DAVID FULTON

Addressing the Problem: Gunn, Doty and the AIDS Elegy

In commemorating friends who died of AIDS, Thom Gunn and Mark Doty faced a number of challenges, which they addressed in different and variously successful ways. Foremost among these was the duty to produce elegies that were more-than-adequately composed, both in the sense of achieving a literary excellence appropriate for subjects who died young and insufficiently mourned, and of ensuring dignity for those deaths through a controlled expression of grief, which avoided extremes of mawkishness and hyperbolic rage. Given the ambiguous response to AIDS of America's heterosexual majority, verse like Monette's *Love Alone: 18 Elegies for Rog*[1] with its overstated anger that fractures logic and syntax would not be helpful.

AIDS, which killed so many people during the 1980s Doty felt he was witnessing an "epidemic,"[2] presented poetry with a theme which, though new, released strong traditional echoes. Its tendency to kill a disproportionately high percentage of the young—as war and epidemic had done in the past—placed it in a category so extensive that D. J. Enright, Gunn's fellow Movement poet, devoted a whole section to it in *The Oxford Book of Death*.[3] The unsettling way the syndrome linked "the sexual" and "annihilation"[4] had already been investigated by the literature

of syphilis and, on a strictly poetic level, the gay elegy, of which the AIDS elegy is a sub-genre, stretched in an unbroken line from Theocritus' "Idyll XIII" through what Curr[5] calls the English "male love elegy" (Milton's "Epitaphium Damonis," Gray's "Ad Favonium" and Tennyson's "In Memoriam") to more recent examples like Gunn's "To Isherwood Dying." Though foreshadowed, the syndrome still represented a fresh, compelling topic, but would Gunn and Doty do justice to its freshness and compulsion? New topics, like new forms, do not automatically produce enduring verse.

Despite a principled reluctance to exploit others' suffering for his own literary advantage, Gunn simply could not ignore AIDS' "possibilities" as a "subject," especially since it had, by 1992, provoked such an unsatisfactory poetic response:

> There's an enormous amount of AIDS poetry over here. People are responding to it like Vietnam, and as with Vietnam, an awful lot of bad poetry is being written.[6]

However, there was every reason why Gunn should do better. He needed to signal a return to form after the disappointing *Jack Straw's Castle* (1976) and *Passages of Joy* (1982), and he was dealing with a theme which could not have had greater personal resonance since AIDS was threatening the continued existence not only of himself and his partner, Kitay, but the entire American gay community in which he had found a real measure of happiness.

Unfortunately, he was only too well-qualified to confront the topic, having observed the virus's devastation at close quarters. Within the space of a few months in the mid-eighties AIDS had killed five of his closest friends (Noseworthy, Rathweg, Lay, Hoyt and Hinkle). His relationship with them was, like the romance in "American Boy," "bicoastal,"[7] Noseworthy and Rathweg being based in New York,

Lay, Hoyt and Hinkle in San Francisco. Their deaths therefore commented on the whole republic, suggesting a significant diminution in its promise.

While Gunn honoured Noseworthy as the helper who released "a huge amount of extra [poetic] material" by finally persuading him, while staying at his flat in 1974, to "come out" in both literature and life,[8] he viewed the other New Yorker, Rathweg, in neoclassical terms as the dying athlete, whose Chelsea Gym summoned to his mind memories of that city's "excitement in the late seventies and early eighties."[9] However, the friend whose death shook Gunn most profoundly was Hinkle, for he regarded the San Franciscan as a youthful alter ego, someone who similarly aspired to combine English teaching with the writing of poetry—indeed he uses an extract from Hinkle's verse (taken from the posthumous edition of his *Poems* edited in 1988 by Gunn and William McPherson)[10] as epigraph to the AIDS elegies of *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992). Of the five, Gunn found Lay—a man "resistant to… help"[11]—the most difficult, yet, ironically, he was the one with whom Gunn shared his San Francisco house,[12] together with three lovers from various stages of his life. Lay's sudden disappearance from that "gay family" affected the poet almost as deeply as Hinkle's because it exposed just how vulnerable to fragmentation the gay community's seemingly "increasing family" actually was.[13]

Although keeping vigil beside the dying is hardly a new poetic theme—"one of the oldest subjects is how you face the end"[14]—it was so for Gunn:

> I hadn't written much… about death because I hadn't experienced much…. My mother died early in my life but I didn't watch her die, and my father died in England while I was in America…. So it's the first time I've watched people facing death and I've been watching a great many….[15]

Such a defining experience placed on Gunn the duty to produce verse monuments, which would round off through formal completion all that was incomplete in his

friends' brief lives. Thus the beautician, who attends the morgue to repair her friend's disordered hair and, by applying "a concentrated mind" and "tenderness as skill," shapes "an epitaph by her action," represents the poet himself in elegiac mode.[16] Like Jesus on the cross addressed by the thief, or Hamlet by his father's ghost or the servant by Purcell's Dido or the imaginary lover by Christina Rossetti, Gunn felt a quasi-ritualistic injunction to keep the memory of the dead alive:

> When near your death a friend
> Asked what he could do,
> "Remember me," you said.
> We will remember you.[17]

By alluding in the last line to Binyon's commemoration of the First World War dead, which was given great visibility throughout the twentieth century by being displayed in the old British Library's reading-room, Gunn is both asserting that his friends have matched the heroic dead in their bravery and also conceding that his poetic memorials, because of their subject matter, will never achieve as significant a public presence as Binyon's.

Gunn's admirably democratic reason for composing his elegies—"for the record… *my* record if… no one else's, because they were not famous people"[18]—is often qualified by the guilty sense that he, as a considerably older man, should not have survived:

> "Why not me?"… I had… had sex in various forms of extraordinary risk in the late '70s, just when everybody was starting to get infected.[19]

Guilt, and the obligation to record, unite at the close of "In the Post Office" where Gunn, on learning the AIDS patient he visited in hospital regarded him not as someone he shared Hinkle with (the poet's own standpoint), but a hated rival, finally imagines the roles the dying man cast him in—"victor," "heir," then the bitterest:

> …survivor, as I am indeed,
> Recording so that I may later read
> Of what has happened, whether between sheets,
> Or in post offices, or on the streets.[20]

The pun on "sheets," which follows Ben Jonson in introducing ironic play into the most solemn contexts, is matched in "Courtesies of the Interregnum" where Gunn recalls how a visit to Rathweg exacerbates feelings of guilt:

> He is, confronted by a guest so fit,
> Almost concerned lest I feel out of it,
> Excluded from the invitation list
> To the largest gathering of the decade, missed
> From membership as if the club were full.
> It is not that I am not eligible,
> He gallantly implies….[21]

Gunn is, Rathweg courteously suggests, a fit fellow-candidate for the AIDS club: "it wasn't my fault I wasn't infected; I was really just as… attractive as the people who were…;"[22] but he is also "fit" in the darkly-ironic sense of being in good physical condition—we learn elsewhere he works out three times a week in the gym[23]—unlike his host, the unhealthy "expert of health," the no-longer-athletic "athlete."[24] Although an old man with an old man's grotesque lust,[25] Gunn retains youthful looks at a time when AIDS is producing accelerated senility in his young friends. After visiting Hinkle in his pathetic decrepitude ("His gifts… withdrawing one by one / Even before their usefulness was done"), he rides "back to [his] health;"[26] when Lay is helped downstairs with painful slowness by a friend, though there is only "eight years difference" between them, Gunn notices a "disparity so wide" all he can "think of" is "Oedipus, old, led by a boy."[27]

