but, as Rüdiger Safranski puts it, "without being seduced by the idea of the contemplative life, by Plato's sun" (246). Reaction to the speech focused mainly not on Heidegger's interest in returning to a more-or-less medieval model of German social organization nor on his ruminations on Plato. Rather, emphasis was placed on his alliance with the National Socialists and his complicity in their plans to "renew" German universities. While Heidegger made no specifically anti-semitic remarks in this speech, the anti-Semitism of the Nazis was by the early 1930s widely known, thus he was implicated in this aspect of their project as well. By the end of 1933, Heidegger was shunning his Jewish students and colleagues, and even though his anti-semitism was never whole-hearted, his very public position as university rector forbade him from doing much for the Jewish intellectuals around him as the Nazis' purges intensified. Under pressure from his publishers, in the early 1940s he removed the dedication to the Jewish Husserl from Being and Time; as well, he failed to attend Husserl's funeral in 1938. Even if "Heidegger's Nazism was decisionist" (Safranski 254)--that is, pragmatic--his association with National Socialism would permanently taint his life and work.

For his part, Levinas, who had begun a book on Heidegger in the 1930s, abandoned that project owing to his erstwhile mentor's involvement with Nazism, what Levinas would later term "the horror that eventually came to be associated with Heidegger's name" ("Dying" 208). Levinas spent most of World War II in a military prisoners' camp doing forced labor; as a French officer, he was protected from being sent to a concentration camp. Levinas has written a brief memoir of his experiences as a prisoner of war, "The Name of the Dog, or Natural Rights." He recounts in it that for non-Jewish others, he and his fellow prisoners

> were no longer part of the world. Our comings and goings, our sorrow and laughter, illnesses and distractions, the work of our hands and the anguish of our eyes, the letters we received from France and those accepted for our families--all that passed in parenthesis. ("Name" 153)

Under Nazi rule, Jews entered a parenthetical space, a space aside, easily ignorable in the large "text" of humanity.

I summarize these historical and biographical details because they are significant for understanding Levinas's philosophical break with Heidegger. Responsibility to the other, Heidegger's "care," is insufficiently theorized and attended to in Sein und Zeit according to Levinas. Although he borrows many assumptions and a complex vocabulary from Heidegger, Levinas finds in Heidegger's ontology a thinker who has turned from Plato's Ideal--the Sun of the Republic--but remains blinded by it. And Heidegger's pivotal blind-spot is the ethical, our responsibility to the other, particularly an other with whom we communicate, the other-in-language. This indeed was as well for Levinas the fatal-est of all of the flaws of German National Socialism: its crucial missing of the inherent humanity of the Jew, the Dasein of the Semite. World War II and its concomitant shoah would remain for Levinas an (un)ethical extreme, that which instils urgency in his philosophy of ethics.

E. Levinas: "Is Ontology Fundamental?"

Levinas first vigorously critiques Heidegger's ontological assumptions in a 1951 essay entitled "Is Ontology Fundamental?" Here Levinas explicitly seeks not to cross but

to theorize and characterize the divide between apprehension and comprehension, perception and understanding in a way that does not inadvertently fill it up with "being," that allows it to remain mysterious. For Levinas in this essay the ethical relationship, the encounter with the other, "excends," moves beyond, comprehension, and is thus unavailable in its (infinite) entirety to rationality and analysis. Moreover, the site of this relationship is speech as a tangible situation. As Simon Critchley puts it, "In speaking or calling or listening to the other, I am not reflecting upon the other, but I am actively engaged in a noncomprehensive, nonsubsumptive relation to alterity where I focus on the particular individual in front of me and forgo the mediation of the universal" (Intro. 1-2). For Levinas, what he would later term the face-to-face is characterized in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" as an unmediated encounter with the other that occurs both concretely and textually.

His basic point here is that an ontological philosophy such as Heidegger's "presupposes the factual situation of the mind that knows" (2); that is, ontology assumes that we can know our immediate situation, that somehow it can be made available to intellection, thus to comprehension. The problem with such a system is that it totalizes all being, particularly human being, in terms of ontology. For Heidegger "the whole human being is ontology. Scientific work, the affective life, the satisfaction of needs and labor, social life and death--all of these moments spell out the comprehension of being, or truth, with a rigor which reserves to each a determinate function" (3). To think in ontological terms is therefore to subject all that is, even perhaps what is not, to the workings of the human mind. Might there not be something significant that escapes human thought, something pervasive and integral to human life? In what ways might the Western

philosophical tradition, epitomized by Heidegger, be blind to or unaware of its very blindness, or at least purblindness?

In asking such questions, Levinas seeks to move beyond his teacher by examining closely some of Heidegger's basic distinctions, particularly that between uncritical being--"everydayness" or being-in-the-world--and a more analytical, self-aware mode of being that Heidegger labels "Dasein." As was noted above, Dasein is always complicated by, even infected with, Mitsein, the very everyday "being-with" that it seeks to gain mastery over. If "to comprehend being is to exist," then according to Levinas "it would seem" that there has developed "a rupture within the theoretical structure of Western thought. To think is no longer to contemplate but to commit oneself, to be engulfed by that which one thinks, to be involved. This is the dramatic event of being-in-the-world" (4). One cannot contemplate something, anything, without giving oneself, or at least part of oneself, over to the object of contemplation. This gift, often inadvertently given, seems to disappear--perhaps into the "rupture of thought" that Levinas mentions--along with some part of ourselves. At the same time, we pull something away from the contemplated other, something not-us, that forces a readjustment to our very being and beyond, to that which is both us and excends, exceeds, overflows us.

It is in this regard that Levinas first puts forward the notion of the "trace," an idea that would in turn become crucial in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. Levinas: "In doing that which I wanted to do, I have done so many other things I did not want. The act has not been pure, for I have left some traces. In wiping out these traces, I have left others" (4). In other words, there is no pure, objective transcendence: Plato's ideal Good, like Aristotle's, Aquinas's, and Heidegger's transcendent Being, is itself a fantasy rather

than an ultimate reality. It is the result of a mimetic process, an attempt to imitate, represent, and contain the relation between self and object, self and other, self and self. Such idealistic, ontological whimsies are not to be mistaken for the reality of being--the truth that ethics exceeds both reality and being. That is, "Does not the fact that a being is "open" belong to the very fact of its being?" (4-5).

This "open"ness and Levinas's insistence upon it allow for a refocusing of attention from reason--what we know, or think we know, about being--to language--how we speak about being. Contra Heidegger, then, "we are entitled to ask whether reason, presented as the possibility of [meaningful] language, necessarily precedes it, or if language is not founded on a relation anterior to comprehension and which constitutes reason" (5). Levinas will continue to explore this possibility throughout his life, the possibility, that is, that language precedes reason and thus that human communication, the encounter with the other, presents problems and opportunities that escape reason and cannot be contained in the intellect or reduced to comprehension. To put it another way,

> Our relation with the other (autrui) certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension. Not only because knowledge of the other (autrui) requires, outside of all curiosity, also sympathy or love, ways of being distinct from impossible contemplation, but because in our relation with the other (autrui), he does not affect us in terms of a concept. He is a being (étant) and counts as such. (6)

In the economy of Levinas's ultra-ontological ethics, here presented in its nascence, the (human) other "counts" in amounts that can only be described as infinities. His or her demands on me foil and overcome my ability to understand them.

We can, nevertheless, speak or write about him or her; for Levinas "Speech delineates an original relation" (6). According to Derrida, language is inescapably catachrestic; it must be warped and wilfully misused in order to signify in modes that confound the ontological (see "White" 255-57). For Levinas everyday speech can not only access and reverence the "difference" of the other, but such speech is in fact the proper mode for paying hom(m)age to other humans. It is important to note here that thought and comprehension are not insignificant for Levinas when it comes to an encounter with the other; these categories are, however, definitely secondary to that of language. The "impossibility of approaching the other (autrui) without speaking to him signifies that here thought is inseparable from expression," but: "Before any participation in a common content by comprehension, [expression] consists in the intuition of sociality by a relation that is consequently irreducible to comprehension" (7). Comprehension is an aspect of our encounter with the other, but this encounter cannot for Levinas be reduced to it, and therefore "the relation with the other is not...ontology" (7) but something quite else and much more. In fact, that which eludes my comprehension in the other is exactly what the other is; to encounter the other is to know that one will never know, never master, him or her (9).

The encounter with the face of the other is inherently speech; it is the essence of speech. For Levinas "the relation with the face, speech, an event of collectivity, is a relation with beings as such, pure beings" (10). Later Levinas would avoid a phrase such

as "pure being" as too wholly invested in the epistemology of ontology. But his point is clear and remains consistent throughout his writings: facing the face of the other invokes purity, infinity, even divinity, albeit in passing. The face signifies, enters into language, speech, textuality, but it as well, and crucially, "signifies otherwise.... Completely naked (and the nakedness of the face is not a figure of style), the face signifies itself. We cannot even say that the face is an opening, for this would be to make it relative to an environing plenitude" (10). The face is thus for Levinas in this early essay the ground upon which all signification rests. All language finds its source vis-a-vis the face of the other, which here manifests itself as an excendent signified. The face escapes the realm of the rational and the ontological. It can be implied and connoted in language and as language but never defined or contained. The face of the other is encountered in all its rawness by the face of the self, and this encounter, a gaze of recognition and irreducible difference, can never be fully understood or theorized about. The demands that the face of the other puts upon me are infinite, and my resources are meagre. This is for Levinas the inherent human situation, elusive, incomprehensible, far beyond our own and our collective capacities to be.

F. "Meaning and Sense": Levinas on Metaphor

Humans have long felt the need or desire to make sense of the world around them and of themselves. For Levinas this goal can never fully be reached; he is in this sense, as in others, no idealist, whether Platonic, Kantian, or Hegelian. Nevertheless, Levinas attempts in his 1964 essay "Meaning and Sense" to outline the relationship between

meaning and incomprehensibility, explore the ontological, particularly phenomenological, argument about it, and suggest a foundation upon which to build a new epistemology of meaning: namely, ethics. The crucial category for working out modes of meaning and failures to mean is for Levinas the metaphoric. As the poststructuralists, particularly Derrida in "White Mythology," would later argue, language works, or fails to work, as metaphor; all language is metaphoric, "the reference to absence" (Levinas, "Meaning" 36). But this is only part of the (il)logic of metaphor. It is also, paradoxically, "an excellence that belongs to an order quite different from pure receptivity" (Levinas, "Meaning" 36). Like a musical tone beyond human hearing, metaphor in Levinas's philosophy is both not-here and too much with us--far beyond our abilities of perception and intellection.

It is commonplace that metaphor consistently points towards what is not here, what is missing. The word "meta-phor," to bear beyond, to overload, suggests that metaphoric language loses something crucial in the process of communication, of saying, that it refers always and often inadvertently to absence. Simultaneously for Levinas, and contra Derrida, language can be understood as insufficient to contain the said or the signified; it is constantly filled to overflowing. Metaphor can thus be taken, in Levinas's words, "to be due to a deficiency of perception or to its excellence, according as the beyond involved in metaphor leads to other contents, which were simply absent from the limited field of the perception, or is transcendent with respect to the whole order of contents or of the given" ("Meaning" 34-35). But if to speak is both to say nothing and to say too much, how can one possibly hope to make any sense through the use of language?

Husserl's answer is found in his notion of categorical intuition, the idea that a reader does not actually read nor an auditor hear: in both cases the receiver of a

communication intuits the meaning of a particular use of language. As Levinas puts it in The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, the notion of intuition in Husserl "seems to be independent of whether it takes places in a sensible or in an intellectual act" (83). For Husserl to be in the world is to intuit the world, whether through one's senses or in terms of processes of intellection. To put this in Saussurean terms, we understand the meanings of signifiers because humans have a basic ability to intuit signifieds from them. According to Levinas, Husserl "accounts for meanings by a return to the given. Categorical intuition, a notion by which he breaks with sensualist empiricism, in fact prolongs the intuitionist conception of meaning" ("Meaning" 36). Husserl attempts to escape empiricism and its emphasis on sense experience but fails to do so, in that his notion of intuition relies on both sense and intellect in order to understand the production and dissemination of meaning.

Heidegger, for his part, argues that "language is the house of being" (qtd. in Levinas, "Meaning" 38). Broadly, language for Heidegger shapes and gives meaning to being, it provides the means through which existence can be understood and examined. According to Levinas, Heidegger jettisons Husserl's notion of "categorical intuition" as overly compromised by empiricism and positivism and compensates for its absence with a notion of the totalizing intellect, employed by and in terms of Dasein. Being and language are analogous in Heidegger in that they are structured along the same hermeneutical lines: "Everything remains in a language or in a world, for the structure of the world resembles the order of language, with possibilities no dictionary can arrest. In the this as that, neither the this or the that is first given outside of discourse" (Levinas, "Meaning" 38). Importantly, language in this formulation is, like existence and thought, opaque, solid, and

full, allowing for no spaces or gaps. It is metaphor not as absence but as presence, a replacement of this as that, an hermetically sealed epistemology that allows neither for absence nor, in Levinas's sense, excendence. Nothing is missing from Heidegger's system, and nothing is beyond it. And it is exactly that nothing that interests Levinas: the putative space behind and beyond, in which he situates the ethical. In their emphases on immediacy, fullness, and presence both Husserl and Heidegger remain positivists and idealists in the tradition of Aristotle. For both language refers to something solid and full behind it: being. The ontological everywhere underwrites the textual in the thought of these philosophers. And behind being there is nothing.

Levinas's solution of the dilemma of the metaphoric represents a distinct turn from the phenomenological model out of which he is working and from which he is attempting to free himself and his thought. As something of a by-product of his critique of Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas posits a meta-language of ethics behind the putative meta-language of ontology. John Llewelyn summarizes this position: "Heidegger draws attention to the ontological non-metaphoricity. While applauding and retaining that insight, Levinas thinks that there is an ethical non-metaphoricity underlying the ontological non-metaphoricity" (178). Llewellyn's formulation of Levinas's position distinctly echoes a passage from Derrida's "White Mythology":

> The primitive meaning, the original, and always sensory and material, figure...is not exactly a metaphor. It is a kind of transparent figure, equivalent to a literal meaning (sens propre). It becomes a metaphor when philosophical discourse puts it into circulation. Simultaneously the first meaning and the first displacement are then forgotten. The metaphor is no

> longer noticed, and it is taken for the proper meaning. A double effacement. (211)

Here Derrida, following Levinas, points toward something behind what philosophy claims to be behind language; in Levinasian terms, Derrida is here moving towards the ethics behind ontology.

Also striking from this Derridian passage is the use of the French word "sens"--"sense" in English--the same term that Levinas uses to point towards a signified behind the signified Truth that has long been the object of the Western metaphysical project. Behind this search for Truth, a search rooted in history and culture yet attempting to escape from such categories, is for Levinas "le sens," the unique sense, meaning that moves beyond culture, history, and the overarching philosophical model that has long circumscribed these categories in the West. This movement is one of overflow, what Levinas earlier terms "excendent," a journey beyond the self to the other, even the Other. In defense of this notion of sense, Levinas claims that "the impossibility of establishing the univocal meaning of being upon materialism...does not itself compromise this ideal of unity, which constitutes the force of Truth and the hope for an understanding among men" ("Meaning" 46). Something, he suggests, causes humans to continue hoping and attempting to communicate, even in the face of a postmodern disorientation rooted in the breakdown or bankruptcy of monotheism and metaphysics in Western thought ("Meaning" 47). Behind the idea of God and the "death of God," "the crisis of monotheism," and the "breakup of...unity" ("Meaning 47) lie unity, God, "sens," that is, meaning.

This excendent meaning or unique sense is found in the ethical language that lurks within and beyond both the material and the textual and connects these categories through processes of mimesis. As Martin Srajek characterizes it, "Levinas assumes that prior (logically and temporally) to every particular language a sign is passed on from one to the other.... It is silent, opposed to the noisy proclaiming (lat. clamor) of intentionality. It is language, although it lacks everything one would normally associate with language" (35). Further, it is the job of the philosopher to connote, suggest, move towards this meta-meta-language. Levinas in "Ethics of the Infinite": "Philosophy is primarily a question of language; and it is by identifying the subtextual language of particular discourses that we can decide whether they are philosophical or not" (54-55). Here Levinas suggests that philosophical language is interested in the nature of language itself, particularly that language that is typically referred to as "being." Ontology is in this sense rhetoric. In that there is a "primitive meaning" or "unique sense" underlying the traditional quest for meaning or sense, the ontologists of the West have from the time of the ancient Greeks possessed an insight into the basic non-metaphoricity that underlies language. Their mistake for Levinas is in locating this most fundamental category in the ontological; ontology is an effect of language and its metaphoric structure, not a first cause or primary state. Behind, beyond, absent from language and being is paradoxically both a crucial absence and an over-fullness that escapes the very category of being. Behind <u>all that is</u> is that which is right in front of my face: the face of the other.

G. Face to Face with the Other

Proceeding from the fundamental textuality of my encounter with the world, with being, and with the other is a narrative of responsibility--the ethical. This is the most crucial category in the thought and writing of Levinas; it is also the most difficult to grasp, by design. The situation is a dialogue, a juxtaposition, what Levinas terms the "face-à-face." Georges Hansel, before suggesting some possible modes for interpreting Levinas's notion of the face-to-face encounter with the other, outlines what the Levinasian other is not:

> The Other is not the object of knowledge, representation or comprehension; we do not grasp the Other. Nor is the Other the object of a description; there is no "phenomenology" of the Other. It is even improper to speak of the Other in terms of appearing or unveiling, terms which still belong to the register of knowing and knowledge. What can be said positively about this Other that evades all that we know, that evades Being, as the philosophers say? What can be said about this Other who comes from an elsewhere that belongs to no world? (121)

The other slips between thought and perception, discourse and silence, comprehension and apprehension. Simultaneously, it overwhelms and exceeds the ontological system that underlies these binary distinctions. In technical Levinasian terms, the other excends, becomes the Other.

This understanding of (really, failure to understand) the other is consistently found in Levinas's writing, beginning with the basic insights in "Is Ontology Fundamental?"

(discussed above). The first is that "the other (autrui) is not...ontology" (7), and thus implicitly that ethics precedes ontology. The second relates to the connection between language and the other, viz. that "To be in relation to the other (autrui) face to face is...the situation of discourse." Perhaps Levinas's clearest delineation of this inherent human situation--and its relationship to his theory of language--can be found in his 1961 tome Totality and Infinity:

> Meaning is the face of the Other, and all recourse to words takes place already within the primordial face to face of language. Every recourse to words presupposes the comprehension of the primary signification, but this comprehension, before being interpreted as a "consciousness of," is society and obligation. Signification is the Infinite, but infinity does not present itself to a transcendental thought, nor even to meaningful activity, but presents itself in the Other; the Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me by his essence qua infinity. That "something" we call signification arises in being with language because the essence of language is the relation with the Other. (206-07)

Here Levinas has replaced his earlier term "excendence" with "infinity," a concept that suggests both overfullness and also desire (50), a wish to escape the limitations of being and thus an acknowledgement of a fundamental absence operative in the self's relationship with the world. The subtitle of Totality and Infinity--An Essay on Exteriority--indicates clearly the direction and thrust of Levinas's argument and indeed human life: outside of the self, towards the other.

What this emphasis on exteriority produces is responsibility, namely my immediate responsibility to the immediate demands of the other. As Jill Robbins puts it, "In the face-to-face encounter, responsibility in its most original form of response, or language-response, arises" (135). The face demands of me an autochthonous response, previous to intellection, intuition, and language in the conventional sense. Andrew Tallon understands Levinas's face in terms of Paul Ricoeur's definition of a symbol, that which means "other than what is said" (qtd. in Tallon 111). For Tallon, "Symbols, like the face, represent the fullness of language in that a symbol, much more than a word, contains an overdetermination of meaning" (111). This reading represents, however, only a partial understanding of the face in Levinas. The face, as sign or symbol of the excendent in Levinas, does indeed point towards the over-fullness of meaning associated with the other; at the same time, it suggests a concomitant absence, something crucially missing, something just missed. The face inevitably demands that which I can never fully provide.

That demand, which emerges from without, from the other, is the source of language, of even the possibility of language. Levinas summarizes his position in the conclusion of Totality and Infinity: "The presence of the Other, or expression, source of all signification, is not contemplated as an intelligible essence, but is heard as language, and thereby effectuated exteriorly. Expression, the face, overflows images, which are always immanent to my thought, as though they came from me" (297). In contrast to Heidegger, who prioritizes the regime of the "intelligible," Levinas understands "expression"--the language of ethics--as beyond processes of the intellect, beyond therefore the self. As well, the conception of the face presented here thwarts mimesis or representation; as Levinas puts it, the face "overflows images."

Levinas continues: "This overflowing, irreducible to an image of overflowing, is produced commensurate with--or in the inordinateness of--Desire and goodness, as the moral dissymmetry of the I and the other" (297). Here Levinas makes his clear and sharp break from Plato's Sun as the Form or image of Goodness--no analogy is ever sufficient to characterize the face as excendent signified. As well, the move from the other/self binary, firmly embedded in Western thought since Aristotle, is determined, even alacritous. What we have in Levinas's formulation of this relationship is not an even exchange or one-to-one relationship between self and world, not symmetry but dissymmetry. The other's face places a demand on me that can never be met. Looking into that face is not like looking into a mirror, as Jacques Lacan, among others, would have us believe. Levinas's transcendence does not signal the beyond of the Lacanian "true subject" that is itself beyond the "imaginary" and the "symbolic." Levinas's category is metaphysical rather than psychoanalytic, transcending the category of subjectivity, though initiated, like Lacan's mirror stage, by the encounter of self and other(ness) (see Staten 166). For Levinas, looking at the face of the other is like looking at a religious icon or the face of a concentration camp victim in a photograph, except that the mimetic, the frame, the representative quality of such experiences is replaced with immediacy. To face the face of the other is to glimpse, in passing, the face of God, even God-as-language, the Word. As Levinas puts it in a 1966 essay on Roger Laporte: "Language is the fact that always one sole word is proffered: God" (Proper 93).

Georges Hansel's comments on this situation provide a helpful outline of Levinas's position:

> Having purified our language, what is left? The Other is the "face" [visage], not in the sense of a face "seen," a face which can be captured in a photographic image or in the memory; the "face" is expression and discourse. It is immediately and all at once speech: question, supplication, commandment, teaching. And therefore the "face" obligates me; it demands response, help, solicitude, compassion. And thus we come to the expression that is perhaps the most often employed by Levinas: responsibility to the Other. (Hansel 121-22)

Once Levinas establishes his meta-meta-language of ethics, posits, that is, a "purified language," he charts an escape from imitation, representation, and thus mimesis. In the face-to-face we leap into the void of otherness, of the not-self, and are awed by the overflow not just of signification but of responsibility that we encounter in this process. Levinas: "I must always demand more of myself than of the other....This essential asymmetry is the very basis of ethics: not only am I more responsible than the other but I am even responsible for everyone else's responsibility!" ("Ethics" 67). In contrast to Martin Buber's formulation of an I-Thou relation as "symmetrical co-presence," Levinas puts forward a theory of infinitely lopsided responsibility for the other (see Levinas, "Ethics" 67). But if the other's demands are so unreasonable, why even bother to try to meet them?

H. Derridian Digression: "Violence and Metaphysics"

The question that concludes the above section requires a thorough answer and thus warrants a digression into Derrida's well-known critique of Levinas's thought, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" (1964). One of Derrida's basic points in this essay is that language can never be purified, that Levinas's gestures toward excendence, toward the language that ostensibly underpins even the language of being, place him within the ontological tradition that Levinas claims to be so strenuously fleeing. That is, by employing the language of philosophy and its Western ontological tradition, Levinas basically redeploys its figures and assumptions, rather than effecting the radical break that he seeks.

Derrida recognizes that Levinas's project is meant to be a fundamental attack on the ontological assumptions of the West, particularly those of Husserl and Heidegger, but contends: "No philosophy could possibly dislodge them without finally destroying itself as a philosophical language" ("Violence" 82). The "them" in this sentence refers to three assumptions: (1) "the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek"; to utilize philosophical language is inevitably to cite Plato, Aristotle, and the unbroken line of their epistemological successors. (2) The philosophy of both Husserl and Heidegger represents "a reduction of metaphysics," its distillation and fulfilment. Here Derrida and Levinas would agree. And (3), which is the crux of Derrida's critique: "the category of the ethical is not only dissociated from metaphysics but coordinated with something other than itself, a previous and more radical function" (81). That is, Levinas's privileging of the ethical as a special category separate from and previous to the ontological presupposes and reasserts

a notion already found in the phenomenological discourses of Husserl and Heidegger: there is something behind what is commonly referred to as "existence." Dasein informs and allows for Mitsein, in Heideggerian terms; it is the Being behind being. Analogously, behind intuition and thought for Levinas is found true otherness, with all its impossible demands. Levinas's putative break with phenomenology, based on its assumptions and indeed critiques, utilizes its language and replicates a fundamental split between metaphysics as it has been traditionally understood and an ultra-metaphysics--Heidegger's "Dasein," Levinas's "ethics." Levinas's ethical philosophy is thus indeed not at all the "escape" from ontology, that is, the logic of ontology, that it claims to be.

As Colin Davis puts it, "Throughout his essay Derrida seeks to show that Levinas may have misunderstood the significance of his own thought" (64). By separating ethics from ontology and by placing the former category before and beyond the latter, Levinas has in Derrida's estimation posited "a language without phrase, a language which would say nothing" ("Violence" 147). The suggestion here is that Levinas's ethical philosophy is actually (and simultaneously) an apophatic theology, valorizing a language that is nothing more than silence in the face of the God-in-passing, otherwise known as the other. This silence is inspired, even demanded, by the infinite nature of the other, as Levinas characterizes it in Totality and Infinity: "The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our difference" (Totality 194). For Derrida, Levinas's clinging to terms such as "infinity" and "transcendence" contradicts his contention about the primacy of ethics over ontology and in fact reinscribe the ethical within the ontological, the other within the regime of being,

rather than outside of it. Derrida: "Paradoxically, it would be this thought of infinity (what is called the thought of God) which would permit one to affirm the priority of ontology over theology, and to affirm that the thought of Being is presupposed by the thought of God" ("Violence" 150). Any conception of God, even Levinas's God-in-passing, inevitably cites the ontological tradition and its notion of the "existent-God" (Derrida, "Violence" 150), God as Being. Thus Levinas does not break from ontology, but retheorizes and reinscribes it.

Derrida pursues this argument by demonstrating Levinas's indebtedness to and reliance upon the the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger. He asserts, for example, that Levinas and Husserl are both able to speak of the "infinitely other" because the "original, transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice," that is, the violence of language, allows the speaker to usurp the subjectivity of the other, to speak <u>for</u> and <u>about</u> the other. Both engage in the "violent and totalitarian act" of using language (Derrida, "Violence" 125). When Levinas characterizes the other as "infinitely foreign, infinitely transcendent," for example, he inevitably silences not himself but the other by situating him in a regime of discourse in which the self speaks and the other is contained and carried within the process of signification. Here is the paradox, then: to be silent before the other is to refuse to do violence to him or her, to refuse to attempt to contain and interiorize his fundamental alterity. It is also a refusal to philosophize. But Levinas speaks and writes nevertheless of the other, indeed of our appropriately apophatic relationship to him or her, and thus for Derrida affirms his or her subjection to the category of the same, of the ontological.

Derrida makes a similar argument about the relationship between Levinas's thought and Heidegger's. Specifically, Derrida contends that Levinas "confirms Heidegger in his discourse" about metaphysics, that metaphysics "thinks Being in an implicit fashion, as is inevitable in every language" (Derrida, "Violence" 142). Both critique metaphysics by positing a remembering, an encounter with things themselves, based on the assumption that the other is external to the self. As noted above, Heidegger calls this awareness of the other "Dasein" and Levinas characterizes this relationship as a face-à-face. For Derrida, Levinas does not leave behind or move beyond metaphysics; rather, he amends metaphysics with a refigured humanism, as did his teacher Heidegger:

> Now, Levinas simultaneously proposes to us a humanism and a metaphysics. It is a question of attaining, via the royal road of ethics, the supreme existent, the truly existent...as other. And this existent is man, determined as a face in his essence as man on the basis of his resemblance to God. Is this not what Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of the unity of metaphysics, humanism and onto-theology? (142)

As long as Levinas remains a theist (albeit simultaneously an a-theist) and perceives humans in relationship to God, he remains for Derrida an ontologist, albeit an unwitting one, a metaphysician-in-denial. Thusly Simon Critchley is able to summarize Derrida's reading of Levinas in "Violence and Metaphysics": "the transgression of phenomenology and ontology that is effected by Levinas's empirical metaphysics in fact presupposes the very things that it seeks to transgress" (Critchley, Ethics 93). To put it another way, Levinas's desire to figure the encounter with the other as beyond ontology echoes and

reaffirms the project of phenomenology, to look past the self to the other, to the world, to "things themselves."

By clinging to phenomenology, its language, and its basic tenets, no matter how naively or unwittingly, Levinas for Derrida prolongs, extends, and perhaps complicates the process of the death of philosophy, reaffirms its "dying nature" (Derrida, "Violence" 79). For Colin Davis Derrida's critique points out that "Levinas's fundamental problem concerns the language of philosophy itself. Levinas's recourse to a language rooted in the primacy of the Same necessarily defeats his desire for a discourse fully exposed to the strangeness of the Other" (66). The moment that Levinas, or anyone, speaks of an other, that other is situated unavoidably and permanently within the horizon of the speaking self. The self does violence to the other by usurping his or her position, by turning him or her into the equivalent of a ventriloquist's dummy.

According to Derrida Levinas is trapped between two conceptual poles. The first is rhetoric and metaphor, or language as that which inevitably supplants and replaces, even Levinas's meta-meta-language of ethics. The second is empiricism--the quest for the other outside of language, a project that inevitably must be undertaken within language. Levinas's philosophy might thus be characterized as "the dream of a purely heterological thought at its source. A pure thought of pure difference.... We say dream because it must vanish at daybreak, as soon as language awakes. But perhaps one will object that language is sleeping." (Derrida, "Violence" 151). Levinas dreams the dream of an uncommon language and thereby his philosophy slips into the yawing gap between rhetoric and empiricism. His philosophy yawns in that it is not quite awake, not quite

asleep; as Derrida suggests, it replaces Plato's brilliant afternoon Sun with the crack of dawn, in a transitional mode between fantasy and reality and back again.

For all his critiques and queries, Derrida finally in "Violence and Metaphysics" recognizes the significance of Levinas's achievement, particularly in Totality and Infinity:

> By radicalizing the theme of the infinite exteriority of the other, Levinas thereby assumes the aim which has more or less secretly animated all the philosophical gestures which have been called empiricisms in the history of philosophy. He does so with an audacity, a profundity, and a resoluteness never before attained. By taking this project to its end, he totally renews empiricism, and inverses it by revealing it to itself as metaphysics. ("Violence" 151)

In seeking to situate Levinas in terms of the Western, that is Greek, tradition of philosophy, Derrida finds that Levinas is within and outside of it--a (Greek) philosopher and a (Jewish) theologian. Quoting Joyce's Ulysses, Derrida sees Levinas as both: "Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet" (153). Derrida discovers in Levinas an emphasis on perception, apprehension, empiricism that ought to annihilate or nullify his use of language, comprehension, metaphysics. Somehow, though, Levinas fuses and refuses these ostensible opposites. In a word, he deconstructs them, as Davis has perceptively pointed out: "In his essay on Levinas, Derrida is also describing the fundamental aporia of deconstruction, unable to be fully inside or outside its host discourse, determined in its habits of thought by that which it rejects" (66). The crucial difference between these two thinkers, at least in 1964, is that Levinas clings to a theism of absence or overpresence, while Derrida rejects the Law of the Father--that is, Judaism, the Mosaic Law--replacing it

with what John Caputo has characterized as the "magnum mysterium called différence" (1).

I. Beyond Essence: "Persecution" and "Substitution"

Both Levinas and Derrida are interested in aporia--the space between self and other, comprehension and apprehension, life and death. Levinas's thought, like Derrida's, "represents both a breach and a continuity within the philosophical tradition, maintaining the history of philosophy even as it disrupts it" (Davis 67). It is in terms of this continuation-disruption that we might begin to theorize a response to the insistent and unconformable, but never entirely ineffable or unmeetable, demands of the other. Levinas, who quickly became aware of Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics," takes into account Derrida's critique and the methodology of deconstruction in his post-1964 texts, including his second major philosophical treatise, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (1974). This volume and other writing of the same period are both a response to Derrida and something of a co-optation of him. After "Violence and Metaphysics" Levinas becomes much more self-conscious in his use of language, more willing, that is, to acknowledge his debts to his phenomenological fathers while at the same time rearticulating his sharp turn from their thought and methods.

A significant aspect of Levinas's attempt to rearticulate, in some ways further purify, his language and ethical philosophy is his abandonment or retheorization of a number of ontological terms that had been liberally and sometimes unselfconcsiously distributed through earlier texts. As Colin Davis has pointed out, these include: "the

Same, metaphysics, transcendence, exteriority, totality, and separation" (69-70). Rather than the term "transcendence," for example, Levinas often utilizes the phrase "beyond essence" (au-delà de l'essence), borrowed from Plato (in Greek: epekeina tés ousias). He does this not to reaffirm Platonic ontologies, but to query them, as Adriaan Peperzak points out in a summary of Levinas's project: "When human thinking reaches out beyond its own dimensions, it produces contradictions: but this is not a good reason to withdraw to easier terrain. Thinking through and beyond the unfolding of ousia and physis, meta-physics or meta-ontology, seems to be the task that philosophy must achieve, today as yesterday" ("Transcendence" 186). Thus Levinas employs terms such as beyond essence, or, as it is sometimes translated, beyond being, to point toward what he earlier labelled excendence, the transcendence of transcendence that is ethics.

In addition, Levinas's post-"Violence and Metaphysics" work revisits the issues of meaning and sense that allow for a discussion of that which is traditionally obscured in philosophical language. Particularly, he replaces the notion of "le sens" (unique sense)--the primal scene of ethical language--with "an-archy" in order to clarify "the ethical anteriority of responsibility" ("Diachrony" 170), our inevitably belated entry into the ethical situation. Levinas characterizes anarchy most succinctly in Otherwise than Being:

> Anarchy is not disorder as opposed to order.... Disorder is but another order, and what is diffuse is thematizable. Anarchy troubles being over and beyond these alternatives. It brings to a halt the ontological play which, precisely qua play, is consciousness, where being is lost and found again, and thus illuminated.... Anarchy is persecution. (168)

The troubling of being that is anarchy arises for Levinas out of an "immemorial past"--"a past irreducible to a hypothetical present that once was" ("Diachrony" 170). Anarchy is in significant ways analogous to the Christian notion of "fallenness," the idea that we enter into a "trouble[d]" world, that "persecution" is inherent to the human condition, rising out of the circumstances of our existence.

Following this line of thought, Levinas proposes, or really reaffirms, that ethics precedes ontology, that, in his words,

> there arises, awakened by the silent and imperative language spoken by the face of the other,...the solicitude of a responsibility I do not have to make up my mind to take on, no more than I have to identify my identity. A responsibility prior to deliberation and to which I was therefore exposed and dedicated before being dedicated to myself. ("Diachrony" 170)

Before the self is the other, distilled in a face that meets my gaze, "the very signifyingness of signification" ("Essence" 112), as Levinas writes elsewhere. Arising from pure diachrony, the immemorial past, the inherent anarchic situation of the world is the other; "I," that being I refer to as "myself," enters and encounters a world that precedes, overflows, and continues after me. The other is thus before me (1) in language, as "signification" itself ("Essence" 120); (2) in space, right under my nose, as it were, facing me; and (3) in time, always preemptively placing infinite and thus impossible demands upon me. This responsibility to the other that usurps and overarches my responsibility to myself is the product of a process that Levinas terms "substitution." And it is this process that allows for the production of the category of the "self," the ethical milieu in which ontology subsists.

