



AIDS, Affect, and Alternative Realities: Paranoid and Reparative Readings of Thom Gunn's *The Man with Night Sweats*

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Abstract

*As both a constant reminder of the disease-inflicted body and the celebration of queerness and queer communities, AIDS literature generates a wide affective spectrum. In *The Man with Night Sweats*, Thom Gunn explores this spectrum through a poetic process of (dis)embodiment that creates a web of relationships marked by negative (pain, grief) and positive (joy, love) feeling. On the one hand, Gunn's work calls for what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "paranoid reading": an anticipation of, and emphasis on, AIDS' ravaging of the body to reestablish poetry in its real-world social/political context. On the other hand, Sedgwick's reparative reading, which searches for pleasure rather than warding off pain, is imperative to the queer world-building Gunn achieves in conjunction with his corporeal recognition. In this paper, I suggest a simultaneous application of paranoid and reparative strategies in reading *The Man with Night Sweats*. I argue that this simultaneous reading accounts for the agency of marginalized bodies while also acknowledging the shared spaces constructed for those bodies—spaces that persist with and without the diseased body.*

During the height of the AIDS epidemic, poetry offered alternative ways of seeing what was, for many, a grim reality in its historical, medical, and social conditions. Utilizing the flexible, playful possibilities of language, poets could write about AIDS and rewrite AIDS discourses; they could reflect on difficult lived experiences while also reconstructing those experiences in self-sustaining ways. Both negative affect (for example, anger at a homophobic politics, grief for sick and dying loved ones, exhaustion from continued acts of oppression) and positive affect (for instance, sexual/social pleasure in queer relationships, intimacy in developing queer communities, love and care toward the next generation(s) of queer people) can be captured simultaneously in the constantly deconstructing nature of poetic form and language.

In his collection *The Man with Night Sweats*, Thom Gunn powerfully exemplifies the generative possibilities of the (re)writer-poet in the AIDS era. Replete with harrowing descriptions of bodies-with-AIDS and heart-wrenching deliberations on the epidemic's social and political consequences on affected communities, Gunn's poetry does not repress its subject matter. His anger toward the political silence/silencing that further exacerbated the AIDS crisis hangs heavy in these poems—many of which are elegies for Gunn's gay male friends and lovers. At the same time, though, Gunn works to subvert problematic discourses—particularly ones that rationalize illness as a natural consequence of homosexuality and point to AIDS as a physical marker of that consequence. *The Man with Night Sweats* transcends oppressive ideologies of queerness to reimagine it as a community of shared understandings and affects; queer people release individual subjectivity and exist in an in-between space.

In its common usage, “affect” has become synonymous with “emotion.” However, while emotions are categorical due to their linguistic signifiers, affect is more fluid and relational. To be “affected” is to be involved in some kind of relationship—sometimes with oneself but more often with someone or something else. In practice, affect theory centers the *acts* of reading, writing, and critical interpretation along these relational lines; it asks questions like “how do we read/write?” and “how do we feel when we read it?” at each individual enactment. Drawing from the work of Baruch Spinoza, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg write that “affect’s ‘not yet’s’ [are] never really supposed to find any ultimate resolution. . . . [I]t would be . . . a rather serious misrepresentation of contemporary theories of affect if we were to understand each of these ‘not yet’s’ as moving forward in some kind of integrated lockstep” (Seigworth and Gregg 3). To attempt to predict the “not yet’s” or the “unknowns” of an always-acting affective system by relying on historical or narrative patterns is to live in a paranoid mode.