The accumulated pressure of these factors found outlet in the magnificent sequence of seventeen elegies in *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992) and the four scattered elegies of *Boss Cupid* (2000). These poems are admirably composed not

merely in the sense of achieving outstanding literary performance, but also of exhibiting signal restraint in mourning. Gunn shares an approach to suffering and death with what Shaw calls "the strong mourners of classical elegy."[28] By virtue of his emotional toughness that faces death with "manly" fortitude, his expressed admiration for those who endure bravely what they cannot escape, and his tendency to find dark ironies in desolating subjects, he descends from Ben Jonson, who, according to Shaw, "writes as a kind of stoic."[29] However, neither Jonson's nor Gunn's "rigorism" is monolithic: just as Jonson, according to Pigman,[30] fails only once, in "On my First Sonne," to resolve the tension between personal feeling and a reasoning faculty that instructs him to transcend grief, so Gunn limits the breakthrough of strong emotion to a single occasion: "Of course I simplify. / Of course. It tears me still that he should die…."[31] Gunn normally voices sorrow with an indirection that can at times, as he himself concedes, make him appear "cold;"[32] thus in his longest poem Noseworthy's death progresses from a "difficult enterprise" in the opening line to a "difficult, tedious, painful enterprise" in the last.[33]

Doty felt even more forcefully impelled to make an exemplary poetic response because AIDS, which spared Gunn's partner, claimed his: Wally Roberts was diagnosed HIV-positive in 1989 and died of viral brain infection in 1994.[34] The partner's slow decline cast Doty in the almost "unbearable" role of "witness"[35] and his death trapped the poet inside a cycle of mourning from which he could only escape by making "some record." Although "halting,"[36] this would restore individualising specifics to a name that, like those of Gunn's friends, was "only a name:" "details, stories, remind us of the particular body and being…."[37] Writing about Roberts and other dead friends would enable Doty to give voice to the voiceless for, as ACT UP declared, "SILENCE = DEATH":[38] "I'm speaking for the dead I

carry in me, and I will make sure they're heard."[39] However, this urgent need to restore individuality and voice to those whose deaths were ignored by mainstream society was mixed with an equally compelling need to shape the past into an enduring "story" that would lessen the burden of survival guilt: "how, when Wally and I had unsafe sex countless times, could I be negative?"[40] All this coalesced in an epiphany outside a Boston rooming-house, revisited in 1994:

> Until today, I have never felt what… other men… say, that they don't understand why they're alive, when so many are gone. I am alive… and all the men I knew in that house… are dead. Wally, and Bobby, David and Doug…. I am here… walking a city street indifferent with its own hurrying life… filled with the… weight of their stories.[41]

What made this experience pivotal was the realisation that through "writing" he could not only "catch what could be saved of Wally's life," but also, literally, "save" his own.[42] Doty had tried to kill himself with an overdose during adolescence.[43] When this traumatic experience was compounded by his mother's drunken attempt to shoot him,[44] he reacted with an obsessively programmatic optimism, which his cultural heritage—Franklin's self-help, Emerson's self-reliance, Whitman's cosmic aspiration, and so on—nurtured. Hence a culled dog, dying upside-down in snow with legs running in "that pointless version of flight," provokes not lament, but parable: "Even with one eye shot away and the brain spasming // the life takes it in and says *more*."[45] However, his creed that life's "unlikely miracle" should be preserved, no matter what,[46] unravelled in the trauma of Roberts' death as the old "urge to take [his] own life" returned.[47] Hotel windows and balconies began to beckon—"suddenly… I can't stop seeing myself plummeting… all the way down…"[48]—and as late as 2005 he finds himself leaning against platform pillars or standing "at a distance, against the back wall, / …to… more firmly resist the impulse" to throw himself in front of a train's "inviting" onrush.[49] Elegiac composition gave Doty a reason to live:

> I dreamed one night…I was wondering how I would survive this… and… saw in front of me a stack of books and papers and pens. The message: *You have everything you need*.[50]

When Gunn made his disparaging remarks about AIDS verse, he could not have known whether Doty would redeem the situation because his elegiac output in book form was at that time limited to "Tiara" and "Bill's Story" in *Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Poets Respond to AIDS* (1989).[51] It was not until the publication of *My Alexandria* (1993), *Atlantis* (1995), *Sweet Machine* (1998) and the prose memoir, *Heaven's Coast* (1996), that the illness, death and posthumous presence of Roberts and other friends moved to the centre of his writing. Unfortunately, the elegies, though often rhetorically and structurally impressive, are not always written with that hard brilliance which will enable them to withstand time's attrition: they have a tendency to avoid intractable realities, interpose a poetic self between reader and the presented object, and relax into abstraction and rhythmic flatness.

Doty's determination to interpret everything, no matter how apparently unpromising, optimistically nullifies AIDS' privations for a time. Roberts contracts the syndrome, but San-Franciscan clinics promise "empowerment, no passive relinquishment but a firm grasp on possibility" and a new pet gives hope of a "common futurity."[52] His partner's progressive enfeeblement desolates, but he is comforted by Roberts' unexpectedly long survival, peaceful death and "hugely happy" funeral.[53] Wind blows Roberts' scattered ashes all over the poet, yet this cheers him.[54] However, during the period of mourning, a long-suppressed critique of optimism bursts through:

> The world's a maw…. *All our /… consolations feel so flimsy…. I used to think depression wrong… an injustice to the world's bright possibilities. But I understand better than I did before*….[55]

In this mood he stigmatises the New-Age belief of Roberts' AIDS-diagnosed brother, Jim, that positive thinking creates immunity as an "unacceptable optimism" that "trivialize[s] pain" and "suspend[s] compassion:" "the firmest exercise of will is humbled by processes out of our hands."[56] He even holds his nerve to end an elegy with an "empty," "off season" Provincetown, his site of gay fulfilment, wholly overshadowed by AIDS: "you'd think that everybody'd died."[57]

In these rare instances he faces a sobering situation squarely, but in general he will adopt almost any tactic to avoid doing so. Thus at Roberts' HIV-test Doty resists the overwhelmingly likely implication that the *P* the health-care worker's "phantom hand…forms," as if on a ouija-board, spells the first letter of *Positive*:

> Planchette,
> peony, I would think of anything
> not to say the word.[58]

In like manner Doty converts a Manhattan AIDS-testing clinic's speciality from *"immunology"* to *"illuminology,"* thus enabling him to hide the building's dark uncertainties beneath a neo-Luminist patina.[59] More worrying, however, is the way death's finality can be denied by an aesthetic salvation that the poet would not necessarily subscribe to outside the poem's elegiac moment. Thus in "Brilliance" a dying man, who has stoically renounced treasured possessions as if "he's had enough / of the whole scintillant world," redeems himself in the poet's eyes with a late request for goldfish, the luminous pets allowing him to escape closure by being reincarnated into that "last loved object / of… attention," the Yeatsian aestheticised nature of "icon-colored fins / troubling the water."[60]

Although Doty follows H. D. in celebrating the enduring beauty of sea flowers[61] and artefacts,[62] he finds that quality most powerfully present in abandoned boats.[63] "I need this evidence" that "something must hold,"[64] he says of a wrecked,

sea-pounded trawler, implying that human flesh, like Roberts', when battered by AIDS, generally fails to hold.[65] However, this stoic endurance, so sympathetic in objects, becomes problematic in humans. Bob, realising a sarcoma gives him only eighteen months to live, "circle[s] on his calendar the approximate date he expect[s] to die"[66] and sets his life in order. This admirable composure is, according to Doty, "wrong-headed" because it makes no effort to "resist fatalism,"[67] surrendering instead to the kind of passivity in the face of AIDS that Nunokawa criticises in Merrill.[68] However, we suspect the real reason is Bob's Job-like readiness to jettison all "consolation" and entertain "the bleakest view of the human situation" as a "breath caught between two darknesses,"[69] a slightly more convivial version of which Gunn endorses at the close of "Duncan."[70]

Doty is only prepared to entertain a stoic, or indeed existential, view of reality at his mourning's nadir and, as soon as the process of healing begins, the old optimism returns. Thus although AIDS has converted "the bodies [he] most adored to flame/ and powder," "white petals" on Broadway's indifferent "wind," memories of Roberts and his new partner's proximity can effortlessly flood the avenue with hope:

> I've been lucky; I've got a man
>
> in my head who's spirit and ash
> …and a live one
>
> whose skin is inches from mine.[71]

Doty's willingness to adopt techniques of evasion makes him, in Shaw's terms, the weak mourner of romantic elegy, who refuses to accept death's finality and responds to loss with an over-emotional rhetoric.[72] "In my heart," he declares, "I can sentimentalise [Roberts'] death,"[73] and the heart decidedly dictates in "The Wings" where wish-fulfilment creates that sentimental Victorian icon, a guardian angel,

christened "*unharmed*," who "bend[s] over [the poet's writing] desk" to impart comforting words before hovering over the "sleeping" Roberts and perhaps even enfolding the mortally sick man in "encompassing wings."[74] When Roberts actually dies, the rhetoric goes into overdrive:

> I believe with all my heart that when the chariot came for Wally…a band of angels swung wide out over the great flanks of the sea, bearing him up over the path of light the sun makes on the face of the waters.[75]

This hyperbolic reworking of the spiritual can be juxtaposed with Gunn's refusal to overplay emotion: "if I were a rhetorical poet, once I'd let myself start lying… I'd lie in all sorts of different directions."[76] Gunn, whose elegies exhibit the kind of restraint he prized in Pound's versions of Anglo-Saxon and Chinese laments,[77] would never describe AIDS, as Doty does, as "Apocalypse… in… bed."[78] This inflationary tendency means that Doty's elegiac writing is at its finest when grief is expressed obliquely by means of the Provincetown coast and its various weather.[79]

The elegies may evade (or overstate) painful realities, but what is never evaded is Doty himself. There is scarcely an elegy in which "I" or "we" does not enter. The poet's duty to engage with the dead is typically interrupted by personal anecdote[80]—on one occasion so repeatedly that the ostensible subject is scarcely returned to.[81] Similarly, the elegiac memoir, *Heaven's Coast*, concentrates not on Roberts' illness and death, as one might expect, but on how Doty coped with it, and even this is subsumed within the poet's personal myth. "PML," he remarks of his partner's disease, "was what we had:" "I write… 'we' …as though it were my illness too… but there is a way… people have illnesses—especially terminal ones—together."[82] The care-worker's presence helps Doty "feel it isn't me who's dying."[83] Death, according to Doty, leaves us "inconsolable" by reminding us the world and its music "could go on without us."[84] Thus the "unimaginable shape of not-myself" stays

uppermost in his mind when faced with death by plane crash: "What was the world without me to see it?"[85]

The external exists for Doty to colonise. He recovers from the suicidal urges stirred up by Roberts' death with the thought: "there was too much in the world… I wanted to pour myself into."[86] This wish to imitate Rembrandt ("the glorious, entirely idiosyncratic Self is everywhere") and reject earlier Dutch painters with their "odd quality of egolessness"[87] can produce elegies as self-absorbed as Milton's "Lycidas," but can also inspire subtly indirect ones where what seems objective description finally reveals itself as personal symbol. Thus a pair of sunken vessels is gradually unveiled as Doty and his dead partner: "Two ruined boats / —like myself, my lover…."[88]

Although Doty is a memorably painterly poet, who values Dutch still-lifes as "poems of materiality," he is never satisfied with pure presentation, must always allow his poems to run the risk that the repetition in didactic commentary of what depiction has already embodied will thin the texture. Hence an elegy like "The Wings" follows a beautifully concrete evocation with a litany of abstract nouns which ignores its own advice:

> …the day's narration is simple assertion;
>
> It's enough to name the instances.
> Don't let anybody tell you
>
> Death's the price exacted
> For the ability to love….[89]

However, even when his elegies allow particulars to speak for themselves, trouble can arise from the unreliability—to a British reader, at least—of Doty's ear. Cadence is not always consistently sustained or coherently varied, even in the best work:

> Peter died in a paper tiara
> cut from a book of princess paper dolls;
> he loved royalty, sashes
>
> And jewels….[90]

The forceful way occasionally alliterative plosives play against a sporadically dactylic music in the first two lines is dissipated by the following two's throwaway prose and arbitrary stanza break.

These failings, when joined with other problematic features, sometimes prevent Doty's elegies from being adequately composed in the wider, more fundamental sense to which Shaw subscribes. By applying Austin and Searle's speech act theory to the genre, Shaw is able to argue that the elegy's function is essentially "performative:" if poets manage to combine the assured manipulation of the conventions and techniques at their disposal with a suitable context, then the elegy's quasi-magical function of breaking death's hold by achieving emotional healing will be successfully realised.[91]

What makes this task so difficult, as Ramazani has shown in his study of the modern elegy,[92] is that Doty and Gunn have to enact the ritual in an age lacking transcendental belief and unsympathetic to public expressions of mourning. Crucial to this enterprise's success is a clear sense of audience, but the two poets risk uncertainty when they consider the merits of two worthy groups of potential readers. Should they—"in time of plague"[93]—minister exclusively to a gay readership or seek approval from a general audience?

Landau[94] ranks Doty above Gunn as an AIDS elegist on the extra-literary grounds that he provides an embattled community with greater relief and solidarity. While Doty overturns "oppressive discourses about AIDS, enabling redemptive transport to a place beyond pain and misery,"[95] Gunn forces readers "to witness the

effects of AIDS unshielded and uncomforted."[96] Ironically, the quality Landau criticises in Gunn becomes the very one that, under Cady's dispensation,[97] makes Monette and, by implication, Gunn himself superior— "immersiveness:" "the reader is thrust into direct imaginative confrontation with the special horrors of AIDS… with no relief or buffer…."[98] By avoiding such confrontation, Doty's elegies, under Cady's scheme, fall into an inferior, counter-immersive category.

Gunn's immersive realism is never achieved at the expense of the dying man's dignity. Aware of the fraught "debates… on the decorum of representing… physical disfigurement,"[99] he refuses to allow the slightest hint of the sensational to enter his depiction of AIDS' progress through the body. So determined is he to avoid introducing any detail that might reduce his dying friends to exhibits in a freak show that he excludes specific reference to the demeaning ways AIDS can transform a sufferer's flesh from all his elegies, except "Words for Some Ash:"

> Poor parched man, we had to squeeze
> Dental sponge against your teeth,
> So that moisture by degrees
> Dribbled down to the mouth beneath.
>
> Christmas Day your pupils crossed….[100]

Here, however, the crossing of the eyes is not dwelt upon as gross physical fact, but joins the poem's heroic moral economy: a man, lessened in life by his inability to see things straight, is magnified through the Christmas crucifixion of his faculties to a Christ-like status. This ennoblement through suffering has already been suggested by the invocation "poor parched man," which makes Lay the emblem of that essential humanity to which Lear appeals during the storm.[101]

Monette's immersive poems respond, as Gunn's and Doty's do not, to Crimp's demand that during the AIDS epidemic writers should renounce elegy's

passive grief in favour of an agit-prop rage that might save lives.[102] Gunn and Doty are not activists in this sense. However, Gunn's elegies are implicitly "socialist"[103] in the way they equate HIV-positive sufferers with the underclass, "Reagan's proletariat,"[104] and concentrate on the gay community's collective response to AIDS. In contrast, Doty's elegies are bourgeois-individualist. Down-and-outs interest him as symbols of self-help. One manages to transform himself into "a citizen, / who'd built a citizen's // household, even / on the literal edge,"[105] thereby preserving links between himself and an America which Doty finally defends as an aggregation of individual consumers.[106] Although supportive of the Gay Community's money-raising efforts[107] and public commemoration of the dead,[108] Doty fails to find in it much evidence of Whitman's proto-socialist ideal of adhesiveness: thus the solidarity of the shower-room fragments to "separate clothes" and "separate cars" as the men return home to "the song of my self, self, / self."[109] A similar individualising force is at work in the syndrome itself, as it destroys the persona's carapace to reveal the "pure self." Hence AIDS makes Roberts "more and more himself" until it exposes that "irreducible stuff of character" and finally, at the moment of death, leaves him "most himself, even if that self empties out into no one."[110]