Levinas's clearest theorization of the process of substitution is found in "Substitution" (1967), the aptly titled essay that would become the centerpiece of Otherwise than Being. For Levinas, "Responsibility for the other does not wait for the freedom of commitment to the other. Without ever having done anything, I have always been under accusation: I am persecuted" ("Substitution" 89). Our pervasive situation in this world is thus one of passivity, having always already been accused or persecuted. Levinas continues: "What can it be if not a substitution for others? In passivity without the arche of identity, ipseity is a hostage. The word 'I' means to be answerable for everything and for everyone" (90). This situation of being a "hostage" or substitute of the other is the very selfness ("ipseity") of the self; it is what we are, an ontological condition emerging from the ethical situation of anarchy. It is also a tall order, a reaffirmation of Levinas's decades-long insistence that the "I" is responsible to the other for everything. Is this situation fair? Absolutely not, but this inherent dissymmetry is exactly what allows for the appearance of the self on the horizon of being, always existing in (ethical) relationship, in proximity to the other.

The self, understood in this way, is inevitably obsessed with the other and abandoned to him or her: this is substitution, "an inside-out of being" ("Substitution" 91). As Levinas puts it, "There is abandonment, obsession, responsibility, and a Self because the trace of the Infinite (exceeding the present, turning its arche into anarchy) is inscribed in proximity. The noninterchangeable par excellence, the I, substitutes itself for others. Nothing is a game. Thus being is transcended" ("Substitution" 91). According to this theory what Levinas terms the "arche"--arc, horizon--of identity is predicated upon "anarchy," the inherent unfairness of the human situation, our overwhelming debt to the

other. This process of substitution that allows for the construction of the self further heralds its demise. Here Levinas abandons once and for all the humanism that accrued to his earlier philosophical writings. But Levinas retreats from the category of the human not because it is pervasively immanent nor because (or not only because) it is merely an effect of language, as early Derridian formulations would suggest, but because humanity, particularly the human other, "excends" being, qua being. The human other transcends and preempts, in sum, not just "myself" but transcendence itself as an ontological category.

Levinas summarizes his position as follows: "Modern antihumanism...makes a place for subjectivity positing itself in abnegation, in sacrifice, and in substitution. Its great intuition is to have abandoned the idea of person as an end in itself. The Other (Autrui) is the end, and me, I am a hostage" ("Substitution" 94). Levinas's use of a capital "O" here suggests that the other in question is both human and divine, a figure that signals "the impossibility of escaping God" ("Substitution" 95). It is as well passivity before the other that transcends transcendence, that excends me; it is the possibility of death within being, as Heidegger realized, at least in passing, in his theory of being as inevitably being-towards-death. According to Levinas, this situation is however something more:

> This passivity is not simply...the possibility of impossibility, but is an impossibility anterior to this possibility, an impossibility of slipping away, an absolute susceptibility, a gravity without any frivolity, the birth of a meaning in the obtuseness of being, a 'being able to die,' submitted to sacrifice. ("Substitution" 95)

The best gift that I can give the other is the gift of death, or really the gift of being willing to die for him or her, although even this is hopelessly insufficient to repay my debt to the other. To sacrifice my life for the other is thus to acknowledge what I inherently am: a victim, a hostage, a substitute.

J. The Other Before Death

In short, the encounter with the other propels me towards something other than being, something very much like death. In Levinas, there is no dying alone. As John Llewelyn puts it, "Death is not in isolation. Death is interpersonal. Terrifyingly. For it is personified in the threat of an alien will" (104). We are all for Levinas being-toward-death, as Heidegger would have it, and more. That is, beyond the fact of our own death, our ontological end is the death of the other whose hostage I am. Andrew Tallon helpfully summarizes this situation: "Not one's own death, as Levinas says, contra Heidegger, but the death of the other, should be the human obsession" (113). Our desire is to allow the other to remain other, to reverence his or her alterity; at the same time, we cannot help but attempt to usurp the place of the other. Levinas:

> The face is not in front of me (en face de moi) but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to be an accomplice in his death. Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill. In the relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other. ("Ethics" 59-60)

Here, through his use of the terms "above" and "before," Levinas reaffirms his interest in transcendent transcendence or excendence, an encounter with alterity that is both beyond me and prior to me, both absent and proximate. In addition, the face is in this formulation inherently language, particularly the foundational injunction not to kill.

In the very early Time and the Other (1949), Levinas puts forward his basic understanding of the relationship between death and alterity, especially as these two concepts relate to the experience of suffering. Suffering reminds us both that we are and that we might not always and have not always been. This experience, and notably the experience of physical suffering, "entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence. It is the very irremissibility of being.... It is the fact of being backed up against life and being. In this sense suffering is the impossibility of nothingness" (Time 69). In short, suffering reminds us, inescapably, that we are alive, that we are. It is also, however, a reminder of death, "the call of an impossible nothingness, the proximity of death" (Time 69). We know that suffering can lead to death, that it can be the calling card of death, that which calls and invites us beyond being. As Levinas puts it, "This way death has of announcing itself in suffering, outside all light, is an experience of the passivity of the subject" (Time 70). We are persecuted by death through suffering, its hostage, and thus death in this formulation takes on characteristics very similar to alterity. Death, like the other, is radically different from (my own) being; to stare at the face of death is to encounter the possibility of the loss of both self and other.

Death, prefaced by suffering, is thus necessarily "never present," always projected into the future. "Death is never now" (Time 71-72). As Colin Davis suggests, for Levinas "death is that which lies irretrievably beyond experience, it is utterly unknowable"

(31). It is, again, in this way analogous to the other. Davis continues: "the Other is not another self, but is constituted by alterity; it is unknowable and therefore refractory to the metaphors of light which support the phenomenologists' claims to knowledge; and it disrupts the self-enclosed totality of a world described in terms of harmony and communion" (31). Death points toward the other and our potential encounter with him or her in the face-to-face. It as well suggests the anarchy inherent in the human situation, undermining knowledge in any definitive fashion as well as the dream or ideal of a common language or transcendent signifier along the lines of Plato's Sun or Heidegger's Dasein.

Levinas links death and alterity in an explicit way in Totality and Infinity: "The Other, inseparable from the very event of transcendence, is situated in the region from which death, possibly murder, comes" (233). "Transcendence" here refers to Levinas's notion of ethical transcendence or, as he terms it earlier, excendence. Death, which "does not lie within any horizon" (233), approaches from beyond the "horizon" of the ontological, as does the face of the other. As Levinas argues in "Ethics of the Infinite," "The face exposes death" (59). The other and death are not synonymous in this formulation, but complementary. As death remains mysterious, unknowable, untotalizable, so the other, or more properly his or her face, provides the possibility of encounter with this radical alterity from being. Brian Schroeder helpfully describes this arrangement: "Ethical transcendence (Desire) is the refusal of the ontotheological viewpoint that radical exteriority is subject to totality. In this sense, transcendence is infinity, that is, the impossibility of encompassing or totalizing alterity" (10). To put this another way, neither death nor the other who gives us some glimpse of it is ever fully

perceptible or knowable. To desire the other is thus to overleap ontology and to enter the unknown terrain of excendent (ethically transcendent) nonbeing. It is as well to seek a God beyond "ontotheolog[y]." To look at the face of the other is thus to seek God, death, and an authentic alterity behind and above the ontological regime of the same.

A crucial difference between death and the other is pointed out by Levinas in the late (1991) "Death and Time." The other, like the self, is circumscribed by mortality: "I am responsible for the death of the other to the extent of including myself in that death. That can be shown in a more acceptable proposition: 'I am responsible for the other inasmuch as the other is mortal.' It is the other's death that is the foremost death" (qtd. in Derrida, Gift 46). In The Gift of Death, Derrida, whose thought has moved closer to Levinas's in recent years, provides a useful gloss of this notion of the primacy of the other's death: "Levinas wants to remind us that responsibility is not at first responsibility of myself for and to myself, that the sameness of myself is derived from the other, as if it were second to the other, coming to itself as responsible and mortal from the position of my responsibility before the other" (46). First for Levinas, as for Derrida, is difference, alterity, a concept irreducible to the regime of sameness, of ontology. As Derrida puts it: "Every other (one) is every (bit) other [tout autre est tout autre]" (Gift 68). Inferred from the "every (bit) other," even parasitical to it, is the self, forever in the other's debt even for its bare existence.

Thus, before and prior to the self is the other and my responsibility to him or her. This Levinas, following Heidegger, terms "care":

> the concern-for-being of the human being-there [Dasein] also bears the concern for the other man, the care of the one for the other. It is not

> added onto being-there, but is a constitutive articulation of that Dasein. A concern for the other man, care for his food, drink, clothing, health, and shelter.... Thus being-there, in which being is always at stake, would appear to be, in its very authenticity, being-for-the-other. ("Dying" 12-13)

In this way Levinas summarizes his position--and sustained critique of Heidegger--in the 1987 essay "Dying for...." His is not an ontology of Dasein but an ethics of Mitsein, of "being-with," indeed "being-for" one's fellow human beings, before one is for and with oneself. This refigured formulation of Heideggerian Mitsein reaffirms Levinas's emphasis on the process of substitution, our inherent persecution by the other, our position as his or her hostage. We depend on the other for our mere existence; our appropriate response to his or her proximity in the face-to-face is thus eternal gratitude. We ought to express this attitude as care, the "concern-for-being" of the other and thus the self.

To care for the other and his or her needs--"food, drink, clothing, health, and shelter"--is to minimize the suffering of the other, to hold off his or her death, to love:

> The priority of the other over the I, by which the human being-there is chosen and unique, is precisely the latter's response to the nakedness of the face and its mortality. It is there that the concern for the other's death is realized, and that 'dying for him,' 'dying his death' takes priority over 'authentic' death. Not a post-mortem life, but the excessiveness of sacrifice, holiness in charity and mercy. This future of death in the present of love is probably one of the original secrets of temporality itself and beyond all metaphor. ("Dying" 217).

Here Levinas reveals the appropriate response to the other: sacrifice in excess, a willingness to die for the other upon whose existence and radical alterity my existence depends. The closer that the other comes to death, the more that he or she suffers, the greater and more pressing is my responsibility to him or her. To respond to the call, the demand, of the other is love: "Care as holiness, which is what Pascal called love without concupiscence" (Levinas, "Dying" 216).

Love in this Levinasian formulation is, as Richard Cohen characterizes it, "compassion without concern for reward, recompense, remuneration" (179). That is, our responsibility to the other is to take on his or her suffering as if it were ours, to incorporate it into ourselves. By doing this we recognize in the mortality of the other our own mortality. By serving the other, particularly the suffering other or the other near death, we attempt in a modest way to thank the other for the gift of our bare existence. In "care" we therefore attempt to respond to the other in his own basic language, that of excendence and ethics; in this way seek to move "beyond metaphor," to the God behind and above the God of Being, the God-in-passing. This movement leads us not beyond language but to the language of "unique sense" in early Levinas, of the anarchic foundation of ethics in the late Levinas. Hereby we glimpse the Word, the initiatory "saying" that underpins the encounter with the other: "Saying bears witness to the other (autrui) of the Infinite which rends me, which in the Saying awakens me" (Levinas, "God" 145). To take on responsibility for the other, to care, to love, is therefore to hear the language beyond being, the language of ethics, and to strive to understand or at least recognize it. It is to encounter the other-as-discourse, to apprehend him or her, and to do my best to make sense of the insistent demands which he or she makes upon me. It is to

find the other interstitially or asymptotically, where we both ultimately subsist, in a space between and beyond being, between and beyond life and death.

K. "The Thing that Makes Language Possible": Levinas on Poetry

It is striking that Levinas's ethical philosophy points our attention towards a space very similar to that upon which much AIDS theory focuses its attention--between apprehension and comprehension, empirical and discursive "reality," "reality and its shadow" (Levinas, "Reality" 1). For Levinas, the aesthetic and the literary explore this space of paradoxical absence and overflowing presence. In a 1973 essay he argues that "It is the essence of art to signify only between the lines--in the intervals of time, between times" (Proper 7). The gap within which art and literature operate is thus both temporal and spatial; contra Heidegger, it is a (w)hole between being and time, a radical, mysterious, and ethical other to the ontological order that Heidegger mistook for everything, including, even, nothing. It is in the artistic and literary--that is, mimetic--realm that Levinas locates, at least potentially, an escape from or excendence of the "ontological claustrophobia" (Llewelyn 9) that he spent his philosophical career critiquing and attempting to move beyond. As we will see in the next chapter, the elegiac poetry of AIDS provides an illuminating test case for Levinas's ethical philosophy, particularly is it relates to language, specifically literature.

Edith Wyschogrod has noted that two objections tend to be raised about Levinas's philosophy of language. The first is that Levinas's approaches to the other at least seem to be inherently nonlinguistic: "they include the human face, an idea of the infinite that

exceeds any description of it, sensation as a noncognitive relation of sensing and sensed" (Wyschogrod, "Art" 137). If ethics precedes and overleaps everything, the entire ontological register, does it not elude the order of the linguistic? Levinas's answer to this question, as we have already seen, is that ethics is itself a kind of language that provides the foundation for other languages. The ethical is not disordered but "anarchic," not atemporal but situated in an "immemorial past," as he argues in Otherwise than Being and elsewhere. That is, the etymology of ethics can be traced to the very beginnings of the notion of the human. The encounter with the other, the basic human situation, occurs in language, more specifically the language of ethics that is beyond being (what I have also called "meta-meta-language"), what Levinas terms "A signification older than ontology and the thought of being, and that is presupposed by knowledge and desire, philosophy and libido" (Proper 46). The ethical is in this way not beyond language qua language, that is, communication, but beyond the language of ontology.

A second frequent objection to Levinas's understanding of language is that "he disparages the aesthetic by relegating art and poetry to a status inferior to that of philosophy and, a fortiori, to ethics" (Wyschogrod, "Art" 137). Levinas does in fact argue, in the early "Reality and Its Shadow" (1948), that "art consists in substituting an image for being" (5) through the process of mimesis. Such a statement suggests that artistic images generally are dependent upon and secondary to "real" being. Levinas's conception of this process, however, is more complicated than it first appears; as Wyschogrod puts it, "the image neither yields the object nor replicates it in an ontological sense" ("Art" 138). What we find in Levinas's theory of the image, particularly in "Reality and Its Shadow" and the later essays on literature collected in Proper Names

(1996), is thus not mimesis as it was understood by Plato and Aristotle, not a mere replication or imitation. Rather, for Levinas "an artwork is more real than reality": "When common language abdicates, a poem or a painting speaks" ("Reality" 1). The artist, whether literary or plastic, moves beyond everyday perception to the "ineffable," the "irreducible essence" that lies behind and beyond common ways of seeing and understanding. Philosophy, or at least Levinas's ethical philosophy, is engaged in a similar project--to read the otherwise illegible--but Levinas refuses to privilege his mode over that of the artist or literary writer. Indeed, following Maurice Blanchot, he even goes so far as to suggest that "literature challenges the arrogance of philosophical discourse" (Proper 151). If anything then, literature and art are more inherently ethical than philosophy, including Levinas's own philosophical project.

According to Levinas the artistic and literary image is "beyond being" (Proper 93), not inferior to it or "third from the truth," as Plato asserts in the republic; it is a "non-object" ("Reality" 5), "the non-place of an absolutely unprotected space," "a leap over the chasm opened in being" (Proper 64, 42) The image is further a kind of "waking dream," "a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity" ("Reality" 4). In constructing art or writing a literary text the author thus loses him or herself; the language of literature is thus "impersonal" (Proper 41), beyond the control of either author or reader. Thus art signifies in a space between: "It is of the essence of art to signify only between the lines--in the intervals of time, between times--like a footprint that would precede the step, or an echo preceding the sound of a voice" (Proper 7). The way that art means, or fails to mean, is analogous to the process of HIV infection as "Richard" explained it to me and others in 1994 (see Chapter I). In both cases an original is somehow made from a copy. In

Levinas's anti-mimesis, images, the shadows on the wall of Plato's famous allegory of the cave, are actually more real than what commonly passes as "reality." They affirm that behind ontology is something else, albeit shadowy and difficult to make out. And that is ethics, my responsibility to the other.

Plato was however right, according to Levinas, to be suspicious of "imitators." We never find in art or literature pure ethics, distilled essence, or transcendent transcendence. Although artists and literary writers tend toward excendence, their work can also "appear as a cultural product, a document or testimony, be encouraged, applauded and highly prized, sold, bought, consumed" (Proper 147-48). Here again Levinas resists idealism by rejecting any simple association between art and literature and the excendent. At its best, imitation can gesture beyond the ontological, but never in a way that completely escapes the basic "anarchy" of the human condition. At its best art, particularly poetry, is as Paul Celan asserted "a handshake" (qtd. in Levinas, Proper 40). The ethical language embedded in art and literature can inscribe (or reveal the always already inscribed nature of)

> pure touching, pure contact, grasping, squeezing--which is, perhaps, a way of giving, right up to and including the hand that gives. A language of proximity for proximity's sake, older than "the truth of being"--which it probably carries and sustains--the first of languages, response preceding the question, responsibility for the neighbor, by its for the other, the whole marvel of giving. (Levinas, Proper 41)

Understood in this way, a poem thus is the face-à-face, at least potentiality--not an imitation or inscription of it, but a copy whose deepest secret is that it is not a copy, not

an imitation at all, but originary and excendent. Locatable in the language of literature, in the poem, is thus ethics itself.

To put this another way, art, literature, poetry signify in a register between what Levinas terms the "said" and the "saying," between the author's or artist's attempt to communicate and the reader's struggle to understand, that is, between self and other. "Language," particularly literary language, "permits us to utter, be it by betrayal, this outside of being, this ex-ception to being, as though being's other were an event of being" (Levinas, "Essence" 113). To approach the other, inevitable in language, is always to attempt to communicate "the very signifyingness of signification" ("Essence" 112), responsibility, substitution, what Levinas elsewhere calls my "persecution" by the other. This communication Levinas associates with waking up, the struggle to rouse oneself from the dream of sameness: "It is the Saying that always opens up a passage from the Same to the Other, where there is a yet nothing in common" (Proper 6). To connect with the other in this way, to view art or to read a poem, is for Levinas "An awakening signifying responsibility for the other, the other who must be fed and clothed--my substitution for the other, my expiation for the suffering, and no doubt the wrongdoing of the other" (Proper 6). To read a poem and discover that the other suffers, that the other is before death is to leap beyond being into ethics and indeed potentially to action, to an active engagement with my responsibility before the other and for the other.

What we find when we approach a painting or a poem is for Levinas the absence of the object. Viewing art, we are confronted with the fact of reflection, imitation, mimesis: "The consciousness of the representation lies in knowing that the object is not there" ("Reality" 7). We know when we look at the Mona Lisa that we do not "really"

perceive a woman smiling enigmatically but paint of various hues and thickness applied to a canvas. Likewise, in Milton's Paradise Lost we find neither God not Satan, Adam nor Eve, but ink applied to paper. "The perceived elements are not the object but are like its 'old garments,' spots of color, chunks of marble or bronze" ("Reality" 7). What an emphasis on the material provides is therefore a realization of absence, that the "reality" of Mona Lisa or God is a constructed effect, is essentially absent. From such insights, however, Levinas reaches the following surprising conclusion:

> These elements [paint, marble, ink] do not serve as symbols, and in the absence of the object they do not force its presence, but by their presence insist on its absence. They occupy its place fully to mark its removal, as though the represented object died, were degraded, were disincarnated in its own reflection. The painting then does not lead us beyond the given reality, but somehow to the hither side of it. It is a symbol in reverse. The poet and the painter who have discovered the 'mystery' and 'strangeness' of the world they inhabit every day are free to think that they have gone beyond the real. The mystery of being is not its myth. The artist moves in a universe that precedes...the world of creation. ("Reality" 7)

Art for Levinas does not transcend (in this early formulation "lead us beyond") in the conventional, ontological sense but excends, takes us to the "hither side" of reality, transcending even transcendence.

In a 1973 essay on Derrida, Levinas clarifies this point: "A transcendental semblance, engendering metaphysics, produces the illusion at the heart of presence itself, which is incessantly lacking to itself" (Proper 55). That lack is, exactly, alterity, both as

that which is absent from the regime of sameness, of ontology, and that which exceeds it. Literature and art at least potentially lay bare the inherent incommensurability of self and other, presence and absence and thus the asymmetry of my encounter with an, any, other. Literature and its mimetic world of "shadows" imply the essentially linguistic structure of both being and that which underpins and exceeds it: ethics. "To be is to speak" for Levinas--here again echoing and explaining Blanchot, "but in the absence of any interlocutor. An impersonal speech, without 'you,' without address, without vocative, and yet distinct from the 'coherent discourse' which manifests a Universal Reason belonging to the order of Day" (Proper 131). Beyond the ontological "order of Day" is "an order, older than Saying" (Proper 15) that is the said, communication, the encounter with another who is both absent and impersonal, and proximate and immediate, like a handshake.

At the heart of this paradox is Levinas's notion of the "trace", a term that points toward an encounter that is simultaneously just missed. The Levinasian trace, as Edith Wyschogrod explains it, is "not a sign, because signs are transparent with respect to their objects." It is, in contrast, "the marker of the immemorial past of a transcendence that has passed by. Traces are clues, track, or trails that cannot be integrated into the order of the world wherever transcendence inscribes and erases itself, preeminently in the human face" ("Art" 142). The other human is profoundly foreign, strange, mysterious, and this alterity is for Levinas written all over his or her face in the form of the trace. To encounter another person is to recognize his or her radical difference, to lose oneself in the other, to substitute oneself for the other. "But the surprise of that adventure, in which the I dedicates himself to the other in the non-place," as Levinas would have it in a 1972 essay

in Proper Names, "is the return. Not return as a response of the one who is called, but by the circularity of this movement that does not turn back, the circularity of this perfect trajectory, this meridian that, in its finality without end, describes the poem" (Proper 44). The paradox of the literary is in this formulation of the paradox of the trace: in art, in literature, in the face-to-face encounter with the other, we both find and lose the other, lose and find ourselves. And the most sufficient way of describing this process is chiasmus, as Levinas himself recognized (Proper 62).

This space between self and other, presence and absence, encounter and missed opportunity, is further characterized by Levinas as the "infinite" gap between life and death (Proper 132). As he put it in 1971: "The presence of absence is not pure negation. Does not writing become poetry? The anonymous and incessant droning--is it not overcome by song filling the literary space?" (Proper 152). To put this another way, beyond death, beyond the distinction between life and death, is literature, art, mimesis: "In their places, at their posts, beyond their own being, no longer speaking to us--are the dead not freed from death, resuscitated in their very death? Only the living would ask for more existence" (Proper 14). The artist, the poet are thus beyond death, beyond life in a "literary space," in "the exteriority of absolute exile" (Proper 133). What remains in the literary text is the trace, the absent presence of the other, who is lost, exiled, dead, ontologically speaking but at the same time in front of my face. By imitating the encounter between self and other, poetry teaches me what it means to be responsible for the needs of an other that can never possibly be met.

The other that I find and miss in the literary text does not demand resuscitation but action, as Levinas suggests in "Poetry and the Impossible" (1969): "Is the poetic vision

which transcends [politics] for ever doomed to remain 'belles-lettres' and perpetuate phantasms? Is it not, on the contrary--and this is probably the very definition of poetry--the thing that makes language possible?" ("Poetry" 132). In poetry "what is spoken is not some content that eludes language but unsayability itself" (Wyschogrod, "Art 144). What a poem therefore asks of its readers is to read, to encounter, that which is otherwise than being, otherwise unreadable, otherwise absent--"such poetry becomes an ethics" (Wyschogrod, "Art" 147). This is possible for Levinas because "Literature is the unique adventure of a transcendence beyond all horizons of the world" (Proper 134). In this way, what Levinas presents, like Sontag in Against Interpretation or Barthes in The Pleasure of the Text, is an erotics of reading. What the poetic text asks of me is to acknowledge my desire for it, for its radical alterity. (What is desire after all but a grasping beyond, a leap into infinity?) What the other that I encounter in the poem asks of me is, in sum, to love it. "And love means, before all else, the welcoming of the other as thou" (Levinas, Proper 6), that is, as the God-in-passing, the trace of the Divine.

L. Conclusion: Tainted Love

The goal of Levinas's ethical philosophy and his literary criticism is plain: to love. This can never be done fully or completely; to love is for Levinas to attempt to repay an infinite debt. Love is inevitably tainted, by the anarchic underpinnings of the human situation, by selfishness. The usefulness of Levinas emerges therefore in an exploration of reading and desire, or love, that is founded upon responsibility for the other, a responsibility that precedes and exceeds that to one's own self. Here we find and can

adapt a mode of reading of poetry, particularly the poetry of AIDS, that allows for a recognition of the other that is reverence and service. What Levinas helps us to ask is: what does poetry teach me about my responsibility to the other? What does the poem demand of me? Such questions are fundamentally ethical. While his work anticipates, responds to, and in some ways incorporates the generally deconstructive mode of Derrida, Levinas allows for a mode of reading that is both postmodern--inherently textual and self-conscious--and grounded in the immemorial fact of the Other's demands upon me.

Both Levinas and Derrida are interested in ethics, Derrida occasionally, in texts such as "Violence and Metaphysics," and Levinas pervasively. A number of writers have recently wondered whether the phrase "postmodern ethics" is necessarily oxymoronic. Scott Lash, for example, suggests that a postmodern, postphenomenological, posthumanist ethics is impossible: "most postmodernist writers on ethics--such as Bauman, Derrida, and Levinas--only address the element of deconstruction, of ambivalence or difference, while ignoring [the] dimension of groundedness" (91). One can respond, in light of a careful and thorough reading of the Levinasian corpus, that Lash's familiarity with Levinas's ethics is at best passing. Levinasian philosophy is grounded, in the other, mysterious and unknowable, radically foreign, insistently demanding. In this way Levinas implicitly points out the main drawback of Derridian deconstruction, at least until the 1990s. One finds in essays such as "Violence and Metaphysics" no ground, but pervasive critique, deconstruction, an ethics of suspicion. As Martin Jay has perceptively pointed out, in the classic Derridian formulation "a positive theory of ethics is both untenable and dangerous" (40). Where Derrida's current reconsiderations of Levinas--in The Gift of Death, "Adieu"--will lead is currently unclear.

Levinas, in contrast to the poststructuralists, gives us a starting place, the other human being, and further claims that we encounter that other person most immediately in literature, art, the world of mimesis. What precedes, informs, and emerges from the encounter is my responsibility to that other, to keep him or her alive, to alleviate his or her suffering (this Levinas means in a general sense, in the sense of the Other--not in the sense of keeping any individual other alive). By disembodying--making absent--the other, literature for Levinas encourages an acknowledgement of our responsibility to every other, to my neighbor, to the stranger, to the needy and the suffering, and most pertinently for the purposes of this thesis, to the person-with-AIDS.

Chapter III.

"Neither Living nor Dead": Elegiac Traditions

The imagination spans beyond despair,

Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer.

(Crane, Complete 32)

Mourning is the horizon of all desire.

(Staten xi)

A. Introduction

A large part of the appeal of Levinas's theories at the beginning of the third millennium is their insistence on excendence, what I have also termed the transcendence of transcendence. In a post-Nietzschean and indeed post-Hitlerian world, in a world, that is, situated after the death of God, after Hiroshima and Auschwitz, in the midst of a global AIDS pandemic, Levinas's ethical philosophy is nothing if not reassuring. "God is dead. Long live God," he everywhere, implicitly insists. From "Ethics of the Infinite":

> God is the other who turns our nature inside out, who calls our ontological will-to-be into question. This ethical call of conscience occurs, no doubt, in other religious systems besides the Judeo-Christian, but it remains an essentially religious vocation. God does indeed go against nature for He is not of this world. God is other than Being" (61).

This position has been called Levinas's "a-theism" (Lash 95), "the method in which atheism and mysticism shake hands" (Llewellyn 151). I prefer to term his position a

theism of excendence, in which the God who escapes being is both absent and too fully present.

Levinas's position is that behind, before, and above the traditional ontological view of God, which has come under scrutiny and attack from almost every imaginable quarter in the twentieth century, one can glimpse God as radically other, albeit in passing. God is, in a word, the trace: "It is not by superlatives that we can think of God, but by trying to identify the particular interhuman events which open towards transcendence and reveal the traces where God has passed" ("Ethics" 67). God is here akin to a train or flight that we always just miss, leaving in its wake a wisp of smoke or sonic "Ba-oum." Further, our access to this divinity-beyond-being, that place where we can find its traces, is the face of the other, whether alive or dead or somewhere in between. "Behold, in the other, a meaning and an obligation that obliges me beyond my death!" (Levinas, "Diachrony" 173). To imagine a God beyond ontology is to posit meaning beyond meaning and thus, potentially at least, to move beyond mourning, rather than remaining in the pervasive melancholic state that has characterized many of the discourses of grief, particularly elegiac writing, since Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God.

To see beyond the human face to God in this way is to find a mystical truth-beyond-truth behind the technological, institutional, and psychological accoutrements of death--the tubes and machines, doctors and funeral directors, self-help books and grief counselors that currently circumnavigate, penetrate, and patrol both public and private spheres of mourning in Western culture. My basic argument about the AIDS elegy is that the poems of writers such as Paul Monette, Kenny Fries, Thom Gunn, and Mark Doty seek, in a reinvigorated, refigured, and indeed postmodern fashion, the anagnorisis or

discovery available in traditional elegiac writing. Further, their poems of mourning might be situated in terms of a number of literary genealogies, including that of the modern elegy, the homoerotic elegy, and the American elegy. These poets write after the death of God, the construction of homosexuality, and the establishment of an American tradition of writing. But their belatedness is not my central point here. Rather my basic argument about the AIDS elegy at the end of the twentieth century, written mostly (but not exclusively) by gay men in the United States, is that these writers intuit, at the very least, Levinas's central insight, that behind the corpse of the God of ontology is, if not consolation, at least a (no)place of radical alterity that surpasses the binaries of death and life, meaning and meaninglessness.

B. British Modernism

My reading of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century elegies will focus on two aspects of the genre. The first is the long-standing attempt in such poems to inscribe, to put into language, the signifier that ostensibly silences all discourse: death. The second, and intimately related, focus will be the often complex and fluid relationship between death and desire, particularly homoerotic desire, inscribed into the elegies of AIDS. Much writing in the tradition of the poetry of mourning takes on homoerotic overtones, inscribes the love of one man for another, albeit deceased. This pattern emerges in the Callimachean poems of ancient Greece (see Fredrick 174-76), is continued in Catullus and Ovid (see Potts 50), and is represented in the English-language tradition with its best-

known elegies: Milton's "Lycidas," Shelley's "Adonais," Tennyson's "In Memoriam," Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

A number of conventions and figures have traditionally clustered around these topoi, including the pathetic fallacy, a public commemoration of the dead (often including a procession of mourners), contrast between the finality of death and the cyclical nature of life (troped variously as the seasons of the year, the diurnal course of the sun, the phases of the moon), and, at least in pre-twentieth-century elegies, a movement from grief and mourning to consolation and transcendence. Aristotle's Poetics provides a framework within which to understand the general epistemological structure of poetry about the dead, with its emphasis on anagnorisis, or discovery: "A Discovery is, as the very word implies, a change from ignorance to knowledge" (Aristotle 1465). This discovery--in elegy, usually the discovery that the beloved has somehow transcended death, is not really dead--may take place for Aristotle through "signs or marks," "directly through the poet," "through memory," "reasoning," even "bad reasoning," or, in its best form, through probable "incidents themselves" (Aristotle 1470-71). In her 1967 The Elegiac Mode, Abbie Potts famously takes up Aristotle's concept as the centerpiece of her study of the genre, arguing that "elegy is the poetry of skeptical and revelatory vision for its own sake, satisfying the hunger of man to see, to know, to understand. Whether the reader be purged or indoctrinated, he must be enlightened" (37). While her rhetoric of light is here implicitly Platonic and ontological, this point is consonant with a Levinasian reading of death as that state that thwarts, challenges and exceeds the binary of apprehension ("to see") and comprehension ("to know"). Potts's "hunger" here suggests both desire and

"skeptical and revelatory vision," a state that is simultaneously uncertain and sure, critical and eminently transcendent.

Potts's basic insight into the paradoxical underpinnings of Aristotle's anagnorisis is developed in a 1994 study by W. David Shaw: "a paradox both demands and resists translation, it escapes the grasp of categories. Tennyson's assertion [in "In Memoriam"] that Hallam is 'deeplier loved' as he is 'darklier understood' offers paradoxical escape of this kind, for it causes the mind to expand, moving beyond closed fortresses of skepticism and belief" (3). Other such paradoxical constructions that at least potentially lead to anagnorisis are pervasive in the elegaic tradition. "Aster," an epigrammatic elegy attributed to Plato, for example, provides just this kind of paradoxical situation: "You were the morning star among the living:/ But now in death your evening lights the dead" (qtd. in Coote; trans. by Peter Jay). Evening here signals a kind of dawn, the bringing of light, albeit to the dead, and thus ending becomes beginning. Likewise, Milton's Lycidas, although he, like "the day-star" (l. 168), is "sunk...beneath the wat'ry floor" (l. 167)--that is, he is drowned--"yet anon repairs his drooping head,/ And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore/ Flames in the forehead of the mourning sky" (ll. 169-71). Thus, we are told, "Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high" (l. 172). The paradoxical combination of height and depth, life and death provides access to anagnorisis in the traditional elegy, particularly in this case, the pastoral elegy. Milton's poem enacts or performs a move beyond such binaristic distinctions towards something else, something to be discovered by the reader.

The dead are sometimes apostrophized--spoken to--in elegies; in other instances death itself is addressed, as in Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd":

"O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies" (Whitman, Leaves 262). Sometimes the dead themselves speak, through the figure of prosopopoeia, as in section 85 of Tennyson's "In Memoriam." In many instances, however, the first pose taken on by the voice in such poems is a talking about the dead, introduced by a communication or invocation from the poet to a muse or muses, as with Milton's "sisters of the sacred well" ("Lycidas" l. 15), Shelley's Urania from "Adonais," or even to God, as in the "Strong Son of God" of the prologue to "In Memoriam." In "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward," John Donne goes as far as to elegize God himself, apostrophize him--"O think me worth Thine anger, punish me" (Donne 92). God here thus takes on the roles of both muse and mourned dead. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the convention of invoking a muse in an elegy had become stale and trite for most writers, and the substitution of God or Christ for the muse was often deemed as insufficient as well, particularly for those poets who saw themselves writing in a God-less world.

One senses in the twentieth-century elegy a frustration with the conventions and history of the genre that began in the modernist moment and continues throughout the century. As Jahan Ramazani has persuasively argued, "modern poets reanimate the elegy not by slavishly adopting its conventions; instead, they violate its norms and transgress its limits. They conjoin the elegiac with the anti-elegiac, at once appropriating and resisting traditional psychology, structure, and imagery of the genre" (1). Most significantly, modern elegists for Ramazani resist a move from grief and mourning to consolation and compensation (3). Their poems are thus melancholic, as Freud employed that term, most famously in his 1917 "Mourning and Melancholia":

> a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (Collected 4:153)

If, as Ramazani argues, elegies are traditionally poems of grief leading to consolation, epiphany, anagnorisis, that is, "normal" mourning, then the typical elegy of the twentieth century represents "melancholic" mourning, expressing anger, grief, ambivalence, and uncertainty that remain unresolved.