If AIDS literature is an affective tradition in its close relationships between body to text and reality to discourse, it is essential to consider the method by which it is read. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies a trend of “paranoid reading” and an alternative, “reparative reading,” in two essays deeply

important to queer theory and influenced by AIDS-era thinkers and writers: “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” and the later “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes.” Drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and cognitive theorist Silvan Tomkins, Sedgwick asserts that paranoid reading is the dominant (and often only) method of twenty-first-century literary criticism. Occasioning a constant state of anxiety, or “dread” (Sedgwick, “Melanie” 633) about potential bad surprises or humiliation, paranoia is anticipatory and reflexive; it “grow[s] like a crystal in a supersaturated solution, blotting out any sense of the possibility of alternative ways of understanding *or* things to understand” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 131). This “blotting out” is what makes paranoia a “strong theory”; paradoxically, the anticipation by which surprises are prevented persists and grows in fear of future surprises. The contrasting “weak theories”—*good* surprises in the forms like tonal nuance, attitude, and wit—are specific and localized, only able to “describe the phenomena which [they] purport to explain” (Tomkins 519). Thus, paranoia becomes a “monopolistic strategy of anticipating negative affect . . . entirely blocking the potentially operative goal of seeking positive affect” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 136). In other words, paranoia reminds the embodied subject of bad interactions to such an extent that any interaction is reflexively blocked.

Characterized in this way, paranoid reading has become unsustainably negative and unproductively circular for Sedgwick. She instead advocates for reparative reading, made possible by Klein’s depressive position in which one uses one’s “own resources to assemble or ‘repair’ the murderous part-objects [projections of one’s paranoia onto others] into something like a whole” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 128). In this newly assembled whole, “the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 128). In other words, reparative methods do not anticipate negatively affected (“bad”) surprises but embrace the possibility of things unanticipated. The reparative reader can then redirect their attention towards “weak theories,” things explicitly (and often positively) affected—nourishing themselves in their relationships with others. In these specific, localized instances, “the ‘for now’ promise of affect’s ‘not yet’” can be achieved, in which “that propitious moment when the stretching of (or tiniest tear in) bloom-space could precipitate something more than incremental” (Seigworth and Gregg 12). This “bloom-space” is not inhabited by bad memories but eagerly awaits new interactions and connections.

Though Sedgwick’s binary language betrays a preference toward reparative reading, the historical and cultural context of *The Man with Night Sweats* (the AIDS epidemic) demands concurrence of the two methods. Heather Love, unconvinced that Sedgwick’s essay should be read “only [as] a call for reparative reading,” remarks on Klein’s paranoid/schizoid and depressive positions: “[N]ot only is oscillation between them inevitable, but they are also bound together by the glue of shared affect” (Love 239). Similarly, David

Kurnick takes issue with Sedgwick for “taking a terminological doublet (paranoid/depressive) that it is hard to conceive of as an opposition and transforming it into a dramatically moralized binary (paranoid/reparative)” (Kurnick 364). Because Sedgwick’s initial manipulation of Klein’s terms is binaristic, she implicitly suggests an incompatibility between them—which she resolves by “choosing” reparative reading. However, in *The Man with Night Sweats*, Gunn’s speakers are not as resolute as Sedgwick appears to be, especially when considering that AIDS is both a contagious illness and a social marker in its specific pandemic discourse. These speakers occupy and interact with a wide range of subject positions: people living with AIDS (PLWAs), loved ones of PLWAs, queer parents, etc. Thus, they are always moving in the in-between spaces of physical (health vs. illness) and affective (positive vs. negative) binaries, pulled in multiple directions by their current realities and the relationships that structure them. Paranoid reading, then, acknowledges the body-with-AIDS and “real-world” social and political consequences in AIDS literature. However, this literary tradition does not exist solely to alienate its speakers through an anticipated future—or nonfuture. Gunn’s work is especially resistant to the use of negative affect to elicit empathy, as Tyler B. Hoffman notices in his work on Gunn’s “representing AIDS”: “refusing to hold his intellect in abeyance, [Gunn] ‘thinks as he grieves’” (Hoffman 15). If reparative practices view the AIDS text as a producer of new futures, new ways of thinking and loving in AIDS-affected communities, then the concurrent use of these methods is particularly important in reading *The Man with Night Sweats*. In this new way of reading, Gunn’s poems can be seen to accord agency to marginalized bodies and create shared, intersubjective spaces of belonging for PLWAs.