Gunn's supra-individual concerns do not mean his elegies primarily address the gay community. They are in large part a riposte to Donald Davie, showing "he was wrong."[111] In a review of *The Passages of Joy* Davie had argued that by promoting "Gay Liberationist sentiments" with their post-Enlightenment "attitude to ethics," Gunn sacrifices the Renaissance "resonances" that make his earlier verse so powerful.[112] While finding the implications of Davie's argument—that "homosexuality is a modern phenomenon" and "sexuality… a social construction"—"persuasive," Gunn nevertheless felt the assertion that an openly gay point-of-view

and canonical poetry could not coexist "eccentric:" "there are so many queer poets in history, Marlowe and Whitman just being two of the most famous… it struck me… it was a strange view that such a project was not tenable."[113] Gunn had a great affection for Davie—"he was one of the poets I've been closest to in my life"—and, in particular, admired his lack of dogmatism: "he was a wonderful man and could accept my atheism, as I could accept his Christianity, very well. We admired each other's work…."[114] Therefore, rather than just dismiss the review wholesale, he decided to write elegies which would "prove to [Davie]… you could be a homosexual and write good poetry!"[115]

In consequence, Gunn always has in mind a heterosexual reader for whom intimate details of gay experience are alienating. Former students told him of Davie "going on about… Gunn going off to bathhouses and writing about them!": "I suppose it was his religious beliefs partly, and partly a distaste…."[116] Gunn proves his point twice over by writing marvellous gay elegies, which achieve excellence through fortifying echoes of Shakespeare and Marvell.[117] Indeed he later provided an affectionately cheeky coda in the form of an elegy on Davie himself where the dead poet-critic in heaven modifies his objections to Auden, a poet Gunn suspected Davie "didn't like" simply because of his sexual orientation.[118]

While Gunn was aware that social pressures could push homosexuals into the role of outsiders and that desire conferred on them a "romantic otherness,"[119] he had little time for a ghetto mentality. His elegies follow Duncan in representing a homosexuality which "refus[es] to be rejected" and cut off from society's "wider concerns."[120] In this they reflect the Dantean paradisal vision of a meeting of all sexualities in mutual understanding that Miller fails to discern in Doty's more exclusive elegies: "straights simply do not figure in the resurrection of the

dead…."[121] While this is true of Doty's elegies on a collective paradise ("Tiara," "One of the Rooming Houses of Heaven"), it is not of those elegies which imagine a heaven of individual wish-fulfilment not just for gays ("Heaven for Paul"), but also heterosexual men ("Heaven for Stanley") and women ("Heaven," "Heaven for Helen") and even pets ("Heaven for Beau," "Heaven for Arden").

Doty's elegies, written primarily for a gay readership, emphasise that very homosexual dimension which Gunn's excise. The poet self-consciously breaks "the last [gay] taboo" of "allow[ing] oneself" to indulge in camp's "swooning, gorgeous silliness." Thus Doty celebrates Bill, dying in an AIDS ward, covered with the "over-the-top femininity" of his "lushly nelly," "mint-green chenille bathrobe" or Peter who is rumoured to be lying in his coffin with *"big wig / and heels."*[122] His poems aspire to both opera's sheer performance and couture's glittering extravagance: they "announce / their maker's bravura," proclaim, as "the queen" did, "no such thing… as too many sequins."[123] This sense of exaggerated role-playing equally informs Doty's thinking about sexuality: hence his elegies' fascination with cross-dressing—"the mysterious permission of the dress"[124]—in general and drag acts in particular. A drag queen is, for Doty, camp's quintessence: "since she *was* irony / she did nothing ironic…."[125] By hiding vulnerability behind a pose she becomes a "colossus / of gender,"[126] a successful version of his mother and wife, both of whose artistic aspirations were undermined by alcoholism,[127] and of self-destructive gay icons like Bette Davis,[128] Diana Ross[129] and Judy Garland. The star of *The Wizard of Oz* had been emblematic for Doty ever since his mother caught "her ten-year-old son performing a [Garland] drag show" in his bedroom.[130]

The drag queen's ability to be, despite everything, "perfect"[131] makes her the ideal symbol of gay identity—"she walks for us all"[132]—and the ideal voice of mourning for the AIDS dead:

> …we were already,
> in her lyric, contained….
>
> she sang the necessary
> gleaming emptiness.
> …you who are gone now
> in the drift and ash of the lyric…
>
> how will we remember you?[133]

The question of attitude towards the dead proved as problematic to Gunn and Doty as that of audience. Like Gunn, who juxtaposes Noseworthy the good patient (amenable, self-deprecating) with Lay the difficult one, Doty frequently sets up the awkward Shore as counterweight to the more accommodating Roberts. Shore's and Lay's contrariness functions as a means of exposing the tension the two poets felt between incompatible impulses to honour the departed, yet pursue accurate notation, whatever the cost. Ramazani[134] has shown how under the influence of social pressures modern poets have moved away from the traditional convention of encomium by introducing critical and even satirical details into their elegiac portraits, but should Gunn and Doty—in the context of their friends' premature and insufficiently-mourned deaths—return to unstinting eulogy?

The poets addressed this problem in different ways. Gunn's elegies seek to be as positive as they can without succumbing to sentimental idealisation: "I've tried to *celebrate* what each man was… and in doing that I was influenced by the manner of dying, usually with tremendous courage."[135] On the rare occasions when they deal with weakness (as in the Lay poems), they relegate it to the background through oblique reference. Thus by minutely detailing the painfully slow manner

Lay is "helped" downstairs, "Terminal" minimises through distance the negative irony that this is the very man who, the opening lines tell us, always rejected "help."[136] Similarly, in "Words for Some Ash" Lay's tendency to be constantly "worried by arguments with people" (Wilmer),[137] is never directly described, exists only by reason of the ocean's wonderfully tactful allusion whereby that quarrelsome, vulnerable man's ashes find ultimate content in natural process, becoming pacific in the Pacific:

> May you lastly reach the shore,
> Joining tide without intent,
> Only worried any more
> By the currents" argument.[138]

While Gunn's elegies are as equanimous as Lay in his imagined resting place, Doty's are often focused on weakness. Indeed in his elegies to Shore any hint of eulogy disappears. He does call him "my old friend" when dreaming of his ghost in "One of the Rooming Houses of Heaven," but soon qualifies this seeming solidarity with "we weren't ever that close." Such a process of making fortifying gestures only to undermine them is replicated on a larger scale by the rest of the poem where particulars suggesting Shore's discourse, so irritating in life, has become bearable, even entertaining, after death, are wholly sabotaged by a dismissive last line: "I can't remember now a single thing he said."[139] "*Grosse Fuge*" repeats this pattern of diminishment. Doty honours the title by adopting a roughly contrapuntal form of three motifs—a "false spring" in autumn,[140] Beethoven's Great Fugue and Bobbie's AIDS-induced "dementia"[141]—which he, more or less, arranges into an alternation of subject and answer. However, what one would expect to be the subject—the nursing of a now-dead houseguest—is consistently relegated to the role of response (II, V, VII), while the other two motifs share the dominant position (I/III; IV, VI), a

hierarchy which continues even after the two main themes merge, autumnal nature becoming music (VIII) and autumnal Beethoven becoming nature (X, XII). This structural belittling is matched by one through hostile detail: its relentless accumulation virtually forces the reader to collude in Doty's decision to tell Shore to leave.