In this way the modernist elegy might be understood as both continuing and disrupting the elegiac tradition. The pattern of melancholic mourning that emerges in the elegiac verse of this period has been thoroughly traced by Ramazani, but it should prove useful here to return to some of the poets he and others have already discussed in order to emphasize the two topoi that will frame my readings of AIDS elegies: the significations of "death," and the relationship between death and (male homoerotic) desire. I will attempt in the following analyses, beginning with Tennyson's "In Memoriam," to trace briefly and selectively some significant aspects of the modern, homoerotic, and then American elegiac traditions that have impacted the poetry of AIDS. What might be Tennyson's best-known poem arguably marks the Victorian high point and culmination of the elegy, with its invocation of Christ as muse, employment of paradox (discussed above), and move from grief for his friend Arthur Henry Hallam to consolation and a vision of eternal life, troped, finally, as marriage. "Forgive my grief for one removed" (Prologue, l. 37) the poet's voice implores Christ at the beginning of the poem; by its end, he realizes the the potential

fecundity of his sister's marriage provides assurance that all life continues: "For all we thought and loved and did,/ And hoped, and suffered, is but seed/ Of what in them is flower and fruit" (Epilogue, ll. 134-36). Ian Kennedy and others have pointed out the traditional elegiac, and indeed pastoral elegiac aspects of "In Memoriam" (see Kennedy 351 ff.). But this poem also provides the basis for the more skeptical, melancholic writing of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

For all its Christian sentiments, "In Memoriam" evinces a clear influence of "an increasingly skeptical age of industrial and scientific advance" (Kennedy 351), and in fact perhaps more specifically a Darwinian influence, as James Eli Adams has argued (see Adams 7 ff.). Nature is often understood in the poem as warring with God (see, e.g., section 55, ll. 5-6), and, as the references to "seed," "flower and fruit" above suggest, it is the rhythms of nature that finally reassure Tennyson about his friend's immortality, rather than any promise of Christian resurrection. The marriage with which the poem ends most importantly holds the promise of reproduction and thus at least the physical continuance of life. This is the poem's discovery, in the Aristotelian sense: the cycle of life will continue through marriage; death, particularly the death of Hallam, needs to be understood in terms of the cyclical pattern that includes death, but also heterosexual marriage and physical reproduction. The union of male and female is thus figured finally as participating in eternity in ways that a male-male friendship cannot. As Richard Dellamora argues, "Tennyson explicitly subordinates the marriage of male minds with marriage in the usual sense" (Masculine 32). (Adam and Eve, not Alfred and Arthur?)

Nevertheless, "In Memoriam" lays out a pattern for the homoerotic elegy at the moment that sexual identities were in the process of being constructed in the discourses of

writers such as Sigmund Freud in Austria, Richard von Krafft-Ebing in Germany, and Edward Carpenter in England. This is the period when, according to Michel Foucault's famous formulation, "the homosexual was now a species" (History: Vol. 1 43). That is, by the mid to late nineteenth century in Europe, the traditional, medieval model of sexual activity understood as sin was giving way to one of sexual identity understood through the discourses of psychology and biology. Sodomites, long conceived as sinners or criminals, were in the nineteenth century quickly becoming homosexuals, "inverts," "uranians," those with inbred or inculcated same-sexual proclivities. Same-sex desire was refigured during this period as anima muliebris in virila corporis inclusa, "a hermaphrodism of the soul" (Foucault, History: Vol. 1 43). The formulation of the homosexual as "a past, a case history, and a childhood...a type of life, a life form, and a morphology" (Foucault, History: Vol. 1 43) was at the time of Tennyson's publication of "In Memoriam" just coming into currency (but see also Sedgwick, Epistemology 45-46, for a critique of this Foucauldian model). Freud is a particularly relevant figure here, according to Henry Staten, who in Eros in Mourning suggests that the "dialectic of mourning" is associated in Freud with "narcissistic libidinal cathexis," that is, with the individual's inability to move beyond the self to the other, his or her insistence on remaining the object of "affect," thus "self-attachment" (8). The suggestion is that the melancholic mourning of the moderns might in some sense be narcissistic, self-obsessed, and for Freud homosexual, as he characterizes this category in "On Narcissism," the classic psychoanalytic formulation of same-sex desire.

Writing out of a tradition of male friendship that precedes such medicalized essentialism, Tennyson also anticipates more properly "modern" notions of sexual identity.

The relationship with Hallam commemorated in the poem is itself compared to a marriage; after Hallam's death the life of Tennyson's speaker becomes a "widowed race" (section 9, l. 18; see also section 85, l. 107-08). This comparison of friendship to marriage does not necessarily rest upon a notion of a stable, inherent, homosexual identity, although clues in the poem point towards some inherent secret, something "behind the veil, behind the veil" (section 56, l. 28). Addressing a nightingale in section 88 of the poem, the voice of the poet inquires after "a secret joy" that is reassuring even "in the heart of grief" (l. 8, l. 7). One way of reading such references to veiling and secrecy has been suggested by Eve Sedgwick in terms of her notion of the epistemology of the closet: "by the end of the nineteenth century...knowledge meant sexual knowledge, and secrets sexual secrets" (Epistemology 73). For Sedgwick by the end of the nineteenth century references to hiding, secrecy, and unspeakability had come to figure consistently the fraught category of the homosexual, the sexual other ostentatiously hidden from view. The "Strange friend...Loved deeplier, darklier understood" (section 129, l. 10) of Tennyson's 1850 elegy might at the very least anticipate the trope of closetedness that for Sedgwick dominated discussions of homosexuality--and continued the process of constructing the homosexual--throughout the twentieth century. Emerging from the tradition of male friendship in "In Memoriam" is thus a newer model for understanding male-male relations: secrecy, a hidden truth about the self and one's inherent sexual identity.

Based on his reading of "In Memoriam" 93.13-14--"Descend, and touch, and enter; hear/ The wish too strong for words to name"--Jeff Nunokawa claims "It is difficult for a contemporary audience to read these lines...without thinking that the wish too strong for words is the love that dare not speak its name" ("Extinction" 427), and then goes on

persuasively to argue that Victorian notions of homosexuality are quite pervasively embedded in Tennyson's poem. This is not to say that "In Memoriam" is a "homosexual poem"--for Nunokawa it puts forward the notion of homosexuality only to replace it with heterosexuality. Alan Sinfield characterizes sexuality in the poem as follows: "Such intensity of male bonding was situated ambiguously and provocatively in the complex field of nineteenth-century sexuality. As in our time, sex and gender were sites of struggle across which people contested opposing patterns of behaviour, within a context of changing class and power relations" (Alfred 132). The basic point is that "In Memoriam" is charged with male eroticism at a time when men's romantic feelings for other men were beginning to be studied with ever greater intensity, leading to the introduction of the word "homosexual" into English in 1892 and eventually something of a Western cultural consensus that human beings are essentially divided into homo- and heterosexuals.

For the modern elegist, then, the difficulty becomes how to mourn a departed loved one of the same sex--a dear friend, say--without explicitly associating oneself with homosexuality in the context of a deeply homophobic society. Gerard Manley Hopkins, for example, writing only about a generation after "In Memoriam" and anticipating many of the conventional and thematic shifts of modernist writing, attempts an escape from the dilemma of homosexuality through his spiritualizing of the erotic. A superb example of this endeavor is his late, unfinished "Epithalamion." This poem is not an elegy but--at least ostensibly--a poem celebrating Hopkins's brother Everard's marriage, hence the title. It is however, like Milton's "Lycidas" and many traditional elegies, pastoral in both setting and mode. The 1888 poem opens with a sensualized view of "boys from the town/Bathing," viewed by an unseen "stranger" (Hopkins, "Epithalamion" l. 14), who

"Sees the bevy of them, how the boys/ With dare and with downdolfinry and bellbright bodies huddling out,/ Are earthworld, airworld, waterworld thorough hurled, all by turn and turn about" (ll. 16-18). The bodies and movements of these young men are celebrated and admired for their own sake, at least until the last few fragmentary lines of the poem, when Hopkins presents his reader with what Richard Dellamora has termed "an audible fig leaf intended to cover the sentiments expressed earlier" (Masculine 43). "What is.....the delightful dene?" the poet asks, "Wedlock. What the water? Spousal love" (ll. 46-47). Here we find a homoerotic poem that by its end attempts contain the scenes and figures earlier presented in it within the regime of marriage as institutionalized heterosexuality.

The poem thus inscribes the implicit realization that some readers might find the "unspeakable vice" of the Greeks embedded in the poem through its presentation of classical pastoral scenes of sensualized male-male interactions. The final lines of the Hopkins's text suggest a deep anxiety about the homoerotic imagery put forward in the earlier sections of the poem. Further, the change from homoerotic pastoral to epithalamion "is analogous with religious transformation, which Hopkins liked to associate with purity, martyrdom, and bathing in a sanctified, pastoral setting" (Dellamora, Masculine 43). The scene is simultaneously sensual and spiritual, and by tacitly invoking Christ as muse, the poem endeavors to divert its readers' attention from its frisson. The images of the male youths' "gambol" in the poem (l. 19) end with the words "Enough now," followed by a short transition to "the sacred matter" that is the occasion of the poem: "I should be wrongdoing longer leaving it to float/ Upon this only gambolling and echoing-of-earth note" (ll. 43-44). The suggestion here is that the move from a pastoral

mode to the poem's few epithalamic lines should be understood as a transition from the world, "echoing-of-earth," to the spirit, "the sacred matter" of marriage.

Turning to an 1878 elegy of Hopkins, "The Loss of the Eurydice," we find a similar move from the corporeal to the spiritual, the homoerotic to the mystical. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice is perhaps the first elegy and contains a homoerotic edge: Orpheus is for Ovid the initiator of male-male love. Hopkins's poem commemorates the loss in an unexpected storm of the frigate H.M.S.Eurydice along with all but two of its approximately three hundred crew members, all male. Here the invocation of God as muse is presented in the very first lines: "The Eurydice--it concerned thee, O Lord:/ Three hundred souls, O alas! on board,/" (Hopkins, "Loss" ll. 1-2). This prefaces Hopkins's lengthy description of the capsizing of the ship, which lingers for three stanzas (out of thirty) to detail the appearance of a particularly handsome corpse:

> They say who saw one sea-corpse cold
> He was all of lovely manly mould,
> Every inch a tar,
> Of the best we boast our sailors are.
>
> Look, foot to forelock, how all things suit! he
> Is strung by duty, is strained to beauty,
> And brown-as-dawning-skinned
> With brine and shine and whirling wind.

O his nimble finger, his gnarled grip!

Leagues, leagues of seamanship

Slumber in these forsaken

Bones, this sinew, and will not waken. (ll. 73-84)

The phrases "lovely manly" and "strained to beauty" underline the eroticism of Hopkins's description of the length and shape of this drowned sailor's body, and "He was but one like thousands more" (l. 85).

Like Tennyson's "In Memoriam," the final notes of this poem are not homoerotic but heterosexual, as Christ-as-muse is reintroduced by the mourning mothers, wives, and sweethearts of the beloved and beautiful dead. Their prayer: "Holiest, loveliest, bravest,/ Save my hero, O Hero savest" (ll. 111-12). In this passage the erotic, indeed necrophilic, view of a handsome corpse is transferred to Christ as "loveliest" of all humans and thereby a description of male beauty is transferred into the heterosexual realm: it is not the male poet who prays for the eternal salvation of the beautiful sailors but their female loved ones. It is as well not the male poetic voice who notes the beauty of Christ, but these same women. As in traditional elegiac writing, the lost beloved(s) will transcend death, here through the prayers that "shall fetch pity eternal" (l. 120), but only after any eruption of male-male desire is contained within the regime of the heterosexual family ("mother"), contract ("wife"), and courtship process ("sweetheart") (ll. 105-06). As in Tennyson's famous elegy and Hopkins's own later "Epithalamion," the "cure" for homosexuality, or at least the homosexual possibility, is a spiritualized view of the basic heterosexual unit: the traditional family.

Other British elegists of the late Victorian and early modern period likewise attempt to inscribe male-male desire in coded ways and reinscribe it in terms of larger heterosexual institutions. A.E. Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" might provide another example of this mode. The vast majority, however, unlike Tennyson and Hopkins, turn abruptly from or even wholly ignore Christianity, towards a naturalistic view of the world colored by neoclassicism (Charles Algernon Swinburne), myth (W.B. Yeats), or pessimism (Thomas Hardy, Wilfred Owen). Such turns allow for the melancholia that for Ramazani characterizes modernist elegies, in which we find "not transcendence or redemption of loss but immersion in it" (Ramazani 4) and therefore at least potentially obsession.

Swinburne, in his "In Memory of Walter Savage Landor," situates the elder poet's death within the context of the natural cycle, and thus constructs a pastoral elegy along fairly traditional lines. Marriage, as in Tennyson and Hopkins, both underlines circular patterns in nature and diverts his readers' attention from the homoerotic charge of the poem. It begins: "Back to the flower-town, side by side,/ The bright months bring,/ New-born, the bridegroom and the bride,/ Freedom and spring" (ll. 1-4). In Swinburne's formulation, Landor will remain eternally in "His sacred sleep" (l. 48), never again to awake or live again, unlike the "Flower" (l. 10) above his grave and the "old suns" that "revive" (l. 11) in the rhythm of mornings and evenings. Life will not emerge from death for Landor, but the "lovers" (l. 49) of both Florence and Landor, including, presumably, the presence of the poet, will come to his burial site in the apostrophized Florence "from afar,/ Mix with thy name/ As morning-star with evening-star/ His faultless fame" (ll. 49-52). Landor's fame, like that of the city of Florence, will live on in the memories of their

mutual "lovers," but no promise of a resurrection or return in the Christian sense reassures the reader. Here we find, in contrast to work of the Victorians discussed above, an early example of "melancholic" mourning for a deceased, same-sex, beloved, both "Father and friend" (l. 28). Here Landor is figured both as a member of the traditional family structure and simultaneously as a romantic friend, with muted hints of something more.

W.B. Yeats, too, in poems such as "Easter 1916," records the transformation of human beings into memory and then into myth. The "terrible beauty" (Yeats 84) born as a result of Irish martyrdom during the Easter Rebellion is not a personal resurrection but an Irish political awakening, paradoxically terrible in its anger and beautiful in its justice and fitness to centuries of British oppression. Yeats engages briefly in a pastoral mode in the poem--suggesting the rural scenes of "Lycidas" and other traditional pastoral elegies (Yeats 84-85); as well the rhythms of nature are acknowledged, as in the "summer and winter" (84) through which the Irish patriots remained steadfast to their ideals. The Easter resurrection cited in the poem's title is not Christ's or the Christian's but Ireland's, perceived as a country reborn as a result of the deaths of "MacDonagh and MacBride/ And Connolly and Pearse" (85). Although it is nearly impossible to find even a hint of homoeroticism in Yeats, his elegiac writing, particularly "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" (1918), does at times record the intense love of one man for another that will live on in memory and through Yeats's verse, but not spiritually, at least in a Christian sense. Yeats's elegy for Gregory leaves the poet "speech"less, but not consoled (Yeats 55).

Transformed into myth and inconsolably mourned by the living, the dead for Yeats are more alive than the living. According to Ramazani, "Yeats contrasts the vigor and vitality of the dead with the pallid reality of the living" (13). As this critic points out, something similar might be said about Hardy in poems such as "Rain on a Grave," "Lament," and "The Voice" from Poems 1912-1913. In terms of the homoerotic tradition, however, Wilfred Owen's war elegies provide some of the best examples of mourning for a beloved other man that resists closure, solace, and thus traditional anagnorisis. Such a state might best be described as unrequited mourning, a loss for which no recompense might be made, whether memorial, ceremonial, or emotional. Particularly in post-World War I writing, the traditional elegiac move through mourning as both a cultural and natural ceremony towards an eternal, transcendent vision tends to become stalled in a persistently immanent funeral procession and wholly overwhelming pathetic fallacy.

The most illustrative example of such unrequited mourning in Owen is his 1917 sonnet "Anthem for Doomed Youth." In this poem the traditional paraphernalia of funereal ceremony, "passing-bells" (l. 1) and "choirs" (l. 6), become in the context of the French trenches of the First World War "the monstrous anger of the guns" (l. 2) and "wailing shells" (l. 7). Here we find a modernized version of the traditional elegiac convention of the pathetic fallacy, although it is not nature but the effects of human-made machines that reflect the poet's mood. Back in Britain, the "pall" (l. 12) of the dead soldiers is analogous to "the pallor of girls' brows" (l. 12)--the "girls" in question likely being wives and sweethearts of the "doomed youth." The "flowers" (l. 13) for the dead are troped as "the tenderness of patient minds" (l. 13) (Owen 76). This last line has

typically been read as a reference to the minds of the same female loved ones, or "girls." But Owen wrote this poem as a "patient" himself at the Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland for shell-shocked soldiers; that is, he himself had returned from the front with a "tender"--delicate, fragile--"mind" after witnessing the deaths of a number of close male friends. These facts, coupled with the homoeroticism of Owen elegies such as "Strange Meeting" and "Greater Love," suggest an alternate meaning to this line. Instead of the traditional flowers given to the dead, those lost in the trenches are commemorated, in a sense, through the shell-shock, the "tenderness of patient[s'] minds," of Craiglockhart "Mental Cases" such as Owen himself. As in earlier homoerotic elegies, we find in "Anthem" references to overarching heterosexual institutions in modern society--courtship, marriage, family--contested by a coded, homoerotically charged counter-discourse. In an important sense, the anagnorisis for the perceptive reader in such poems of unrequited sorrow is an embedded testament to male-male desire.

After all, as in Hopkins's "The Loss of the Eurydice," Owen presents in "Anthem" a (presumably) male voice grieving over the death of other men. Women are introduced into these poems essentially to heterosexualize grief that might otherwise be read as homoerotic in the context of modern constructions of homosexuality. Such codedness, however, by no means characterizes all of Owen's war elegies. A less apologetic inscription of men's desire for men can be found in a number of other poems, particularly those written after his departure from Craiglockhart. The clearest example of this more explicit mode is "Greater Love," which begins: "Red lips are not so red/ As the stained stones kissed by the English dead./ Kindness of wooed and wooer/ Seems shame to their love pure./ O Love, your eyes lose lure/ When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!" (ll. 1-

6). In this poem, the love of one soldier for another, "blinded" and "dead," exceeds that of a presumably heterosexual couple, "wooed and wooer." The vacant eyes of the deceased are for the speaker of this poem more compelling and attractive than those of his (female) "love," whose feminine, "gentle" (l. 16), and "dear voice" (l. 15) is not as compelling or attractive as that of the silenced mouths of dead (male) friends, whose voices "none now hear" (l. 17) (Owen 143). Typically for the modern elegy, the grief here is melancholic, unrequited, unclosed and, as is characteristic in the homoerotic elegy, the poem conveys the significance of a love between men that is often understood to be greater than that between men and women.

The trenches of World War I, particularly the intense homosocial experiences many soldiers had in them, allowed for a new flowering, as it were, of the homoerotic elegy in English. The poetry of Owen's friend Siegfried Sassoon provides a number of examples of this modern-homoerotic mode, notably his 1916 "To His Dead Body," and R. Nichols's "The Burial in Flanders" manifests similar tendencies. Perhaps the best known of all World War I elegies is T.S. Eliot's 1922 "The Waste Land," a key text for any reading of modern poetry. I will linger over this text only long enough to point out its significance for reading the genre of the homoerotic modernist elegy. One of the overarching themes of the poem is rebirth through death, typically read (at Eliot's own suggestion) in terms of James Frazer's The Golden Bough and that text's reinterpretation of a vegetation god who appears in the mythological systems of most cultures. The pastoral aspects of the poem are at best anemic, as suggested by the poem's title and developed in lines 1-7, 19-30, 331-358. One suspects, as in Owen's "Anthem for

Doomed Youth," a hyperbolic employment of the pathetic fallacy: "The Waste Land" is read often both psychologically and geographically.

John Peter was the first critic to put forward the interpretation of this poem as Eliot's elegy for his friend Jean Verdenal, who was killed in the Dardanelles in 1915 and who is the dedicatee of Eliot's Prufrock and Other Observations (see Peter). Writing in 1952, Peter argues that "The Waste Land" records the suffering resulting from the loss of an intimate friend, likely Verdenal, who appears in the poem as Phlebas the Phoenician. This reading was suppressed by Eliot and his solicitors, who read the essay "with amazement and disgust," as they reported to Peter (qtd. in J. E. Miller 13). James E. Miller develops Peter's argument into a book-length study of the poem, including eventually excised portions such as "Elegy" (see J. E. Miller 140-43), which imagines the "death of someone close" to Eliot (J. E. Miller 140). Certainly "Death by Water," section four of "The Waste Land," evinces a number of the characteristics of elegy for the character Phlebas, "once handsome and tall" (l. 321) (Eliot 75). As Ramazani puts it, "The Waste Land" "borrows substantially from the repertoire of elegy" (26).

The poem's refrain of "Those are pearls that were his eyes" (ll. 48, 125) and persistent return to the figure of the drowned man or Phlebas suggest obsessive loss and mourning, although, at least according to Wayne Koestenbaum, the poem's basic mode is not melancholic but hysterical, a state that explains both the neurotic repetitions of the poem and its fragmentary style. "Hysteria is a disturbance in language," as Koestenbaum explains (113). The muse of "The Waste Land," invoked at the end of section one, is clearly delineated: "You! hypocrite lecteur!--mon sembable,--mon frère!" (l. 76) (Eliot

65). Here Eliot narcissistically gestures towards the other as brother, who mirrors the poet's hypocrisy and thus might understand the causes of the poet's hysterical state.

As in many other modern elegies, transcendence, at least in the ontological sense, seems to be generally disallowed in "The Waste Land." Death is not positioned in terms of the hope of resurrection, but within the pervasive deadness of the landscape: "He who was living is now dead/ we who were living are now dying/ With a little patience" (ll. 328-29) (Eliot 76). This palpable despair suggests a complete rejection of the consolations ultimately put forward in traditional elegies. It is however an open question whether or not the "Shantih shantih shantih" of the poem's end points beyond death to some overarching mystical presence. It is at least interesting that Eliot cites not his own Christian tradition at the end of the poem, but gestures instead to "The Peace which passeth understanding" (Eliot 86) suggested by the "shantih" of a Hindu Upanishad. The implication is that the Western metaphysical God of ontology is irrevocably dead for Eliot, but might at least potentially be replaced by a figure beyond knowledge and metaphysics, locatable in the texts of ancient Eastern spirituality. Generally what we find in the poem is a pattern familiar in the modern elegy that encodes homoerotic desire: an anxiety about the way male friendship is read in the modern world that results in a neurotic (melancholic, hysterical) relationship to the Western ("normal," heterosexual) tradition. In "The Waste Land" this fraught rapport provides the basis for an attempt to escape the tradition, a move from Occident to Orient, reason to mysticism.

By the 1930s, self-identified gay men in the British tradition were beginning to write more openly and less hysterically about their affections for deceased lovers, and this trend continues throughout the twentieth century. Although later suppressed, W.H.

Auden's early writing includes some fine examples of homoerotic poetry, most notably his 1936 "[Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone]." This poem was originally written for the play The Ascent of F6 (in which it was declared by two characters, Lord Stagmantle and Lady Isabel Welwyn). The elegy was widely unknown before its recitation in the titular funeral of the 1993 film Four Weddings and a Funeral. I quote it entirely:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crèpe bows round the white necks of public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;

For nothing now can ever come to any good. (Auden 163)

If traditional in its regular stanzaic form, rhythms, and rhyme, this poem is thoroughly modern in its imagery and theme, and provides a superb example of the modern homoerotic elegy.

The mood here is imperative, as the reader, something of a stand-in for the world, is directly addressed. Mourning is seen as public, with the reference to the procession of "mourners" (l. 4). An exhortation to public mourning suggests a move from the private to the public sphere, with "aeroplanes," "public doves," and "traffic policemen" (ll. 5, 7, 8) exhorted to give witness to the sorrow of the speaker. The grasp of the poet's grief is infinite, or at least seeks to be, both geographically ("my North, my South, my East and West" [l. 9]) and temporally (ll. 10-11). Synchronic time overwhelms diachronic through the figure of death, as the depth of the moment of mourning is plumbed by the poet's voice and projected into a permanent future: "nothing now can ever come to any good" (l. 16). No consolation or closure is suggested; we find essentially a plea to the world, the public, to try to understand the personal, private loss of one man to another. Even the rhythms of nature provide no consolation: the cycles represented by moon and sun are "pack[ed] up" and "dismantle[d]" (l. 14), and the poetic voice orders us to "sweep up the wood" (l. 15), the pastoral locale where the elegist traditionally finds solace and eventually transcendence. Here there is no attempt to conceal or code sorrow for the beloved other man, but only a plea for a pathetic reaction to the speaker's loss.

Auden might usefully be understood as the last of the British moderns and as a crucial transition figure from modernism to postmodernism, from the melancholic seriousness of the early twentieth century to the more playful, satiric, and (sometimes

black) comic modes of its second half. For all its insistent gloom and sorrow, one is not quite sure how to read the tone of "[Stop all the clocks...]." One is uncertain whether or not the sentiments are intentionally over-the-top and thus something like camp, or if they are sincere and straightforward. Certainly the even, sing-song rhythms and rhymes of the poem arouse the reader's suspicion, especially from so sophisticated and subtle a formalist. Are the childlike rhymes in the poem, for example, a manifestation of the speaker's infantilization in grief or an ironic comment on such infantilization? The question is, of course, rhetorical: the tone of the poem is ambivalent. Here we will leave the British tradition--at the cusp of postmodernism--and attempt both to retrace and to enrich some of our readings of modern homoerotic elegies by way of American writing. The AIDS elegies that will concern us most were all written by Americans, with the exception of those by Gunn, an Americanized Brit. By returning to the beginnings of American homoerotic poetry, that is to Walt Whitman, we will thus eventually be better equipped to read the AIDS elegy in a fashion that combines three traditions: the modern, the male homoerotic, and the American.

C. American Modernism

Through his experimentation with both form and matter, Whitman arguably invented American modernist poetry. As well, his verse, like Tennyson's and Hopkins's, inscribes homoerotic desire during the period of the construction of homosexual identity in Europe and America, as Robert K. Martin, among others, has so persuasively argued (see esp. Martin, Homosexual 3ff.). For Ramazani, Whitman, like Tennyson, wrote

elegies "as if writing love poems" (5). Examples include "Of Him I Love Day and Night," "As if a Phantom Caress'd Me," and Whitman's well-known elegy for Abraham Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." This eroticized elegiac mode, coupled with Whitman's strikingly free-form rhythms and continentally expansive vision, produces a poetry of mourning that is distinctly American. Whitman might thus be understood as the originary point of a tradition of elegiac writing that combines three elements--modernism, homoeroticism, and a conspicuously American vision.

It is thus setting, and secondarily form, that distinguishes most clearly British and American elegies, as Peter Sacks has suggested:

> because of a strong compulsion toward originality and privacy, American elegists could not easily situate their poems in familiar pastoral settings or even within the familiar ritual procedures of the genre. American elegists have had not only to reinvent the forms (if not the functions) of elegaic mythology but also to establish their own literal and figurative settings. (313)

This argument is compelling. We typically find ourselves in American elegies not in fields with shepherds but in pioneer cabins in the wilderness with refugees and loners--as in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's paean to the long persecuted Jewish Americans of "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" (1858) or Herman Melville's commemoration of a snow-bound hermit in "Monody" (1891). Later, a typical locale becomes the industrialized American city of Hart Crane's "To Brooklyn Bridge," Langston Hughes's blues poems, and Allen Ginsberg's "Howl." In both rural and urban American landscapes, the accoutrements of public mourning inherited from Europe, the ceremonies of death, are

often seen as empty or irrelevant in a way that provides a striking contrast to the British tradition. And, instead of Greek muses or Christ, American elegies--emerging from the transcendentalist tradition--tend to invoke a more disembodied spiritual/mystical presence as inspiration and reassurance. Combined with a transcontinental modernist movement in the context of solidifying psychological models of sexual identity, American elegies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prepare the way for a new manifestation of the literature of death: the AIDS elegy.

A striking early example of the American mode of modern elegy is Whitman's "Of Him I Love Day and Night," originally included in the explicitly homoerotic "Calamus" section of Leaves of Grass (Moon 63; see J. E. Miller, Leaves 11), the section that foregrounds Whitman's notion of romantic, male-male friendship, or "adhesiveness" (see Martin, Homosexual 34-36). The poem's speaker dreams that "him I love day and night...was dead" (Whitman 350). While looking for his lover "among burial places," this speaker soon comes to a significant discovery:

> And I found that every place was a burial place;
> The houses full of life were equally full of death, (this house is now,)
> The streets, the shipping, the places of amusement, the Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, the Mannahatta, were as full of the dead as of the living,
> And fuller, vastly fuller, O vastly fuller of the dead than of the living. (350)

In searching for his love the poet's voice finds an American landscape overfull, "vastly full" of the dead. The entire nation becomes figured as a burial-place of beloveds, including Whitman's own deceased friend. No particular "sacred" spot is understood by Whitman as sufficient to contain an overwhelming, one might even say excendent, presence of the dead.

Michael Moon: "Whitman imagines a general dissemination of death through the world, beginning at the point of the disappearance and dispersal of his lover's dead body" (64). While Moon's point about a kind of mystical dissemination in this poem is germane for reading Whitman's conception of death, his argument that this dispersal occurs "through the world" ignores the American specificity of the poet's vision, as in the catalogue "Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia...Mannahatta." Although Whitman speaks to "every person and age" (Whitman 64), his geographical landmarks are exclusively American; as well, his desire "to disregard burial-places and dispense with them" (Whitman 64) is strikingly American in its impetus do away with traditional ceremonies of death. The poet seeks to situate the past synchronically within the present, not as history or myth, but as absence figured as mystical overfullness. In this way Whitman, anticipating the union of mysticism and atheism found in Emmanuel Levinas, positions anagnorisis beyond being, above and before the binary of life and death. He offers us not the consolation of transcendence in the traditional sense, in a Christian heaven with its promises of eternal happiness, but invisibly yet presently in the here and now. It is this specific epistemological train that will lead to the excendent vision of the later AIDS elegy.

It may seem strange to apply the theories of a twentieth-century, Lithuanian-born, German-educated, French post-phenomenologist to a nineteenth-century American poet, but the comparison, while anachronistic, is fruitful. This is because my focus when reading the AIDS elegy and the traditions that lead up to it is not author but reader. I am most interested in providing a frame for reading literature that overcomes traditional ontological biases without giving in to the nihilistic underpinnings of that critique of ontology commonly termed "deconstruction," to its tyranny of absence figured as "differance." Literary texts have frequently been read over the past few decades in terms of a variety of critical models--psychoanalytic, new critical, social materialist, new historicist, feminist, deconstructive. All have revealed modes of meaning that might otherwise have gone unnoticed or unremarked, modes that allow for a reinvigoration of the literary critical project generally and for sustained relevance of past cultural artifacts--literary texts--for present culture. The most recent turn in criticism, the ethical, will allow for a similar reanimation of debates surrounding literary texts and their significations. Levinas allows us to reengage texts such as Whitman's in a way that makes his poetry directly relevant to more self-consciously postmodern and post-ontological texts such as the poems of AIDS.

Michael Moon's essay "Reading Walt Whitman under Pressure from AIDS," quoted above, represents just this kind of critical project. Moon reads what he calls Whitman's "sex radicalism," "his insistence on representing a wide range of nonprocreative sexualities in his poetry" (53), in terms of late twentieth-century approaches to sexual orientation, including a generally Foucauldian reading of the history of sexuality. He historicizes, but in ways based upon and allowed for by post-

phenomenological and poststructuralist theoretics. In comparing Whitman's radical configurations of sexuality and desire to those of AIDS artist and activist David Wojnarowicz, Moon produces a juxtaposition that encourages us to reexamine Whitman and his world and our own, via Wojnarowicz. Moon argues in his conclusion:

> The terms in which Wojnarowicz proposes that the component of rage in mourning be thoroughly enacted by the mourner make especially striking and salient one of the features of Whitman's poetry that is most valuable to those of us rereading it under pressure of the AIDS pandemic, and that is the way the writing can focus not only the melancholia we inevitably feel...but also other feelings and states that are perhaps harder to recognize and harder to avow but are indispensable to us in our current struggles with embodiment and disembodiment. (65-66)

By situating Whitman at and as the genesis of a homoerotic-modern-American tradition of elegy that leads to and allows for the AIDS elegy, I strive to engage in a similar undertaking. By reading this tradition in the frame of Levinasian excendence, I hope to point out the ethical implications of this literary tradition and its relationship to larger struggles to transcend transcendence, rediscover anagnorisis, find meaning in death from AIDS of the beloved other.

Whitman's attempt to move beyond grief in his consummate elegy, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," provides a pattern for later homoerotic mourning in the American tradition. As Peter Sacks points out, "When Lilacs" includes a number of traditional elegiac features: "the use of pastoral, of cropped flowers, of stellar and solar imagery, of covering the coffin or grave, of procession, of reality testing, of repetition and

antiphony, of eclogue and self-surpassal" (316-17). To this catalogue he adds, tellingly, "But we should also be alert to the issue of the mourner's sexuality" (317). Even though Whitman had never met Abraham Lincoln, the subject of this elegy, "he mourns the terrible loss of a great national hero...with feelings of one mourning the death of a deeply loved camerado" (J. E. Miller, American 45). The three principal tropic vehicles in the poem, the "spring of lilac" (Whitman 262), "great star" (260), and "solitary...thrush" (261) function to triangulate and thus locate the homoerotic desire for the lost loved one inscribed into the poem as a liminal space, alongside being and nonbeing. The poem's speaker, like the thrush an outsider and loner, offers Lincoln in the poem a lilac sprig, his love, affection, and admiration, which he "breaks" (261) from a lilac bush at the "dooryard," a space immediately outside, or alongside "an old farm-house" (260). Lincoln, like the star, "droop'd in the western sky in the night" (260). In the guise of the bird mourning for the dimming of this star, the voice in the poem asks "O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?" (262). Typically for an elegy, this question refers to the poem itself, Whitman's elegiac "song" for Lincoln.

As in "Of Him I Love Day and Night," the ghostly presence of the beloved dead is projected, palpably and pervasively, onto the "varied and ample land" of America (263):

> Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
> And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
> And I in the middle as with companions,
> and as holding the hands of companions,
> I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,

Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the

dimness,

To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still. (264)

Death here is figured as the poet's companions, both as "knowledge" or comprehension and "thought," a word perhaps suggesting a relationship to death that is pre-cognitive, beyond and before thought and perception. Taking with him the understanding and perception of death, the speaker travels both into the "hiding receiving night that talks not," a welcoming darkness and silence, and into a primordial, and--with its "cedars" and "swamp"--recognizably American wilderness. Here the poet attempts to sing, through the voice of the thrush "the carol of death, and a verse for him I love" (265). This secluded scene of the speaker's musing on and friendship with death and simultaneously with his dead friend is connected with Whitman's earlier, homoerotic poems of adhesiveness through his use the term "comrades" to personify death. "Comradeship" typically takes on an unmistakable homoerotic tenor in Whitman, according to Martin (Homosexual 34) and others.

Unlike the poetic voices in many British manifestations of nineteenth-century homoerotic elegy, the speaker in Whitman's poem makes no effort to subsume homoeroticism into a larger heterosexual order. Indeed, the democratic vision of "When Lilacs" allows for something like parity between male-male and male-female relationships: "The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,/ And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd" (Whitman 266). Here the loss for the male friend is seen as similar, even equal, to that of the mother, wife, or child. Whitman's poem is however similar to Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and other British elegies in that the hope of

resurrection is situated within the natural cycle: "Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,/ I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring" (267). The lilac bush remains at the end of the poem as a reminder of the love of the speaker for him who has died, Abraham Lincoln here troped as Whitmanian comrade. The final image is that of apotheosis, and indeed anagnorisis: "Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,/ There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim" (267). As with the grass of Whitman's "Song of Myself," the lilac here reminds us that "there is really no death" (Whitman 29), that the cycles of nature belie any notion of death as finality, that the male beloved will live on, mystically, somewhere beyond binaristic notions of life and death, and at the very least through the memories of the poet and indeed in the poem itself. This insight is most fittingly articulated through the medium of elegiac poetry, here described by the poetic voice as "the chant of my soul."