Cognizant of the inevitability and intensity of the physical symptoms experienced by bodies-with-AIDS, Gunn’s elegy “Lament” reveals the security provided by a paranoid response through the speaker’s anticipation of his friend’s death. Frontloading that the man’s “dying was a difficult enterprise” (“Lament” 12), the poem seems to introduce a retrospective perspective that would naturally prevent bad surprises. However, even if the anticipation of death, the cause of the “Lament,” is quelled in the opening statement, its being “a difficult enterprise” evokes further paranoia: *What* made it difficult? *How* difficult was it? Paranoid readers must prepare themselves for a negatively affected description—one consistent with a typified image of the suffering, isolated AIDS patient. Gunn’s painstaking detail concurs with these anticipated descriptions of “the cough’s dry rhetoric” (4), “a hard headache” (13), and “the same short cry / Of mild outrage, before immediately / Slipping into the nightmare once again / Empty of content but the drip of pain” (15–16). This cycle of expectation and experience of pain reflects the tautological nature of paranoia, which “can’t help or can’t stop or can’t do anything other than prove the very same assumptions with which it began” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 135). However, in the AIDS-affected context of “Lament,” this paranoia does not function as a “triumphant advance

toward truth and vindication” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 135). Rather, “paranoid forms of revelation help nurture [the speaker] for whom survival is always a matter of interpretative intervention” (Wiegman 12). Because his companion has already died at the outset of the poem, the speaker must anticipate this death even if interpreting the past differently (i.e. reparatively).¹ This always-already paranoia can be understood through George Piggford’s “empirical discourse,” which “assumes that AIDS is extra-discursive and exists in physical bodies” (Piggford 178). This position, available to “the subjectivities of those for whom AIDS signifies an everyday struggle” (Piggford 178), resists discursive, textual reimaginings. Thus “Lament,” though itself a text, is read through the paranoid lens of that struggle—anticipating AIDS and its wrecking of the man’s body by prognosticating his dying.

However, the speaker’s recognition of his companion as he shifts to a depressive position—a recognition in large part produced by the text’s nonlinear temporality—produces local instances of *sought* positive affect that can be read reparatively. At first, these depressive turns are infrequent: “In hope still, courteous still, but tired and thin, / You tried to stay the man that you had been, / Treating each symptom as a mere mishap / Without import” (“Lament” 9-12). Even if these lines still write AIDS onto the body (“tired and thin”), the speaker *localizes* each symptom outside of its “empirical” context. That is, as “mere mishap[s],” these symptoms *could* be conceived of as insignificant surprises that are “realistic and necessary” to the reparative reader (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 146). Later, the speaker’s reparative impulses are detailed further:

You tried, tried hard, to make of it a life
 Thick with the complicating circumstance
 Your thoughts might fasten on. It had been chance
 Always till now that had filled up the moment
 With live specifics your hilarious comment
 Discovered as it went along; and fed,
 Laconic, quick, wherever it was led.
 You improvised upon your own delight. (“Lament” 54–61)

The speaker recognizes that the man might fix his thoughts on the “complicating circumstance” of his illness but is nevertheless determined to live with and through it.

Importantly communicated here is that this present paranoia is not this man’s typical way of “reading.” Before the “now” of AIDS, he had been reliant on chance, his “hilarious comment / Discover[ing] as it went along.” In other words, he had lived free of anticipation and instead “improvised upon [his] own delight,” being “fed” on the pleasure and positive affect in that “not yet” space. Latching onto this “interpretive intervention,” the speaker is reminded of a night

¹ Because of the personal/(auto)biographical nature of these poems, I have assumed that speakers whose identities are not specified are queer men, as Gunn himself was.

during which he and his friend “talked between [their] sleeping bags, below / A molten field of stars” (“Lament” 62–63). This reparative episode, which can be traced back to an initial anticipation of the man’s death, is only reparative for the speaker. Still, this moment importantly indicates that the most drastic bad surprise shielded by paranoid thinking can lead to the most beautiful reparative reinterpretation.