Nature in "*Grosse Fuge"* extends Shore as little sympathy as the poet. True, it provides objective correlatives of decay (bare branches, fallen leaves, ice), but these autumnal signs are transcended by an amazing spring-like bloom of flowers. Gunn senses a similar disjunction in "Lament" when he passes from the sterility and cold whiteness of Noseworthy's deathbed to the heat and luxuriant growth of the hospital grounds:

> Outdoors next day, I was dizzy from a sense
> Of being ejected with some violence
> From vigil in a white and distant spot
> Where I was numb, into this garden plot
> Too warm, too close, and not enough like pain.[142]

Thus both Doty and Gunn renounce the conventional device of pathetic fallacy, as Ramazani has shown many modern elegists have done; but they do conceive of a natural order whose processes provide hospitality, albeit unconscious and unintentional, to the remains of the dead. In "Words for Some Ash" Gunn offers a secular prayer in the hope that nature will right the humorous imbalances in the dying Lay, compensating for lack of air and water in life ("poor parched man," "gaping" for "the air you lost") with an open-air site for the scattered ashes and rain to conduct the grit down through the ground and out into "the water's play." Cremation is imagined as further harmonising the elements by burning away AIDS' excessively fiery fevers

and allowing the choleric body to return to "the dust" the Bible says it is made of, a dust from which rain will leach out all "discontents."[143]

Roberts' cremated ashes also find their way into water, but directly into salt marshes where nature again makes its benign accommodations. In "Where You Are" Doty imagines sun and water providing a "secret," "blue" "shining room," in whose "sparkle and beckon" Roberts is "sleeping," so that the poet could simply "lean across this shifting watery bed // and ask are you awake."[144] What is so significant about this domesticated place of mourning and recuperation is its mixture of memory and desire (Roberts' spiritual body is "naked now" as when they used to swim "in those shoals" together), its openness ("unbounded edgeless") and simultaneous closure ("salt parameters"). Such an intersection of the open and closed is entirely appropriate because AIDS exposes the body's "limitations,"[145] continually imposes "new set[s] of… limits," yet by obliterating personality's false accretions opens up the self "all the way to the edges" and, with death, beyond the edges— "free," "outside the boundaries of time and space."[146]

Doty chose this site for his partner's death-home because of its intimate reciprocity with the Provincetown home they had shared: "Wally's body belongs in the huge sun-burnished field of the salt marsh beside our tiny airport, the first and last of home I see… when I fly in and out of town."[147] Doty so much wanted Roberts to feel at home in death because that is what he himself has striven for in life. As an adult he tried to counteract a childhood of "nomadism" through "Sunbelt places—Tennessee, Florida, Arizona, California"[148]—by "the making of [a] home" with Roberts,[149] initially for five years in Vermont, then, more permanently, in Provincetown, a resort on Cape Cod's tip whose past contained his family's American origins—Edward Dotey had first come ashore there from the Mayflower

"370 years before"[150]—and whose present, in line with its bohemian traditions, allowed for open displays of homosexuality. Inside this New-England house Roberts, the window dresser, provided the kind of stylish "redecorating" Doty sees as characteristic of gay sensibility, while the poet himself concentrated on "getting [the] garden right."[151] Home, however, has never been all-sufficient for Doty. His personality is split between "connection" and "freedom:" "on the one side… is the need for home, for the deep solid roots of place and belonging; on the other is… the single separate spark of the self freely moving forward, out into time."[152] Roberts' place of "burial" ideally balances closure (the blue room) and openness: "The open horizontals of coast… the figure of fluid and aerial being."[153]

Doty found a great consolation in the nature of Roberts' death. That his partner's life ended where "doctors…[couldn't] hurt him"[154] was of great significance to Doty: "…we took care of him right here at home, and ushered him out of the world. He never had to go to… hospital once."[155] An adjustable hospital bed, imported during the last days, was immediately de-institutionalised: "new sheets—patterned in scrollwork and flowers, as far from hospital white as we can get—soften things, and help it feel like home."[156] However, if the AIDS-sufferer is thrown into a hospital's "institutional world," where he is "at [its] mercy, subject to invasion, unprotectable," he should still domesticate his room:

> Bill has draped a scarf across the… bedside lamp, as Blanche DuBois would have, to warm the light to something rosy and flattering…. The walls are covered with paintings… the windows thick with flowers… the whole room redolent of… human habitation, an aura—in opposition to the severity of every floodlit room we passed…—of civility.[157]

The enclosed areas in which Bill and Roberts die aspire to the condition of the "Cavafian room."[158] Doty sees Cavafy as setting out in "The Afternoon Sun" and "In the Same Place" a template for an "emblematic" interior "space," whose primary

elements are elegy (the "ashen atmosphere"), "regret," "memory," "desire" ("erotic with the passion the space has come to contain"), seclusion (lovers "hiding" from a hostile outside), "consolation" and, finally, aesthetic "redemption" (life is "transformed into feeling," "into…dreams" and, ultimately, into "art").[159] Roberts' death-room is the Cavafian focal-point of a house Doty calls a "refuge,"[160] a focal-point suffused with the regretful sense that AIDS has prevented the two men from ever knowing "the life" they "might have had" together, yet also with renewed desire as Doty falls "in love with [Roberts]… again" in "the naked beauty of his dying."[161] Above all, it generates the energy to transform the "old" house's melancholy into a consolatory and ultimately redemptive transfiguration, which Doty could turn into art:

> Wally wasn't the first to die there, but… his death filled the space with a strange, vital light—a light within a light…. *Wally dead, but somehow a profound sense of mercy and peace, even joy, around him.*[162]

Cavafy would look from his upstairs room and make Alexandria "entirely into himself;" the windows of Roberts' room produce a similar reciprocity in Doty, converting the surrounding Provincetown into "my Alexandria."[163]

The place of death is most sharply scrutinised when unsatisfactory—a foreign battlefield or, as in the case of Edward King's in "Lycidas," a "watery bier" in the Irish Sea with all the classical associations that accrue for Milton of a spirit for whom the funerary proprieties have not been performed. Gunn alludes to Lycidas (and Phlebas the Phoenician) when he evokes Noseworthy's "death by drowning on an inland sea,"[164] but also links Milton's concerns with those of "Hamlet" in associating the dying Hinkle ("Unready, disappointed, unachieved"[165]) with the "unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled" ghost of Hamlet's father (I.v.77).[166] The location and manner of his friends' deaths particularly pained Gunn because they became entrammeled with what Watkin calls the "modern… medicalisation of the body in death."[167] His

friends die not at home, but hidden away on sterile wards, where machinery utterly suppresses them. The "angle" of Hoyt's head in "Still Life" is "arrested and reared back:"

> Back from what he could neither
> Accept, as one opposed,
> Nor, as a life-long breather,
> Consentingly let go,
> The tube his mouth enclosed
> In an astonished O.[168]

This intervention is on one level sustaining, for without the tube Hoyt would die; yet it seems such a gross intrusion that the patient must register some form of resistance. Gunn resists too through the title's bitter punning, the apparatus freezing virtually all movement into the still-life painting of a man who, while looking dead, is in fact still alive. However, realising that Hoyt will soon be a corpse, the reader remembers, as Doty has remarked, that the French for still life is "nature morte."[169] Similarly, the medical procedures of "Lament"—"the spinal tap," "the machine" that does "all [the] breathing," the final fatal injection—rob the dying man of the heroic connotations Gunn would like to lend him. The journey towards death, which the first line presents as a "difficult enterprise," a voyage of exploration and profit, like Frobisher's for the North-West Passage, taking Noseworthy from "the sun's kingdom" to "the far Canada of a hospital room," "a wilderness" where he lies on a bed's "bare ledge toured by the gale," is diminished through institutional bathos to the last line's "difficult, tedious, painful enterprise."[170] However, disturbing as the deaths in these two elegies are to Gunn, they are confronted without emotional overstatement.

