Using Up Words in Paul Monette's AIDS Elegy

IN THIS ESSAY, I argue that AIDS elegy succeeds not just in aesthetic, literary, and metaphorical terms, but in terms of cultural productivity. The idea of an active poetics, a politically and socially effective literary body, is manifested through AIDS elegy in bodies of work and persons. AIDS elegy collects data as if substantial weight will force change. It pares away affect and the unnecessary (although often through experiencing and exhausting them first) and remains robust and full of information for an ongoing community of mourners. It is because of the active engagement between AIDS elegy's work and the future reality of a community of sufferers that I insist on separating this mode of elegy from classical pastoral elegy, which tends to reflect and console in the present. The mourning community in Lyddas, by contrast, is not one that fears mass drownings in the wake of Lycidas's death. Even in Tennyson's In Memoriam, which seems to be battling theology and scientific development as it mourns Hallam, it is talking in these moments about the personal faith of the poet and not the life of the dead one or *others like him.*

I begin by opening up some issues—to which I return later—about writing and representation both in *Love Alone* and artistic creation as a whole. This incorporates setting *Love Alone* and earlier elegy side-by-side for initial comparison. In part two, I discuss in more depth the role of AIDS elegy in the real-world cultural setting of AIDS (in America), and how Monette begins to push past his anger (and his depiction of the AIDS "war") toward a reconciliation with heterosexual mourners. This consolation, I argue, is again different from the traditional apotheosis; it is the creation of healing for the future and for others as well as the poet, whether or not Monette really cares to be part of that wider process. The real effectiveness of language,

communication, and writing is interrogated later in section two where I discuss Monette's replacement of concepts with objects. I hope here to illustrate how AIDS elegy pulls itself away from a less severe pastoral mode. Part three continues the discussion of the power of words and of the ways in which *Love Alone* both uses and breaks out of convention. I close with an extended discussion of the final elegy in *Love Alone* and suggest that in the end Monette recalls traditional closure, but—while writing some of the best poetry in the collection—achieves uniqueness by leaving language for a reliance on the permanence of a single image.

Considering the book as text, as a play of signifiers in an expanding field, we see that *Love Alone*'s engagement with AIDS speaks—or rather shouts—across a gap in communication. As a reinvention of the classical elegiac genre, with the shadow of AIDS cast upon it, *Love Alone* takes language from the heterosexual shelves, appropriates it, re-presents it, and exposes it under the banner of AIDS specifically to be opened up and reflected back onto the world at large. It is part of Monette's achievement in the open-ended mode of his free verse in this collection of elegies that he emphasizes the role of what Lee Edelman has termed "homographesis," exposing the difference and différance in gay inscription. "Like writing," writes Edelman,

> homographesis would name a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labor of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on *de*-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively inscribed. That these two operations, pointing as they do in opposite directions, should inhabit a single signifier, must make for a degree of confusion, but the confusion that results when difference collapses into identity and identity unfolds into différance is...central to the problematic of homographesis. (10, italics original)

If we consider the book as a cultural work or object with assigned meaning regardless of how the text works, we see on the one hand that the acts of printing a book with a "Stonewall Inn Editions" cover and of stating that the book should be filed under "AIDS" rather than "poetry" (Monette xi) work to publicize the voices of gay men in the world at large. On the other hand, they allow confirmation by an extreme heterosexual system of difference that sees as inevitable the gap of silence—Baruch Blumberg's term is "fear gap" (87)—between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

These acts of text and work, however, are also accommodations of power: the words, phrases, acknowledgements, are all burdens of the heterosexual order's inscription. By being carried across the "gap" they are appropriated not as confirmations of that order's original view of the other, but are homographically rebuilt, redefined, and resemiotized. The words still echo the other order, but the identity that has been formed by an ignorant "difference" now "unfolds into différance" as the new queer regimen of signifying units slowly but surely homes in on its own referential identities—or rather keeps shifting away from its opposing heterosexually assumed identities. Such creation of newness is something akin to gay life, as defined by Jeffrey Weeks:

> Lesbians and gays have a sense of their own creativity because they are, day by day, involved in self making, constructing their own meanings, networks, rituals, traditions, calling on the inherited traces of the past, but responding all the time to the challenges and possibilities of the present. (134)

It is arguable whether this notion can be claimed as a perquisite of gay and lesbian experience; processes of self-fashioning have been in place for white, powerful, heterosexual males for centuries. For the present, however, there is a symbiosis, strongly identified by Monette, between being gay and confronting AIDS, and this dynamic dyadic is explored in improvisatory and exploratory language and acts of selfhood. Each experience promotes understanding of the other and insists on vocalizing that learning. The resulting texts are lessons on sexual life and the frailty of life for self-styled "mainstream" readers as well as homosexuals.[1]

The methods for this improvisational creativity are stark and forward-looking. If the literary text is infused with its cultural and literary past, it also feeds the cultural and communicative future. In spite of the almost violent wielding of his textual tools, Monette manages to bridge this gap between radical AIDS "warrior" and the resisting reader because of what I will show to be the inevitable continuum of the text through all cultural forms. The notion that everything is text, inside and outside of the literary

work, is hardly new in a poststructuralist age, but studies of Monette's prose and poetry have struggled to let go of affect as the central driving force of the work, even as they claim to be centralizing politics. Monette's inability to escape generic and expressive convention in his work means that he at once reappropriates any heterosexism in language to an opposing cause and also speaks back to (or at) the heterosexist majority in ways they might resist, but are forced to understand.[2]

It is because of this premise that *Love Alone* behaves as one text among many—whether literary, political, religious, or artistic, or all of these—that I would place *Love Alone* within Barthes's paradox of pop art:

> [In pop art] on the one hand, the mass culture of the period is present in it as a revolutionary force which contests art; and on the other art is present in it as a very old force which irresistibly returns in the economy of societies. There are two voices, as in a fugue—one says: 'This is not Art'; the other says, at the same time: 'I am Art.' (198)

Monette's *Love Alone: Eighteen Elegies for Rog* contest the notions of traditional pastoral elegy and its infusions of nature by importing the mundane and mass-produced; yet we realize that benignity in elegiac trauma is traditional. His lexical disturbance and typographical non-conformity vocalize the departure from the norms of literary response to death; yet by imposing radical alterations the text takes its place in a genre that relies on a rhetoric of special effects such as narrative interruption and direct speech. Elegies have always had to do the impossible and they do it through forcing language where it has hitherto feared to tread. That Popean allusion placed back in context of course indicates recklessness, and there is indeed a reckless intelligence throughout *Loue Alone*, at once rejecting and incorporating the caring elements of the world, from people to flowers. I argue here that Monette's elegies are "pop art" in this sense of the contrapuntal fugue, screaming "I am not the same, not usual," while letting in signifiers that indicate "I am another small example of the familiar in history." Pop art foregrounds difference from classical art, but it foregrounds sameness and repetition in its own aesthetic. It relies on certain aspects (though not wholes) of universal experience (e.g., mass-produced consumer goods), but it is always fighting against the frustration of deconstruction, of never being able to make its point in a place of semiotic stability ("originality" becomes a contested term).

It is an apt if unfortunate fact that "AIDS" is an acronym, a powerful indication of the inscrutability of satisfying closural language for the state of a diseased nation and world; the letters highlight deferral of the cure, or even the ability to communicate effectively in the AIDS arena. Monette's elegies are similarly caught in these tensions between independence and incorporation, and between textual and personal definition and loss. They inevitably draw on traditional elements in spite of the text's radically disturbed surface, multiple social situations, and stark politics breaking through the poetry—in fact, *because* of it. If we think of great elegies such as Milton's Lycidas, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, or even Yeats's *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*, they all foreground textual instability, changes of voice, and political commentary as necessary features of elegy.[3] Kinereth Meyer, discussing "the mythology of modern death" (Coleridge's term), argues that it "represents not a radical shift away from the elegiac tradition, but rather a further intensification of its basic concerns" (Meyer 25). Celeste Schenck also speaks to the "pop art" paradox with which I began. Modern elegy, she reminds us, either speaks in "elevated registers" of poetry's restorative power or reacts cynically to the prospect of poetic recovery. This latter form,