Though the end of “Lament” returns the reader’s focus to the paranoia-invoking body-with-AIDS, the speaker’s memories of his friend reassemble into a “more satisfying object” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 128) that nourishes him even after his friend’s death. Throughout the second half of the poem, the speaker’s textual reflections rewrite his friend’s death in a way that illuminates “his friend’s poise—his refusal to hand over life without a fight, his grim ‘endurance’” (Hoffman 25). In between life and death, the man’s “mind, alone, / Explore[s] this emptying intermediate / State for what holds and rests [are] hidden in it” (“Lament” 40–42). For a paranoid reader, this state may recall his friend’s impending death—as the linear nature of paranoia enforces this chronology. For a reparative reader, though, the state functions as what Thomas Yingling calls “the gap between the apprehension and the comprehension of the disease, . . . an asymptotic space where allegory persistently finds itself at play” (38). As a space of both *apprehension* and *comprehension*, this space does not exclude paranoid readings but instead balances them with reparative ones. It is true, as Deborah Landau points out, that the “oasis-like interlude” of the aforementioned summer night passage is “cut short with the line ‘Now you were tired,’ launching a catalogue of further medical complications” (200). However, Landau’s strictly paranoid analysis does not take note of the lines immediately afterward: “Still hungry for the great world you were losing / Steadily in no season of your choosing” (“Lament” 69–70). The speaker envisions his friend’s hunger, his desire to seek a world beyond the AIDS-inflicted body and the exhausting paranoia that comes with it.

Even at the subject’s moment of death, the speaker discerns a reborn self: “You made local arrangements to the bed / And pulled a pillow round beside your head. / And so you slept, and died, your skin gone grey, / Achieving your completeness, in a way” (“Lament” 95–98). After this moment of reparative recourse, though, the magnitude of *real* death is realized and the speaker is “delivered into time again” (“Lament” 104). That this death does not inspire a “meditation on his lover’s body that might have inspired a redemptive erotic or spiritual vision” (Landau 200) does not nullify earlier reparative reflections. Instead, it regrounds the speaker in his tedious material reality—this time with a newfound recognition of his friend’s “completeness.” As reparative moments in “Lament” succeed in rewriting a pre-death reality that comforts the speaker, the paranoia of the present remains visible in the periphery.

While “Lament” reframes temporality to allow its speaker to interpret his friend’s death in both paranoid and reparative modes, “In Time of Plague”

allows paranoia to drive new expressions of gay male sexuality. Like in “Lament,” the speaker in “In Time of Plague” begins by invoking the most dramatic effect of AIDS on the body: “My thoughts are crowded with death” (“Plague” 1). However, this paranoid expectation of death is accompanied by a surprising feeling: “it draws so oddly on the sexual / that I am confused / confused to be attracted / by, in effect, my own annihilation” (“Plague” 2–5). The speaker wonders about the sexual excitement he derives from the anticipation of AIDS, asking: “Who are these two, these fiercely attractive men / who want me to stick their needle in my arm?” (“Plague” 6–7). Aware of the dominant AIDS discourse that naturalizes illness as a consequence of homosexuality, the speaker is at once aroused by risk and the anticipation of a shared perspective—that is, the paranoid perspective. The speaker echoes Sedgwick’s claim that paranoia requires “being imitated to be understood . . . and seems to understand only by imitation” (“Paranoid” 131):

I love their daring, their looks, their jargon,
and what they have in mind.
Their mind is the mind of death.
.
.
.
They know it, and do not know it,
and they are like me in that
(I know it, and do not know it)
and like the flow of people through this bar. (“Plague” 12–18)

The speaker, whose own thoughts are dominated by death, recognizes that the other men’s thoughts are the same. However, this recognition of paranoia does not evoke rage or annoyance, but love. Recontextualizing sexuality in Gunn’s poems, Colin Gillis writes that “the speaker gives voice to a community of individuals . . . defined and empowered by a willingness to enjoy sex and the face of illness and death” (Gillis 159). In “In Time of Plague,” the people in the bar are both paranoid and aware of the eventual futility of paranoia; the endless cycle of knowing and not knowing drags the very rhythm of Gunn’s lines. In “Lament,” the staggering reality of death and the speaker’s subsequent isolation can only be read reparatively through “ephemeral encounters” (Gillis 169) with memory. The presently narrated “In Time of Plague,” though, is a testing ground for reparative practices amid a paranoid reality.