Gunn's HIV-positive friends die in hospitals where, like Rathweg, they become "subdued to [their] pale room[s]," a process for which mouth-stopping tubes provide the metonymic sign.[171] However, the poet refuses to entertain any

consolatory tales of the beyond. His friends' lives, as one would expect from an atheist, conclude with the absolute closure of an "end,"[172] and Gunn marks this formally by writing most of his elegies in couplet, quatrain, or a combination of the two. Nevertheless, a posthumous, albeit inorganic, "existence" is maintained as the dead's ashes are absorbed into natural cycles[173] or a temporary, subjective presence is preserved through the Hardyesque ghosts troubling the poet's memory: "their story, being part of mine, refuses to reach an end."[174]

When Doty considers what might happen after death, he upsets the balance between openness and closure he found in Roberts' death-room and watery burial-room. Although dying is in one sense for him, as for his pet dog, "an ending," it is more properly the climactic episode in a lifelong quest for romantic infinitude: "Haven't we wanted / all along, to try on boundlessness...?"[175] Death fulfils this wish by incorporating us into the "unbounded,"[176] a process the living can gain intimations of through natural contemplation. Thus though "breaking" waves tell the poet and his HIV-positive partner, "*You're dying*… the rhythm and shift of the whole / Says [sic] nothing about endings…." as its blown-back spray pulls the couple's vision "toward the open sea."[177] Fog similarly removes death's restrictions. While Doty "know[s]" the salt marsh, in which Roberts' ashes lie, "ends," has "a precise limit," the fog's descent obliterates distinctions, creating a sea "without edges, horizon erased" and undermining the notion of death as "a line to be crossed."[178] Fog, amorphous shape-shifter, teaches Doty how death will transform his body: "Isn't it a pleasure, / finally, to be vaporous //… without limit?"[179] However, though "desire" projects the poet beyond death's frontier, fog, by also being a "smudged" piece of paper, reminds him that any attempt at transcendental writing is constrained by "what we can't say," by "words' failure"[180] and, ultimately, by the slipperiness of meaning.

In death the world, which is normally "heaven's coast,"[181] becomes continuous with paradise:

> Won't it be like this,
>
> …shore and bay,
> harbor and heaven one continuum
> *sans* coast or margins?[182]

In other words death represents for Doty, as, according to Ramazani, it did for Yeats, the "ultimate occasion" of "the sublime,"[183] an occasion by which terror and "awe" can be converted to tragic "joy," and "the depths of the dark" modified by a "sense of brightness."[184] The sublimity the poet first glimpsed in the horror films, acid trips and Transcendental Meditation of his youth[185] finds full realisation only in Roberts' death. In an "atmosphere so charged it seemed almost to sing," with "the world… in absolute suspension… everything centered," Doty's "spirit" meets Roberts' in a Wordsworthian "shock of recognition," a "double vision," both joining its liberating leap "out of the top of [the dying man's] head… into the empyrean" and remaining grounded in the room.[186] There is a kind of combined apotheosis: Roberts "join[ed] the invisible majority" and "in the same way I… joined the invisible, too."[187] This final movement towards consoling transcendence is marked by a Dantean mystical illumination that floods the dark scene: "[Roberts'] death filled the space with a strange, vital light… so that it became… vibrant,"[188] and as "the aura that surrounded his leave-taking [drew Doty] in," the poet began to wonder whether "*radiance leaks out of the opening the dying make… between worlds.*"[189]

Death represented for Doty an exceptional manifestation of the sublime. While Diehl[190] has demonstrated how women poets have felt excluded from the American sublime, Doty implies gay poets, other than Whitman and Crane, sense an equal alienation from its grandiose phallocentricity. He therefore constructs his own

counter version, a gay sublime, instinct with camp irony, which recognises sublimity's simultaneous grandeur and absurdity. Thus "American Sublime" allows a bat, loose in a gallery, to both celebrate and undermine the pretensions of the native tradition's two founding figures—one an artist, the other a poet-philosopher: it "skims… / a Bierstadt prospect of Yosemite," reducing it to "a billboard for immensity," and places its weary behind on the "bust" of someone Doty thinks is "Emerson."[191] Similarly, in his solo school dance to Stravinsky's *Firebird*, which confirmed Doty in an artistic calling, he is at once "utterly transported… free… weightless" and a "heavy little sissy."[192] Thus, in close succession, he loses balance by being subsumed in sublimity's inflationary tendencies, then regains it through the sense of proportion irony brings.

The gay sublime is merely one aspect of an acute self-awareness that Doty takes to extremes. This quality is a characteristic of elegies,[193] which tend to be composed in full consciousness of the conventions they are drawing on or departing from. Ironically, Doty warns against "the self-referential[ity]," "the formal self-consciousness… we've come to call post-modern,"[194] yet there is scarcely a postmodern elegist who is more metapoetic. His constant urge is to transform the dead into art-objects, Whistlerian semi-abstract colour arrangements, poems or, more broadly, language itself. Thus the eponymous emerald an AIDS fatality used to wear "around his neck" becomes "*my* emerald," the "flashing" elegy Doty is fashioning out of him and other "*handsome wraiths,*" the poet's self-consciously gay variant of the floral offerings in traditional elegy which eventually became the poetic flower of the work itself.

In deaths not caused by AIDS the same imperative is at work. A dead rabbit makes Doty aware of the "task of explication, / the elegist's thankless work: / *So*

long, so what?" Despite reservations, the poet honours that task by transforming the corpse into literature: it lies on "the carpeting text" of "the grass's book" and the last glimpse we have is of its "eraser-coloured nose" on which "some trace // of thought is written." In parallel fashion, the "so" of the elegist's "work" becomes linguistics: "single syllable," "sibilant // sliding into the aperture / of O."[195]

Gunn's self-consciousness is much more concerned with the ethics of mourning. He is, as Watkin has remarked, sensitive to mourners' selfish need to attend to their own interests before those of the dead "in order to survive loss."[196] Thus in "The Reassurance" Gunn is alert to the irony that his dreaming "mind" utilises Noseworthy's ghostly return less to establish he is "all right" than "to make itself secure."[197] However, he also has a historical awareness of how he in his role as poet-mourner might modernise the pastoral elegy. "At the Barriers," which commemorates the poet Duncan, transforms a San-Franciscan gay street fair into "an Arcady of tarmac."[198] Although there are no contests between poet-shepherds to win possessions of the dead man, the notion of inheritance does impinge. The dying Duncan passes on the mantle of San Francisco's gay laureate to Gunn by attempting to fall "into [his] strong arms" when losing balance on the steps after a last reading at Berkeley.[199] When Gunn's mother kills herself with the "backwards flute" of a gas-poker, filling her body with "its music," it is implied he will take up this terrible gift and convert its inverted associations into the more composed, objective music of his poetry, in particular, playing her "lament" on his lyric pipe "forty-eight years" after the death.[200] It is possible this inheritance also relates to sexuality; the way the mother takes the phallic pipe into her mouth might speak of the son's orientation. Finally, Hinkle's death, with grim irony, reverses pastoral convention. By ceding "the cherished property" of "a piece of stained-glass" he had made to Gunn, the dying

Hinkle becomes the young, aspiring poet making an older, established poet "heir" to an important example of his creativity.[201] The irony is deepened by the fact that Gunn does not "even remember, still less want" the gift and, when he receives it, hides it away in a place where it "acquire[s] a cobweb," but that after retrieving it he discovers an "inscription" containing a prophetic warning ("The needs of ghosts embarrass the living"), which confirms his own sense of being continually harried by his "dear… everpresent" AIDS phantoms.[202]