> usually resorting to parody and inversion, deliberate rupture of ceremonial patterns, results in works that are generically mutant—*élégies manquées* which register, in their disruption of inherited form, the impossibility of conventional transcendence. These anti-elegies, often reproducing elegiac conventions more faithfully than poems of the first type, should be viewed in their own right as survivals of a sustaining literary mode; these peculiarly modern poems, by their acts of criticism, testify to the resilience of elegy as a form both in which and *against* which to couch literary ambitions, thoughts of mortality, death, love, potency, and poetry. (io8)[4]

For all the weight of traditional precedent and usefulness of paradigms, *Love Alone* shows us a discrete mode within the genre of elegy. Its immersion in the inescapably altering infusion of AIDS produces difference, because the improvisation of the text reveals new identity not in the tricky manner of

the anonymous swain of *Lycidas*, but in two unique ways. First, the constant searching for, and learning about, the right objects, drugs, cleaners, and tokens of affection to employ ensures ongoing revelation and re-evaluation of the self; second, the white, middle-class American gay male autobiogra-pher's position in "a no-man's land somewhere between the male and the 'other'" (Newtown 52) requires constant self-assessment and recognition of one's place in a culture that categorizes around the trope of the "norm."

The combination of these differences yields elegiac success, which is enabled through new experience, contact with psychological and material impetuses unimaginable before the rise of AIDS, and therefore excluded from elegy before the 19805. Jahan Ramazani speaks eloquently of the work of the NAMES project Quilt in his major work on elegy, but it is telling that his discussion, published the year before Monette's own death, remains only in a coda to a large book. While AIDS elegy, like modern elegy before it and concurrent with it, returns to tradition as well as defying it, its job and sense of effectiveness separate it from much of elegiac writing. AIDS elegy attaches itself at places with war memorial and employs war metaphors as well as those of apocalyptic plague extensively (which I examine below). David Jarraway has reminded us in his essay "From Spectacular to Speculative: The Shifting Rhetoric in Recent Gay AIDS Memoirs" that the use of the tropes of plague and terror to talk about AIDS has run its course; here, however, we still have to speak about Monette's work on its own metaphorical terms of the 19805, while trying not to perpetuate the rhetoric. The notion of fighting and of dying for a cause that few can understand connects the modes, both expressing frustration for their cause being either ignored or perpetrated and perpetuated by authoritarian figures who are not directly, and in the present, affected by such death. For all its contiguity with traditional pastoral elegy, then, its premise—the reason for and explanation of loss—is so distinct from tradition that the major studies on elegy by Ramazani, Sacks, Shaw, and Potts, among others, can only speak gener(ic)ally to poems like those in *Love Alone*.[5]

This is not to say that extended study of the genre is not useful to a reading of *Love Alone*; simply that we must reread the earlier work for an emergent, more relevant mode within elegy. As a very brief example, we can expand Schenck's trace of the adaptation and "literalization" of classic elegiac motifs after Lycidas. She turns to Crane's *Cape Hatteras* as an example of elegiac myth-making or story-telling. Crane is talking to Whitman, speaking to the dead, asking "if infinity / Be still the same" as when Whitman had walked in Long Island. Crane meditates on Whitman's stomping ground, "Not this our empire yet." Schenck writes, "clearly Crane intends to inherit that 'empire' of recognition" (100), but does not focus on Crane's apparent desire to incorporate this homosocial region of his precursor. The empire is not yet gained (through mythologizing or real action) for gay men. Traditional, and possibly oppressive, elegiac practices, such as flower-collecting or flower-strewing, must be altered and appropriated for use in the modern, ravaged world. The spinning windmill toy on little Brian's grave (in the poem "The Losing Side," discussed below, Monette 37), for example, is a plastic flower, made of the modern material that saves and sustains lives in hospital, blown and turned by the pathetic winds that care about the dead. In the process of replacing natural beauty with artificial interruption, AIDS elegy can force us to feel the alienation of persons from a place or community (e.g., Whitman's Paumanok) while it is unable to avoid alluding to (the work of) that excluding community, thus reproducing elements that are "startlingly conventional" (Schenck 101).