As the speaker struggles to hold true to his reconfigured sexual desire in the temptation of a protective, dominant paranoia, “In Time of Plague” begins to offer a solution in the reparative form of a collective subjectivity. As the poem continues, the speaker spirals into cycles of self-doubt about the morality of his reparative impulses: “I seek / to enter their minds: am I fool, / and they direct and right, properly / testing themselves against risk?” (“Plague” 22–25). Here, the speaker faces “depressive pressures” in the form of “a paralyzing

apprehension of the inexorable laws of unintended consequences” (Sedgwick, “Melanie” 637). What if he has misread the traces of sexual desires in the men’s words and expressions? The speaker, desperate to quell his worries, defaults to the mimetic thinking of paranoia. This spiraling continues: “I weigh possibilities / till I am afraid of the strength / of my own health / and of their evident health” (“Plague” 29–32). Just when it seems that paranoia has dominated, a reparative community reveals itself as a “moving concourse of people / who are boisterous and bright / carrying in their faces and throughout their bodies / the news of life and death” (“Plague” 35–38). In this fleeting moment, the paranoid and the reparative are inscribed on the same body. The “news of life and death” is carried on “boisterous and bright” faces unwilling to be ruined by cyclical, self-sabotaging paranoid thinking.

While AIDS still exists as an empirical discourse in “In Time of Plague,” Gunn’s poem also exemplifies Piggford’s tropic discourse, which “regards AIDS as a metaphor constructed in language” (Piggford 178). Just as reparative reading builds on paranoid reading, the tropic builds on the empirical. “[M]ere death’s heads lighted glamorously” (“Plague” 28) both embody the individual’s anticipation of death and the magic of the collective “moving concourse” (“Plague” 35). With this, the speaker accesses the “threshold to the depressive position . . . the simple, foundational, authentically very difficult understanding that good and bad tend to be inseparable at every level” (Sedgwick, “Melanie” 637). The good and bad become part of a renewed sexuality. As Gillis explains it, the “state of ardent life” (“Plague” 20) is one in which “the risk of infection allows for a partial abolishment of the self-interested self . . . [and] the self [is expanded] by eroding the boundaries that separate self and other” (Gillis 172). This in-between space in Gunn’s work is tropic—nourishing the self by distributing subjectivity across a community.

Possibly occupying a body-with-AIDS himself, the speaker of the collection’s titular poem, “The Man with Night Sweats,” is the most paranoid in Gunn’s work—as the effects/affects of AIDS are felt empirically and no longer approximated textually. The poem opens as the speaker wakes from “an intoxicating dream dashed by the cold, sobering reality of illness” (Gillis 165): “I wake up cold, I who / Prospered through dreams of heat / Wake to their residue, / Sweat, and a clinging sheet” (“Night Sweats” 1–4). The “dashed dream,” the positively affected moment cut short by the cruelty of waking reality, typically characterizes the presence or reemergence of paranoia in Gunn’s poems. Elsewhere, Gunn writes that this poem is “spoken by somebody who wakes up sweating and *assumes* that he has AIDS” (Gillis 167). Thus AIDS, through a paranoid lens, exists in opposition to “dreams of heat” as their sweaty remains; the speaker’s intimate moments are expelled from his infected body and deemed separate. In the past, the speaker’s “flesh was its own shield, / Where it was gashed, it healed” (“Night Sweats” 5–6). As Gillis describes it, his body “served as a sheath that protected the man during sexual encounters: it [was] ‘its own’

self-repairing ‘shield’” (Gillis 165). Now that the speaker occupies a body-with-AIDS, “anxiously watch[ing] as his body betrays the symptoms of his disease” (Hoffman 19), self-reparation seems unlikely.