A variety of American modernists were profoundly influenced by Whitman, developing his transcendentalist and mystical tendencies and building upon his freer poetic forms and attempts to inscribe the American continent. William Carlos Williams, for example, in his long poem Paterson (begun 1946) "conjures up some of the same kinds of poetic vision" as Whitman, according to James E. Miller (American 127). Book V of Paterson features imagery that is both sexual and religious, with a the figure of a unicorn arguably representing physical and spiritual redemption (see J. E. Miller, American 159-60). Through his free verse experiments Williams follows Whitman onto a poetic open road, leading at times to mysticism. However, Williams puts forward no hope of an eternity beyond death in his few elegiac poems, including "Death" and "The Widow's Lament in Springtime." The grief explored in the first poem never transcends

melancholia, as Ramazani has pointed out (6), and in the second the widow remembering her dead husband (the inspiration here: Williams's parents) remains likewise decidedly melancholic, even suicidal. Other American modernists, including Langston Hughes, Wallace Stevens, and Marianne Moore, adapt a variety of Whitmanian techniques and themes while resisting the excendent spirituality of the poems collected in Leaves of Grass. These poets wrote no notable elegies, with the exception of a number of powerful blues and lynching poems by Hughes, all of which remain sociological rather than spiritual. Homoeroticism, as well, is almost entirely absent from the poems of these modernists, excepting, again, Hughes, whose own same-sexual desires very occasionally find their way into the deeply embedded counter or subtextual discourses of his poems (as in "The Trumpet Player" or "Café, 4 a.m.").

A notable contrast to the generally anti-mystical and stridently heterosexual character of much modernist American writing can be found in the poetry of Hart Crane, the most astute early pupil of Whitman's style and philosophy. Crane develops the elegiac thematics of his poetic teacher and makes them directly relevant to a more urban, industrialized America, in which the homosexual no longer wanders wilderness and swamp but the streets and underground passages of the modern metropolis and its suburbs. If any poem in the American literary canon is about the transcendence of transcendence, mystical fusion, it is Crane's "To Brooklyn Bridge" (composed and revised 1926-30), the "Proem" that provides an overture for his lyric-epic The Bridge.

This poem is not strictly speaking an elegy, although it does commemorate the death-by-suicide of a "bedlamite" (Crane, Complete 43) who throws himself from the eponymous bridge. Thomas Yingling, in Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text, reads this

figure in terms of the homosexual thematics of Crane's work: "The problem of the modern...is the problem of motion, the problem for the homosexual who understands himself as displaced, the fact that nothing 'stays' him." The effect of this "rootlessness and movement" is in Yingling's interpretation the bedlamite's "suicide" (Hart 191). The homosexual is thus positioned in the margins of society, as Whitman's mourner for Lincoln was himself situated in a liminal space: the dooryard between domesticity and the public realm. The love of Whitman's speaker for his lost comrade allows him to transcend the diurnal round of star-rise and star-fall from which he feels alienated, via his use of symbolism (the bird, the lilac, the star). Crane overcomes the incessant, anonymous motion of the industrial city likewise via a symbol, Brooklyn Bridge, which, though human-made, could "lend a myth to God" (Crane, Complete 44). Here the suggestion is that what the bridge represents transcends even the transcendent God of the Western tradition, the God of ontology. It is further through human endeavor--the building of a monument, the writing of a poem (that is, the use of language)--that some God beyond being might be intimated. In the Brooklyn Bridge, Crane finds something like his muse, a mystical-technological figure that is relevant to the modern world in ways that Greek myth and Christian spirituality are not.

Two poems by Crane might properly be called elegiac: "At Melville's Tomb" (1925) and "Praise for an Urn" (1921-22). "At Melville's Tomb" evinces, at least for Robert Martin, the fact that "Crane saw in Melville a model for the expression of love between men" (Homosexual 130), based on, for example, Crane's reading of homoerotic desire in Moby Dick. Certainly Crane in this poem thematizes, albeit catachrestically, his debt to Melville, and the poem serves as something as a preface, even invocation, for the

"Voyages" suite that follows "At Melville's Tomb" in the collection White Buildings (1926). For all its imagery of waves and stars, suggesting infinity, this elegy remains melancholic, ending: "High in the azure steeps/ Monody shall not wake the mariner./ This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps" (Complete 33). Melville's most appropriate tomb is understood to be the ocean floor, suggesting the locale from which life itself emerged, and thus a locale of potential rebirth. The slumber of this "fabulous shadow" is however seen as eternally unbroken; Melville's rest will remain undisturbed even by Crane's own poem or "monody." If Melville figures as Crane's muse in the following "Voyages" sequence, he must be understood as a sleeping muse, unwakeable at least in any conventional or traditional sense.

In "Praise for an Urn" Crane associates the movement beyond life into death, possibly in fact beyond death, in terms of an encounter with a particular other. The mourned friend in this poem is identified by Crane as Ernest Nelson, with whom Crane quite possibly had a love-affair (Martin, Homosexual 127). The focus of the poem is the face of Nelson, whose eyes are a combination of those of the classical harlequin Pierrot and the Rabelaisian giant Gargantua. These are viewed, in the speaker's memory, on a "white coverlet and pillow" (Crane, Complete 8), suggesting perhaps a post-coital scene, perhaps Nelson's death-bed. In Levinasian terms, the purpose of the poem is essentially for the self to receive the communication of the other as other, mediated through his eyes, to come to terms with the "radical alterity" of the other. The speaker realizes the inherent difference between himself the dead beloved friend when he allows a memory to emerge, itself triggered by the memory of Nelson's eyes. Namely: "The slant moon on the slanting hill/ Once moved us toward presentiments/ Of what the dead keep, living still" (Crane,

Complete 8). That is, the living speaker can relate to the deceased only by imagining him as still alive, musing about what one might "keep" after death. Here Heidegger's basic insight into the paradox of life and death is relevant: the dead are dead--gone, absent--only from the perspective of the living; they represent the inherent "being-towards-death" of the living. As well, the dead continue to "live" only through the memories and commemoration of those left behind. And as Levinas, following Heidegger, has pointed out, death never occurs in isolation, it is always communication from other to self: the face "is the other before death, looking through and exposing death" ("Ethics" 59)--death exactly as the impossibility of the impossibility of being, at least in the imagination of the living.

What remains after death in the homoerotic elegy is desire for the absent beloved--Tennyson's for the "deeplier loved" Hallam, Hopkins's for a sleeping, "lovely" tar, Owen's for doomed and silent victims of the First World War, Eliot's for Phlebas, Whitman's for Lincoln. In "Praise for an Urn" it is Nelson's "gold hair" (8) that signals love continued after death. This image reappears at the end of Crane's "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" (composed 1921-23), a poem about metaphysical bridging, between hebraism and hellenism, knowledge and beauty, the present and the past (see, e.g., J. E. Miller, American 165):

> Laugh out the meager penance of their days,
> Who dare not share with us the breath released,
> The substance drilled and spent beyond repair
> For golden, or the shadow of golden hair.

Distinctly praise the years, whose volatile

Blamed bleeding hands extend and thresh the height

The imagination spans beyond despair,

Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer. (Crane, Complete 32)

Posited here is a move "beyond despair" through "imagination," a facility that is understood to transcend language in the conventional sense, "outpacing...vocable and prayer." The occasion for this move is particularized desire--the love of one individual for another, personified by--and heterosexualized as-- "Faustus" (learning gone awry) and "Helen" (classical beauty). The "golden hair" of the beloved is a kind of halo, that might lead the speaker of this poem, albeit with difficulty, with "blamed, bleeding hands," beyond even the purified language that is prayer. This language is based on what Crane called "the logic of metaphor," summarized by Lee Edelman as "a logic of catachresis" (Transmemberment 8), what I have elsewhere defined as "an illogical catachrestic and tropic practice that involves something of a 'magical' or irrational transformation of a variety of images into a rhetorical unity" (Piggford 190). Crane is interested in poems such as "To Brooklyn Bridge," "The Marriage of Faustus and Helen," and "Praise for an Urn" in "the contemporary human consciousness sub specie aeternitatis" (Crane, "Modern" 175-76) in terms of infinity, in terms of the Other in the Levinasian sense. His attempt to infuse eternity into language leads to an extreme of modernist experimentation in the juxtaposition of words. Phrases such as "blamed bleeding hands" might firmly be placed in the tradition of Hopkinsian neologisms such as the "downdolphinry" and "bellbright" (from "Epithalamion") and of Whitmanian

catalogues. One senses in Crane a frustration with traditional notions of transcendence and thus a desire both in language and theme to overleap and move beyond them.

In "Praise for an Urn," the earliest of the poems discussed above, this attempt ends in failure, in contrast to the later works. The "well-meant idioms" of the poem will, the poem's speaker fears, "be lost./ They are no trophies of the sun" (Crane, Complete 8). Here the young poet worries that he has failed, Icarus-like, in his desire to transcend--to inscribe "trophies" of "the sun." Perhaps he had yet to realize that traditional Platonic-ontological consolations suggested by the trope of the sun had lost their power to bring closure and meaning to grief. And perhaps his later, more successful attempts to transcend such transcendence did finally reassure him that his poetic experiments in language would perdure. Anticipating the post-ontological explorations of later elegists, Crane's work nevertheless remains closely tied to modernism and its pervasive melancholia. Crane in America, like Auden in Britain, therefore brings us to the cusp of postmodernism and thus to the immediate antecedents of the AIDS elegy.

D. Postmodernism and the Elegy

It has become a critical commonplace that sometime in the middle of the twentieth century a sea-change occurred in both Western culture and its literature. At least in terms of writing about and cultural attitudes towards death, the foundation of this change can be found in the period of World War II, particularly in its technologized manifestations of mass killing. This is epitomized in the iconic events of the war, the obliteration of whole cities such as Dresden and Hiroshima and the attempts of the German National Socialists

to eliminate entire categories of humanity: gypsies, homosexuals, Jews. The connections between the Jewish shoah and the incarceration of homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps began to be explored in the 1970s by writers such as Rüdger Lautmann and James Steakley, the latter of whom in his The Homosexual Emancipation Movement provides a pioneering study of the "homosexual genocide" (106) of World War II. By the 1980s the pink triangle, used by the Germans to mark homosexuals in concentration camps, had become a symbol of gay pride and political power. This symbol became prevalent in the AIDS era, and for many theorists it represents an at least implicit link between the shoah and the high mortality rate of gay men during the AIDS pandemic, particularly in its first decade (see Wright, esp. 51-54; and Edelman, Homographesis 82).

After the events of wide-scale murder during the period of the Second World War, many have asked, how can anyone cling to traditional Judeo-Christian notions of a loving, or even just, God? The literal and figurative God-in-the-machine--put forward by a variety of inter-war groups (vorticists, futurists) and celebrated by Crane in his invocation of the Brooklyn Bridge--was revealed through gas chambers and atom bombs for many to be variously vindictive, indifferent, or nonexistent, rather than benevolent, loving, or even fair. Many of the poets of modernism, including Hardy, Yeats, and Owen, anticipate in their most melancholic modes the general Western attitude towards God, the afterlife, and the institution of religion after World War II. The first lines of Richard Eberhart's 1947 elegy "The Fury of Aerial Bombardment" neatly sum up a typical reading of God of this period: "You would think the fury of aerial bombardment/ Would rouse God to relent; the infinite spaces/ Are still silent" (Eberhart 90). Here a God who is unrelenting and "fur[ious]" and simultaneously "silent" and thus apparently indifferent is blamed for the

deaths occasioned by modern air war. The understanding of the figure of God in the poem might thus best be characterized as confused, as the poem's speaker himself admits: "History, even, does not know what is meant" (90). The poem commemorates "Van Wettering" and "Averill," two (male) gunners whom Eberhart had trained as a gunnery instructor, but bears no evidence of homoeroticism.

Randall Jarrell's 1945 "Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" provides a view of technological warfare as "nightmare" (Jarrell 144), echoing Owen's World War I verse. Jarrell often characterizes soldiers through bestial metaphors, as in the "wet fur" (144) of the ball turret gunner, or the "wolf" and "puppy" metaphors of his "Eighth Air Force," written the same year (143). The latter poem alludes to Christ and his crucifixion, but only to replace the paradigmatic scapegoat of the Western tradition with the soldier elegized in Jarrell's poem, characterized as a "murderer" with whom he finds "no fault" (143). The speaker in the poem takes on the persona of Pontius Pilate through this refusal to find fault and through a further Biblical allusion to the common guilt of humanity: "Men wash their hands, in blood, as best they can" (143). In the poem is no hint of a larger spiritual structure, but only of a Christian tradition that seems insufficiently reassuring in the face of technological war and of a broadly Darwinian view of human as animal.

Many others have wondered how anyone could find consolation in mourning a personal, private, individual human loss in the face of the large-scale, violent death of this period. That is, how possibly could the elegy survive in the face of the collapse of traditional Western spirituality, ontology, ceremony, privacy, humanity? Such are the weighty questions that face the elegist and the philosopher in postmodernity. Levinas

took the events of World War II and made of them a new ethico-philosophical system by revisiting transcendence and by rejecting aspects of traditional conceptions of it that he found insufficient, limited, dangerous. His project is thus best understood as an attempt at reinvigorating transcendence through ethics, his a-theism of Divine absent-overpresence. Elegists--particularly American homoerotic elegists--faced with a similar set of circumstances in the AIDS pandemic, responded to the conundrum of postmodernism in a variety of ways: with continued modernist melancholia, through postmodern play and superficiality, and in attempts similar to Levinas's to reanimate the category of transcendence and thereby the corpse of the Judeo-Christian God.

It is generally accepted that postmodernism might best be understood in terms of depthlessness and playfulness, particularly in and with language. Its stance and its goals are decidedly critical rather than creative. Postmodernism, as the theoretical and artistic response to the cultural moment after the modern, continues the experimentations and reconfigurations of modernism, at the same time intensifying and critiquing them. As we have already noted, postmodernism reacts to the collapse of what Jean-François Lyotard calls "metanarratives," those all-encompassing, totalizing, and institutionalized explanations of a particular field of inquiry: Newtonian physics, Darwinian evolution, Christian theology (see Ch. 1). It as well contends with the collapse of the very category of the human as unified and whole typically not through the modernist tropes of alienation but in terms of fragmentation, collage, schizophrenia. AIDS, as Eric Savoy has pointed out, has itself been seen as postmodern disease that is no disease at all, but an array of diseases and discourses.

For Fredric Jameson, postmodernist mimesis is characterized by what he calls "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (9). This is accompanied by "the waning of affect" in culture generally, suggesting that emotion, particularly the spontaneous overflow of such in the Romantic tradition, has no place in postmodernism (10). The emphasis on superficiality, accompanied by a rejection of the emotive, leads not only to a de-spiritualization of culture and art but also to an emphasis on medium or mode of communication, that is, in the case of literature, on language itself. In this way, postmodern writing often provides an at least implicit critique of empiricism, in that its language frequently refers not to the world, as in traditional mimesis, but to language itself. Thus language, following Derrida, does not signify something outside of itself but refers to or cites other discourses and discursive systems. This slippage from signifier to signifier within language itself he has famously termed "differance."

Another characteristic of postmodern writing according to Jameson, Linda Hutcheon and others is its pervasive critique of the category of history as it has been traditionally understood. This aspect of postmodernity follows from its challenge to empiricism: if there is no world, separate from language, how can there be history separate from language, that is, from historiography? As Hutcheon puts it, in postmodern writing "there is a view of the past, both recent and remote, that takes the present powers and limitations of the writing of that past into account. And the result is often a certain avowed provisionality and irony" (90). This process of ironization, even of the profoundly ironic project of modernism (an ironizing of irony), can take, at least at its extremes, no prisoners, whether taxonomic, epistemological, or generic. Numerous

writers, notably Andreas Huyssen, Ihab Hassan, and Linda J. Nicholson, echo, broaden, and complicate the analyses of Jameson and Hutcheon.

After the ostensible collapse of genres, conventions, "metanarratives," and Truth that is frequently labelled postmodernity, poets are faced with two competing facts: the tradition and its conventions and the impossibility of maintaining or continuing the tradition in any uncomplicated or naive way. They are faced, in sum, with what Derrida theorizes as "the law of genre" and the competing and contradictory "law of the law of genre." "Suppose for a moment," Derrida suggests, "that it were impossible not to mix genres. What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination?" ("Law" 225). Genre in this deconstructive formulation is both asserted and denied, written and erased in any particular example of any genre--say, poetry--or subgenre, including the elegy. Derrida asserts that "genre declasses what it allows to be classed," that it "tolls the knell of genealogy or of genericity, which it however also brings forth to the light of day" ("Law" 231). A literary text in a word "cites" generic distinction but can never perfectly follow the laws, obey the limits, of any genre, "putting to death the very thing that it engenders" ("Law" 231). All literature is in this sense elegy, every text mourns the death of the genre in which it participates and suggests a new birth, a reconfiguration of categories and distinctions.

Unfortunately for the postmodernists and poststructuralists, however, much post-war poetry in America and Europe, with the notable exception of the language poetry of Robert Glück and others, seems blissfully unaware of the ostensible collapse of genre, mimesis, emotion, history, and empiricism in late twentieth-century literature. Many poems of this period combine modernist emphases on emotion and psychological depth

with a more postmodern stress on wit, play, superficiality, and textuality. Death and its commemoration in these poems can produce, as in modernism, a pervasive melancholic state or it can bring about something like classical anagnorisis, the discovery that one death is really all death and that the death of the other is also inevitably a loss of self. Texts by at least four homoerotic elegists of the period illustrate this point: Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, James Merrill, and Thom Gunn.

Frank O'Hara's famous elegy for Billie Holiday, "The Day Lady Died" (1959), does evince a number of the qualities of postmodernity as it has typically been characterized. The emotions that prepare for and accompany mourning in the poem are downplayed as the speaker immerses himself in the details of his own quotidian life--his "shoeshine," followed by a lunch consisting of "a hamburger and a malted," and errands at the "bank" and "liquor store" (O'Hara 325). While superficial, the poem is hardly anti-psychological: after the fashion of modernist stream-of-consciousness, the speaker reports his ruminations on the writers Verlaine, Hesiod, Brendan Behan, and Jean Genet. The routine of everyday life and thought of an evidently bohemian Manhattanite is however interrupted by the speaker's encounter, at a tobacconist's, with the face of the recently dead Billie Holiday reproduced on the cover of the New York Post. This face-to-face leads him to a confusion of his own death with Holiday's and to an at least implied conflation of death and desire.

It is through a nostalgic flashback that this mixing of self and other, death and desire takes place in the last stanza of the poem:

> and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
>
> leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT

while she whispered a song along the keyboard

to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

(325)

Here the speaker recalls hearing Holiday sing, accompanied by Mal Waldron, in a club evidently called "The 5 Spot." A bathroom in the club is the specific locale of this imaginative flashback--almost Proustian in its use of a sense experience (the sight of Holiday's face) to trigger a memory. The speaker in these lines returns through memory to the moment when he heard Holiday's "whispered" voice, a mode of communicating suggesting secrecy and intimacy. The speaker is clearly not the primary recipient of this secret: Holiday whispers "to Mal Waldron," then to others. The figure who here remembers Holiday's song is thus an eavesdropper, a third party, liminal to the scene. Further, it is unclear on which side of the "john door" he is positioned, either outside of the restroom, leaning on its door, or inside. The phrase "sweating a lot" suggests a feverish heat, brought on perhaps by the temperature of the room, perhaps by the high emotion of its occupants. Another possibility is that the speaker here remembers a moment of sexual encounter with another--likely, from the perspective of the homosexual-identified O'Hara, another man--during which Holiday sang. A homosexual subtext is suggested by the authors mentioned in the poem, noted above: the French poet Verlaine was, for example, the lover of the younger Rimbaud, Brendan Behan famously wrote plays with pronounced "quare" themes (e.g. "The Hostage"), as did the homosexual-identified Genet.

The word "john," used colloquially in "The Day Lady Died" as the name for a bathroom, can also mean a prostitute's client, perhaps an oblique reference to the relation

between the poem's speaker and the other with whom he engaged in a sexual encounter while both heard Holiday's voice. The fact that the speaker "stopped breathing" at some point during this experience may suggest a pause in breath that typically precedes the moment of orgasm. If the scene remembered at the end of this poem is in fact in some sense sexual, there is no clear indication that the speaker might not be engaged in an autoerotic experience. The fact that the face of another--Holiday's--allows for this epiphanic moment suggests, however, that the face of an other--some other--plays a significant role in the speaker's memory, as does the use of the word "john." This other thus might reasonably have been a sexual partner.

The phrase "stopped breathing" is also, of course, a way to characterize death. At the moment that the voice in the poem remembers this interruption of breath, the reader is reminded that the scene being described is a flashback, that the speaker "caught his breath" both when he heard Holiday's voice and, later, when he encountered her reproduced face--a face announcing her death. At the moment of his escape into the past, a past laced with and complicated by an indefinite notion of likely homoerotic desire, he is reminded of the present (and thus Holiday's death), and projects himself into the future, by imagining his own death. Not only does the poet's voice stop breathing, but, at least possibly, so does "everyone." Here, as in Auden's earlier ["Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone]," the entire world is invited not just to mourn, but to die, to cease to breathe, along with Holiday and the speaker. Not coincidentally, when the speaker imagines his own death, the poem ends--in a sense, dies. The anagnorisis in the poem is that the death of another, specifically in this case a diva admired widely by gay men, is simultaneously in some way the death of the self, that, as Levinas persistently points out, no one dies alone.

We are all held "hostage," persecuted by, responsible for the death of the other, especially the beloved other.

In that the poem leaves its reader with this insight, it might be firmly situated, for all its postmodernist flourishes, in the elegiac tradition of commemorating and honoring the dead. Marjorie Perloff characterizes the poem as follows: "O'Hara dispenses with all the traditional props of elegy--the statement of lament, the consolation motif, the procession of mourners, the pathetic fallacy, and so on--and still manages to pay an intensely moving tribute to the great jazz singer" (180). This critic further sees this poem as more successful in this regard, in writing, in essence, a postmodern elegy, than O'Hara's other poems about death, including those occasioned by the sudden passing of James Dean, another icon of popular, and gay, culture (see Perloff 180, and Feldman 115-19). While conventions such as a procession of mourners and the pathetic fallacy may be absent from the poem, the passing of Holiday is understood to be communal through her celebrity status, the possibility that any American who picks up a newspaper might participate in mourning her loss. The passing of Holiday or "Lady Day" (a common nickname for the singer, cleverly inverted in O'Hara's title) is made even more poignant through her preexisting association with otherness and abjection, as a black woman in America, and with mourning and melancholia, as a blues singer.

The cessation of breath and thus life with which the poem ends is a kind of metaphor for the absence that the poetic voice feels on learning of Holiday's death and the concomitant transcendence, epiphany, and sexual energy associated with her voice. In O'Hara's poem we find postmodernism, as defined by Lyotard, Jameson, Hutcheon, and others, only furtively or partially. The excendent resonances of the poem resist any

reading of it as wholly superficial or unspiritual. "The Day Lady Died" in this way moves beyond language in the conventional sense, but, in postmodern fashion, remains focused on the discursive, particularly through the poem's metatextual performance of its own death. In other words, the poem, duly anthropomorphized, expends its last breath taking its last breath. It ends, grammatically, in an indeterminate fashion, with no final period or other punctuation mark, as is typical in O'Hara's poetry.

The textual strategies of Allen Ginsberg's elegies are generally more straightforward than those of O'Hara's poem, as are his emotions and indebtedness to the loose verse forms of Walt Whitman, an inspiration for both of these poets. As with O'Hara, we will focus on one paradigmatic and well-known poem, "A Supermarket in California," Ginsberg's elegy for Whitman and invocation of him as muse. As James E. Miller has pointed out, Ginsberg "intuitively sensed that he could take from the primal source itself: Whitman" (American 283). Ginsberg's long poem "Howl" (1956) imitates Whitman in terms of its form, that is in its long, loose lines and catalogues, and in its theme, as a post-war "Yawp!" inspired by "Song of Myself." "Howl" serves, as Robert Martin notes, as a "lament" for Ginsberg's "hipster" peers "destroyed by the cruelties of American society" (Homosexual 166). "A Supermarket" is the poem that Ginsberg placed immediately after "Howl" in his first collection. The setting of the poem is not pastoral, as in the traditional elegy, nor urban, as in Crane's and O'Hara's homoerotic paeans to Brooklyn Bridge and Billie Holiday. Rather, the locale definitively postmodern: suburbia, particularly a suburban supermarket.

The population of the supermarket, visited at night, evidently consists of middle-class families: "Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!"

(Ginsberg 136). The scene is, however, haunted by homosexuals, "Garcia Lorca...down by the watermelons," and "Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys" (326). As in Crane's--and even Whitman's--Manhattan urbanscapes and O'Hara's "5 SPOT" jazz club, gay cruising coexists subtextually with traditional heterosexuality as a kind of phantom other, personified by the shades of Whitman and the gay Spanish poet Lorca. The speaker in Ginsberg's poem admits that his vision of dead homosexuals among the meats and vegetables is at least partially fantastic; he and Whitman "strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy" (326). The basic question that the poem poses is: what would Whitman make of "postmodern" America, a country of supermarkets and "blue automobiles in driveways," in contrast to his nineteenth-century "lost America of love" (326)? By addressing and thus invoking him, Ginsberg seeks both to commemorate Whitman and his view of America and to connect postwar consumerist, middle-class culture with Whitmanian idealism.

What Ginsberg generally ends up doing, however, is ironizing both Whitman's idealism and his own attempt to relate his project to Whitman's. A Whitman who is "eyeing" the "meat" of the "grocery boys" in the refrigerated section of a supermarket finds himself in an ironic position (in the sense of situational irony), the object of the reader's and the poet's bathetic gaze. It is thus unclear how seriously to take Ginsberg's apostrophe to his ostensible muse, including the interrogative call to Whitman that concludes the poem: "Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe?" (326). This

final flourish, with its classical overtones, suggests nothing so much as postmodern parody, an over-the-top imitation of Whitmanian style and sentiment. The potential seriousness of this Whitmanian simulation is undercut by its self-consciousness use of Freudian family imagery, as in "Ah, dear father"; mythological pretension, particularly the references to Charon and the Lethe; and sexual allusion, as in "poling his ferry"--a possible metaphor for anal sex (poling = penetrating, ferry = "fairy," a slang term for homosexual).

In Ginsberg's poem, unlike O'Hara's, the trajectory of its narrative is not even implicitly transcendent, and indeed, as Jameson suggests is common in postmodern writing, emotion is well-nigh absent from "A Supermarket in California." The poem seems absorbed in its own wit and cleverness, and Whitman is put forward not so much as a great figure whose passing ought fittingly to be mourned (as in, say, Swinburne's Landor elegy), but as a foil to the poet's ruminations on the ridiculousness of superficially heterosexual suburbia. Whitman may be Ginsberg's muse, but he is also a foolish figure, fixated even after death on his desire for young men and his idealistic, materialistic view of the American continent. Whitman is employed by Ginsberg as a cipher for and personification of forgetful naiveté (Whitman is, after all, on the other side of the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness that follows death). This figure is used by Ginsberg to record the collapse of American optimism and expansion. It is thus no coincidence that the setting of the poem is not just suburbia but also Californian suburbia. What was once the far end of the American wilderness, a space of potential escape from heterosexist constraints, has become domesticated, ordered, and at least superficially heterosexualized. Gay men haunt this imaginary supermarket, but do not properly inhabit it. Whitman's

nineteenth-century vision of rugged, masculine, male-male desire in America has become by the 1950s only a phantom image, vaguely criminal and barely discernible in the "brilliant" glare of the supermarket's presumably fluorescent light.

James Merrill's verse provides a profound contrast to that of Ginsberg. His brilliance and sensibility are distinctly homosexual in the tradition of Wildean camp, as Robert Martin has pointed out (Homosexual 202); his wit and his language are metaphysical, subtle, and, properly speaking, gorgeous. In his poetry the light is not stark, rude, and fluorescent, as in Ginsberg's supermarket, but variable, subtle, and "changing," as the title of his book-length poem, The Changing Light at Sandover (1977-82), suggests. Whitman remains an inspiration in his work, though aestheticized via Wilde, Henry James, and Marcel Proust. Merrill's skills as an elegist are perhaps epitomized in "The Country of a Thousand Years of Peace," written in 1959 for his friend the Dutch poet Hans Lodeizen. The title refers to Switzerland, where Lodeizen died of leukemia in 1950, two weeks after Merrill's last visit to his hospital room. This "country" also suggests heaven, or possibly the ancient Greek Elysium, a land of death where "they all come to die/ Fluent therein as in a fourth tongue" (Merrill 25). The space of death signifies for Merrill (as it is for Levinas) not the absence of language, but another language, a different language, a "fourth" (one inevitably hears "forked") tongue.

During Merrill's last visit to his friend, he realizes that what keeps Lodeizen from the place of death and peace are "the old masters of disease" (25), that is, his doctors. J.D. McClatchy points out that "there is a tone of angry bewilderment" in the poem, "not at his friend's eventual fate but at his treatment" (132). Here Merrill anticipates a distinctive feature of the later AIDS elegy: the omnipresence of medical doctors and their

various accoutrements. The purveyors and professional practitioners of medicine at best momentarily thwart the inevitable. We are told that the scene makes the poem's speaker

cry aloud

At the old masters of disease

Who dangling high above you on a hair

The sword that, never falling, kills

Would coax you still back from that starry land

Under the world, which no one sees

Without a death, its finish and sharp weight

Flashing in his own hand. (25)

The allusion here is to the sword of Damocles, who was forced by the ancient Syracusan tyrant Dionysius to attempt to enjoy himself at a banquet with a sword dangling by a single hair above him. Lodeizen, in Merrill's formulation, has been placed in a similar situation by his doctors, positioned by them on a threshold between life and death, forbidding him for the time being to die.

This situation of a human caught in a provisional space between death and life is of course a metaphor for life itself; to live is to exist under the constant threat of death. Our death is not in our own hands, but, as Merrill's final line suggests, "his." It is unclear, however, to whom this third person, singular, masculine pronoun refers. Its immediate antecedents are "death," presumably personified, and "no one," a non-existent entity (God, dead?) who nevertheless holds the "sword...that kills" by "never falling." Another possible referent is the "young man" of the poem's third line, a distant and impersonal

early reference to Lodeizen. Other than these figures, a generalized "they" (the dying), and "the old masters" (a plural, if male, group), no other characters appear in the poem. The overdetermination of this reference points towards a general confusion about the meaning of death and the relationship between the will and the event of death, but Merrill's poem also crucially resists any notion of death as meaningless. His friend's early, unjust death may be "madness," but it is not meaninglessness. Its meaning is written in a language that the poet cannot easily decode, or perhaps can only intuit and channel, as in that of the spiritual world of his later Ouija poems. But this elegy is clear in its figuration of life as a space between, that we "all come," eventually, "to die" (Merrill 25). In its emphasis on death as a language, "The Country" might well be characterized as a postmodern poem, but in its earnest desire, though thwarted, to understand the death of a beloved friend, to apprehend it, record it, commemorate it, this poem might be situated solidly within the elegiac tradition.

Thom Gunn might be seen as the last word, as it were, in postmodern, homoerotic poetry. His work, like Merrill's, is concerned with surface, though Merrill's exquisite, refined world is replaced by Gunn with grittiness, even squalor, motorcyclists and masochists. What these poets have most in common as formalists is an overarching sense of order, whether flexible and relaxed, as in Merrill, or typically strict and even, as in Gunn. Gunn's typical adherence to matters stylistic is however clearly something of a pose, as is his affection for and affectation of what one might term queer macho. Robert K. Martin, among others, has recognized this: "Gunn is, of course, aware that the homosexual 'tough' is a poseur, but that is precisely why he is admired. Gunn's poetry is marked by a concern with style, conceived as definition of self" (Homosexual 183). This

implicit credo of style over substance connects Gunn, like so many other gay male writers of the twentieth century, with Wilde. Here we will briefly pause over one Gunn poem, "The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His Death," written, like those by O'Hara, Ginsberg, and Merrill that we have already examined, in the 1950s. Gunn's poem was composed decades prior to The Man with Night Sweats (1992), a landmark collection of verse that includes explorations of the resonances of AIDS, often in an elegiac mode. A separate section of this study (see chapter 4) provides readings of Gunn's later elegies and especially a thorough analysis of his contribution to the poetry of AIDS.

"The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His Death," from A Sense of Movement (1957), presents a figure who is for Gunn an exemplary ironic hero, the biker, who here soliloquizes. Riding through "open countryside," the speaker is made uncomfortable by drenching "walls" of rain, but is consoled by the fact that he is "being what I please" (54). The struggle in the poem, typically dialectical (see, e.g., Wilmer) is between human, particularly man, and nature: "we're at war," the speaker states, and "whichever wins/ My human will cannot submit/ To nature, though brought out of it" (54). The natural world is seen as the source both of life and of death; one is in this way reminded of Whitman's nature imagery, his mystical vision of the cycles of life and death present in the natural world. An emphasis on such cycles, here troped as struggle, even "war," further situates this poem in the elegiac tradition, with its emphasis on potential rebirth through death.

The vision of Gunn's motorcyclist is initiated by his passing from "firm heath" to "marsh," where he engages in a full-blown struggle to keep moving forward as his wheels begin to "sink deep." He is soon caught, as "The front wheel wedges fast between/ Two shrubs of glazed insensate green." These twin plants are associated by the biker with

"order," particularly natural order. As he continues to seek an escape from this natural trap, the speaker begins to realize that he, like the surrounding marsh, is part of the order of nature. Although mired in this natural scene, the motorcyclist never ceases to make progress through it, however slow. "Though so oppressed," here by the "weight of death," the "rot" of the marsh, the speaker nevertheless finds that he "may/ Through substance move" (54). His moment of panic over, this figure presumably moves away from this scene, at least eventually, and he distances himself psychologically from the experience of being momentarily mired. The suggestion is that cycles inevitably spin forward (one thinks of Yeats), whether natural or man-made/technological (that is, "motor"-cycles).

This process of distancing leads to a rumination on the cyclist's eventual decomposition, akin the the "stagnant" processes of decay represented by the marsh. The suggestion about the relationship between the speaker and nature might usefully be read in terms of Keats's notion of negative capability, the loss and in a sense death of the self, and the perspective of the self, in the natural world (on this, see Glazier 158):

> And though the tubers, once I rot,
> Reflesh my bones with pallid knot,
> Till swelling out my clothes they feign
> This dummy is a man again,
> It is as servants they insist,
> Without volition that they twist;
> And habit does not leave them tired,
> by men laboriously acquired.

Cell after cell the plants convert

My special richness in the dirt:

All that they get, they get by chance.

And multiply in ignorance. (Gunn 55)

In his imagination, the plants replace the self, provide something of a vegetable simulacrum of the human, and thus animal, original. Gunn's use of rhymed couplets and regular tetrametric rhythms situates this imagined process of transformation within a tight natural order, though one with no volition or inherent meaning. Plants "multiply in ignorance." The tone is cool, unemotional, scientific, and more specifically biological as the phrase "cell after cell" suggests.