WE WILL HAVE TO KEEP making our way into AIDS elegy through its predecessors. James Miller adapts the notion of the classical elegy's resurrection of the dead one, or *anastasis*, to write, "In AIDS elegies anastasis conies as a blessed moment of recovery when the dead rise from the mass graves dug for them by the fatalistic discourse of public health and join forces with the living against the World, the Flesh, and the Virus" (266). Added to this trinity should be the "Word." For what is used as weapon and counter-weapon in all situations of "battle" involving the AIDS debate is the "word." In the beginning was the Word, and it was a word of creation; next came the words of naming; then the words of seduction, of sin, of expulsion; and then those of resurrection and new life. It is the end of this lexical chain that elegy represents, and it tends to strive to connect the final links into a circle. The end of the elegy is not the end of the battle. We are in the upturn of the AIDS crisis, and the product that is the printed (the

"finished" book) can be a weapon. Monette's agnostic clinging on to a non-traditional belief in some greater power that is not the conventional God suggests that every book on AIDS or written under the shadow of AIDS is a challenge to the Bible itself, a challenge to the order that returns time and again to the joke about Adam and Steve, and to the word of destruction against Sodom and Gemorrah. Even at this extreme, however, we should temper the interpretation by remembering that Milton's attack on the "corrupted Clergy then in their height" was a challenge to orthodoxy;[6] and Tennyson's biggest dilemma is keeping his faith as his intellect shows him natural evolution. Radical disturbance to reigning ideology has long been a child of the creation called elegy.[7] In the end, Monette's anger is only doing what comes naturally: it is ironically an orthodoxy to be heterodox in elegy.

Anastasis, in Miller's interpretation, cannot actually happen in AIDS elegy. A stable resolution through language cannot be achieved to close the mode, a fact that may have much to do with the inability yet to name the cause of death. Elegy needs this information to place the deceased successfully in a tangible and permanent state of rest (albeit often through mythologizing the real situation). Edelman notes that the U.S. Government definition of AIDS in 1991 ran to fourteen pages (93-94). Whereas Lycidas "sufferfed] death by submersion in water" (OED, "drown"), Rog died through an indefinable complex of fourteen pages of viral infections, cancer attacks, and weakening conditions, none of them finally blamable alone. To locate the precise mode of death, the location of death, and to suppose the repose of the dead, is essential if the traditional elegy is to be able to end. But then Monette's elegy does not end. There is (literally) no full stop. There is a metamorphosis, a move from word to song and image, but the constantly mimetic work takes us on a journey "toward death" that does not end by falling down, but by a sudden and final upturn, a small ramp that throws us lightly into the air, as a "song." From there, to imagine the place of Rog is as much our guess as Monette's.

Extremities often highlight contrasts, and thus the indefinability of Rog's disease highlights the particular centrality of Paul's grief. Both men are fighting for their own and their brothers' causes. Monette is particularly interested in depicting their roles as fellow warriors. Sheryl Stevenson proposes that we read past Susan Sontag's and Susan Jeffords's concerns with the dangers of over-militarization and "remasculinization" of cultural

texts and discuss why those in a position to lose out by metaphorical overload in fact appropriate such modes (241-43).[8] Monette consistently uses war as representation of the struggle of persons with AIDS ("PWAs"; compare, of course, military tags such as POWs). Through such language, he can assert the heroism of AIDS sufferers, notes Stevenson (243-44). The idea of war enables deeper assessment of an individual's role, too. The concept of "winning" in this war is quite different from that of destroying your human enemy: to win is to survive. To have survived is, of course, different from being in the process of surviving, which is another, partial victory. And it is survival against a number of enemies. The fight becomes at once selfish and magnanimous, utterly like elegy itself. Persons with AIDS must take any opportunity to sustain life for themselves and learn how to cope (and to record their findings) for the sake of others. Those others, Monette prophesies harshly, will be "those / who are not yet touched" by the disease. Those people "will beg us to teach them how to / bear it we who are losing our reason" ("Manifesto," Monette 42).