However, these critics’ isolation of the paranoid body-with-AIDS from the non-paranoid, self-repairing body-without-AIDS soon reveals itself as binaristic and oversimplified. The speaker continues:

I grew as I explored
 The body I could trust
 Even while I adored
 The risk that made robust,
 A world of wonders in
 Each challenge to the skin. (“Night Sweats” 7–12)

As in “In Time of Plague,” the speaker’s body had functioned as a self-repairing shield *because of* paranoia; he pursued “the risk that made robust,” as it created a “world of wonders” within each bodily interaction—each affective instance. In this way, “the threat of infection makes real the potential for gay sex to be a form of self-sacrifice, an abolishment of ‘proud subjectivity’” (Gillis 165). The speaker’s realization that he may have been infected is a bad surprise, just as previous moments were good ones that produced wonderful worlds. Understandably, he “cannot but be sorry / The given shield was cracked,” as the shield-as-flesh is now marked by the empirical evidence of AIDS (“Night Sweats” 13–14). Indeed, this crack is another “challenge to the skin” (“Night Sweats” 12) that will produce its own world of wonders.

Only this time, the speaker’s increased proximity to AIDS forces the poem to consolidate the tropic and the empirical, the text and the body. The body-within-text becomes the “good internal object” to which Klein’s depressive position relates in a way that is “virtually intersubjective, profoundly ambivalent, and a locus of anybody’s special inventiveness” (Sedgwick, “Melanie” 629). The speaker in “The Man with Night Sweats,” more than those in the previous poems, has been strengthened by this threat of disease. He has taken on a “second, binocular angle of vision . . . more programmatically resistant to . . . the excluded middle term, where passive is the opposite of active and desire is the opposite of identification” (Sedgwick, “Melanie” 631). That is, Gunn’s internal object is constantly shifting in response to the present, an “affectively resonant scene” (Wiegman 6); it switches between paranoid and reparative modes according to what is currently necessary.

The speaker or “internal object,” responding to the *real*, physical pain of AIDS on his body and the sexual and emotional community that traverses through it, seeks to repair his body when it does not repair itself. By “hugging [his] body to [him] / As if to shield it from / The pains that will go through [him]” (“Night Sweats” 19–22), the speaker seeks to love and protect his “cracked”

body. He is aware of the fate dictated by his illness, naively hugging himself “as if hands were enough / To hold an avalanche off” (“Night Sweats” 23–24). The reparative impulse, though, knows that the “unmediated charge of all that thematized bad affect . . . can be genuinely disabling to cognitive function” (Sedgwick, “Melanie” 630). Thus, instead of exhausting himself in anticipation of the avalanche, the speaker embraces himself in an act of agency. Hoffman writes that the poem’s ending is hopeless, as the speaker “futilely tries to ward off death” (Hoffman 19). What this paranoid reading misses is that death is viewed as *only* negative because of the terms set by paranoia. In a space in which paranoid practices coexist alongside others, death does not impede hope, love, and other positive affects as individual subjectivity is dispersed across many part-objects. In Gunn’s poems, queer PLWAs confer love upon each other, especially so in the inherently paranoid reality of AIDS as if to balance the two methods.

The final poem in the collection, “A Blank,” offers a post-AIDS discourse in which the body can be read through a reparative frame of reference; the consolidation of sexuality, identity, and community produced by AIDS discourse can now be imagined in ways *outside* of illness. In this poem, the speaker recognizes a past lover who now has a young child. Though the speaker’s relationship with this man only existed in “certain passages . . . in my bedroom and his” (“A Blank” 10–12), he recalls a shared, lived experience. However, what surprises the speaker is the man’s “self-permission / that he turned from nothing he had done, / Or was, or had been, even while he transposed / The expectations he took out at dark” (“A Blank” 19–22). The reparative possibility that Ellis Hanson describes as “build[ing] or rebuild[ing] some more sustaining relation to the objects in our world” (Hanson 547) is made *public* here. It exceeds the text and grounds itself in reality in the form of this child—the material product of a “decision” (“A Blank” 17).

Unlike in “Lament,” reparation does not happen retrospectively in “A Blank”; instead, it is a present “transposition” of AIDS-era reparative discourse. This transposition is encapsulated by the desire to “educate, permit, guide, feed, keep warm, / And love” (“A Blank” 26–27). Here, the speaker discovers that “it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 150). Both the speaker and his former lover, having survived a paranoid “year of griefs” (“A Blank” 1), exist within a community in which “murderous part-objects” are reimagined as objects on which to confer love. In an exclusively paranoid discourse, part-objects are “magically good or bad—where those are not in the first place ethical designations but qualitative judgments perceived as involving life or death” (Sedgwick, “Melanie” 633). Good/bad and life/death are always and already merged in “A Blank,” as the “wayward and eager” (“A Blank” 18) child is enlivened by the force of his father’s intersubjective expectations—identified by and thus known to the speaker.