One might usefully understand Gunn's typical poetic voice as analytical, or, when it comes to desire, voyeuristic (as in "The Corridor," from the same collection). The measuredness of his verse, what Robert K. Martin terms its "decorum" ("Braced" 221) is therefore ironically juxtaposed to the rough-and-tumble, rugged, and disordered character types who are often portrayed in his poems. The reader is likely surprised that the rumination of Gunn's unsettled motorcyclist is so complexly metaphysical and allusory. One is incredulous that this character would produce an interior monologue in elegant, if simple, metrics and in a rhyme scheme reminiscent of nothing so much as those of the witty and sophisticated poems of Andrew Marvell. Gunn might best be categorized, therefore, as no so much a classical formalist as a parodic classicist who ironizes form via subject matter. I do not mean to suggest that his poems are unserious, only that they are flat, in the sense that transcendence is unavailable to Gunn's biker. After death is simply a

continuation of a pervasive immanence, the thorough birth-rot-rebirth cycles of the natural world.

If Gunn is a mystic, at least in his early work, he is at best a furtive or implicit one. Death is transformation in this poem, but not to a higher, happier state, nor even to Merrill's country of a thousand years of peace, but to a vegetative imitation of human life. "The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His Death" is not, properly speaking, an elegy, but it does provide a useful background to reading later poems that thematize death, written by Gunn and others under the pressure of AIDS. If death is essentially a natural, biological phenomenon, then, one assume, AIDS ought to be understood in terms of the natural processes and cycles of the material world. Beyond and behind it for Gunn is no God in the ontological sense, but even in this early poem one senses that it is only through language--mimesis--that one might have any hope to make sense of and represent the systems that contain us. The basic difference between the poem's speaker and the world in which he finds himself is that while it is ignorant, he is knowing, or at least articulate. He is able to do his best to shape his experiences, to transform them into art.

As with Gunn, the general struggle of homosexual-identified men in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to mourn their beloved dead--or even their own deaths--in an elegiac mode is directly relevant to reading the poetry of mourning precipitated by the AIDS crisis. The poets of AIDS and of death and dying from AIDS continue and critique a set of traditions that both provide for and lay bare the limitations of the literary arts as they have been practised since the construction of sexual identity, the putative death of God, the slow but persistent collapse of metanarratives in the West. As well, as we will see, AIDS elegists in the United States continue to be fascinated and stymied, consoled

and infuriated by the transcendental thrust of their literary heritage, the melancholic modernist turn from transcendence, the playful postmodernist critique of it. Like Levinas, the poets of this period and mode seek to come to terms with transcendence and, at least in some cases, transcend or excend it and thereby reinvigorate the concept and allow it to console and to prompt to action, to serve the other through mourning and love.

Chapter IV.

"Art. It Cures Affliction": The AIDS Elegy

I do not want you ever to die.

(Doty, Turtle 23)

A. Introduction

The basic question that most elegists in the era of AIDS take on is: what use is art, specifically poetry, in an epidemic? Kenny Fries asks this in "The Healing Notebooks" (12) by quoting a statement commonly attributed to Auden: "Not one of my poems ever saved one Jew" (Fries 12). The allusion is to the frustration that Auden and others experienced because their craft saved no lives during the holocaust; here Auden refers both to his generation of poets and to Western poetry generally. How could European and American civilization possibly produce such "great" poetry, a whole tradition of refined sentiment and aestheticized transcendence, and, as well, concentration camps and Hitler's "final solution"? As we have already seen, throughout the modern and postmodern literary periods, poets have been asking this question, then answering it variously by forswearing transcendence or thematizing confusion or uncertainty. In the context of AIDS, when Adrienne Rich in the poem "In Memoriam" asks "How will culture cure you?" (Rich 202), Douglas Crimp, art critic and AIDS theorist (see chapter 1), in effect responds: "We don't need to transcend the epidemic; we need to end it" ("AIDS" 7).

At the same time, literary writers have throughout the century continued to intuit and thematize the transcendent, even after the ostensible collapse of Judeo-Christian metanarratives in our society, after, that is, the death of God. In the three decades or so

since Jacques Derrida and other poststructuralists put forward a deconstructive, relativistic theoretics of reading the world as text, as pervasively immanent and referential, poets continue to seek, perhaps obsess about, the category of the transcendent. As we have seen (chapter 2), Derrida himself has returned to such categories as his work continues to become progressively more ethical, even theological. Is the only order in the universe the "natural," after Darwin? Or is it inherently rhetorical, as in early Derrida, and as suggested by Gunn's "Unsettled Motorcyclist" of the previous chapter? Or might there not be a language, primary meaning, "unique sense" behind language, rhetoric, poetry as they are conventionally understood? Such questions highlight the usefulness of a Levinasian frame for reading the literature, particularly the elegies, of AIDS.

Poets continue to try to make sense of death, to order and textualize it. As Gregory Woods puts it, "Writing poetry is not a waste of time" (Woods 158). Levinas provides a theoretical background within which we might contextualize the literary struggles of AIDS elegists. I suggested this possibility in chapter 3, and in the present chapter I will foreground and explore it through readings of Paul Monette, Kenny Fries, Gunn, and Mark Doty. Preparatory to this, it will be useful to outline the general characteristics of elegiac responses to AIDS. What good is art in an epidemic? James Merrill provides (though perhaps ironically) at least one possible answer in his elegy for the literary critic David Kalstone: "Art. It cures affliction" (Merrill, "Farewell" 165).

While scattered examples of elegies may be found throughout mid- to late-twentieth-century homoerotic writing, the advent of Western AIDS and its impact on gay cultures has initiated an undeniable renaissance of the genre (see Woods 155ff., J. Miller, "Dante" 266). Rafael Campo ruminates: "The poetry of AIDS...is about losing all control,

it is about dying and fucking. Souls dissolving into songs, memories of a lost lover last seen in New Orleans, laments" (Campo, "AIDS" 99). If, as Leo Bersani and others have argued, homosexuality and death have always been connected in the Western tradition, how does a gay male writer inscribe and commemorate the death of a beloved other while contesting the assumption that gay men are always-already dead or dying? James Miller, for one, takes up this question in "Dante on Fire Island: Reinventing Heaven in the AIDS Elegy." His answer is not dissimilar from what one might expect from Levinas, an inscription of what Miller terms the "anastatic moment": "the illuminative climax of the personal or public struggles of the bereaved to make sense of death, and what they have lost to it, in opposition to the easy consolations provided by the dominant institutions in their culture" (J. Miller, "Dante" 266). This critic and many homoerotic elegists in the AIDS era seek, that is, a reinvigorated notion of transcendence, anagnorisis, or, in this case, anastasis. Many AIDS elegists, moving in this direction, present their subjects in a liminal space between life and death, hell and heaven, sometimes as a frozen image, sometimes as a work of art.

A number of the elegies of AIDS are preoccupied with the relationship between high art--poetry, painting, sculpture, dance, classical music--and activism, or at least the lived reality of life, conceived as empirical sense experience or Heidegger's "everydayness"--our "thrownness" in a world not of our own making. Rich's "In Memoriam" and Merrill's "Farewell Performance," both alluded to above, are concerned with this connection, or tension, as Langdon Hammer has pointed out (see Hammer, esp. 103). Other such poems are Gunn's "Still Life" (Gunn 47), which portrays a dying man in a hospital bed with the precision and power of a classical-realist oil painting, and Paul

Monette's "Your Sightless Days," with its pointillist "park full of Seurats" (6). While the speaker in Henri Cole's "40 Days and 40 Nights" awaits the results of his "blood work," he notes that "big expectant mothers from Spanish Harlem/ appeared cut-out, as if Matisse had conceived them" (Cole, Look 7). Mark Doty's "Grosse Fugue" compares Beethoven's musical tour-de-force to the life of Doty's friend Robert Shore (Atlantis 20-26); Reginald Shepherd employs a similar mode with the Mahlerian allusions of "Kindertotenlieder" (Some 34). What can we discover, these poems self-consciously ask, about life and death through the (old-fashioned, high-art) medium of poetry? And what difference(s) can these discoveries make?

Art in these poems tends to be associated with the medical arts, as in Merrill's prescient "Country of a Thousand Years of Peace" and its "old masters of disease." Modern medicine frequently appears synecdochically in AIDS elegies through its technological manifestations: tubes and wires, breathing apparata, a wide variety of healing machines. Examples include Thom Gunn's "Lament," with its "pills, shot, X-ray," and the "I.V. line" of Tim Dlugos's "G-9" (Dlugos 84). Casual references to technology are in fact ubiquitous in the poetry of AIDS, from the "respirator hiss" of Assotto Saint's "Contagion" (Saint 8), to the "injections and wires" of Gil Cuadros's "RM#" (Cuadros 131), the "CAT scan" of Melvin Dixon's "Heartbeats" (Dixon 68), and the "hints of lab reports" in Michael Lynch's "Survivors" (Lynch, These Waves 56). For Mark Doty, the results of an MRI scan become, metaphorically, "charcoaled flowers,/ soft smudges, the image that is Bobby" (Atlantis 22), that is, a work of art akin to a charcoal drawing. Also present in many such poems is a "vast pharmacopoeia" (Monette 35), featuring "ribvirin b.i.d." and "acyclovir" (Monette 34), "morphine" (Larkin 18), "leucovin, Zovirax,/ and

AZT" (Dlugos 84). Tim Dlugos and many other poets are further aware that every medicine is also a poison, that "pharmakon" can both prolong life and destroy it: "the pills/...poison you while they extend your life" (Dlugos 73). These medicines, like art and poetry, may or may not be effectual in "fighting" AIDS. Following the classical Derridian formulation, the danger here perceived is that the poet's medium, language, might kill as it attempts to heal.

Thus, and typically for a mode "infected" by postmodernity, language itself become an object of attention as well as a source of anxiety in the AIDS elegy. The deployment of signifiers such as "HIV," "AIDS," and "positive" raises some particularly difficult issues for many writers. In The Man with Night Sweats Thom Gunn does not use the word AIDS at all, even though many of his titles--"The Man with Night Sweats," "In Time of Plague," "Terminal"--point toward the syndrome and cultural phenomenon that is his central preoccupation, particularly in the fourth section of the collection. In his "Elegy," Timothy Liu points out that at a friend's wake "No one mentioned AIDS" (Liu 59); paradoxically, he here "speaks" the term only to silence it, to note, that is, that one meaning of silence is "AIDS." Although "Silence = Death" according to many t-shirts and buttons in the 1980s and 1990s, Lee Edelman has emphasized that language and discourse do not (necessarily) = life in that, as Derrida taught him, disease (might very well) = discourse. Speech is thus just as risky as silence, if not more so, in the era of AIDS. Mark Doty has written an entire poem, "Fog," that strives, successfully, to avoid the word "positive," particularly as it might be associated with his lover Wally: "Planchette,/ peony, I would think of anything/ not to say the word." He goes on: "I would say anything else/ in the world, any other word" (Doty, My Alexandria 36). Here what Doty searches

for is not silence but metaphor, "any other word" to replace the word he wants to avoid. It is this very avoidance, one might argue, that impels this poet to transform experience, as he understands and perceives it, into art.

The compulsion to name, to label, is however powerful, particularly when the naming of the dead becomes a litany, a mode of remembering individuals whose deaths might easily be combined as statistics and thus might become generalized and unspecified. The Names Project quilt, initiated by Cleve Jones, has provided, at least in the U.S., an opportunity for people who have died from AIDS to be remembered in their individuality and, perhaps more importantly, to have their lives translated into art, text, collage, artifact, and thereby preserved. A number of poets (see esp. Dixon 62-65, Cuadros 125-36) have meditated on the power of naming and specifying inherent in the phenomenon of the quilt, which is at the time of my writing now too large to fit in any reasonable venue, whether indoor or outdoor. It can no longer be viewed from any single perspective in its entirety.

Michael Klein's "Naming the Elements" is dedicated "for the Names Project/ San Francisco, California," and evinces, as its speaker views panels commemorating the dead, both a frustration with language and a need to employ it: "What is left to us/ this morning/ is the serial enunciation/ of names wanting to say,/ of wanting to name something" (Klein, 1990 47). Here desire is attributed to the dead, particularly the desire to speak, to employ language; the dead are figured as those "names wanting to say." This desire is of course projected onto the quilt and its represented dead from the perspective of the speaker, who wants to know more about the lives commemorated by its sections. The desire to communicate with the dead through language is further troped as trope itself, as metaphoric slippage: "When I think of one name I remember/ another" (1990 48). One

name gives way to another within a field of seemingly endless citational deferral or difference. Thus to cite one individual who has died from AIDS is to suggest another, and another, and another--a movement not unlike the process of HIV transmission from one body to another through intimate contact.

The process of HIV infection is here like metaphor, and conversely metaphor like the process of infection; in addition, the site of transferal of AIDS--understood as the process of "communicating" HIV--is the human body. That is, the names on the Names Project quilt stand in, are substitutions, for humans who were once bodies-with-AIDS, now dead. The body in this formulation is a referent, in Judith Butler's sense of the "body" (see Butler 10-11), and thus a manifestation of AIDS as an "epidemic of signification" (Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia" 31); it is as well--or once was--a material, biological entity, an object of empirical apprehension, in some important sense outside of language, at least as that concept is traditionally characterized. The tension between these two bodies--the textual and the actual--is found in many poems about AIDS and indeed provides a crucial tension for numerous elegists of the AIDS era. Examples of poems that thematize the difficulties of inscribing the body include Steven Riel's "The Arm that Has No Place to Go" (Riel 4-6), Doty's "With Animals" (My Alexandria 77-81); Shepherd's "Kindertotenlieder" (Some 34), Dixon's "Blood Positive" (58).

An elegy that illustrates particularly well this juxtaposition of bodies, textual and material, is Richard McCann's poetry sequence "Nights of 1990," from Ghost Letters. Seeking to situate its explorations of the body within the American tradition of homoerotic poetry, particularly the elegy, the sequence alludes to and therefore cites Whitman regularly, beginning with an epigraph from "The Sleepers." Following loosely

the style of Whitman, "Nights of 1990" provides a catalogue of body parts--"the spine," "tissue," "back" (3), "face," "chest," "hips" (4), "elbows," (6), "heart" (8). These often are transformed through metaphor into something else. The spine of the speaker's lover becomes a "rope of bulbous knots," his tissue "something that could tear," like Kleenex (3). The body is figured by McCann as a medium of tropic slippage and of communication, a metaphorical page on which to write, to commemorate. The speaker remembers, for example, that the apostrophized (thus second-person) lover "wrote your name on my bare chest" (5). Here the body of the one left alive becomes, like McCann's poem, a mode of inscription and naming. In section four of the poem the reader is informed that the commemorated body exists only in memory, as text, and as ashes: "I saw the silver vase that holds your ashes,/ and I realized you had no body, no body at all;/ you were less than even the word body" (6). As in Crane's "Praise for an Urn" or Merrill's "Farewell Performance," the body here inscribed has ceased to exist through cremation, even as a corpse. The body mourned and lost to the speaker is not even a "ghost," suggesting, perhaps, that the poetic voice has little faith in an immortal soul (6).

Nevertheless, the speaker tells his departed lover "I still loved you" (6). Love, he declares, persists beyond death, although the past tense of this declaration implies that even love passes, albeit belatedly. Without the physical presence of the other's body, without the reassurance of "touch" (9), the poet's voice hints that love will die, and even more that we die trying to love. "It wasn't that I didn't die trying" (9)--to love, that is--the voice of the deceased insists via prosopopoeia. Ultimately, the poem reveals its underlying theme: not the death of the other but of the self, the fact that when another dies, we too die in some way. When a "stranger" or a "masseur" presses "his hands

between the shoulder blades" of the speaker in the last stanza of the fifth and final poem in the sequence, this other is frustrated by the resistance to life found in body associated with the poem's voice. This stranger exhorts: "Breathe,/ Breathe deeply,/ Why do you keep forgetting to breathe?" (9). As in O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died," the speaker in the final lines of the poem imagines his own death, represented by a cessation of breath. His profound desire for the absent, beloved other and his nonexistent body becomes finally a desire for death itself.

The notion of "God" tentatively put forward in McCann's sequence is insufficient to allow the bereaved speaker to overcome his melancholia and thus perceive some meaning or order beyond his own grief (7). A direct address to God in poem five of the sequence ends uncertainly, ambiguously, elliptically:

> And you, God, if you were to speak to me now
> through his body--his reckless body; his tender, feathered
> body; his fragile body that even in its dying sometimes
> seemed newborn, so compassionate and astonishing... (7)

The speaker indicates a desire for God "to speak" through the body of the beloved other a word of definitive resurrection or analepsis--new birth. The subjunctive construction (that is, the "were") of this passage suggests however a possibility that is contrary to fact, that the poem's speaker speaks to a God who is both silent and likely dead or absent. At one point the speaker remembers that a mysterious female figure entered the hospital room of his dying beloved, promising a "miracle" that never arrives (8). McCann's elegiac series strives at times for a transcendent vision, some form of anagnorisis, a realization that life proceeds from death. But no such epiphany is achieved in "Nights of 1990." Although

his lover's face is remembered "in the full glory of some passion" (5), the poem's speaker is unable to find meaning beyond death, what Levinas would call the God-in-passing, in the visage of the other. Figured in the face of the deceased and beloved other for McCann is the inevitable expiration of the self.

A number of poems by Rafael Campo explore this same dilemma, the difficulty of making sense of the loss of a beloved, embodied and actual, who is located after death primarily in the elegist's memory and in language as a kind of trace. Campo, as an "old master of disease," as a doctor who is also a poet, puts forward a conception of embodiedness, both empirical and textual, as paradox. His work typically attempts to listen to the language of the body, to try to understand What the Body Told, as the title of his 1996 poetry collection suggests. Campo's language tends to be biological, attentive to the importance of the body's "cell[s]" and "organs," the insights of "anatomy and physiology" (What 122). For him in "What the Body Told," the last poem in the collection, what the body speaks is both "terrible" and "fabulous" (words that suggest Yeats's "terrible beauty" from "Easter 1916"). His Catholic upbringing encourages him to read the body in terms of "desolation" and "sin"; his medical training provides a deeper "truth" (What 122):

> I've studied medicine until I cried
>
> All night. Through certain books, a truth unfolds.
> Anatomy and physiology,
> The tiny sensing organs of the tongue--
> Each nameless cell contributing its needs.

It was fabulous, what the body told. (What 122)

The language of corporeality is figured as "fabulous," thus both wonderful and fantastic, this latter in the sense of fantasy. The body, as object of empirical-medical attention and poetic theme, is inscribable but never fully, speaking the language of the other, "the stranger's language" (What 122), which can never be fully translated into conventional words. Something of the other's body always escapes the gaze of the self, both medical and artistic.

As in McCann, the spirituality of Campo's poetry is tentative, vague, uncertain. In one poem, "Jane Doe #2," from the series "Ten Patients, and Another," a doctor determines after a cursory glance that a woman brought into a hospital emergency room is dead, likely of a heroin overdose. But the crossed hands of the corpse prevent the physician-speaker from putting his hand on her heart to confirm what he knows already. So:

I traced the track marks on her arms instead,
Then pressed my thumb against her bloodless lips,
So urgent was my need to know. I felt
The quiet left by a departing soul. (What 71).

Although we are told that the doctor's need to know his patient's status is "urgent," the even rhythm of iambic pentameter in the poem undermines any sense of strong emotion. One imagines that this doctor, perhaps frantic within, maintains a veneer of professional calm, just as Campo's verse employs the even patterns of traditional prosody for the purpose of containing and ordering emotion. As he presses his thumb against his dead patient's lips, he simultaneously silences her and establishes that she will never speak

again. The gesture suggests as well the blessing of a priest, perhaps even a desire to impart Catholic viaticum, or "bread for the journey."

Along with this multivalent gesture, the doctor-poet's use of the term "soul" indicates at least in the last lines of the poem not a scientific but a theological reading of his patient's body. Through the use of this term the poem's speaker implies that some part of the anonymous human being of this poem's title may be immortal. The poem does not however offer any suggestions about wither this spiritual aspect of "Jane," now "departing" or making itself absent, may be going. The body for Campo speaks, is comprehensible in, the discourses of biology and medicine, while the trace of a Christian world-view that might allow for an understanding of death as analepsis persists. The voice paying tribute to an other resists understanding the passing of that other in terms of transcendence, even as it inscribes the possibility of transcendence. In "Fear of Elevators," for example, Campo's speaker "kneel[s]"--in the traditional posture of prayer--only when "forced" (32). "Jane Doe #2" is not necessarily an "AIDS elegy"; Jane is not designated as HIV-positive, though this is a real possibility considering the statistical HIV rates for heroin addicts in the U.S. Death in Campo's poetry is not always death from AIDS, but it is this frequently, and the AIDS pandemic has pervaded his work both as doctor and poet. In this context, death in his verse is invariably an uncertain and ambivalent category. Campo's poetry, even with its emphasis on the "truth" of the medicalized body, calls its reader's attention occasionally but crucially to the space between biology and theology, body and soul.

In their attempts to inscribe the body, to allow it to speak, to immortalize it through poetry--as in the traditional elegy--many poets of AIDS express, like McCann and

Campo, uncertainty or tentativeness about the traditional (Judeo-Christian) notion of God. In addition to works examined above, poems by Tim Dlugos ("All Souls' Day" [79]), Henri Cole ("Une Lettre à New York" [Look 49-50]), and others, including myself ("A Different Country" ["Different" 15]), examine the place of God in postmodern mourning, particularly for those who have died or are dying of AIDS. Michael Klein asserts that he must "invent a God I can pray to" (1990 30). Taking this ambivalence to an extreme of anger and frustration, Carolyn Muske vents bile towards the God of monotheism in "Applause," in which this figure is seen as

> ...a space chimp, communicating
> from his little phobic cell circling earth, razzing the planets.
> Intercepting the perfunctory hand-off, airport to port,
> the altitude drift--God the screecher, God the stomper,
> God the whistler in the balcony: they listen to twisting static,
> hungry for his holy voice, his Bronx cheers. God in his tiny
> monkey space-suit, chewing up the tubes of all the technology
> he never mastered, God the Glitch, clapping his ugly furry little
> mitts. (Muske 182)

God in here is perceived to be a figure out of his depth, not a scientist, but a kind of guinea-pig (or chimp--possibly "chump"?) of science, like "victims" of AIDS enwrapped and trapped in the "technology" of late-twentieth-century medicine. He is an absurd figure providing no consolation to the grieving. Muske's God represents an outmoded and irrelevant episteme, ridiculous in the face of the postmodern crisis of AIDS.

Following Muske many poets whose work thematizes AIDS and loss turn from spirituality and its frequent failure to console towards activism; "salvation" in many poems about AIDS is figured not as theological but political. The underlying assumption of much of this work is that if enough public money and energy were devoted to AIDS research, safe-sex education, and medical care, the plight of those alive and infected or at risk might be improved. One way to postpone elegizing the dead is to keep people living with AIDS living as long as possible. Moreover, activism is often seen in AIDS poetry as a mode of mourning and commemoration, a fitting response to a loss that otherwise, in a putatively post-theist world, seems to disallow consolation. Perhaps the most powerful of such activist poems is Michael Lynch's "Yellow Kitchen Gloves," from his 1989 collection These Waves of Dying Friends. The gloves of the title refer to those worn by protesters during an October 13, 1987, march on the U.S. Supreme Court to object to then-recent rulings, including one upholding the criminalization of sodomy in some U.S. states. Several weeks before this action, police wore rubber gloves when confronting, arresting, and processing a group of AIDS activists who were demonstrating in Washington. The October group called attention to this attempt at prophylaxis by donning similar gloves, many inscribed with the names of loved ones lost to AIDS (see Lynch, These Waves 93).

The poem provides a description of the demonstration, in which the speaker takes an active part and which he historicizes through references to figures from the history of the gay-rights movement in the U.S., including the founder of the Mattachine society, Franklin Kameny (These Waves 89), and Harvey Milk, the openly gay San Francisco city councilor who was assassinated in 1977 (91). Lynch was himself U.S.-born, though a

long-time resident of Canada before his death from AIDS. The poem is as well an elegy "for Bill"--these words are inscribed on the speaker's rubber glove (88). This beloved friend was, at the time of the October 1987 action, "now three weeks dead after three weeks ill," and the "nam[ing]" of this specific individual both on the speaker's glove and in Lynch's poem insists upon human specificity in the midst of a public, communal event (91). The parenthetical refrain "(I want him back.)" echoes in sections two, three, four, and seven of the seven-part poem. Its final articulation is italicized--"(I want him back.)"--in order to record a change or transformation in the poem's mode, from elegy to outright polemic, through its speaker's attempt at "converting lament to rage" and "fear to action" (92). The "I" and "him" of this phrase become at this point "We" and "you": "We want you back" (92). A declarative statement in this way becomes communal apostrophe. Private, individualized grief is shared with other activists and Lynch's readers and thus becomes public action.

Immediately after the shift in tone from mourning to anger, the particularity of the beloved's (Bill's) death is disseminated and intermingled with the personal, discrete losses of all those demonstrating alongside the poem's speaker; consolation, or at least a sense of common defiance, follows the move in Lynch's poem from the specific to the general. "Bill's" name becomes, in effect, part of a litany. In the last stanza of "Yellow Kitchen Gloves," "all" those dead from AIDS are addressed by the entire gathering of activists:

> We want you all beside us on these steps,
> this other dancefloor, gloved fists in the air
> defying the empowered who deny
> our lives and deaths, our fucking, and our hate.

> We too can organize, and camp
> inside whatever colonnade. We should have known
> we're tough, our fist in the yellow kitchen glove
> transformed by the outer fingers in the air. (92).

In the middle of this stanza we find the apt word "camp," emphasized by its position at the end of a line that is missing one metrical foot (which is made up for in the following line). Certainly there is something outrageous, over-the-top, queer, arresting, and thus campy about a group of gay political activists fist-fucking the air outside of the U.S. Supreme Court, and thus symbolically the legal branch of the U.S. government, their hands encased in gloves intended to aid in house cleaning, paradigmatic woman's work. These "tough" homosexuals, male and female, refuse to remain in a private, closeted, domestic sphere, just as they insist upon mourning their own, personal, beloved dead. No longer willing to cower in their kitchens, these demonstrators hope to transform the world into a disco's "dancefloor," implicitly in the frame of gay-rights activism a space of joy and freedom.

The U.S. government--particularly the Reaganite "Rehnquist court" that metonymically represents it (88)--is not the sole culprit in this poem. Government in its various manifestations is understood to be working in tandem with the institution of medicine. The speaker notes that "government and science/ direct their receptionists to order morning/ coffee and the day: the drugs untried, the less distasteful/ viruses, and who else can they test that fights back the least?" (87). Characterized in this way, the government and the medical profession are understood to be diseased morally. The scientific method, like Muske's God, encourages an understanding of humans, especially those who "fight...back the least" (87), as guinea pigs, not quite human. The medical,

particularly psychiatric, profession invented the notion of homosexual as "diseased"; it has traditionally defined the sexually different as objects of fascination and experiment. Lynch points out elsewhere that

> Another crisis exists with the medical one. It has gone largely unexamined, even by the gay press. Like helpless mice we have peremptorily, almost inexplicably, relinquished the one power we so long fought for in constructing our modern gay community: the power to determine our own identity. And to whom have we relinquished it? The very authority we wrested it from in a struggle that occupied us for more than a hundred years: the medical profession. (Lynch, "Living" 88)

This dehumanizing approach disallows a face-to-face in the Levinasian sense, an encounter between two human beings in terms of service and love. Thus the poem's speaker and his fellow protesters can meet the other--police officers in riot gear--only "Face to helmet" (These Waves 89). In such a situation what emotion is more appropriate than rage, Lynch suggests, righteous anger directed at unrighteous and unjust institutions?

Lynch's poem usefully outlines the nexus between literature, in this case the literature of mourning, and action, between text and world, theory and practice. In "Yellow Kitchen Gloves" one senses the value of Levinas's insight that literature can become ethics, can teach us our responsibility to the other, both particularly and in general. Lynch's speaker--roughly Lynch himself--mourns his friend by protesting the U.S. government and its ally, institutionalized Western medicine. The poem argues persuasively that these "empowered" institutions allowed for the untimely and possibly unnecessary death of "Bill" through homophobic inaction, delay, and wrong action. This

elegy strives to make its political point by aesthetic means. It seeks to transform its reader's mood from melancholia to rage by "reaching out" to him or her in the traditional mode of poetry. When the fingers of Lynch's activists are raised into the "air" (Lynch, These Waves 92) they are "transformed" (92) at least potentially, as they stretch toward the reader, into the space beyond the page, between text and the human face gazing at it, apprehending it and trying to make sense of it. The textual "fingers" of Lynch's poem--itself inscribed "for Bill"--attempt to make a connection to an other, me, as I scan its lines.

This attempt on the part of the poem self-consciously to move beyond itself might usefully be characterized in terms of Levinas's notion "excendence," a transcendent transcendence or reinvigorated spirituality even in a world absent of God. The voice of Lynch's "Prayer" implores: "Touch my face with your open hands,/ man of air, confirm these lines/ with the tips of your fingers as a breeze/ confirms the sage" (These Waves 38). In these lines the "air" into which the activists in "Yellow Kitchen Gloves" lift their hands becomes personified as a "man" whose "fingers as a breeze" will connect with and thus confirm the poet's "lines." Following Whitman's direct address to his reader in various poems in Leaves of Grass (see, e.g., "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" [Leaves 94]) and even Eliot's "Hypocrite lecteur!" from "The Waste Land," Lynch invokes his reader as muse, figured as well as beloved other. In this way Lynch strives for what Levinas terms "pure touching, pure contact, grasping, squeezing" (Proper 41), a move into the asymptotic space between self and other, reality and mimesis.

The readings that follow will concentrate in detail on the poems found in Paul Monette's Love Alone, Kenny Fries's "The Healing Notebooks," Thom Gunn's The Man with Night Sweats, and Mark Doty's My Alexandria. I am interested most in how poetry

can become ethics, as Levinas has suggested, in what poetry can teach us about the other, ourselves, the world, responsibility, and, finally, action. What good is the elegy in an epidemic? What work does it do? The preceding chapters, with their readings of "AIDS" as cultural signifier, of Levinasian ethics, of elegiac traditions are intended to inform, enrich, and complicate these readings. My goal is to locate the poems of AIDS within the various, competing, contradictory discourses that have produced, allowed for, limited, and expanded the field of "elegy" as it intersects and interacts with the field of "AIDS" in the literature of the United States.

B. "Raging for Day": Paul Monette's Critique of Ontology

Paul Monette's Love Alone: Eighteen Elegies for Rog (1988) is the body of poetry about AIDS that has received the most critical and popular attention. As in Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir (also 1988), in which Monette recounts the last nineteen months in the life of his long-time lover Roger Horwitz, the dominant narrative model is the life and death of Socrates as recorded by Plato. Monette is particularly interested in Plato's summary of Socrates' concept of heroism, understood as the virtuous act of facing death "without any lies," of dying in accordance with the way one has lived (see Plato, Great 453-59). Such--often Christianized--Platonic notions pervade Monette's writing about AIDS, as he strives to find a philosophical infrastructure within which to situate and explore his grief.

Monette stations the beginnings of this search for meaning and consolation in Plato's allegorical cave from the Republic. Like Plato's philosopher, Monette seeks

escape from the perceptual and epistemological constrictions of typical modes of thinking; he seeks enlightenment and transcendence. The speaking voice of Monette's lyrics, whom we shall, after Monette, designate "Paul," discovers however by the end of Love Alone that the concept of ontological transcendence is insufficient in the postmodern context to allow for a move beyond grief and anger to consolation and calm. Monette thus lays bare Levinas's critique of Western, metaphysical transcendence, that this notion, as it is traditionally formulated, has become enervated in the late twentieth century. Monette's elegies, unlike Levinas's philosophical ethics, can find no hope beyond this failure to move outside the everyday, the empirical-material, the psychological. AIDS figures in Monette's poems as the signal failure of the ontological project. Unlike Lynch, Monette does not, at least in my reading, call for an activist response to the cultural--particularly gay cultural--crisis precipitated by AIDS. Instead his elegies, like those by his modernist forbears, disavow the transcendent--philosophical and theological--and fail to find meaning subsequent to this disavowal. In Love Alone we find the fag-end of melancholic mourning and its obsession with the putative finality of death.

Monette's struggle for a dialogue with the ontological tradition is in Borrowed Time often melodramatized unselfconsciously and thus inartistically, as Douglas Eisner has pointed out (Eisner 214). And, as in his memoir, it is Monette's lack of artistry in the poems of Love Alone that many of their readers first notice. Monette's elegies were written "during the five months" after Roger, or Rog, died, "one right after another, with hardly a half day's pause" (Love xii). This hurriedness is certainly displayed in the rawness of the emotions that they inscribe and the indecorousness, informality, even haphazardness of their form. Some critics, notably Robert Martin, have criticized this

aspect of Monette's elegies: "Although printed as conventional verse, the lines seem random and their breaks arbitrary" (Homosexual 273). Martin concludes: "Language, far from being shaped by the constraint of emotion, runs wild" (Homosexual 273). Monette himself acknowledges that his elegies are modes of mourning first, poems second: "I would rather have this volume filed under AIDS than under Poetry, because if these words speak to anyone they are for those who are mad with loss, to let them know that they are not alone" (Love xi).

Monette's precedent is Wilfred Owen, particularly the earlier writer's "Preface" to the poems that record his experiences in the trenches of World War I. In that document Owen famously privileges the theme of "the pity of war" over prosody: "Above all I am not concerned with poetry" (qtd. in Monette, Love xi). Monette expresses similar sentiments about his collection, which is also akin to Owen's work in that it is rife with the language of military engagement, such as the bacterial "land mines" of "Worrying" (Love 10). As Sheryl Stevenson has noted, the language of war pervades much AIDS poetry, including Monette's (see Stevenson, esp. 248). Although he enjoins "Pity us not" at the end of his preface (xiii), Monette focuses considerable attention on the pity of the "war" against AIDS (see Sontag, Illness 96-99 and chapter one of this thesis for an analysis of the rhetorical dangers of this theme). He is however primarily interested not in pity but rage.

Martin's reading of Monette is valid and persuasive, but others have seen Monette's form, or lack thereof, as a strength rather than weakness. Certainly the intentional disruption of traditional prosody situates Monette firmly within the modernist project. Joseph Cady discusses Love Alone in terms of "immersive" writing about AIDS,

an immanent mode designed to shock and confront, often in polemical ways (Cady 244-47). The orderly rhythms of traditional verse would only blunt a message that an author imperatively seeks to convey, in this case that rage is the most appropriate response to loss. Deborah Landau's study of Monette supports this view:

> Monette's is an activist poetry, a testimony to the brutal public disregard for those who are living with HIV.... Monette is politically engaged, enraged, and sarcastic. He rages against intolerable circumstances in an abrasive tone and an aggressively antilyrical style. Although his gritty prosody is often difficult to read, the fury-infused lines are consonant with the suffering associated with this plague. (204)

Although it is unclear what Landau means by the label "activist," her apologetic interpretation of Monette's grittiness and antilyricism is helpful. For her the form of the poems in Love Alone is eminently appropriate for a poet who seeks to convey anger and inconsolable grief. But what is this poet raging against in his series of commemorative verses that refuse to be contained within the traditional structures of prosody?

One answer to the above question is for Monette "intolerable circumstances" and is thus polemical and broadly political, as Stevenson suggests. Monette's "Your Sightless Days" provides another: that his elegies, like Dylan Thomas's famous "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (1951), rage against "dying of the light." In the last stanza of Thomas's poem the speaker exhorts his dying father:

> And you, my father, there on the sad height,
> Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
> Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (Thomas 128)

In these lines a prayer is articulated not to the Christian Father-God but to Thomas's own father, who curses and blesses him simultaneously, in dialectical fashion. Rage in this modernist elegy is figured as a virtue, an appropriate and active struggle against death as life's enemy. Monette's epigraph to "Your Sightless Days" cites another line from Thomas's elegy: "Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay." The "blazing" here implies bright flashing, and therefore the "spark" of life; it may also suggest the flames of Christian hell. The overtly homosexual milieu of Monette's verse encourages a reading of "gay" in this epigraph as synonymous with both "happy" and "homosexual." A similar double entendre might also be associated with "blazing," synonymous with "flaming" and thus in gay slang "very homosexual." In this way, Monette replaces Thomas's traditional familial bond of father and son with that of male lover and his male beloved, echoing the classical homoerotic formulation of eromenos and erastes most clearly articulated by Pausanius in Plato's Symposium (see Plato, Great 78-82).