> The war fought in AIDS poetry thus occurs on multiple fronts; the enemy is defined and then redefined. Observing the many casualties of AIDS, one poet notes that the "war has no name / so it's everywhere and not" (Young 8), suggesting that not recognizing this war allows it to be denied, in spite of its omnipresence. (Stevenson 246)[9]

The elegist must contend with the "AIDS" label, which—it bears repeating—is not a name but an acronym. It substitutes for a name we do not yet have, one that defines the indefinable disease(s). It is also appropriate to note that "aero-" means the tip or the uttermost, for the name gives us just the tip of the iceberg, the suggestion of what lies beneath and keeps it hidden from those who cannot, or will not investigate its shape, force, and future movements.

At some point, the impossibility of comprehending the disease or the scale of its devastation, and the impossibility of communicating with all necessary parties and getting them to listen leads to irony and sardonic humour. The poetry understands its own weaknesses and the limits of its metaphors. Stevenson efficiently brings out this problem in her reading of the poem, "The Losing Side" (Monette 37-39). In this poem, Paul is at

Rog's graveside when he meets Eve, a woman visiting her son Brian's grave, who died when he was two years old. "By continuing to develop military metaphors" in such inappropriate circumstances, Stevenson writes, "this passage makes a point by their inaccuracy, showing that the struggles of life have even fewer rules than those of warfare" (247). By acknowledging that "somehow we got to be men together" (Monette 39), Monette is building a bridge between the AIDS dead and those killed by multiple other causes. Monette is perhaps also setting the example for his resistant readers by outlining communicative success between homosexual and heterosexual mourners. Such recognition on the poet's part pulls us away from familiar suspicions of narcissism and self-victimization in elegy. Here the contiguous methodologies of mourning (Monette's and Eve's) and the manner of ending (Rog's and Brian's) come as close to touching as may be possible. At this point, however, with spoken and written metaphor finally inadequate, the words are replaced by an object, a thing to evoke new representations—a toy windmill:

> Eve is five graves over or Brian is at least
> d. 18 June two years old Eve elbow-rubs
> the bronze plaque changes her flowers before
> the least brown edge and sticks a pinwheel in
> the ground above think what a brave toy it is
> to flutter here on the hill catching the vague
> random air like an amnesiac trying to
> hum a few bars of the wind.
> ("The Losing Side," Monette 37)

Rather than recover Rog as a man, the windmill causes Eve to lament that Brian could not live to be a man and Monette to be reminded of the years as a boy that he did not know Rog. At all points the elegy forces displacement. The object not only stands for the promise, "I'll remember everything," and does away with the Sisyphean task of using language to attempt to get to any sufficient signification; it stands also for all those things that were not allowed to be, for the time and experience death takes away from all mourners.

The loss of metaphorical power, the inability to get to the essence of the disease, and the beginnings of cross-community communication all lead to the necessity for naming the dead. This traditional elegiac moment takes on vital importance, whether we consider the dead as victims of war who must be remembered for the fight or, more harshly perhaps, as exhibits, evidence in the case against denial. Both these purposes are folded into the elegiac text that is the NAMES project AIDS Quilt.[10] The Quilt sections are often submitted with letters and include pictures and names of those who made each piece. Unlike the inscriptions on the Vietnam Memorial wall, the names on the Quilt are looked for and found in a context that does not isolate the community of the dead, but rather one that infuses the words and image—the presence—of the living. This may be the closest any attempt at mourning or epitaph has come to properly representing the dead within the full context of their own death—that context being one that includes the living, the surviving. Here, despite the indefinability of the disease, AIDS deaths find a delimited place.