The English pastoral elegy continually alludes to its traditions. Thus the name Milton chooses for King in "Lycidas," the "Doric lay" he fashions, and the questioning of the nymphs as to their whereabouts when his friend was dying, specifically refer to the practices of Theocritus and Virgil in their idylls and eclogues. Gunn's elegies do allude to classical precedent ("To the Dead Owner of a Gym," "To a Dead Graduate Student," "Epitaph"), but the focus of their allusions is predominantly the English Renaissance ("Courtesies of the Interregnum," "In Time of Plague") and the English pre-modern poet, Hardy, from whom he "got a bit of help"[203] in writing "The Gas-Poker" and on whom "Words for Some Ash" is modelled. Just as Hardy's "Poems 1912-13" mourn his first wife indirectly through objects associated with her (fashion prints, for instance), so Gunn addresses Lay's death obliquely by means of his metonymic ashes. The scattering of Lay's dust on a beloved Californian "coastal ridge" from where in life he "watched the distant crash, / Ocean on a broken edge" is meant to recall "I Found Her Out There," where Hardy guiltily remembers how far Emma, buried in inland Dorset, is from her native Cornwall, from whose coastal "heights /… she would often gaze" to "where the ocean breaks / On the purple strand."[204] In poetic recompense for neglect during their marriage, Hardy imagines Emma's "shade" creeping "underground / Till it catch the

sound / Of that western sea,"[205] a journey imagined for Lay's ashes as they progress down through "damper ground" and out into the Pacific.[206]

Doty's elegiac allusions are less oblique and, in their tendency toward rhetoric**,** less restrained. He will quote from the model—often in translation—then base the whole emotive poem round that quotation. Apart from Cavafy, the poet who has most shaped his thinking on death is Rilke—indeed he placed a citation from *Duino Elegies* on the printed cards for Roberts' funeral.[207] Thus in "Lament-Heaven" he takes for his title a translated phrase from "Orpheus, Eurydice, Hermes" and throughout the poem expands mournfully on Rilke's sense that "the lamenting" does not stop "at the borders of this world" in counterbalance to the Ouija-board's blithe insistence that the death Roberts imminently faces is "home." Though the reality principle in the form of a practising violinist forces Doty to side with Rilke's non-consolatory vision in the poem,[208] he is generally happier relaxing into Whitman's cosmic optimism. When Roberts died Doty couldn't help "*thinking of Whitman: 'to die is different than anyone supposed [and luckier].'*" In consequence, he chose this line and the rest of *Song of Myself, 6* to be recited at the scattering of Roberts' ashes.[209] Floating on Whitman's afflatus, he can entitle an elegy to a barbarously culled dog "With Animals" after a phrase in *Song of Myself, 32* and proceed to convert the squalid details into affirmation.

Animals die without ritual, but pastoral elegies are accorded a ritualised solemnity by their processions of mourners, measured pace, stately repetition of questions and names, catalogues of offerings and steady movement from darkness to light. However, gays, as Doty points out, have no "big tradition" of mourning ritual. Unconstrained by church ("I cannot be queer in church") or "family wishes," they devise "ritual occasions [that]… tend to look a lot like the person they… mourn."[210]

Camp irony, as "Tiara"[211] shows, is always on hand to deflate any hint of portentousness.

In contrast, Gunn's elegies adopt a quasi-ritualistic seriousness. By so doing, they attempt to show, despite prejudices to the contrary, how dignified homosexual death can be. Of course, the formality of traditional genre ("Lament," "Epitaph," the pagan intercessional prayer "Words for Some Ash") and of regular couplet and quatrain help, but unity of tone is also vital: Gunn never mixes register—formal grief with camp humour, for instance—as Doty does. He sustains the tone within the poems not merely through the direct presentation of stark details, but also the repetition of refrains—"I shall not soon forget"[212]—and phrases—"Of course I simplify. / Of course."[213]—that allude to the procedures of pastoral elegy. However, Gunn does not repeat the names of the dead because what he is aiming for is an intimate seriousness: he tends to address the dead man directly as "you" so that the poem becomes an implied dialogue in line with the dialogic nature of much pastoral elegy.

Thus, in writing AIDS elegies at the end of the twentieth century, Gunn and Doty faced a number of problems in the areas of poetic performance, subject matter, treatment, tone, generic convention and readership. Although their contrasting solutions climb to different levels of success, they unite in taking full account of what is new about the syndrome, while simultaneously providing original glosses on more than two millennia of tradition.

---

[1] Paul Monette, *Love Alone: 18 Elegies for Rog* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988).
[2] Mark Doty, *Heaven's Coast: A Memoir* (London: Vintage, [1996], 1997), 110, 277.
[3] D. J. Enright, ed., *The Oxford Book of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
[4] Thom Gunn, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 463.

[5] Matthew Curr, *The Consolation of Otherness: The Male Love Elegy in Milton, Gray and Tennyson* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002).
[6] Thom Gunn, Interview with Alan Jenkins, "In Time of Plague" (*Independent on Sunday*, 1 February 1992), 24.
[7] Thom Gunn, *Boss Cupid* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 47.
[8] Clive Wilmer, *Poets Talking: The "Poet of the Month" Interviews for BBC Radio Three* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 3; Gunn, "In Time of Plague," 25.
[9] Wilmer. Unpublished comment made in introducing readings, which followed the Wilmer interview on Radio 3.
[10] See David John Richards,"'Each Challenge to the Skin:' The Significance of the Body in Thom Gunn," unpublished thesis (London: University of London, 2004), 280, n64. The epigraph is from Charles Hinkle, *Poems*, ed. Thom Gunn and William McPherson (San Francisco, CA: Eos Press, 1988).
[11] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 469.
[12] Thom Gunn, Interview with Elgy Gillespie, "Poems of the Plague" (*Guardian*, 24 February, 1992), 33.
[13] Ibid.; Gunn, "In Time of Plague," 24; Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 483.
[14] Thom Gunn, *Shelf Life: Essays, Memoirs and an Interview* (London: Faber and Faber, [1993],1994), 229.
[15] Wilmer, 4.
[16] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 455.
[17] Ibid., 479.
[18] Ibid., 492.
[19] Thom Gunn, *Thom Gunn in conversation with James Campbell* (London: Between the Lines, 2000), 50.
[20] Gunn, *Boss Cupid*, 15.
[21] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 476.
[22] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell*, 51.
[23] Gunn, "In Time of Plague," 25.
[24] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 476-77.
[25] Ibid., 415; Gunn, *Boss Cupid*, 47-48.
[26] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 481.
[27] Ibid., 469.
[28] W. David Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 103.
[29] Ibid., 181.
[30] G. N. Pigman III, *Grief and the English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 88-90.
[31] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 481.
[32] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell*, 26.
[33] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 465-68.
[34] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 137-44.
[35] Ibid., 204-5.
[36] Ibid., x.
[37] Ibid., 6.
[38] Gabrielle Griffin, *Representations of HIV and AIDS: Visibility blue/s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 36-38. ACT UP is an acronym for the American gay activist group: AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power.
[39] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 278.
[40] Ibid., 290,141.
[41] Ibid., 57.
[42] Ibid., 290.
[43] Mark Doty, *Firebird: A Memoir* (London: Vintage, [1999], 2001), 144-45.
[44] Ibid., 176-80.
[45] Mark Doty, *My Alexandria: Poems by Mark Doty* (National Poetry Series, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 80-81.
[46] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 108.
[47] Doty, *Firebird*, 190.
[48] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 234, 272.
[49] Mark Doty, *School of the Arts* (London: Cape Poetry, 2005), 26.