In that Thomas utilizes a rigid and strict form, the villanelle, his prosody provides a stark contrast to Monette's apparently arbitrary poetic structure. Both poets however emphasize the importance of rage in facing death and in mourning it. Typically for an elegist, Thomas attempts to order and contain this rage through formal control; Monette, in contrast, loosens himself from form in order to allow his emotions free rein. In late-twentieth-century psychological discourses, anger is seen as an important stage or step in mourning, a healthy expression of emotion, at least temporarily. Monette's allusion in "The Very Same" to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and her notions of the stages of grief in Death and Dying confirm that he is aware of this psychological model. Clinging to a modernist-

melancholic mode of mourning, Monette however rejects "hope"--the last of her well-known stages--along with the possible consolations of the Bible, as "shit" (Love 20; see Kübler-Ross 138-56). In many of Monette's poems, rage is presented as an end in itself, a state of inconsolable grief that at least potentially produces social critique, though it is difficult to understand how his lyrics might strictly be labelled "activist." Monette's are not poems of mass political action or demonstration; they do not explicitly exhort their reader to such action. The typical scene is domestic and bourgeois. "Micropolitical" is perhaps a better word to describe them than "political," "pissed-off" rather than "activist."

It can be very difficult to excise sections from Monette's unpunctuated rants, with their run-on sentences and lines. One must nevertheless attempt to do so in order to fix attention on specific sets of lines. A passage taken from "Your Sightless Days" serves as a helpful introduction both to Monette's style and to his thematization of rage:

> I toss my blinders and drink the world like water
> till the next dark up and down for half a year
> the left one gone in April overnight
> two millimeters on the right side saved
> and we fought for those that knife or light
> and beaten ground raging for day like the
> Warsaw ghetto all summer long I dripped
> your veins at 4 and midnight watching every
> drop as if it was sight itself so did we
> win did we lose you died with the barest
> shadows... (Love 6-7)

Paul here records his concerted effort to prevent Rog from completely losing his sight. This loss, a trope for the loss of Rog himself, is that against which Paul "rage[s]"; this effort is understood to be a battle to be "fought." The reference to the "Warsaw ghetto" relates Paul and Roger's battle with those of the Second World War and its concomitant holocaust. As in many others AIDS poems, the technological aspects of medicine--Paul "dripped" Rog's "veins"--underlie their "fight" against AIDS.

The structure of imagery that shapes the passage above, even with its formal and thematic unconventionalities, relies on the traditional Western juxtaposition of light and darkness, the central binary of the metaphysical tradition. Paul records in "Your Sightless Days" that he and his lover mutually "fought...for light," that is, for Rog to retain his vision. The loss of his left eye leads to purblindness, and the increasing fog of his cataracts leads to the eventual perception of only "shadows," despite Paul's love and the use of a "cataract laser" (Love 7). Through these images Monette presents a version of the method of escape from Plato's allegorical cave, locus of passive ignorance. In Plato's formulation (Republic 193-97), figures are imagined to be chained facing the wall of a cave; behind and unseen by them are others moving back and forth on a raised walkway carrying "artifacts" (Republic 193). And behind these others is a fire. Even farther back is the entrance to--or exit from--the cave. This for Plato represents the unenlightened human situation: "such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things" (Republic 194), the "arifacts" carried by the purveyors of mimesis and other deceptive professions, including the political and the religious (Plato, Republic 197-98). If an unenlightened person were liberated, Plato surmises, he or she would encounter many difficulties escaping from the cave, blinded first by the fire that guards its entrance

and then, once in the "real" world, by the light of the "Sun" itself--the Good, the True, and the Beautiful in the Platonic formulation.

Monette imagines Rog moving not from shadows to light, but from light to a shadowy darkness. It is unclear, however, whether Monette presents a reversal of Plato's path to enlightenment or an account of the seeming blindness that an unenlightened person encounters as he or she moves closer to the Ideal. In that Rog remains perceptive and good-humored throughout his ordeal, he is more likely moving from ignorance to wisdom, from darkness to light, in his journey from sight to an almost total, shadowy blindness. Paul apostrophizes in the last line of "Your Sightless Days": "Rog see how you saw us through" (Love 7). "Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light," Plato tells Glaucon in The Republic. He would be "doing all this in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before" (Plato, Republic 194). The paradox that Monette puts forward is that Rog's progression is both towards light and towards shadow, a paradox already inherent in Plato's allegory.

The Platonic references in Love Alone are both philosophical and erotic. Monette returns to Plato and his ancient Greek context in many of the elegies, seeking within the ontological tradition, particularly the blueprint of transcendence provided in the allegory of the cave, a mode of grief that might ultimately be consoling. At the same time he searches for a transhistorical affiliation with the Greeks' "unspeakable" vice of male-male sexuality. In "No Goodbyes" Paul asserts that Rog is "an ancient Greek like me" (Love 4). As in Borrowed Time, the model in terms of relationship is Plato and Socrates; Monette informs his reader that he has had inscribed on Rog's grave Plato's "last words

on Socrates: 'the wisest and justest and best'" (Love xi). A 1984 vacation to Greece provides a "peak experience" for both Monette and Horwitz, and a "white block of marble" with its "eroding," presumably ancient Greek, text is implicitly associated by Paul with Rog's grave (Love xii). Just as, perhaps, two ancients etched into stone their lives and love for posterity, so Monette writes his poetic testament to his beloved, in hopes that his text's commemoration will persist long into the future. He suggests a connection with homoerotic Spartan militarism and the Theban band by characterizing his post-mortem activities vis-a-vis Rog as "a warrior burying a warrior" (Love xiii). His project might in this way be read in terms of a long procession of homoerotic, elegiac writing that found its first articulation in the ancient world.

Throughout the collection, Paul attempts--and fails--to read Rog's life and death and his own process of mourning teleologically, in terms of a move from darkness to light, echoing the Platonic progression from ignorance to wisdom, to what that philospher's student Aristotle termed anagnorisis or discovery. In "Here," the first poem in the collection, Paul recounts a trip to Rog's grave. The atmosphere is one of "burning dark" (Love 3), a paradoxical image suggesting both hell and Plato's cave, with its shadowy atmosphere and hidden fire. "Gardenias" refers to this space in subterranean and equally Hellish terms as a "mine of pain" (Love 8). In these poems Paul, not Rog, is understood to be trapped in this "mine." The suggestion is that he is a postmodern Plato who seeks the wisdom of his teacher-lover Socrates in order to escape a dim place of persistent suffering, obsessive mourning and remembering, and refusal to accept loss. What Paul requires is the discovery of some way to move into the future, to gain perspective on his loss through relating it to the loss of others and death generally. His failure to do this

signals the incompleteness of Monette's critique of ontology in Love Alone. The poems collected in the text reject a metaphysical-ontological view of the world without presenting any alternative to it.

What Paul seeks is what Levinas terms variously transcendence, excendence, mystery, or God. Monette comes closest to acknowledging this in the poem "The Worrying," within which he prays to, really negotiates with, some ill-defined divinity: "PLEASE DON'T MAKE/ HIM SICK AGAIN" (Love 10). Monette is very likely aware that this attempt at bargaining is one of Kübler-Ross's stages of mourning: "Most bargains are made with God and are usually kept a secret" (Kübler-Ross 85). To shout (indicated by Monette's use of capitals) in this imperative, apostrophizing way towards a transcendent power or presence is to posit, even if momentarily, the existence of such a power. By the end of this poem, it is however less clear to whom Paul prays:

> why not worry worry is like prayer is like
> God if you have none they all forget there's
> the other side too twelve years and not once
> to fret WHO WILL EVER LOVE ME that was
> the heaven at the back of time but we had it
> here now black on black I wander frantic
> never done with worrying but it's mine it's
> a cure that's not in the books are you easy
> my stolen pal what do you need is it
> sleep like sleep you want a pillow a cool
> drink oh my one safe place there must be

something just say what it is and it's yours

(Love 11-12)

Through simile Monette substitutes "worry" for "prayer" for "God," and for, finally, a "cure" for Rog that is "not in the books," thus implicitly somehow beyond textuality and writing. This poem seeks a God-beyond-language who is also a lover. It is unclear whether Paul invites Rog or God to speak prosopoetically, to "say what it is" from beyond "the plot" (Love 11), the grave of both Paul's lover and the God of ontology. Paul's hell (contrasted to the "heaven" of the past), cave, mine is also for him a valued possession, "mine," as he proprietarily puts it. He both wants and rejects the truth, Sun, "cure," that might be beyond the somehow comforting space of worry, beyond death.

Through his intimations of a God beyond being, Monette puts forward the possibility in Levinas's ethical philosophy in which the dead ontological God is reborn as ethics, as responsibility to the other. Monette's poetry certainly evinces an understanding of the need for "substitution," for the sacrifice of oneself to another to whom one owes everything. As Monette puts it in "Manifesto," "I love you better/ than me Rog," and "I had a self myself/ once but he died" (Love 41). In the loss of the beloved other, Paul realizes, one loses some part of oneself. Thus Rog somehow persists for Paul as a trace, a shadow, a remnant accessible through language and memory. It is however Paul's rage and obsessive melancholia that prevent this realization from consoling him, as he indicates in "Readiness": "alas/ stripped Episcopal will do for the post-mortem/ very stripped a little ashes-to-ashes no/ I AM THE LIFE He's not no hymns no organ" (Love 13). This "He" refers most clearly to the Christian Incarnation (the Scripture reference is to John 11.25), but as well might refer to Rog,the God-lover who is, like Monette's Jesus, irredeemably

and irremediably dead. No medicine will cure, and thus save either, as Paul indicates in "The Worrying": "THERE WAS NO MEDICINE" (Love 10). The signifier to be avoided here is "death," which once spoken somehow becomes a death sentence--"DO NOT USE THE D WORD/ EVEN IN JEST" (Love 10). To speak the word "death" becomes, potentially, to kill.

Platonic allusions in "Readiness" further suggest that the Christian God and Plato's Sun are more or less synonymous in Monette's verse. Contemplating suicide as a reaction to his beloved's death, Monette alludes to Socrates' taking his own life: "hemlock/ would be choice for Platonic reasons but/ a cocked .32 will do in a pinch" (Love 14). This death-wish provides the final image in "Readiness":

> I haven't the ghost of a lease on a better
> world though I cry out your name and beg for
> signs I am only prepared for wind and water
> I put my house in order inch by inch
> if it comes when it comes I'll be on the
> diving board toes over the edge my gleaming
> broken body all the details done with
> one last dazzled thought of you in the sun
> be wind and rain with me ready for deepest
> darkness no matter how nothing not alone (Love 15)

Paul is figured in these lines as a diver whose last glimpse of life--before jumping into an empty pool?--is the sun, associated with the highest Platonic Form. While Paul "beg[s] for/ signs," some language that signifies beyond death, he imagines exiting the realm of

any and all meaning. Behind or beyond language for Monette there is however "nothing"--no transcendence, only "deepest darkness." In this way death is understood as a retreat from Plato's idealized reality perhaps back into the reassuring if illusive dim comfort of the cave, perhaps into hell. His desire: to be "not alone," no longer separated from his lost beloved, but there are no guarantees in his atheistic world-view that a reunion with Rog will occur after death.

Paul's feelings of loss and incompleteness in the face of Rog's passing are troped in Platonic fashion in "Half Life," with its allusions to The Symposium and the character Aristophanes' vision in that text of the human person as only one half of what was in the far past a complete human being:

> It is from this distant epoch, then, that we may date the innate love which human beings feel for one another, the love which restores us to our ancient state by attempting to weld two beings into one and to heal the wounds which humanity suffered. (Complete 87).

According to Aristophanes' myth, some humans were made of two male halves, some two female, and some of one male and one female (this last he terms "the hermaphrodite soul"). In order to reduce the pride of these complete figures, Zeus "cut each of them in two" (Complete 86). Since, as Monette puts it, "the world is cleaved in two" (Love 16), humans spend their lives searching for another--our other half--searching, that is, for wholeness.

Monette puts forward this understanding of human love, however, only to reject it:

> Plato's myth
>
> of lovers the fated meeting of equal halves

is a tale for lonely kids there is no act III
the sundering with its howl that never ends
waits till the pictures are shot to sever east
and west like a man bound spreadeagle to four
horses bolting for the corners of an earth
half ash half mad nothing what it was mine
the skull in the field and once I had it all (Love 17)

The vision of the soul's once and potential future completeness in The Symposium is repudiated through the violent and possibly masochistic personification of grief as a man bound and quartered by "horses bolting" to the four points of the compass and thus the "corners" of the world. "Bolting" in the above suggests flight and thus escape and simultaneously entrapment, as in the phrase "bolting a lock." As in Auden's "[Stop all the clocks...], " the entire world is invited to share in Paul's grief, compared through the figure of the "skull in the field" to Hamlet's. The impression is that Paul will never be complete. Rog, cremated, and Paul raging with grief are characterized as an entire world, "half ash half mad." This couple is whole only in the past tense; the poem ends "once I had it all." Hope is unavailable to Paul in this obsessive, melancholic state, and in that there will be "no act III," the anagnorisis and catharsis provided in the final act of an ancient Greek tragedy are unavailable to Monette's gay male anti-heroes.

In Love Alone feelings of incompleteness are further thematized and explored in poems such as "The Very Same," in which Paul responds to the injunction "gotta turn the page" with "BUT THIS IS MY PAGE IT CANNOT BE TURNED" (Love 20). Rog represents through the trope of the "page" both the inability of Paul to move from grief to

consolation and the failure of language to allow for an understanding of Rog's corporeal end. Paul elaborates on his refusal to seek transcendence, renewal, and the future within or after the death of his beloved:

> this page is all that's left of time
> there was no page before I caught you the book
> was nothing but cover painfully thin and
> hopelessly derivative there's something French
> in all of this perhaps la vie continue
> well no it doesn't not if you freeze it in its
> tracks (Love 20)

Monette's poem does not allow for the possibility of anastasis but only for continued statis, a state of frozen paralysis, an emphasis on the synchronic aspect of time to the complete exclusion of diachrony. Monette's "The Very Same," like many of the elegies of modernism, disallows any language that might lead to the discovery that life is hidden in death. The Platonic model of escape from darkness to light is presented in a number of Monette's poems for Rog, but Plato's ideal "Sun," like the Christian God, turns out to be, ultimately, dead: "the sun's cold as the moon" (Love 17).

Monette views idealism, religious and philosophical, as ineffective and unconsoling. Religious myths, like Platonic ones, are put forward in his poems only to be summarily disavowed. His negative view of Christianity is compounded by what Monette perceives to be its inherent homophobia. Paul says about Mormons in "Black Xmas": "those guys/ for chrissakes want us dead" (Love 19). The story of Christ's nativity--of an incarnate God who is born in order to die and be reborn--is conceived as irrelevant to a

late-twentieth-century, consumerist notion of Christmas. A holiday associated with "my breathless mid-December binge" at "Saks" (Love 18) is more fittingly labelled "Xmas." Paul employs apostrophe in order to address Rog directly on this topic:

> it's
>
> not about baby Jesus Rog you have to
>
> take the X out of Xmas and not just to
>
> counter a Jew's rolled eyes (Love 19)

Paul emphasizes the hypocrisy or at least paradox that underlies Christmas, as a celebration of both capitalist excess and the ostensible redemption of the world. As Paul notes, "we are past redeeming"; death in this poem becomes "the dream from which we shall not wake" (Love 19). The figure of the third ghost in Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" has taught Paul to read the language of death; the ghost's "bony finger" is seen "reading the tomb like Braille" (Love 19). What death communicates to Paul through this image is its eternal finality. The "Xmas" after Rog's death cannot, Paul suggests, lead to Easter; its "black" winter will not lead to spring, even, one supposes, Eliot's enervated April from "The Waste Land." The cycle of life and death and new life is understood by this elegist as irrevocably broken by the passing of his beloved.

The last poem in Love Alone, "Brother of the Mount of Olives" continues Monette's thematization of a necessarily failed quest for transcendence. Echoing perhaps the rain that finally arrives in Eliot's "What the Thunder Said" (the last section of "The Waste Land"), Monette's ultimate elegy likewise emphasizes renewal, or at least the desire for renewal, in its epigraph: "Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain" (qtd. in Love 60). This quotation is taken from what is understood by many critics to be the last

of Gerard Manley Hopkins's "terrible sonnets," "[Thou art indeed just, Lord]." In it the poetic voice wonders, like the Biblical Jeremiah, why "sinners' ways prosper" and asks in the last line of the poem--the line quoted by Monette--for a reversal of his own bad fortune, his status as "time's eunuch" (Hopkins, Poetical Works 201). The ending of Hopkins's sonnet is ambiguous: God's possible response to this human prayer remains unrecorded. Monette's poem concludes on a much less ambivalent note. Paul says finally to the kindly Italian brother of the title of the poem: "your god can/ go to hell" (Love 65).

The setting for much of "Brother of the Mount of Olives," as in many of the elegies in Love Alone, is the past, a time when Rog was still alive, in this case vacationing with Paul in the Italian countryside. It begins however in the "present," in the "attic" (and thus "Greek" space?) of Rog and Paul's home (Love 60), where Paul finds undeveloped film that he realizes, after a trip to the "SUNSET PLAZA ONE-HOUR," provides a visual record of their Italian tour (Love 60). A particular photograph of the lovers standing arm-in-arm in the cloister of a Benedictine monastery--Monte Oliveto--inspires the reverie that gives narrative shape to the poem. Paul remembers that the brother "in Benedictine white" (Love 60) who served as tour guide to Rog and him was very likely gay. The monk "likes touching us" (Love 62). This realization encourages Paul to wonder about the monks who have lived at the Mount of Olives monastery over the centuries and whose main object of desire was other men:

> JUST WHAT KIND OF MEN ARE WE TALKING ABOUT
> are we the heirs of them or they our secret
> fathers and how many of our kind lie beneath
> the cypress alley crowning the hill beyond

the bell tower (Love 62)

The three main figures in this poem--Paul, Rog, and the brother, John--are viewed by Paul in terms of the politics of closetedness, what James Miller terms "coming in" (J. Miller, "Dante" 294): who knows what about whom? Has the brother recognized "family" in Paul and Rog, and vice versa? The silence of Monte Oliveto and the associated "unsayab[ility]" (Love 62) of homosexuality within its monastic perimeter prevents a certain connection between the likely sodomitical Italian monk and the American gay couple who have entered the medieval atmosphere of his monastery.

Here Paul finds not an answer to prayer but a further occasion explicitly to renounce the Christian God as a figure of consolation and transcendence. As in "Black Xmas," Christianity, particularly the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, is associated with hatred and hypocrisy:

I've thought of John ever since whenever
the smiling Pope makes another of his sub-
human attitudes the law he drives our people
from the temples and spits on the graves of his
brother priests who are coughing to death in cells
without unction and boots the Jesuit shrink
who calls all love holy he wants his fags
quiet shh (Love 64)

John Paul II--elsewhere "that Polack joke" (Love 63)--here personifies the institutionalized homophobia of the Catholic Church, which insists upon silence and thus closetedness for its homosexual members, even its priests and religious with AIDS

"coughing to death in cells." Monette's inability to find transcendence, and therefore an end to his melancholic mourning, is directly related to his association of institutionalized Christianity with the God of ontology. The Christian God was usurped, modified, and straightened by followers of Jesus who drew upon the insights not only of the Hebrew tradition but also of ancient Greek philosophy, including and especially Platonic idealism.

The last lines of this poem and of Monette's collection enact an imaginative escape into the past of classical Greece, to a time when transcendence had not been co-opted for the ends of homophobic Christianity. He asks brother John, "since you are so inclined," both, it seems, to prayer and to the love of other men,

> pray that my friend and I be still together
> just like this at the Mount of Olives blessed
> by the last of an ancient race who loved
> youth and laughter and beautiful things so much
> they couldn't stop singing and we were the song
> (Love 65)

It is John who has taken the "wedding" photograph of Paul and Rog that triggers Paul's reverie and provides a cover image for the text of Love Alone. The brother is asked in the final lines of "Brother of the Mount of Olives" to record and thus preserve the couple as they were on that day in Italy, to continue their stasis, their status as two-dimensional art object.

Paul sees his open and loving relationship with Rog as the fulfilment of the "song" of the history of male-male desire. But, like that history, his active, loving, living connection with Rog is invariably situated in the past, and discussed in the past tense.

Paul asks for the blessing of John, that brother who is the "last of an ancient race," of a classicism that has perdured through medievalism and modernism. What this blessing entails, however, is a kind of "last rites," a vindication of Paul's current desire for death and his refusal to stop obsessively mourning. Love Alone provides a testament to the fact that none indeed loves alone, that without the other love dies. The death of the beloved leads for Monette to rage, including anger with a centuries-long metaphysical and theological tradition that is ineffectual for Monette as an agent of consolation or transcendence in the face of the AIDS crisis and the death of his beloved. As in the modern elegy, Monette's postmodern rants fail to find any potential rebirth in the death of the other; this realization and the failure to overleap it lead to only one possible response--not a song but a howl of pain, a "raging for day."

C. "From the West You Approach Me": Implied Metaphors in Kenny Fries

Kenny Fries's "The Healing Notebooks" was published as a chapbook in 1990 and later included in his first book-length poetry collection, Anesthesia (1996). Like Monette, he is probably best known as a memoirist; his Body, Remember: A Memoir (1996) was greeted with general acclaim. Fries's work often foregrounds his status as a gay man, Jew, and disabled person. Even so, "The Healing Notebooks," the elegiac journal that records Fries's everyday life with his lover Alex, refers to Judaism and disability only obliquely. It is this cycle, Fries's important contribution to the AIDS elegy, that will be our primary object of attention. In the nineteen poems in the "Notebooks" Fries's speaker rehearses and anticipates mourning for a lover who still lives but is becoming progressively less well; he also expresses fears about his own death. Rather than attempting to inscribe rage through formal disorder, as in the case of Monette, Fries's style is measured and his language is wilfully simple. Instead of rehearsing melodramatically the range of typical metaphors associated with AIDS--war, holocaust--Fries avoids trope. Likewise, he avoids many of the traditional conventions of the elegy, with the notable exceptions of an emphasis on natural cycles and a move towards anagnorisis, the discovery that language heals. Fries seeks a purified mode of discourse, a simplicity that might allow for the immediate communication of the transcendent within the mundane.

It is in this way that the poetry of Fries resonates with the theories of Emmanuel Levinas and his emphasis on an essential, ethical non-metaphoricity that underlies our

relations with every other individual human being. Like Levinas, Fries attempts to achieve a language that is purified and clear. Martin Srajek's comments on Levinas's notion of "le sens" (see chapter 2f) are relevant to Fries's textual project: each writer "assumes that prior...to every particular language a sign is passed on from one to the other" (Srajek 35). That is, both philosopher and poet suggest that a truth beyond logic and ontology is available through interaction with, in the face of, the beloved other. Meaning and potentially a reinvigorated transcendence are locatable in the interaction between Fries's speaker (whom I shall designate as "Kenny") and Alex. In "The Healing Notebooks," Alex's textual body is delineated, explored, penetrated, and in an important sense transcended. To give shape to this body is simultaneously to construct it, and to construct it produces the possibility of finding meaning behind, within, or beyond it. This mystical potential is suggested by Fries's epigraph, from the (often sensual) writings of the Zen master Ikkyu, who was active in fifteenth-century Japan: "Remember that under the skin you fondle lie the bones, waiting to reveal themselves." What the text here seeks, within its body, is a hidden truth--"the bones"--beyond that to which language is conventionally accessible.

Taking what seem to be mundane (Heidegger would say "everyday") materials, including the familiar setting of a lovers' apartment, bald language, simple rhythms, Fries produces in his elegiac cycle a textual product that is as purified as possible. He resists pretense, floridity, and bombast. This sequence invites us into the domestic, private lives of two men, Kenny and Alex. In the first poem of the suite, we enter their living space with their landlady, bringing vegetables "from her garden" and "a bag of apples" to "keep you boys healthy," as she explains (Anesthesia 41). These apples, brought to two gay

men by their fussy, maternal muse, represent what might be called an implied metaphor, a trope subtly resonant in symbolic meaning because not quite a trope. In this way Fries attempts to heed the warnings of AIDS critics and theorists such as Susan Sontag and Libbie Rifkin that metaphoricity is dangerous in the context of AIDS (see Fries, "Interview" 255-60). Rifkin: "metaphor can be a tool of oppression and stigmatization, a dangerous device that molds public consciousness and stagnates the process of healing" (133). Fries's apples are both literal, with an empirical signified--real apples--and rhetorical, textual, and metaphoric: "apples."

This gift alludes both to the old adage "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" and to the Edenic "forbidden fruit," and thus an originary fall from grace. This is brought into the domestic sphere of Kenny and Alex by "Mrs. Jordan," whose name refers to the river that signals the boundary of the Scriptural Promised Land. What Kenny and Alex fall into is, as in the Genesis story, knowledge of good and evil, of the pleasures and the dangers of the body in the era of AIDS. The figure of the landlady, both as muse and surrogate reader, plays the role of "tak[ing] care of things when/ they need fixing" (Anesthesia 41). It is through communication--from text to reader--that the "healing" or return to wholeness narrativized in "The Healing Notebooks" will occur. The medium is language, both as essentially good-and-evil (after Nietzsche), and as Derrida's pharmakon. The goal is the purification of this medium and the transcendence of it, indeed a return to innocence. This is suggested by Alex's request to Mrs. Jordan that she brighten, clean, and thus renew and purify the domestic space, epitomized by the kitchen: "Mrs. Jordan,/ will you paint the kitchen white? We need/ it brighter" (41). Danger is however inherent in this project, represented by the leaking bathroom roof of the tenants above Kenny and

Alex. "Surprised it hasn't leaked down here yet" (41), Mrs. Jordan notes, alluding again to Genesis, in this case its catastrophic deluge.

As its reader discovers, texts and bodies, like bathroom roofs, are "leak[y]" in "The Healing Notebooks"; contagion and "break[ing]" (Anesthesia 42) are a constant worry. In poem two, Kenny pressingly asks of his HIV-positive lover: "'Did your teeth break skin?' Look/ at my neck. 'Did you draw blood?'" (Anesthesia 42). Here Alex is understood in vampiric terms, as a force of infection and death. He is possessed: "What is inside you never sleeps, wants/ the edge, is dangerous" (Anesthesia 43). This presence lurking within Kenny's lover is understood as an active agent of the dissolution of the self, particularly of the body. Kenny's proposed cure for Alex is both a blood-letting and an exorcism: "I want to pour/ all your blood from your body, to spill it/ out of you, cleanse this invisible thing/ from our lives" (Anesthesia 45). This infection or poison contaminates not just bodies qua bodies, but language itself, as Kenny suggests: " Blood is no longer/ life. Positive, a different meaning now" (Anesthesia 45). "Blood is no longer" interchangeable, metaphorically, with "life" in the era of AIDS; indeed, it signifies paradoxically "death." Likewise, "positive" means differently in the context of AIDS--not hope or optimism, but the equivalent of a death sentence. Fries suggests in this way that signifieds are freed from their signifiers in the face of AIDS, in the proximity of a body-with-AIDS. Thus, as numerous AIDS theorists have pointed out, the syndrome might be understood as a plague of discourse, an infection of language (see, e.g., Edelman Homographesis 92). But for Fries it is not merely that; language fails not because there is nothing behind or outside it, but because that (asymptotic) space behind or beyond speaks

otherwise than being. The Word behind words speaks not "death" nor "life" but something else: the self's responsibility to the other.

Fries clarifies his basic textual project in poem twelve, which commences with a postmodern sense of citationality: "Begin with scraps of paper, odd/ sentences, someone else's phrases" (Anesthesia 52). One writes only in reference to other texts, the intervention of others into discourse. The poem then continues, like "the lover quilting names" (Anesthesia 52), with quotations from Louise Glück, Adrienne Rich, Sarah Schulman, and W.H. Auden. The Schulman passage, echoing the sentiments of Douglas Crimp and others (see Crimp, "AIDS" 7), argues against the efficacy and even appropriateness of the literary in the face of AIDS: "People with AIDS need drugs/ not fiction about AIDS" (qtd. in Fries, Anesthesia 52). Shulman made this statement in an interview published in the San Francisco Sentinel in 1989, in which she emphasizes the importance of medical research and therefore funding as an appropriate response to the health crisis precipitated by AIDS (here she departs from Crimp, who argues against "blind faith in science" [Crimp, "AIDS" 6]; see chapter one). Auden's quotation was discussed in the first section of this chapter: "Not one of my poems ever saved/ one Jew" (qtd. in Fries, Anesthesia 52). Fries responds to this sentiment in the last two lines of the poem: "And still I sit all day as if/ choosing the right word could save your life" (Anesthesia 52). In this way he lays bare the purpose of his writing: to "save your life." The immediate antecedent of this second-person pronoun is "Alex," but the poet's use of "you" implicates the reader, indeed all others, in Fries's desire to preserve life.

As Levinas argues, the letter--or at least language that has been purified and simplified--does not kill, but gives life: Fries's poetry inscribes Levinas's notion of

Mitsein, "being-for-the-other": "The there of being-there is world, which is not the point of geometrical space, but the concreteness of a populated place in which people are with one another and for one another. The existential Miteinandersein is a being-together with others in a reciprocity and relationship" (Levinas, "Dying" 213). Fries's verse seeks a return to the beloved other, an emphasis on the responsibility of the self to keep the other alive: "the surprise of that adventure, in which the I dedicates himself to the other in the nonplace is the return...the circularity of this perfect trajectory, this meridian that, in its finality without end, describes the poem" (Levinas, Proper 44; see chapter 2k). The paradox that "The Healing Notebooks" explores is the reinscription of life in the poet's writing about death.

In poem thirteen, after Kenny sees "a large heron," he says to Alex, and simultaneously his reader:

> I turned for your reaction--
> you weren't there. I went inside.
>
> All summer I've been talking to you
> and you're not here. You told me
>
> you didn't want to know I was afraid.
> You said all I could write about was
>
> your dying. Can't you see that's not
> true. I'm writing about our lives. (Anesthesia 53)

It is the lover's (and reader's) empirical absence that allows for his rhetorical presence; that is, through mimesis the poet inscribes and thus commemorates and materializes the other. It is writing about his sense of loss and imbrication in the dying of the beloved that allows Fries to understand death not as discrete and individual but shared--Levinasian Miteinandersein, being-with-and-for-the-other, "our lives."

The essential illogic of this stance, while resonant with Levinas's ethics, is related explicitly to Zen mysticism and Fries's reliance on its insights, as suggested by his epigraph to Ikkyu and his use of formal structures akin to the Zen koan, as in a statement from poem four: "I have held/ ripened berries in my hand. Tasted them./ All this, and the blowing wind" (Anesthesia 44). The emphasis is on both illogic and specific, empirical reality: there is no direct, logical correlation between "ripened berries" and "the blowing wind." D.T. Suzuki, in his Introduction to Zen Buddhism, helpfully summarizes these characteristics:

> We generally think that "A is A" is absolute, and that the proposition "A is not-A" or "A is B" is unthinkable. We have never been able to break through these conditions of the understanding; they have been too imposing. But now Zen declares that words are words and no more. When words cease to correspond with facts it is time for us to part with words and return to facts. (Suzuki 59)

"Facts" here are not Platonic ideals but specific, material realities. Language is, as Derrida and others have pointed out, broken or diseased (that is, pharmakon), but that does not mean that the "facts" to which language points are likewise fraught. Based on Suzuki's formulation, we might argue that Alex's death is Alex's death (A is A), but also that

Alex's death is not Alex's death (A is not-A), it is Alex's life (A is B), the reader's life, Kenny's life, and Fries's poetry of healing. In this way Fries's project, like that of Zen Buddhism and Emmanuel Levinas, moves towards something paradoxical and overdetermined, an infinity understood in terms of exteriority, a self only definable in terms of what is outside of the self, the other.

It is thus helpful to read Fries's scattered metaphors not as tropes in the conventional sense, but as juxtapositions of "A" and "B" that assert both difference and sameness, absence and presence, "due," in Levinas's words, "to a deficiency of perception or to its excellence," pointing towards a "beyond" that is both "absent" and "transcendent" (Levinas, "Meaning" 34-35; see chapter 2f). An example: "Passion, that rusty hinge" (Anesthesia 46). Here the abstract is yoked to the concrete, as in conventional metaphor, but this encounter leads to the transcendent (or, more properly, excendent) sight of the other in the situation of the face-to-face: "Oh,/ how I long to open that door/ one more time, see your face/ that way-wide and staring into me" (Anesthesia 46). This rare metaphor thus expresses longing for an encounter that precedes or exceeds language, at least as it is traditionally understood; this trope brings the "I" face to face with the other, through the opening of a "rusty hinge[d]" door that is both metaphorical and literal.

But this case--of a more customary tropic juxtaposition leading to the discovery that the desire of the I is predicated on the fact of the other--is an exception in "The Healing Notebooks." Most poems exhibit a paucity of conventional metaphors, a resistance to them, that intensifies, and possibly produces, the cycle's power. Fries's close examination of the body flies in the face of numerous discourses that seek to deny or

dematerialize AIDS as an empirical category (see, e.g., Treichler "AIDS, Homophobia" 32, and Edelman, Homographesis 92). Fries focuses the attention of his reader on the physical reality of AIDS, bodies with AIDS, sites and sights from which, he suggests, we must not flinch until the epidemic is finally over: "Not the way they hold me,/ but the way they hold/ the cup, the way your cheeks/ rest on your knuckles, fingers/ folded in, wrists out,/ elbows on the table" (Anesthesia 51). Hands in this passage synecdochically stand in for the body of the beloved other, in all his specificity: "of all hands/ your hands/ of all men/ you" (Anesthesia 51). The force of this passage relies not on metaphor but direct, clear, simple description, a kind of cataloguing of the other's specific, empirical presence. In this way Fries records not a life that is discrete and individual, but a life shared and of a responsibility to the other upheld, even cherished. "The Healing Notebooks" is in this sense centrally political, at the very least micropolitical.

In the last few poems of "The Healing Notebooks" the reader discovers that the beloved has been literally absent during the writing of the poems, which occurred variously at the Millay Colony for the Arts, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Blue Mountain Center (as Fries informs his reader in the acknowledgements for the cycle). As well, Kenny seeks rebirth--life from death--both for Alex physically and for Alex and Kenny's love. This desire is signalled by a phone-call from "Eileen" in poem sixteen: "Eileen calls to tell me the truth/ about the trees: they are not dying/ but storing sap, preparing for winter" (Anesthesia 56). In these words one discovers another of Fries's implied metaphors: the "trees" here are both empirical and tropic; the coming winter is both a seasonal phenomenon and a state of mind. The reference is to the rhythms of nature often emphasized in elegiac writing and the relation between such rhythms and the

process of birth-death-(and hoped-for) rebirth in specific human lives. The return to innocence wished for in the first poem is thus thematized in terms of the change of seasons. "Who is immune to hope?" Kenny asks in poem fifteen (Anesthesia 55). This query leads to other "innocent...questions/...why/ our love begins, and/ as easy, is taken away" (Anesthesia 57). Alex's dying is here conflated or confused with the death of their love. In both cases there is cause for hope, particularly in Kenny's attempt to return to innocence, his circular desire to "get back/ to the beginning" (Anesthesia 58)--of both their lives together and their love.