The Quilt is a politically active place of discourse and representation, for it is mobile, can be set up on any large, flat surface, and cannot be avoided by anyone who wants to be in the same place for other reasons. This is why the Quilt seems so "at home" on the Mall in Washington, DC. It lays itself like a veneer of dissension over the established order's centre of rhetoric and silence (an especially important act in the late 1980s and unfortunately also in the current regime of barely disguised inhumanity). Of course, the text in the Quilt is a silent one, for it is a text of death; but it also presents a discourse *for* the dead in an act of substitution. The Quilt represents highly performative statements and appropriately emphasizes the duality of AIDS death: the single category of "disease" under which all those remembered are classified as having died, yet the individuality and infinite variations (instability) of the disease and persons, as expressed in the starkly different sections, threaded together. In her discussion of the role of AIDS elegy as creating "a common geography of the mind," Kimberly Rae Connor differentiates between the "textual" presence of Monette's work and the "actual presence in the NAMES Project" Quilt (48). But all the aspects of the Quilt's "actuality" are aspects of textual—or at least discursive—experience. For just a couple of examples, we might take the Quilt sections with their definite

borders sewn together, individual yet inextricable, and compare these with the separate elegies in *Love Alone*, independent yet collected, detailing various aspects of character and decline yet connected under the umbrella of AIDS. Or the practicality of the Quilt, laid out on the ground with its passages between sections into which the reader inserts him- or herself to examine the text sections from alternate angles, and *Love Alone* with its constant breaks and interstices, references to the mundane and recognizable that pull the reader in to examine from new angles the profundity of the subject (person and topic) being addressed or discussed.

In his great Quilt-like collection of names and things and textures, Monette is not afraid to pull in other voices from the past and the twentieth century to aid his cause; his rather trite but perhaps revealing allusions, such as hospital "Room 1010" (Orwell's "room 101"?) as the worst of all worlds, locate the state of elegy in the modern world; poetry is not the force at hand here—AIDS is the force; the word, the material object, and the noise constitute the response. The AIDS elegy must (re)cite the past and revivify it in the deadly present. When Monette goes on to write,

> war is not all
> death it turns out war is what little
> thing you hold on to refugeed and far from home,
> ("Here," Monette 3)

we can understand that war reveals the *différance* of the practicum of life—after "everything extraneous" has burned away, after war takes away all things in death, what is left is the result of war, thus strangely war = life. The fight against AIDS, similarly, can be seen as a celebration of life, of what defies the disease. This battle is a war of words, but ones, as we have seen, with doubtful efficacy. Monette falls to naming things a few lines later, "Glad Bags One-A-Days KINGSIZE," as he almost disposes words, words that denote pacifying but ineffective objects. Words are perceptual building blocks to create something real: they resurrect things from the past, place them in the unprecedented context of the present, and build bridges into the future. Monette is always repairing what went wrong with Rog and setting us up for the inevitability of the future. He enacts the cleaning and re-presenting of Rog by the rejection of the actual cleaning items, "the junk

that keeps men spotless" ("Here," Monette 3); he washes Rog's hair in "No Goodbyes" (Monette 4), reminiscent of *Lycidas*, where "With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves." But of course, this ending in Lycidas is the evoking of the—rhetorically, at least—*effective* resurrection of the dead one; Monette is listing the "junk" that does network. Here soap is no cleanser. The word is a new signifier. We no longer have sweet scent and pleasure signified, but the bare referent of a useless block—every noun challenges us to reassess the place of the referent we thought we knew, taking it on for the postmodern world, and more precisely for the AIDS-ridden world where the notion of "value" is constantly refigured.