[50] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 200.
[51] *Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Poets Respond to AIDS* (New York: Crown, 1989).
[52] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 143-5.
[53] Ibid., 112.
[54] Ibid., 283-4.
[55] Ibid., 107, 215-16, 219.
[56] Ibid., 158-61.
[57] Mark Doty, *Sweet Machine: Poems* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 54.
[58] Doty, *My Alexandria*, 36.
[59] Mark Doty, *Source* (London: Cape Poetry, 2002), 13.
[60] Doty, *My Alexandria*, 67.
[61] Mark Doty, *Atlantis: Poems* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1995), 85.
[62] Mark Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 30, 38; Mark Doty, ed., *Open House: Writers Redefine Home* (Graywolf Forum 5, St. Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2003), 211.
[63] Doty, *Atlantis*, 35-37, 86-87, 88-91.
[64] Ibid., 87.
[65] Ibid., 90.
[66] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 151.
[67] Ibid., 150-52.
[68] Jeff Nunokawa, "'All the Sad Young Men:' AIDS and the Work of Mourning" in Diana Fuss, ed., *inside/ out: Lesbian Themes, Gay Themes* (London: Routledge, 1991), 316-19.
[69] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 131-32.
[70] Gunn, *Boss Cupid*, 3-4.
[71] Doty, *Sweet Machine*, 109-11.
[72] Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox*, 103.
[73] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 63.
[74] Doty, *My Alexandria*, 39-51.
[75] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 20.
[76] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell*, 46-47.
[77] Thom Gunn, ed., *Ezra Pound: Poems Selected by Thom Gunn* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 11-13, 22.
[78] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 4.
[79] Doty, *Atlantis*, 83-101.
[80] Doty, *My Alexandria*, 65-67, 20-26.
[81] Mark Doty, *Turtle, Swan and Bethlehem in Broad Daylight: Two Volumes of Poetry by Mark Doty* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000 [published separately: 1987, 1991]), 115-20.
[82] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 138.
[83] Ibid., 235.
[84] Doty, *My Alexandria*, 89.
[85] Doty, *School of the Arts*, 29.
[86] Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, 293.
[87] Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*, 67-8.
[88] Doty, *Atlantis*, 90.
[89] Doty, *My Alexandria*, 44.
[90] Doty, *Turtle, Swan and Bethlehem*, 96.
[91] Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox*, 13, 20-21.
[92] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[93] Gunn, *Collected Poems*, 463.
[94] Deborah Landau, "'How to Live, What to Do:' The Poetics and Politics of AIDS" (*American Literature* 68.1, 1996), 193-225.
[95] Ibid., 194.
[96] Ibid., 200.
[97] Joseph Cady, "Immersive and Counterimmersive Writing about AIDS: The Achievement of Paul Monette's *Love Alone*" in Diana Fuss, ed., *inside/out: Lesbian Themes, Gay Themes*, [244]-164.
[98] Ibid., [244].
[99] Zeiger, Melissa F. *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 22.

[100] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* [472].
[101] Shakespeare, *King Lear,* III. iv, 28-30, 100-05.
[102] Monette, *Love Alone*; D. Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy" (*October* 51, Winter1989), 3-18.
[103] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell,* 30.
[104] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 412.
[105] Doty, *Sweet Machine,* 46.
[106] Doty, *Source,* 28-29.
[107] Ibid., 8-12.
[108] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 44-45.
[109] Doty, *Source,* 24.
[110] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 138, 252, 260.
[111] Thom Gunn, Interview with Chris Jones, "A Transit of Thom" (*Poetry Review* 86.3, 1996), 56.
[112] Donald Davie, *Under Briggflatts: A History of Poetry in Great Britain, 1960-1988* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1989), [177]-81.
[113] Gunn, Interview with Chris Jones, 55-56.
[114] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell,* 25.
[115] Thom Gunn, Interview with Robert Potts, "Profile: Thom Gunn" (London: *Guardian,* Saturday Review, 27.9.03), [23].
[116] Ibid.
[117] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell,* 49-50.
[118] Gunn, Interview with Robert Potts, [23]; Gunn, *Boss Cupid,* 59-60.
[119] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell,* 57.
[120] Thom Gunn, *The Occasions of Poetry: Essays and Criticism in Autobiography,* expanded edition, ed. Clive Wilmer (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, [shorter edition 1982] 1985), 118.
[121] James Miller, "Dante on Fire Island: Reinventing Heaven in the AIDS Elegy" in Diana Fuss, ed., *inside/ out: Lesbian Themes, Gay Themes,* 293.
[122] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 88-89; Doty, *Turtle, Swan and Bethlehem,* 96.
[123] Doty, *Sweet Machine,* 6, 34.
[124] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 18.
[125] Doty, *Source,* 9.
[126] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 19.
[127] Mark Doty, *Firebird: A Memoir* (London: Vintage, [1999] 2001), 181-82.
[128] Doty, *Turtle, Swan and Bethlehem,* 96.
[129] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 7; Doty, *Atlantis,* 25-26; Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 200.
[130] Doty, *Firebird,* 100-01.
[131] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 26.
[132] Doty, *Turtle, Swan and Bethlehem,* 99.
[133] Doty, *Source,* 12.
[134] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning.*
[135] Gunn, Interview with Alan Jenkins, 24.
[136] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 469.
[137] Unpublished comment made in introducing readings, which followed the Wilmer interview on Radio 3.
[138] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 472.
[139] Doty, *Sweet Machine,* 49.
[140] Doty, *Atlantis,* 26.
[141] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 195.
[142] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 468.
[143] Ibid., 472.
[144] Doty, *Sweet Machine,* 11-12.
[145] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 199, 264.
[146] Ibid., 229, 88, 278, 271.
[147] Ibid., 283.
[148] Doty, ed., *Open House: Writers Redefine Home,* xiii.
[149] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 192.
[150] Ibid., 177.
[151] Ibid., 242, 192.
[152] Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon,* 7.
[153] Ibid., 63.

[154] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 243.
[155] Ibid., 266.
[156] Ibid., 242.
[157] Ibid., 87-88.
[158] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 55.
[159] Doty, *Turtle, Swan and Bethlehem,* 53-54; Doty, *My Alexandria,* 26-27; Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 42-43, 55; Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon,* 27-29, 64; Doty, *School of the Arts,* 24, 91.
[160] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 172.
[161] Ibid., 42, 42, 267, 269.
[162] Ibid., 267; Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon,* 42.
[163] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 29; Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 181.
[164] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 467.
[165] Ibid., 481.
[166] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell,* 50.
[167] William Watkin, *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 106.
[168] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 470.
[169] Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon,* 69.
[170] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 465-68.
[171] Ibid., 476, 466, 470.
[172] Ibid., 475.
[173] Ibid., 472.
[174] Gunn, *Boss Cupid,* 16.
[175] Doty, *School of the Arts,* 88; Doty, *Atlantis,* 96.
[176] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 304.
[177] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 76.
[178] Doty, *Atlantis,* 83-85.
[179] Ibid., 96.
[180] Doty, *My Alexandria,* 22-23.
[181] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 294.
[182] Doty, *Atlantis,* 96-97.
[183] Jahan Ramazani, *Yeats and the Poetry of Death—Elegy, Self-Elegy and the Sublime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 106.
[184] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 267-68.
[185] Doty, *Firebird,* 46, 161-70.
[186] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 261-69.
[187] Ibid., 266-68.
[188] Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon,* 42.
[189] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 89, 268.
[190] See Joanne Feit Diehl, "In the Twilight of the Gods: Women Poets and the American Sublime" in Mary Arensberg, ed., *The American Sublime* (NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 173-215, and her *Women Poets and the American Sublime* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).
[191] Doty, *Source,* 62-63. See also Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820-1880* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002).
[192] Doty, *Firebird,* 80-81.
[193] Peter M. Sachs, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 2.
[194] Doty, ed., *Open House: Writers Redefine Home,* ix, 222.
[195] Doty, *Source,* 1-3.
[196] Watkin, *On Mourning,* 72.
[197] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 471.
[198] Ibid., 401.
[199] Gunn, *Boss Cupid,* 4.
[200] Ibid., 10-11.
[201] Ibid., 14-15.
[202] Ibid., 14, 16-17.
[203] *Gunn in conversation with James Campbell,* 19.
[204] Thomas Hardy, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 322-23.

[205] Ibid.
[206] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 472.
[207] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 111.
[208] Doty, *My Atlantis,* 82-89.
[209] Doty, *Heaven's Coast,* 265, 282.
[210] Ibid., 110, 17.
[211] Doty, *Turtle, Swan and Bethlehem,* 96-97.
[212] Gunn, *Collected Poems,* 470.
[213] Ibid., 481.