In the final poem in this sequence, Alex is on his way to visit Kenny: "From the west you approach me. To get here/ you travel the same roads I travelled" (Anesthesia 59). At least two allusions enrich this passage. The first is to John Donne's "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," which (typically) figures the West as the site of death, the direction in which human life travels towards its sunset, with the concomitant promise of rebirth. In "the West," Donne notes, "I should see a Sun, by rising, set,/ And by that setting endless day beget" (Donne 92). In Fries's poem, the lover returns from the West, suggesting rebirth, hope, new possibilities. The other allusion implicit in the passage from Fries is to Robert Frost's well-known "The Road Not Taken," in which taking "the road less travelled by" has "made all the difference." Here again Fries implies metaphors without obviously employing trope: the road that Alex travels is both an interstate highway and the proverbial road of life. He travels literally and figuratively from west to east. What he returns to is the particularity of Kenny's body: "Will you/ touch me in the same places? Do you come/ filled with the same expectations?" (Anesthesia 59). What Kenny desires is the "touch" of his lover--of both Alex and his reader. What the poet and

his poems ask of us is to love them and thereby replicate their desire: to keep the beloved alive through a use of language that overreaches and exceeds metaphor, that moves from mimesis to "pure touching."

In Fries's work since "The Healing Notebooks," also collected as Anesthesia, he continues to call attention to the body, both the textual corpus and frequently the body of the poet himself. In much of Anesthesia he attempts, as in "The Healing Notebooks," to fuse corps and corpus, flesh and ink. The anesthetic alluded to in the book's title seems to be necessary in order to dull the pain concomitant with any opening of the body, whether of the author or of his work. A kind of postop or postmortem, the book probes the scars left by any such operation. In "Body Language"--part five of a series entitled "Excavation"--Fries asks, "What is a scar if not the memory of a once open wound?" (Anesthesia 8). A few lines further along, the poetic voice queries his reader: "What do you feel when you touch me there?" (Anesthesia 8). This is both a question and an invitation to "touch" the textual body as stand-in, simulacrum, mimetic representation of the empirical body of the poet himself. As in Michael Lynch's "Prayer," the literary text seeks to touch, to make contact with, its reader and thus to escape or transcend language in its conventional, ontological formulations. "Which body is mine?" (Anesthesia 70) the poet asks, earnestly.

Fries's more recent work tends to broaden the concerns and themes found in "The Healing Notebooks." The canvas on which Fries, with "a simple palette," uses "a single stroke to capture/ the intricate surface/ of desire" (Anesthesia 22) is most frequently his own body-its gayness, its Jewishness, its literal incompleteness, and ultimately its beauty. As he writes in the fifth of a series of poems titled "Beauty and Variations," "each night,

naked on my bed, my body/ doesn't want repair, but longs for innocence. If/ innocent, despite the flaws I wear, I am beautiful" (Anesthesia 75). Here Fries seeks the Platonic ideal--the Good, the True, the Beautiful--in a language purged of the metaphoric, in a rhetorical mode that seeks to challenge the assumptions of ontology. Unlike Monette, Fries is hopeful that this quest might somehow succeed, though its ultimate success or failure depends upon the reader of his texts, the I whose role it is to take responsibility for Fries's body.

The final poem in Anesthesia, "At Risk," foregrounds the themes of Fries's poetic work as a whole:

> After sex, the blood. The cut inside
> your lip. The sore on my tongue. Long
>
> after you've gone I will feel you tearing
> into me. My body a minefield. I wait
>
> to explode. After sex, I doubt our blood.
> But what we did tonight, when we remember,
>
> will be no different. Built on such
> mortal moments, love is always a risk
>
> worth taking. After sex, your blood is
> my blood. My fate to die in your arms. (Anesthesia 77)

The poem speaks to its reader as lover and suggests that reading and writing, like having sex in the age of AIDS, are inherently risky (on this see Savoy, who understands "reading" AIDS as a perilous endeavor [65]). Anesthesia invites its reader to explore its--notably metaphoric--minefield, not without danger to the reader. At its end, in "At Risk," the volume suffers the fate of every body: it dies. This poem reminds us of Whitman's assertion from "Song of Myself" that "it is just as lucky to die" as it is to live (Leaves 29), particularly if that death is post-coital, in the arms, against the body, of someone we love. Fries's poems asks us to love them, to explore their textual corpus, and thus as in the Levinasian formulation, to "touch" and thereby heal them.

D. "You Can Write in Any Form if You Believe in It": Thom Gunn's Still Lifes

Thom Gunn is best known as a formalist who strives to order and contain most frequently the emotions and struggles of what Robert Pinsky terms "existential motorcycle toughs" (Pinsky 42; see also Hulse 66). In "The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His death," for example, a mid-twentieth-century biker ruminates on his own mortality in a meter and rhyme scheme inspired by urbane pre-twentieth-century wits such as Andrew Marvell and Alexander Pope (see chapter 3d). Likewise, Gunn's collection The Man with Night Sweats (1992) might be read as an attempt to recontextualize AIDS discourse within an ordered structure that focuses both on representation and language: the metered poem. Gunn explores the potential meanings of "AIDS," although the signifier "AIDS" is conspicuously absent from the poems in the book. He remarked to Alan Sinfield in a

1990 interview: "The AIDS situation in San Francisco is all-pervasive; there seems almost nothing else to talk about" (qtd. in Sinfield, "Thom Gunn" 227). Gunn's mode utilizes the decorousness, balance, and artifice of traditional verse in an attempt to order and to frame the irrational and incomprehensible: the process of HIV infection. This is done particularly under the pressure of the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s in San Franciso, Gunn's adopted home. What his poems call their readers' attention to is language itself, the inherent textuality of elegiac poems as, in Gunn's own words, "little monuments" (qtd. in Gewanter 291).

In this regard Levinas's notion of literature and art is directly relevant, particularly because an artistic mode such as the poetic is understood as at least potentially speaking a language beyond being--le sens. Levinas thoroughly outlines the potential of poetry in "Reality and Its Shadow":

> If art consists in substituting an image for being, the aesthetic element, as its etymology indicates, is sensation. The whole of our world, with its elementary and intellectually elaborated givens, can touch us musically, can become an image. That is why classical art is attached to objects--all those paintings, all those statues representing <u>something</u>, all those poems which recognize syntax and punctuation--conforms no less to the true essence of art than the modern works which claim to be pure music, pure painting, pure poetry, because they drive objects out of the world of sounds, colors, and words into which those works introduce us--because they break up representation. A represented object, by the simple fact of becoming an image, is converted into a non-object. ("Reality" 5)

In that Gunn remains a formalist he remains in significant ways a classicist, enamored of order and regularity. By converting objects--notably in The Man with Nights Sweats the bodies of unwell friends--into non-objects through a process of discursive representation, he produces something that is according to Levinas "more real than reality" ("Reality" 1; see also chapter 2k)--the mimetic image.

Within this mode of conversion Gunn moves towards a language of purity, of transcendent transcendence or excendence: his poetry might be understood as belonging "to an ontological dimension that does not extend between us and a reality to be captured, a dimension where commerce with reality is a rhythm" (Levinas, "Reality" 5). That is, through the use of a molded and structured poetic language, Gunn produces the illusion of a face-to-face encounter between the self and a human other, suffering and dying in the context of technologized medicine. For Levinas language that is distilled and purified is the very language that underlies our being; it is that language of ethics that precedes all other articulation or communication. By calling attention to his use of a "medium"--a printed text--Gunn highlights the artificiality and constructedness of the encounter with the other provided in the elegies of The Man with Night Sweats. This in turn, and paradoxically, points out that every encounter with every other occurs in language, not the limited and insufficient language of the metaphysical tradition, but the system of signification--ethics--that allows for the very possibility of the self. To put this another way, when we read an AIDS elegy by Gunn, we look for the other but find only the absence of the other. We find a text in which the human other has slipped into the gap between its lines, between the apprehension of language as a concatenation of signs or collection of signifiers and an understanding of its meaning or signification. And this is

exactly the ethical function of the literary and artistic for Levinas: "It is the essence of art to signify only between the lines" (Levinas, Proper 7). In Gunn's poetry every line is painstakingly crafted for that very reason: to lay bare artifice and thus gain an insight into "truth" of the other hidden, as it were, behind them.

Robert K. Martin uses the term "decorum" (221) as a defining notion of Gunn's style, that mode that allows for some glimpse of the irreducible essence of the other behind, within, and beyond the text. For Martin, Gunn's "sense of decorum is a desperate response to a disordered universe, an attempt to hold things in their places by sheer effort of the will" (221). In the case of The Man with Night Sweats, Gunn is responding both to an enigmatic universe and to the disordered and disorienting subject of AIDS. Jay Parini discusses Gunn's "response to a disordered universe" in terms of a "balance of Rule and Energy" (Parini 134; these terms he borrows from Gunn's "To Yvor Winters, 1955"). "Rule" refers to Gunn's "traditionalist bent" and "Energy" to his "rebellions themes" (Parini 135). Martin suggests something similar when describing in Nietzschean terms Gunn's "precarious balance of Apollo and Dionysus" ("Braced" 222). More recently, Paul Giles has emphasized "the chronometric regularity" of Gunn's verse, his "poetic world of duality and balance" (Giles 164). All of these interpretations point towards Gunn's classicism in form, his attempt to construct texts perfect and pure as possible in their harmony of "vigour" and "rigour" as Gunn himself characterizes it (69; on this see also Martin, "Braced" 221).

Gunn usefully elaborates on his use of form in a 1992 interview with David Gewanter:

> People seem genuinely puzzled why I write in meter. This criticism takes a position that goes back at least as far as R.P. Blackmur, who asks why people in the 20th century should be using forms that court-poets like Wyatt or Raleigh have used, or religious poets like Donne and Herbert, when these forms were created for a completely different type of audience and purpose. This is quite compelling criticism; our situation is entirely different. I think, however, that any decent form can be adapted to other purposes. Levi-Straus says that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery. Now we have found many other uses for these original purposes. (qtd. in Gewanter 289)

Gunn here takes on the argument that to write in traditional metrics and rhymes is to be formally anachronistic, and thus somehow to fail to respond to the world of the present. This criticism seems deeply modernist, relating closely to the period before which no one would question the relevance and appropriateness of writing, say, a sonnet. Gunn is arguing basically for a model of citation and subversion: one references traditional forms while transforming them and intervening in traditions. He continues: "You can write in any form if you believe in it" (qtd. in Gewanter 290). In addition to breaking and simultaneously abiding by the law of genre (as Derrida might put it), it is the responsibility of the poet for Gunn to have faith in the power of form: "to believe in it."

When asked why all of the poems except "In Time of Plague" in section four of The Man with Night Sweats--the explicit AIDS elegies of the collection--are written in traditional form, Gunn replies: "I suppose I was trying to do justice to my subject, to be as artificial as I could, to bring as much artifice as I could, to do them justice. Making a

monument, like the woman in "Beautician" [see Gunn 455] who shaped her dead friend's hair" (qtd. in Gewanter 291). The very word "monument" suggests classicism--the Athenian Parthenon, the Roman Pantheon--and a concomitant emphasis on the object, its "object-ness," its otherness. Thus Henri Cole can write that Gunn's elegies are about "the condition of those around him, strangers and lovers alike" (Cole, Review 231), rather than about the poet himself, as in the confessional tradition. Gunn's discursive objects are clearly constructed, mimetic representations, simulacra, of human beings whose dying Gunn's poetic voice mourns. "Dying" as a process, albeit frozen and monumentalized, must be emphasized when reading Gunn's elegies--"dying," that is, as opposed to "death": "There's nothing to write about death, unless you believe in an after-life. I am writing about people dying" (Gunn, qtd. in Gewanter 292). While Gunn's goal is monumentalizing the dead, commemorating them by freezing them, seeing them in terms of stasis, his emphasis on dying as a process suggests energy, change, perhaps even anastasis. This Hugh Haughton, following so many other critics, has characterized as Gunn's desire to balance "intimacy and detachment" (Haughton 12), proximity and distance, candor and irony.

A poem in the collection that is exemplary of Gunn's decorousness, balance, and artifice ends the first section in The Man with Night Sweats: "Seesaw." This poem, a "song," displays decorum in its form: generally, each line consists of two stressed and usually one unstressed syllable, each of the six stanzas contains four lines. The rhyme scheme of each stanza is A-B-C-B. The text of the poem, too, is evenly poised. The first stanza:

Days are bright,

Nights are dark.

We play seesaw

In the park. (Collected 419)

The universe for this poem's presumably innocent narrator seems to be perfectly ordered. There are no dark days or bright nights; in fact, he drops "down/ Like the night" (419) only to rise back up again. The whole experience is defined as "Give and take,/ Take and give" (419). A kind of dialectic give-and-take categorizes, at least on the surface, the relationship between the speaker and his "friend" (219). However, the "balance" of this poem disguises a central inequality. Day and night are not the same, they are defined by lack or excess of light. Likewise, the speaker in this poem is distinguishable from his "Freckleface" (419) friend through the use of this pejorative nickname. As well, the poem represents an attempt that ultimately and significantly ends in exhaustion: "My legs ache" (419). Spent, the singer of this poem and his friend climb off the seesaw and "no one wins" (420). The phrase might easily be read ironically: the speaker of this poem "wins." He defines this situation as exemplary of an order which privileges his discourse over the silence of his frecklefaced friend. Language might indeed be seen as a kind of enslavement or oppression of the other--the so-called "friend"--as Levi-Straus would have it.

This poem might also be read as an imbalanced sexual encounter: the narrator's "Shiny board/ Between my legs" suggests a penis, and the reference to his friend's "Freckle[d]/...other end" (219) implies anal penetration. Perhaps, thus, within the naivete of the "song" (219) of this poem's speaker lurks both experience and an experiential ethics: Is the message of this poem that "no one wins" during a potentially lethal sexual

encounter in the context of a culture under the threat of AIDS? Does Gunn here suggest an ethical order of responsibility to the other that overarches and precedes a natural arrangement that is typically characterized as the final authority in his poems? Because the poem is overwhelmingly objective and non-judgmental, one can only speculate about such an embedded ethical theme. If order is however the goal in Gunn's poetics and thematics, then the implied imbalance of the milieu of the "park" in "See-Saw" represents an ethical dilemma to be explored in the elegies of The Man with Night Sweats. What (ethical) good might Gunn's AIDS poems do in the context of a pandemic? What might they teach a reader about his or her responsibility to the other?

Additional poems included in The Man with Night Sweats attempt to order AIDS using methods similar to those employed by the speaker of "Seesaw" to order the universe. To this end, the poem "Yellow Pitcher Plant," in the third section of the collection, attempts to comprehend the biological reality of AIDS through an extended conceit. In the poem, a "seely," or blind, fly "is lured to sloping/ pastures at the trumpet's lip" (35) of a yellow pitcher plant. Having pushed through an "underbrush/ of hairs" (35), the fly finds itself trapped. Eventually the fly falls into "a pool that digests protein" (35),

> to become mere
>
> chitinous exoskeleton,
>
> leftovers
>
> of a sated petal
>
> an enzyme's cruelty. (36)

This poem might be read as an objective description of a digestive process; however, if one reads it as an extended conceit representing HIV infection and AIDS, which seems reasonable in the context of a poetry collection which takes AIDS as its overarching theme, then the process described in this poem becomes comprehensible within a framing discourse of biological order. From the moment that the fly comes into contact with the outer lip of the pitcher plant's trumpet, it might be understood as a being-towards-death, a creature for whom death is shortly inevitable.

If the "seely fly" entering "sloping pastures" (35) is read as a metaphor for anal sex, then the fly's entrapment and death become situated within the natural enzymatic processes of living entities, whether plants or human bodies, which are ordered and taxonomized by the discourses of biology and medical science. This poem thus significantly hearks back to earlier work such as "The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His Death," in which, likewise, death is understood in terms of the cycles of nature (see chapter 4d). The narrative voice of this poem seems quite content to operate a-metrically within a secure structure of biological rationalism. Strict form is apparently not required to contain--or attempt to contain--this description of the digestive processes of a yellow pitcher plant, which seems to have no responsibility to care for its victim. Though we can mourn the unfortunate fate of an AIDS victim, like Gunn's fly--"oh alas!" (35)--we are also encouraged to comprehend that fate within a natural, biological order.

But this comprehension can be achieved only though an overt discourse of trope only if the "victim" of a biological process can be metaphorized into something other than a person with AIDS. When, in the last section of The Man with Night Sweats, the author turns his attention to the inscription of AIDS onto human bodies, he moves from a

metaphorically charged discourse to a discourse of empiricism, from an apprehension of biological processes to an examination of the body-with-AIDS. His ethical project is thus the representation of the body itself as a "still life," a work of art, artifice, in order to produce what Levinas understands to be the inherent ethical situation: the face-to-face, the gaze of the I here directed toward the suffering other. Gunn's poems--e.g. "The J Car," "To the Dead Owner of a Gym"--most frequently examine and attempt to inscribe not the AIDS present in/on his own body, but on the bodies others. In the poems of section four, AIDS often is associated with the sensation of living-in-death, the process of dying, characterized variously as biological, psychological, existential.

However, the collection's title poem represents an attempt to inscribe the relationship between an AIDS infected speaker and his own body. In "The Man with Night Sweats," the poet's voice imagines that he awakens in the night with one of the common conditions of those beginning to exhibit symptoms of AIDS. The poem begins:

> I wake up cold, I who
> Prospered through dreams of heat
> Wake to their residue,
> Sweat, and a clinging sheet. (Collected 461)

As in "The Healing Notebooks" of Kenny Fries, Gunn in this poem and others employs trope obliquely and ambivalently. The "residue" of dreams is both explicitly literal--"Sweat, and a clinging sheet"--and figurative, the memory of a "dream...of heat." The use of trimeter communicates the intensity of this experience, and an A-B-A-B rhyme scheme perhaps its "chronometric regularity," as an experience in a series. In the fifth line of the poem the "man with night sweats" records the disassociation of his body from the

metaphoric notion of a "shield": "My flesh was its own shield" (Collected 461). Through the process of HIV-infection and the appearance of symptoms such as nights sweats, the "flesh" associated with this poem's voice has progressively lost its tropic association: "The given shield was cracked/.../My flesh reduced and wrecked" (Collected 461). Indeed, the end rhyme of these lines is itself "wrecked"; it is a half or partial rhyme, neither perfectly aural nor visual, as the word "wracked" would have been.

When what the speaker has imagined to be a "shield" is revealed to be an empirical object, a body, a phenomenon to be apprehended if not understood, Gunn's speaker turns from a discourse of metaphoricity to one of description:

> I have to change the bed,
>
> But catch myself instead
>
> Stopped upright where I am
>
> Hugging my body to me
>
> As if to shield it from
>
> The pains that will go through me (Collected 462)

In this way the speaker rejects poetic language for plain. The word "shield" reappears in this section, though no longer as metaphor but a contrary-to-fact situation beginning with the phrase "as if." The term "body" is in the present no longer interchangeable with a "shield." The speaker's body is now vulnerable and needs to be itself shielded from, in Gunn's clear language, "pains," the immediate experience of suffering, and therefore, for Levinas, being: "the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence" (Levinas, Time 69). The final two lines of the poem describe this effort to fend off pain,

"As if hands were enough/ To hold an avalanche off" (58). The tropic "avalanche" suggests both overwhelming pain and burial, both suffering and dying. The "hands" of this poem reach not towards its reader but towards the self in an effort of self-containment and preservation. As Beret Strong puts it, "the body can't be trusted to keep itself intact" (Strong 128). The reader of this poem is placed in the position of helpless viewer, though by no means innocent bystander, witnessing the failure of poetic language to order the experience of suffering.

A more typical poem that allows for distance between and separation from the poetic voice and the dying other, "To a Dead Graduate Student," utilizes in its first stanza traditionally poetic, metaphorized discourse:

> The whole rich process of twined opposites,
> Tendril round stalk, developing in tandem
> Through tangled exquisite detail that knits
> To a unique promise-- (Collected 482).

A promising graduate student is regarded in this poem as a "tendril" tangled around the "stalk" of the poem's narrator. Since these two elements "twine" around each other, a "promise" of something unique and new develops. As in "Yellow Pitcher Plant," this poem presents an extended conceit based on assumptions of biologized nature, with sexual overtones. Unlike that poem, though, "To a Dead Graduate Student" utilizes explicit metaphor. The direct connection between enzymatic processes and AIDS in "Yellow Pitcher Plant" is conspicuously absent, while plant development and human experience are directly related to each other in "Graduate Student."

The second stanza continues after the formal and thematic breaking off, slowly recovering its regular metrical rhythm (iambic pentameter) in the poem's last four lines:

checked at random,

Killed, wasted. What a teacher you'd have made:

Your tough, impatient mind, your flowering looks

Would have seduced the backward where they played,

Rebels like you, to share your love of books. (Collected 482)

Apart from one metaphoric gesture, the participle "flowering," the second stanza of this poem generally utilizes bald, descriptive language. The image of the graduate student as a developing plant is rejected in favour of a more objective description--a life that is "killed, wasted," not a plant that is, for example, "withered, pruned." One senses in this poem a frustration with the conceit developed in the first stanza since, faced with the empirical reality of this inscription of AIDS onto a particular, beloved, human body, the narrator of this poem is left angry and uncomprehending, as is, presumably, its reader.

The general tone of another representative poem in this section, "Still Life," is locatable between gestures towards tropic comprehension and attempts at empirical apprehension. Whereas the language of "Still Life" centers on the apprehension of a body infected by AIDS, its apprehensive focus exists in tension with its awareness of its own discursivity, its status as mimetic inscription of AIDS. Although written in traditional poetic meter (trimiter) and rhyme (A-B-A-C-B-C), the language of "Still Life" displays a paucity of typical poetic metaphor; the narrator/spectator describes his subject as a camera might reproduce a tableau. In the first stanza particularly, adjectives such as "greyish-yellow" for the observed body's skin and "tight" for its closed eyelids are descriptive

rather than comparative. The poem's only particularly metaphoric image occurs in its second stanza, in which "the angle" of the observed body's head is described as "reared back/ On the crisp field of bed," suggesting a horse risen on its hind legs, most likely in fear of "what he could neither/ Accept.../ Nor.../ let go." No attempt to comprehend this "still life" is made by the narrator; rather, a presumably AIDS-infected body is presented in a moment of absolute immobility. In general, the language of the poem is transparent, mimetic. The poem ends with the detached image of "The tube his mouth enclosed/ In an astonished O," providing an empirical apprehension of astonishment.

But "Still Life" also concludes with the image of a letter, an "O." The poem ends with an emphasis on both textuality and articulation that suggests in its circularity purity and infinity. The text ultimately emphasizes the opacity rather than the transparency of language, by gesturing towards its own discursiveness, its existence as a collection of signs/letters. This ending privileges the signifier over the signified, undermining the empiric apprehension of a material body developed in the rest of the poem. Not unaware of its own discursivity, Gunn's poem generally represents an attempt to move through a less-than-transparent medium of language in order to arrive at an apprehension of AIDS as it is inscribed on the surface of a body. Though Gunn effectively minimizes the metaphoric function of language in this poem, his description of the "astonished O" gestures towards a consciousness of language itself as trope. At the same time, an "O" suggests the rhetorical device of apostrophe, which is often deployed in the traditional elegy to address the dead. This address is terminated at the moment it begins, perpetually suspended by an intrusive tube. The "O" becomes an overdetermined signifier

simultaneously articulated and silenced, privileged and erased. It speaks, in an important sense, "between the lines."

This signifier functions therefore in what Thomas Yingling has called the "asymptotic" space within which the conflicting discourses of AIDS both signify and fail to signify (see Yingling 38). An "asymptote" is a straight line associated with a curve that it will never touch, just as Gunn's "O" is both contained within the lines of his verse and suggests an infinity beyond, exterior to, other than them. For Gunn this space provides a discursive arena in which the significations of AIDS--and its failures to signify--can be examined, challenged, explored. Gunn's collection finally inscribes the failure of language to produce coherent meaning in the context of AIDS just as meaning overflows his text. At the same time it speaks. Gunn's "Still Life" thus suggests the possibility of something outside of language as it is conventionally understood, a suggestion that is for Levinas possible in a privileged way within literary discourses that are capable of inscribing representations "more real than reality," beyond the category of the ontological. Gunn's O is and is not; in Fries's Zen model, it is both "A" and "not-A," or, more exactly, "O" and "not-O."

This overdetermined, yet simple and clear, mode of poetic articulation is evident both in the overdetermined "O" of "Still Life," and in a less complicated admission which opens the poem "In Time of Plague":

> My thoughts are crowded with death
> and it draws so oddly on the sexual
> that I am confused
> confused to be attracted

by, in effect, my own annihilation. (59)

In this passage according to Gregory Woods "the very nature of desire has...become embroiled in the crisis" (162), a crisis both of bodies and of language. If Gunn can teach and encourage others to write and to read the unique sense--Levinas's "le sens"--in a space "situated," to reiterate Savoy's phrase "either in silence or the far side of language" (82), an area between life and death, apprehension and comprehension, reality and fantasy might be located and exploited. Deborah Landau has helpfully characterized Gunn's textual project: "By exposing the anguish and suffering brought on by AIDS, Gunn chooses an aesthetic strategy that might inspire empathy from readers" (Landau 199) who may or may not have themselves mourned the loss of loved ones to AIDS. Here is Gunn's ethical service: an attempt to inscribe the other as other, both lovable and mortal within the rigorous forms of traditional prosody. He attempts to write the conventionally illegible and thereby rewrite the ostensibly "diseased" discourses of AIDS.

E. "I Do Not Want You Ever to Die": Mark Doty's Alexandria

Mark Doty is a formalist, although his forms--rhythms, rhyme schemes--tend to be much looser, more fluid, and more experimental than Gunn's. As in Gunn, a strong emphasis is placed on artifice, constructedness; beauty is often made possible in his poems through human effort. What Robert Martin has characterized as Doty's "praise for the artificial" (Homosexual 277) is evident in poems ranging from "A Replica of the Parthenon"--the first poem in Doty's first collection, Turtle, Swan (1987)--to the poems

included in his most recent book, Sweet Machine (1998). "Favrile," the first in the latter collection, celebrates any artistic achievement

> which begins in limit
> (where else might our work
> begin?) and ends in grace,
> or at least extravagance. (Sweet 6)

The word "grace," with its spiritual connotations, represents well the mystical ambitions of Doty's work, typically undercut, as here, by a sense of queer campiness or "extravagance." For Doty the material is intertwined with the spiritual; it is the combination, ordering, and reverence of these that can produce art. One inevitably thinks here of the late, baroque Yeats and his praise of the mystical aspects and potentially exquisite beauty of artifice in poems such as "Sailing to Byzantium" (Yeats 102-03). Other poets pertinent to Doty's textual project include Whitman and Crane (see Martin 275-76) and Constantin Cavafy (see below). Doty's poems, textual objets d'art, in his 1993 My Alexandria will constitute our primary focus. These illustrate the trajectory from "limit" to "grace," particularly as examples of AIDS elegies that both anticipate and commemorate the death of Doty's partner Wally Roberts, who died in the same year that the book was published. The collection is, significantly, dedicated "for Wally."

Pertinent to Doty's notion of "extravagance" is Levinas's concept of "excessiveness," particularly our excessive, pressing, infinite responsibility to the other:

> The priority of the other over the I, by which the human being-there is chosen and unique, is precisely the latter's response to the nakedness of the face and its mortality. It is there that the concern for the other's death is

> realized, and that 'dying for him,' 'dying his death' takes priority over 'authentic' death. Not a post-mortem life, but the excessiveness of sacrifice, holiness in charity and mercy. This future of death in the present of love is probably one of the original secrets of temporality itself and beyond all metaphor. (Levinas, "Dying" 217)

Wally's death, in some cases past, in others future, is the preoccupation of much of Doty's verse. By utilizing poetry as a mode of testifying to his love for Wally before and beyond death, Doty strives to supersede "authentic" death. Through his textual constructions and self-conscious use of artifice, Doty asserts the priority of the beloved other over himself, substituting himself in the Levinasian sense for his deceased lover. In contrast to the classicist Gunn, Doty often engages in this process with little to no distance from his subject-matter, in a distinctly Romantic, effusive, loosely-ordered vein.

Helen Vendler has aptly associated Doty's poetry with the American tradition of transcendentalism (see Vendler 100-01), and certainly Doty's sense of the spirit emerges from a committed pantheism related to the Romanticism and neo-Platonism of this nineteenth-century school. He argues, for example, in a 1994 essay, "Sweet Chariot" that "our wind, our glimmering horizon and sun, the watchful seals and a face full of snow seem to me to have far more to do with the life of the spirit" than does his "local [Unitarian] church's square jaw-boned New England architecture" ("Sweet" 24). The soul is understood by him in terms of the elemental process of fire: "small, our flames are, though to us raging, essential" ("Sweet" 24). For Doty there is something within or about every human that is essential and immortal, something traditionally called a soul, and referred to by him in a recent (2000) poem as:

Not a bud

or a cinder, not a seed

or a spark: something else:

obdurate, specific, insoluble.

Something in us does not erode. (Doty, "Manhattan" 130)

It is Doty's conviction regarding this primary essence that allows him to find, as in the traditional elegy, consolation at least eventually, even amongst the ruins of his love and life. Certainly this spiritual sense pervades Doty's well-known memoir Heaven's Coast (1997), which rhetorically asks, "What does a writer do, when the world collapses, but write?"

And indeed this writing serves a purpose beyond therapy, healing, and consolation for its author. As Doty asserts in a published exchange between himself and the poet, critic, and editor J.D. McClatchy: "[true poets] are in the end responsible to the community. The ways in which that responsibility is played out are much more subtle and complex than simply a matter of telling the community what it already knows, or what it wants to hear--which is the danger of some political poetry" (Doty and McClatchy 5). For Doty, the poet is responsible, excessively, not only to the specific, beloved other, or "lover," but his reader generally, here understood in terms of a gay "community." He continues: "Yeats or Rilke or Auden didn't give their times what the times wanted, but I think they gave something necessary, a poetry which made possible for readers to see themselves differently, to name the conditions of their experience" (Doty and McClatchy 5). It is this "seeing...differently" for which Doty strives in his elegiac writing; he seeks a

transmutation of mourning into love and love into mourning. This is a quantum leap, to be sure, and both time-old ("anarchic" Levinas would say) and postmodern. Doty's project is related to myths such as alchemy, in which base metals can become gold, or "limit" can become "grace." But there is also a connection here to Einsteinian, relativistic physics, in which, through a seemingly magical formula akin to E=mc2, matter can become energy, and Doty's lover Wally can become reincarnate in a seal, as in Heaven's Coast, or in a meadow that is also the ocean that speaks a unique language, as in "Becoming a Meadow" (My Alexandria 74-76).

In attempting to combine the material and the spiritual, Doty likewise seeks to fuse the political and the aesthetic. He clearly sees his verse as responsible to a larger community, charged politically, as is evident in his exchange with McClatchy and elsewhere, as in for example a 1998 interview with Mark Wunderlich: "When I talk about political poetry, I mean that work which is attentive to the way an individual sense of identity is shaped by collision with the collective, how one's sense of self is defined through encounter with the social world" (qtd. in Wunderlich). Such an encounter is the subject of an early poem collected in Turtle, Swan, "Charlie Howard's Descent." The title refers to a teenager who was thrown from a bridge into the Kenduskeag River by three other young men in Bangor, Maine, in 1984. He died both because "he could not meet/ a little town's demands" (Turtle 67)--that is, because he was gay--and because "he couldn't swim" (Turtle 69). In this poem Doty seeks to commemorate the passing of Howard, from this world perhaps into an-other, and to exhort his reader to anger at least, if not action.

The poem begins with Howard's fall "through a huge portion of night" (Turtle 67), from the bridge to the river, understood by the poet's voice in terms of the life-long process of "falling" undergone by this young gay man:

> Over and over
> he slipped into the gulf
> between what he knew and how
> he was known. What others wanted
>
> opened like an abyss: the laughing
> stock-clerks at the grocery, women
> at the luncheonette amused by his gestures. (Turtle 67)

The cause of his fallenness is implicitly traced back to the pervasive homophobia of Bangor, and, one assumes, small-town America generally. He falls, that is, through no fault of his own, "because he could not meet/ a little town's demands" (Turtle 67). He is insultingly labeled as "faggot" and "queer" simply because of being who he is, because "his wrists/ were as limp as they were" (Turtle 67), because of his identity as effeminate and therefore, in the eyes of the residents of Bangor, gay.

Nevertheless, Doty's speaker insists, in his fall,

> despite whatever awkwardness
> his flailing arms and legs assume
> he is beautiful
>
> and like any good diver

has only an edge of fear

he transforms into grace. (Turtle 68)

In anticipation of the move from "limit" to "grace" or "extravagance" explored in "Favrile," in this poem Doty describes Howard's transformation from "fear" to "grace," and, as the rest of the poem suggests, a concomitant passing from a material life to a spiritual. Doty's speaker imagines Howard in some disembodied fashion climbing "back up the ladder of his fall" (Turtle 69) to forgive his killers, to tell them "it's all right, that he knows/ they didn't believe him/ when he said he couldn't swim" (Turtle 69). Indeed, Howard, or at least his spirit, "blesses his killers" (Turtle 69). In this encounter between an ostracized, gay-identified young man and his homophobic community, forgiveness or "bless[ing]" is a real possibility, at least on the part of the young victim of a hate crime who has been transformed through death from flesh to spirit in the imagination of the poet. For the rest of us, however, reconciliation is likely thwarted by the necessity of a politically engaged response to Howard's murder, as the poem's speaker suggests in the elegy's final two lines. Howard blesses "in the way that only the dead/ can afford to forgive" (Turtle 69). The living, it seems, have other, implicitly political, responsibilities.

As in Lynch's "Yellow Kitchen Gloves," although less explicitly activist in its response to social injustice, "Charlie Howard's Descent" seeks consolation in protest. Doty's poem encourages its reader, as in much post-holocaust discourse that insists "never forget," to change social structures in a way that might disallow or diminish homophobic violence, especially in the context of small-town America. Unlike Lynch or Monette or Gunn, Doty also finds reassurance in the possibility of a spiritual rebirth after death, as in traditional, and traditionally Christian, elegiac writing, notably in the

homoerotic elegies of Tennyson and Hopkins. As in Merrill's "Country of a Thousand Years of Peace" and later Ouija poems, Doty imagines in "Charlie Howard's Descent" a spirit-world beyond death, although Merrill's characteristic irony is missing, at least from this particular poem.

As a homoerotic elegist of the 1980s and 1990s, Doty imagines death, as do so many other poets of his generation, in terms of both homophobic violence and death from AIDS. In the title poem of Turtle, Swan, written in 1984, Doty imagines his lover Wally dying of AIDS, like so many other gay men: "the first symptoms, the night sweat/ or casual flu, and then the wasting begins/ and the disappearance a day at a time" (Turtle 23). As Doty noted in his 1994 interview with Michael Klein:

> An early poem about AIDS, "Turtle, Swan," is basically about reading these terrible stories in the newspapers and feeling like this could happen in my life, my lover could have AIDS. I wrote that in 1984 and now its seems darkly prescient. It was a subject in a sense of something I apprehended at a distance. Gradually, it moved closer in, when I found myself writing elegies for friends or acquaintances. The real shift happened when it became not a subject for me, but a part of my subjectivity, a part of my daily life. (qtd. in Klein, "That" 21)

The death from AIDS of the other, as it moves "closer" to Doty--from the printed stories in the newspaper to the bodies of friends to the body of Wally--becomes "a part" of Doty himself, of his own "subjectivity." It moves thus from "authentic" death to imagined or "inauthentic" death, as Levinas would have it, from the other to the self. Doty's AIDS elegies record this narrative movement--from other to self--suggesting that death ought

indeed to be understood in terms of Miteinandersein--being-with-and-for-the-other, that death means nothing outside of the context of love, and more than everything within it.