The symbol of the titular “blank” is powerful in its ability to weave together paranoid and reparative practices, creating new internal objects within the child *and* the speaker and spreading the model established individually in “The Man with Night Sweats.” The speaker of “A Blank” writes that at the time of adoption, his former lover’s child “was still a blank then on a form” (“A Blank” 28). Excluded from histories of heterosexual reproduction, queer people have often re-produced themselves in communal, cultural forms; the direct parent-child link is an unusually blank space in queer history. With time, however, the “blank was flesh, running on its nerve, / This fair-topped organism dense with charm” (“A Blank” 29–30); the blank spot becomes filled by a positively affected charm. If in “The Man with Night Sweats” flesh is a “cracked shield,” a physical marker of AIDS that can only be transcended temporarily or metaphorically, the flesh of the queer man’s child is not inscribed. Rather, it becomes beautifully unknowable, unnameable, encompassing “an area between life and death, apprehension and comprehension, reality and fantasy” (Piggford 192).

Reparative modes of thinking, in which one demonstrates “affirmative dependency on the object . . . respond[ing] to [its] experience and need” (Wiegman 18), happen on two affective levels in “A Blank.” First, the man responds to his child’s needs, as seen by the aforementioned acts of love and care. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, the speaker responds to the man’s experience. In this response, the risk and uncertainty associated with paranoia remain: “the risk of single parenthood, compounded by the unpredictable outcome of adoption, is continuous with the risk taken by the young man during past chance sexual encounters” (Gillis 179). Rather than prophesying some negative consequence, though, the risk is made implicit as the speaker observes the scene. As Heather Love argues, “there is risk in love, including the risk of antagonism, aggression, irritation, contempt, anger—love means trying to destroy the object as well as trying to repair it” (Love 239). The man’s love for his child, this new internal object on whom he is dependent, may come in the form of negative affect. For the speaker, though, watching his friend’s “countering pull, his own devoted arm” (“A Blank” 32) is enough in that moment. The speaker too is a blank; this time, he is ready “to know and not to know” his reality in ways the speaker of “In Time of Plague” can only imagine within the text.

Through the coexistence of paranoid and reparative reading practices, the poems in *The Man with Night Sweats* allow Gunn to create a unique space of “intellectual creativity” that interweaves discursive binaries until they become complementary positionalities. That is, Gunn’s speakers can think both as they grieve and after their years of grief. While the “glue of shared affect” (Love 239) reassembles the text in ways unseeable to the exclusively paranoid reader, the text also remains glued to the empirical reality of AIDS. Kurnick takes issue with AIDS as a “mood of queer criticism . . . [which] obscures the historical conditions of its articulation” (Kurnick 366). Gunn’s conscious approach, however, makes use of paranoia to avoid disillusioning his readers. *The Man with Night Sweats*

grapples with an avalanche of pain and grief while also hugging itself close in a reparative way.

Along these lines, the collection establishes its distinctive “individual typology,” making possible new ways of physical, sexual, and emotional love during and after the AIDS epidemic. Gunn’s work contributes to “shared histories, emergent communities, and the weaving of intertextual discourse” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 150) in a profoundly affective and thought-provoking way. And though it focalizes gay men (specifically gay PLWAs), Gunn does not link illness and identity in an essentialist way. Instead, he transforms the spreading of illness into the distribution of subjectivity; his speakers “turn outward, surrendering themselves to be shaped by and to speak for others” (Gillis 159). Thus, how we interact with *The Man with Night Sweats*, how we shape and are shaped by Gunn’s discursive and extra-discursive language, is of paramount importance. Just as we must lament the loss of countless lives and acknowledge pain and suffering, we must seek pleasure and nourishment to survive in times of plague. In all the anxiety and fear that comes with life, there is a point at which we must stop anticipating the worst and open our eyes to the “world of wonders” within each of life’s little joys.

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