An exemplary AIDS elegy for a friend or acquaintance by Doty is "Tiara," collected in Bethlehem in Broad Daylight (1991). Beret Strong has argued that this is one of those poems that "redeem sexual and emotional desire" (132); for James Miller it presents, in anastatic fashion, "an erotic defiance of death clearly prompted by an awakening to life" (J. Miller, "Dante" 285). The poem recounts, in what Miller terms "a form of terza rhyma without the rhymes" (J. Miller, "Dante" 285), the death of a drag queen named Peter, who "died in a paper tiara/ cut from a book of princess paper dolls" (Bethlehem 34). A tone of queer camp is palpable, particularly in the extravagance of Peter's love for "royalty" (Bethlehem 34), undercut by the fact that his death-headress is made not from precious metals and jewels but "paper," as is indeed Doty's extravagant textual commemoration of Peter's death. "Tiara" the poem, as material object, consists of paper and ink. The artifice here is both the stock-and-trade of a drag queen and of a poet. Mourners at Peter's closed-casket funeral suggest that the corpse is likely bedecked with "a big wig/ and heels" (Bethlehem 34); the poem's humor is thus, and appropriately, gallows.

In the second half of the poem, the speaker imagines a heaven into which Peter might be reborn:

> I think heaven is a perfect stasis
> poised over the realms of desire,
>
> where dreaming and waking men lie

on the grass while wet horses

roam among them, huge fragments

of the music we die into

in the body's paradise. (Bethlehem 35)

Certainly this image of life after death is erotically charged, suggested most explicitly by the Freudian "wet horses." In the imagination of the poetic voice, death is seen not as a transcendence of desire in the traditional sense, but as an overflow or excendence of it, "the body's paradise." The body is transfigured but not over-thrown, moved beyond but not sloughed-off. The term that immediately comes to mind is "resurrection," in the sense of a rejuvenation and transformation of both body and soul.

For all its spiritual, even mystical, ambitions, however, Doty's poem maintains a political edge. The poem's speaker records that "someone" at the funeral said Peter "asked for it":

Asked for it--

when all he did was go down

into the salt tide

of wanting as much as he wanted,

giving himself over so drunk

or stoned it almost didn't matter who,

though they were beautiful,

stampeding into him in the simple,

ravishing music of their hurry. (Bethlehem 34-35)

The poet's voice refuses to judge Peter for his promiscuous life and thereby thwarts any division of people with AIDS into "innocent" and "guilty" victims. The "music" that leads Peter to the bodies of other men and leads them "into him" is the same celestial tune that he will hear in Doty's heaven. The poem ends with the question "what could he do, / what could any of us ever do/ but ask for it?" (Bethlehem 35). To fault humans for seeking the pleasure of the fulfilment of their desires is, the poet insists, to fault all humans. The political message is thus something like that of Queer Nation activism: "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it."

In My Alexandria Doty turns his attention to the sickness and death of Wally Roberts, and he brings to this theme both his emphasis on the beauty of artifice and his political edge. The collection explores the geography of suffering, death, and desire via the trope of the Egyptian Alexandria. Doty's Alexandria is the city of the Greek-Egyptian poet Constantin Cavafy (1863-1933), whose wistful, melancholic, and powerful poems were first introduced to the English-speaking world by his friend E.M. Forster. Doty's debt to his homoerotic forebear is first acknowledged in Turtle, Swan through the poem "To Cavafy." Cavafy is characterized in this poem as an inscriber of "desire," particularly male-male desire (Turtle 62). The cover of My Alexandria features an all-male group sitting and standing amidst the rubble of what may be (judging from the English-language signs on the remnant of a wall) London during or immediately after the blitz or San Franciso after its great earthquake. In either case the image connects the title of this collection not just to Cavafy's Alexandria but to ruin, perhaps modern ruin, generally.

The possible representations of London and San Francisco on the cover of Doty's collection associate his Alexandria obliquely (in the first case) to the Second World War, a common tropic association for the "war against AIDS," and (in the second case) to the city of Harvey Milk and gay activism, of "fruits and nuts," as my father likes to put it.

The poem "Chanteuse" in this book refers and alludes to Cavafy, and attempts to characterize his work:

Cavafy ends a poem

of regret and desire--he had no other theme
than memory's erotics, his ashen atmosphere--
by going out onto a balcony

"to change my thoughts at least
by seeing something of this city I love,
a little movement in the streets,

in the shops." That was all it took
to console him, some token of Alexandria's
anarchic life. (My Alexandria 27)

The theme of Doty's poem, as well as that (for Doty) of Cavafy's, is consolation in anarchy--"Alexandria's/ anarchic life." As in Levinas, "anarchy" here suggests a truth beyond (conventional) language: "Anarchy is not disorder as opposed to order.... Anarchy troubles being over and beyond these alternatives. It brings to a halt the

ontological play which, precisely qua play, is consciousness, where being is lost and found again, and thus illuminated" (Levinas, Beyond 168; see also chapter 2i). Something outside of the self and the consciousness of the self illuminates, underlies, and transcends the self. In discovering this, and in recording this discovery as poetry, both Doty and Cavafy attempt to use artifice to arrive at something genuine, subjectivity to arrive at objectivity, the fact of an other beyond the self, at least as it is usually construed.

The occasion for Doty's rumination on Cavafy in this poem is the memory of a "crowded bar" in Boston in which "A beautiful black drag queen" sang for Mark and Wally (My Alexandria 26). "Her" voice, though falsetto, was "entirely believable" (My Alexandria 26). As David Jarraway has pointed out, the appearance of drag queens in Doty's work "underscores further the provisionality of gender categories" (Jarraway 175), the artificiality of categories such as masculine and feminine along with much else in Doty's Alexandria and other queer geographies. The "song" of the gender-bending diva is in fact directly associated by Doty with his Cavafyesque inflection of "Alexandria." "Mark" (whom we shall now call Doty's speaker) directly addresses Wally in the last lines of the poem:

her song: my Alexandria

my romance, my magnolia
distilling lamplight, my backlit glory
of the wigshops, my haze

and glow, my torch, my skyrocket,

my city, my false,

my splendid chanteuse. (My Alexandria 29).

The song is figuratively and literally a "torch": for a poet who understand the soul as a "raging, essential" flame (Doty, "Sweet" 24), a torch-song is inherently a song of the soul, the part of humanity that does not erode or die. Doty's--and his chanteuse's--song is similar to the cry of rage that ends Monette's Love Alone: "they couldn't stop singing and we were the song" (Love 65). The difference is however crucial. In Monette's spiritually arid world the song of love sung to his deceased lover Rog is irredeemably a funeral dirge. Doty's "song"--with all its tropic associations--Alexandria, romance, lamplight, wigshop, torch, etc.--testifies to the transcendence of love, or really its transcendence of any conventional, cheap, trite, or ontological transcendence.

"Memory" concerns not only the past for Doty, as in Monette, but the present and future as well, "the future of death in the present of love"(Levinas, "Dying" 217), the fact that death is "never now" or even "then," but always "irretrievably beyond experience...utterly unknowable," always to come (Levinas, Totality 72, 31). As long as love exists in the present, that is, death is deferred; this is the consolation available to Doty but not to Monette. Doty's brazen use of trope in "Chanteuse" and elsewhere further emphasizes his conviction of a language beyond metaphor. The purity of his poetics emerges not from simplicity and directness, as in Fries and Gunn, but in its very excessive artifice, that which paradoxically lays bare a genuineness behind, within, above it. Here is not atheism, or a mystical, Zen nihilism, or a perfect classicism, but a theism invigorated by a-theism, a notion of a God-in-passing or God-as-trace. Levinas: "It is not by superlatives that we can think of God, but by trying to identify the particular

interhuman events which open towards transcendence and reveal the traces where God has passed" ("Ethics" 67). Doty too understands divinity in terms of specificity, the traces of God in the face and corporeal reality of the beloved other: "in the principle of things expressing itself in splendid specificity, a handful of images: a lover's irreplaceable body, the roil and shimmer of sea overshot with sunlight, a handful of cherries, the texture and weight of a word" (Doty, "Sweet" 24). Doty's final emphasis on textuality suggests that behind the language of ontology, of "the codes and laws" ("Sweet" 24), is a truer language tinged, even "bless[d]" with divinity. Levinas, as we have seen, calls this "le sens," Derrida "primitive meaning" (White 211). For Doty it is "grace," the authentic found only within artifice, "the texture and weight of a word." I do not mean here to posit an influence on Doty of Levinas, phenomenology, or poststructuralism, but a resonance and affinity.

"The Wings" in My Alexandria illustrates helpfully this affiliation. Deborah Landau has argued that in this poem "Doty gestures towards unbounded experience by locating himself in an epistemological space between the boundaries of the social order and the unimaginable" (Landau 214). He attempts to speak, that is, in a space between humanity ("the social order") and infinity ("the unimaginable"). Inspired by a variety of memories, including one of a display of part of the Names Project quilt (My Alexandria 44-45), the poet conjures up an "angel." Its voice, like that of the poet's, speaks mostly in loose tetrameter, and describes heaven:

The rule

of earth is attachment:

here what can't be held

is. You die by dying

into what matters, which will kill you,

but first it'll be enough. Or more than that:

your story, which you have worn away

as you shaped it,

which has become itself

as it has disappeared. (My Alexandria 51)

Doty, in his angelic voice, and suggesting nothing so much as one of Merrill's disembodied spirits from The Changing Light at Sandover, rehearses his trajectory from limit to grace, from artifice to authenticity, from metaphoricity to pure speech. His language--his "story"--has "become itself" as "it has disappeared," has "worn away" as the poet has "shaped" it. Behind it is left nothing--these lines end the poem--and everything, an infinity beyond language as it is usually understood, beyond the binaristic hall of mirrors that underlies ontology.

"Difference," also from My Alexandria, emphasizes the role of trope in this process of the extinction of trope and the creation of meaning beyond it, or "birth" (My Alexandria 50). In this poem the subject is a school of jellyfish whose appearances are so extravagant that they defy description, or at least bald description: "This one a rolled condom, or a plastic purse swallowing itself,/ that one a Tiffany shade, this a troubled parasol" (My Alexandria 53). The tumult of metaphors, suggesting simultaneously a Whitmanian catalog and a Wildean, discursive rhapsody, is so layered and diverse that the

traditional stability of tenor and vehicle is undermined, as it is very differently by Fries and Gunn in their implied metaphors, stripped of pretence and convention. Indeed for Doty, the collapse of metaphoricity under its own weight in this poem becomes the subject of the poem itself:

> nothing but trope,
>
> nothing but something
> forming itself into figures,
> then refiguring,
>
> sheer ectoplasm
> recognizable only as the stuff
>
> of metaphor. What can words do
>
> but link what we know
> to what we don't,
> and so form a shape? (My Alexandria 53)

Doty suggests that as a result of the metaphoric process of making "something" from "nothing" a "shape" is formed; this serves a "link" between what is known, potentially comprehensible, and "what we don't" know, that which is beyond intellect and can thus only be apprehended or imagined. The title of this poem, "Difference," might well suggest an awareness of Derrida's "differance"--the insight that signifiers refer to other signifiers

to the horizon of infinity, and therefore that "tout autre est tout autre" (Derrida, Gift 68). If "every other is every bit other," if every jellyfish is a condom, purse, Tiffany shade, parasol, etc., ad infinitum, then every self is dependent on every other. Our primary responsibility is to that other upon whom my existence depends.

Therefore Doty finds the beloved--living and dying--everywhere; Wally, disintegrating bodily, becomes almost literally everything. The beloved in this way cannot "really" ever be lost; everything on earth becomes, potentially, a trope for Wally. In "Becoming a Meadow," for example, Wally is bookstore and meadow and ocean, the latter two fused as in H.D.'s imagistic "Oread" or Virginia Woolf's The Waves. Again we return to the signifier "O," as in Gunn's "Still Life": "Yesterday morning we walked a beach where tide angled/ and broke in beautiful loops, the waves'/ endless rows of bold cursive/ one atop the other, scrawling an exercise page/ of Os in a copybook the world's never tired of" (My Alexandria 74). Here "O" is apostrophic sigh and signifier, infinity and "O"ther. Likewise, "a meadow accepts itself as various, allows/ some parts of itself to always be going away" (My Alexandria 75). Language, earth, and ocean are here confused and intermingled, seen not as stasis but energy, potentially heaven or anastasis. Waves dissolve "only to swell again, like the baskets of bread/ and fish in the story, the miracle baskets" (My Alexandria 76). The allusion is to one of Christ's miracles of multiplication in the Biblical Gospels, foreshadowings of the resurrection and redemption. Wally is associated with all of the images in Doty's poem--language, ocean, meadow, miracle--because he is Doty's poem, the transcendent signified behind all of his writing. We thus return to a kind of pathetic fallacy, in which all of the world, unwittingly, reflects Mark and Wally's mutual love.

Doty's form emphasizes this interlocking of signifier and signified, mimesis and reality, language and the world, life and death. His rhyme scheme is a persistent but subtle A-B-A B-C-B C-D-C etc., as in the end-rhymes of the first three stanzas: "town"-"season"-"down" "frozen"-"souvenirs"-"million" "pier"-"rings"-"nowhere." The stanzas intermingle and "roll," one into another, like ocean waves. The poem ends with an emphasis on the cycle of life and death and new life common in the elegiac tradition, at least before modernism:

> And if one wave breaking says
> "You're dying," then the rhythm and shift of the whole
> says nothing about endings, and half the shawling head
>
> of each wave's spume pours into the trough
> of the one before,
> and half blows away in spray, backward toward the open sea. (My Alexandria 76)

The rhyme scheme breaks down, significantly, particularly in these last two stanzas, as the poet imagines his passing lover moving "toward the open sea," perhaps to a transcendence of the very transcendent cycles that have traditionally underlied elegiac writing, to something like Levinasian excendence.

My Alexandria ends, however, with the failure of consolation in the poem "Lament-Heaven," in which the poet critiques his own spiritual beliefs, his faith in the cycles of life and death: "if we are continuous,/ rippling from nothing into being,/ then why can't we let ourselves go/ into the world's shimmering story?/ Who can become lost

in a narrative,/ if all he can think of is its end?" (My Alexandria 83). What the speaker of this poem discovers is that these questions have no simple answers. The possibility that he arrives at, indeed, is the radical alterity of everything, that the "song" of the universe is beyond both self and other, even love. "God" in this formulation is always necessarily missed or absent, or possibly overly and overwhelmingly present. The poet's voice sympathizes with a prisoner at SingSing who once posted on the penitentiary bulletin board "God's not dead. I can 'feel' him/ all over me" (My Alexandria 85). The speaker further claims that he has "felt" a similar "godliness"

> around me, in the enormous church
>
> in Copley Square, under the gold-ribbed vault
>
> pierced by figured windows.
>
> A girl, twelve maybe, was playing the violin,
>
> rapturously, though I suppose for her
>
> it was not trance but discipline
>
> that made the music gather and then tumble
>
> like water collecting in a fountain,
>
> all hesitation and sudden release. (My Alexandria 86-87)

This music is "discipline[d]" and is simultaneously the anarchic sounds of the unconscious, of a "trance," both "gathering" and "tumbling," creating and destroying.

It thus becomes for the poet the answer to "the little human cry/ at the heart of the elegy,/ "Oh why aren't I what I wanted to be,/ exempt from history?" (My Alexandria 88). The answer is that the music "doesn't need you to continue./ Do you understand me?/ I heard it, the music/ that could not go on without us,/ and I was inconsolable" (My Alexandria 89). The music, in other words, can go on without Wally. This music of the spheres, transcendent tune, God beyond ontology overarches both being and nonbeing, Wally's and Mark's both. The failure of consolation here is thus not that of the melancholic modernists or of an AIDS elegist such as Paul Monette. It is rather the knowledge that something or some-not-thing transcends transcendence that makes Mark realize that beyond the being of any one individual is the "music" that goes on infinitely. This "music" is, however, and crucially, constructed, produced, performed. As a conceit that extends throughout Doty's poetry, it insists upon a movement from "limit" to "grace," even at the expense of the extinction of the self and the love of the self for the other.

It is at this point that My Alexandria ends, in ruins beyond ruins, intimating that the God-who-is-passing is indeed the God-who-never-comes, like a train one always just misses. What Doty indeed finally discovers in this tribute to his beloved is the inherent "taint" of love" on earth and even in the human imagination. After this text Doty writes another "to Wally," Atlantis (1995), in which a new--but still queer--geographic space is explored, one of the mythic, lost, submerged continent of Greek myth. This text is punctuated by elegies, most notably "Grosse Fugue" and "Nocturne in Black and Gold," both of which return to the trope of the song, the fugue for which there is "no resolution" (Atlantis 26) in the former poem, and in the latter the "dizzying pour" of the "voice

becoming no one's" (Atlantis 96), the voice, that is, of Mozart's Queen of the Night. But this collection, like the later Sweet Machine, proves nothing except that indeed the song will go on--after Wally's death and even after the death of Mark's love for Wally--the song that is of Doty's verse. It seems most appropriate therefore to leave Doty in his Alexandria, and to end this study there, in the realization that the poet will love again, that love is inevitably tainted by the anarchic underpinnings of the human situation, of selfishness. Doty, like Levinas, points out the usefulness of poetic mimesis: to serve and reverence the other as other; to testify to his or her passing (in this he or she is like, or really as, God); to keep him or her alive as long as possible and by any and all means; to transcend both signifier and signified, even "AIDS" and AIDS.

Conclusion.

A Different Country

My mother and I went to the clinic together.
A week later I am lying on the grass,
watching the clouds brood on me.
We need eyes in the tops of our heads,

I think. I catch the outdated scent
of pine and remember that a friend of mine
has planted more trees than God could count.
I pull up a blade of grass, one blade,

and roll it between my fingers
and think how lucky it is to die.
My mother emerges from the house
with pears and apples on a tray.

Simon once told me that we all count
instinctively in our mother tongue;
I know that people often revert to the language
of their childhood soon before they die.

Towards the end my grandmother
spoke only seldom and only Ruthenian.
She was very distracted, far away,
as if she were hearing some ancient melody.

I wonder: Does the God who has numbered
our days and the hairs on our heads
speak to us only at the end and
in the language of a different country?

Works Cited

Abelove, Henry, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, eds. The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Adams, James Eli. "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw: Nature and the Feminine in Tennyson and Darwin." Victorian Studies 33 (1989): 7-27.

Aristotle. The Basic Works of Aristotle. Ed. Richard McKeon. New York: Random, 1941.

Bersani, Leo. "Is the Rectum a Grave?" Crimp, AIDS 197-222.

Buckley, Jerome Hamilton, and George Benjamin Woods. Poetry of the Victorian Period. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1965.

Butler, Judith. Bodies that Matter: On the Dicursive Limits of "Sex." New York: Routledge, 1993.

Campo, Rafael. "AIDS and the Poetry of Healing." Kenyon Review 15.4 (1993): 93-100.

---. What the Body Told. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

Caputo, John D. The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.

Cohen, Richard A. "What Good is the Holocaust: On Suffering and Evil." Philosophy Today 40 (1991): 176-83.

Cole, Henri. The Look of Things. New York: Knopf, 1995.

---. Review of The Man with Night Sweats. By Thom Gunn. Nation (31 Aug. 1992): 231.

Coote, Stephen, ed. The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse. London: Penguin, 1986.

Coyle, Hugh. "Life on the Coastline: The OITM Interview with Poet Mark Doty." Out in the Mountains. <Http:///www/vtpride.org/april/doty.htm>.

Crane, Hart. Complete Poems of Hart Crane. Ed. Marc Simon. New York: Liveright, 1986.

---. "Modern Poetry." The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose. Ed. Brom Weber. Garden City: Doubleday, 1966. 175-79.

Crimp, Douglas, ed. AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1988.

---. "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/ Cultural Activism." Crimp, AIDS 3-16.

Critchley, Simon. The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida & Levinas. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

---. Introduction to "Is Ontology Fundamental?" By Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas, Basic 1-2.

Cuadros, Gil. City of God. San Francisco: City Lights, 1994.

Davis, Colin. Levinas: An Introduction. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1996.

Dellamora, Richard. Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994.

---. Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990.

Derrida, Jacques. "Adieu." Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Philosophy Today 40 (1996): 334-40.

---. Dissemination. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.

---. The Gift of Death. Trans. David Wills. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.

---. "The Law of Genre." Trans. Avital Ronell. Acts of Literature. Ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992. 223-52.

---. "Signature Event Context." Trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Limited Inc. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988. 172-97.

---. "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy." Margins of Philosophy. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982. 207-271.

---. "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas." Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978. 79-153.

Dixon, Melvin. Love's Instruments. Chicago: Tia Chucha, 1995.

Dlugos, Tim. Powerless: Selected Poems 1973-1990. New York: High Risk, 1996.

Donne, John. John Donne's Poetry. Ed. A.L. Clements. New York: Norton, 1966.

Doty, Mark. Atlantis. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

---. Bethlehem in Broad Daylight. Boston: Godine, 1991.

---. Heaven's Coast: A Memoir. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

---. "Manhattan: Luminism." London Review of Books (20 Jan. 2000): 13.

---. My Alexandria. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1993.

---. "Sweet Chariot." Provincetown Arts (1994): 22-24.

---. Sweet Machine. New York: HarperCollins, 1998.

---. Turtle, Swan. Boston: Godine, 1987.

Doty, Mark, and J.D. McClatchy. "Art and Identity." James White Review (Winter 1999): 5-8.

Eberhart, Richard. Collected Poems 1930-1986. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Edelman, Lee. Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory. New York: Routledge, 1994.

---. Transmemberment of Song: Hart Crane's Anatomies of Rhetoric and Desire. Stanfod: Stanford UP, 1987.

Eisner, Douglas. "Liberating Narrative: AIDS and the Limits of Melodrama in Monette and Weir." College Literature 24 (1997): 213-24.

Eliot, T.S. Collected Poems 1909-1962. Boston: Faber, 1974.

Erni, John Nguyet. Unstable Frontiers: Technomedicine and the Cultural Politics of "Curing" AIDS. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994.

Feldman, Alan. Frank O'Hara. Boston: Twayne, 1979.

Fenton, James. "On the Frontier." New York Review (29 Feb. 1996): 52-53.

Foucault, Michel. The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Vintage- Random, 1994.

---. The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction. Trans Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage-Random, 1990.

---. The History of Sexuality. Volume 3: The Care of the Self. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage-Random, 1987.

---. Discipline and Punish. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage-Random, 1985.

Fredrick, David. "Reading Broken Skin: Violence in Roman Elegy." Hallett and Skinner 172-93.

Freud, Sigmund. Collected Papers. 5 vols. Ed. and trans. Joan Riviere. New York: Basic Books, 1959.

Fries, Kenny. "AIDS and Its Metaphors: A Conversation with Susan Sontag." Conversations with Susan Sontag. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995. 255-60.

---. Anesthesia. Louisville, KY: Advocado, 1996.

---. Body, Remember: A Memoir. New York: Dutton, 1997.

---. The Healing Notebooks. Berkeley: Open Books, 1990.

Gewanter, David. "An Interview with Thom Gunn." Agni 36 (1992): 289-309.

Giles, Paul. "From Myth into History: The Late Poetry of Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes." Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism. Ed. James Acheson and Romana Huk. Albany: State U of New York P, 1996. 143-73.

Ginsberg, Allen. Collected Poems 1947-1980. New York: Harper, 1984.

Glazier, Lyle. "Thom Gunn." Credences 3 (1985): 155-62.

Grover, Jan Zita. "AIDS: Keywords." The State of the Language. Ed. Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.

Guignon, Charles. The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Gunn, Thom. Collected Poems. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994.

Hallett, Judith P., anad Marilyn B. Skinner, eds. Roman Sexualities. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.

Hammer, Langdon. "Art and AIDS: or, How Will Culture Cure You?" Raritan 14.3 (1995): 103-18.

Hansel, Georges. "Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995)." Philosophy Today 40 (1999): 121-25.

Harper, Philip Brian. "Eloquence and Epitaph: Black Nationalism and the Homophobic Impulse in Responses to the Death of Max Robinson." Abelove, Barale, Halperin 159-75.

Hartman, Stephanie. "'Still Here': Paul Monette and the Politics of the AIDS Elegy." Poetry and the Public Sphere: The Conference on Contemporary Poetry. 24-27 Apr. 1997 <http://english.rutgers.edu/still.htm>.

Haughton, Hugh. Review of The Man with Night Sweats. By Thom Gunn. Times Literary Supplement (1 May 1992): 12.

Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962.

Hoffman, Piotr. "Death, Time, History: Division II of Being and Time." Guignon 195-214.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. "Epithalamion." Hopkins, Poetical 195-97.

---. "The Loss of the Eurydice." Hopkins, Poetical 149-52.

---. The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Ed. Norman H. Mackenzie. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Hulse, Michael. "The Repossession of Innocence: The Poetry of Thom Gunn." Quadrant (1983): 65-69.

Hutcheon, Linda. A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory Fiction. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.

Jarman, Derek. Blue: Text of a Film by Derek Jarman. Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1993.

Jarrell, Randall. The Complete Poems. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969.

Jay, Martin. Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Kennedy, Ian H.C. "In Memoriam and the Tradition of Pastoral Elegy." Victorian Poetry 18 (1977): 351-66.

Klein, Michael. 1990. Provincetown, MA: Provincetown Arts, 1993.

---, ed. Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Poets Respond to AIDS. New York: Persea, 1989.

---. "'That Which Is Left Is Who I Am': A Talk with Mark Doty." Provincetown Arts (1994): 18-21, 131-34.

Koestenbaum, Wayne. Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Kruger, Steven F. AIDS Narratives: Gender and Sexuality, Fiction and Science. New York: Garland, 1996.

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. On Death and Dying. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Landau, Barbara. "'How to Live. What to Do.': The Poetics and Politics of AIDS." American Literature 68 (1996): 193-225.

Larkin, Joan. Cold River. New York: Painted Leaf, 1997.

Lash, Scott. "Postmodern Ethics: The Missing Ground." Theory, Culture & Society 13.2 (1996): 91-104.

Levinas, Emmanuel. Basic Philosophical Writings. (Basic.) Ed. and trans. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996.

---. De l'évasion. Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1982.

---. "Diachrony and Representation." Entre. 165-77.

---. Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism. (Difficult.) Trans. Seán Hand. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.

---. "Dying for...." Entre. 207-17.

---. Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other. (Entre.) Trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.

---. "Essence and Disinterestedness." Basic 109-27.

---. "Ethics of the Infinite." Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987. 49-69.

---. "God and Philosophy." Basic. 129-148.

---. "Is Ontology Fundamental?" Basic 2-10.

---. "Meaning and Sense." Basic 34-64.

---. "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights." Difficult 151-53.

---. Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence. Trans. Alphonsus Lingus. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.

---. "Poetry and the Impossible." Difficult 127-32.

---. Proper Names. Trans. Michael B. Smith. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996.

---. "Reality and Its Shadow." Collected Philosophical Papers. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.

---. "Substitution." Basic 80-95.

---. Time and the Other. Trans Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1987.

---. The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology. Trans. André Orianne. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973.

---. Totality and Infinity. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969.

Liu, Timothy. Burnt Offerings. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon, 1995.

---. Say Goodnight. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon, 1998.

Llewelyn, John. Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Lynch, Michael. "Living with Kaposi's." Body Politic (November 1982): 88.

---. These Waves of Dying Friends. New York: Contact II, 1989.

Lyotard, Jean-François. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. 1979. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.

Martin, Robert K. "'Braced against the wind': Thom Gunn's Selected Poems." Modern Poetry Studies 11 (1983): 221-32.

---, ed. The Continuing Presence of Walt Whitman: The Life after the Life. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1992.

---. The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry. Expanded ed. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1998.

McCann, Richard. Ghost Letters. Cambridge, MA: Alice James, 1994.

McClatchy, J.D. "Monsters Wrapped in Silk: 'The Country of a Thousand Years of Peace.'" James Merrill. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1985. 127-47.

Merrill, James. "Farewell Performance." Klein, ed. 165-66.

---. Selected Poems 1946-1985. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Miller, James. "Dante on Fire Island: Reinventing Heaven in the AIDS Elegy." Murphy and Poirier 265-305.

Miller, James E., Jr. The American Quest for Supreme Fiction: Whitman's Legacy in the Personal Epic. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979.

---. Leaves of Grass: America's Lyric of Self and Democracy. New York: Twayne, 1992.

---. T.S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land: Exorcism of the Demons. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1978.

Milton, John. "Lycidas." Online. Internet. Http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/rp/poems/milton2.html.

"A Mixed Report Card." The Advocate 16 Mar. 1999: 13.

Monette, Paul. Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir. New York: Avon, 1990.

---. Love Alone: Eighteen Elegies for Rog. New York: St. Martin's, 1988.

Moon, Michael. "Reading Whitman under Pressure of AIDS: His Sex Radicalism and Ours." Martin, Continuing 53-66.

Morton, Donald. "The Politics of Queer Theory in the (Post)Modern Moment." Genders 17 (1993): 121-50.

Murphy, Timothy F. and Suzanne Poirier, eds. Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.

Muske, Carol. "Applause." Klein, ed. 181-87.

Nelson, Emmanuel S. AIDS: The Literary Response. New York: Twayne, 1992.

Nunokawa, Jeff. "'All the Sad Young Men': AIDS and the Work of Mourning." Yale Journal of Criticism. 4.2 (1991): 1-12.

---. "In Memoriam and the Extinction of the Homosexual." ELH 58 (1991): 427-38.

O'Hara, Frank. Collected Poems. Berkeley: U of California P, 1971.

Olafson, Frederick A. "The Unity of Heidegger's Thought." Guignon 97-121.

Overall, Chistine. "AIDS and Women: The (Hetero)sexual Politics of HIV Infection." Perspectives on AIDS: Ethical and Social Issues. Christine Overall and William P. Zion, eds. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1991. 27-42.

Owen, Wilfred. The Poems of Wilfred Owen. Ed. John Stallworthy. New York: Norton, 1986.

Parini, Jay. "Rule and Energy: The Poetry of Thom Gunn." Massachusetts Review 32.1 (1982): 134-51.

Patton, Cindy. Fatal Advice: How Safe-Sex Education Went Wrong. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

---. "From Nation to Family: Containing African AIDS." Abelove, Barale, Halperin 127-38.

---. Inventing AIDS. New York: Routledge, 1990.

---. Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS. Boston: South End, 1985.

Peperzak, Adriaan T., ed. Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature, and Religion. New York: Routledge, 1995.

---. "Transcendence." Peperzak, Ethics. 185-92.

Perloff, Marjorie. Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters. New York: George Braziller, 1977.

Peter, John. "A New Interpretation of The Waste Land." Essays in Criticism 2 (1952): 242-66.

Piggford, George. "'Beat[ing] Gerty Stein on Her Own Ground': Hart Crane's Poetry of Narcissism." American Modernism across the Arts. Ed. Jay Bochner and Justin D. Edwards. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. 185-202.

---. "A Different Country." The James White Review 14.3 (1997): 15.

Pinsky, Robert. "Thom Gunn." Pn Review 16.2 (1989): 42-43.

Plato. The Great Dialogues of Plato. Trans. W.H.D. Rouse. New York: Mentor, 1956.

---. The Republic. Trans Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1968.

Potts, Abbie Findlay. The Elegiac Mode: Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967.

Ramazani, Jahan. Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.

Riel, Steven. How to Dream. Amherst, MA: Amherst Artists & Writers, 1992.

Rich, Adrienne. "In Memoriam." Klein, ed. 202.

Rifkin, Libbie. "Language as Gesture: Mourning and the Poetics of AIDS." Minnesota Review 40 (1993): 133-37.

Robbins, Jill. "Visage, Figure: Reading Levinas's Totality and Infinity." Yale French Studies 79 (1991): 135-49.

Sacks, Peter M. The English Elegy: Studies in Genre from Spenser to Yeats. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985.

Safranski, Rüdiger. Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil. Trans. Ewald Osers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998.

Saint, Assotto (Yves François Lubin). Wishing for Wings. New York: Galiens, 1994.

Savoy, Eric. "Reading at Risk: The Mortifications of AIDS." Minnesota Review 40 (1993): 65-83.

Schroeder, Brian. Altared Ground: Levinas, History, and Violence. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. Tendencies. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

Shaw, W. David. Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Adonais." Ed. David Perkins. English Romantic Writers. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1967. 1046-54.

Shepherd, Reginald. Angel, Interrupted. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1996.

---. Some Are Drowning. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1994.

---. Wrong. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1999.

Sinfield, Alan. Alfred Tennyson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

---. "Thom Gunn in San Francisco: An Interview." Critical Survey 2.2 (1990): 223-30.

Sontag, Susan. Against Interpretation. New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1990.

---. Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors. New York: Anchor- Doubleday, 1989. 89-183.

Srajek, Martin C. In the Margins of Deconstruction: Jewish Conceptions of Ethics in Emmanuel Levinas and Jaques Derrida. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1998.

Staten, Henry. Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

Steakley, James. The Homosexual Emancipation Movement. New York: Arno, 1975.

Steiner, George. Martin Heidegger. New York: Viking, 1978.

Stevenson, Sheryl. "'World War I All Over': Writing and Fighting the War in AIDS Poetry." College Literature 24 (1997): 240-62.

Strong, Beret E. "Metaphors in Poems About AIDS." Cimarron Review 112 (1995): 127-37.

Sullivan, Andrew. "When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of an Epidemic." New York Times Magazine 18 Nov. 1996: 52-62, 76-77, 84.

Suzuki, D.T. An Introduction to Zen Buddhism. New York: Grove, 1964.

Swinburne, Charles Algernon. "In Memory of Walter Savage Landor." Buckley and Woods 691-92.

Tallon, Andrew. "Nonintentional Affectivity, Affective Intentionality, and the Ethical in Levinas's Philosophy." Peperzak 107-121.

Taylor, Keith. "Mark Doty: Gorgeousness and Terror." Ann Arbor Observer. Online. Internet.

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "In Memoriam." Buckley and Woods 57-91.

Thomas, Dylan. The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas. New York: New Directions, 1953.

Treichler, Paula A. "AIDS, Gender, and Biomedical Discourse." AIDS: The Burdens of History. Elizabeth Fee and Daniel M. Fox, eds. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. 190-266.

---. "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification." Crimp, AIDS 31-70.

Vendler, Helen. "Comic and Elegiac: Two Poets and the Question of Tradition." New Yorker (8 April 1996): 100-01.

Watney, Simon. Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and The Media. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.

---. Practices of Freedom: Selected Writings on HIV/AIDS. Durham: Duke UP, 1994.

---. "The Spectacle of AIDS." Crimp 71-86. Rpt. in Abelove, Barale, Halperin 202-11.

Whitman, Walt. Leaves of Grass. 1891-92. New York: Modern Library, n.d.

Wilmer, Clive. "Definition and Flow: A Personal Reading of Thom Gunn." PN Review 5.3 (1978): 7-8.

Woods, Gregory. "AID to Remembrance: The Uses of Elegy." Nelson 155-66.

Wright, Les. "Gay Genocide as Literary Trope." Nelson 50-68.

Wunderlich, Mark. "Interview with Mark Doty." Cortland Review. <Http://www.cortlandreview.com/features/dec98/index.html>.

Wyschogrod, Edith. "The Art in Ethics: Aesthetics, Objectivity, and Alterity in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas." Peperzak, Ethics. 137-48.

---. Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and Man-Made Mass Death. New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.

Yeats, W.B. Selected Poems and Four Plays. 4th ed. Ed. M.L. Rosenthal. New York: Scribner, 1996.

Yingling, Thomas. AIDS and the National Body. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

---. Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text: New Thresholds, New Anatomies. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990.