To take this further, we can see that the retention of youth and health that classical elegy insists on doing for its dead is so much more literal and challenging in an age of plastic surgery, deodorant, and vaccination, where appeals in the lexical tradition can seem paltry in comparison with the power of the scalpel. Roberta McGrath writes in her essay, "Dangerous Liaisons":

> the mode of desire is not, in the late-twentieth century, an ascetic mode of desire but an excessive mode, a "culture of pleasure" where the body itself anointed with perfumes, decorated with jewels, swathed in silks and cashmeres, accessorised to the hilt becomes a prize investment; purchases become magic fetishes which give not only sexual pleasure but can ward off disease. They offer a safe decontaminated arena of desire and pleasure. (145)

It is all the more shocking for America, then, that it is faced with AIDS, such a forceful enemy to modern human power in the developed world. Peter Cohen begins his book, *Love and Anger*, with the following observation:

> For middle- and upper-middle-class gay men in the United States, AIDS has constituted two kinds of crises: most obviously a health crisis, but simultaneously a crisis of consumption. Accustomed to having market access to whatever commodities they wanted, middle-class gay men found themselves faced with an epidemic for which no cure could be purchased because none existed. (9)

Paul knows that all the surgical tools and "elixir" ("Black Xmas," Monette 18) in the world cannot cure Rog: "my groping docs might just as well use leeches / for all they can touch my invisible disease" is his response to medicine ("Current Status 1/22/87," Monette 35). At each point we are forced to reconsider the potential use(lessness) of any product, person, or action in the midst of the postmodern viral world. "Virus," McGrath states, "has become a key term of late-twentieth-century life, ascribed alike to both human bodies and bodies of knowledge" (143). But it is not a new metaphorical concept: early modern authorities understood the "infection" possible by subversive example in the public places of recreation. That the attainment of knowledge and the interference and transmission of that knowledge via today's media (paper, celluloid, electronic) has been called viral, lends postmodern elegy a certain air of irony. To begin the elegy is necessarily to be infected with predecessors of centuries. To write the elegy is to investigate the virus (the success of the elegy is to [have] live[d] with the virus), to have created antibodies against its outdated, disastrous elements, and to create with the hosts of words in the elegy a life strong enough to be recreated or mutate in the minds of the readers and accepted as relevant for the postmodern world. The way to achieve this is to keep adding to the language of the elegy all the time, to reconstruct where the new AIDS elegy has necessarily deconstructed in order to reinscribe itself. The additions involve the very naming of postmodernity: Kleenex, One-a-Day;[11] naming flowers and grave markers; names added to the cause (Brother John in "Brother of the Mount of Olives" [Monette 60-65] > [an]d castigation by naming the enemy, Lady Hay, in "Manifesto" [Monette 40-42]). These are new threads in the *textum*, the shroud, the new synthetic fabric of mourning.

Once again, the comparison—or rather imbrication—of elegiac text and the Quilt comes to mind, as both events supplement text with recourse to three-dimensional objects of memory. The direction that *Love Alone* is heading, out of pure text and into material representation (material in both cultural senses of being politically aware and of producing material substantiality), is the same as the ongoing process of the Quilt. This shared activity of text and textile goes some way to answering an objection of writers like Timothy Murphy who ask whether "elegiac writing isn't sometimes a poor substitute for informed and effective political discourse" (307), as though AIDS elegy can somehow not be political discourse.

Since the language of material addition has been turned to reveal the backside of its pre-AIDS signification, and since we are in a world where money does not play its "culture of pleasure" part in buying a pretty cure, Paul puts his Visa credit card to use, not to buy "magic fetishes" to "ward off disease," but to purchase a pair of rings to commemorate Rog's life through an affirmation of his death:

> I NEED A
> MOURNING RING longing you see for an age of
> widows in veils thick as bedsheets...
>
> …
>
> and there it was the very thing black jade
> banded in gold three fifty good god no
> I'll lose it on the plane besides it's just
> for the picturesque like keeping a stuffed cat
>
> …
>
> of course
> I knew right along it wouldn't touch the pain
> it was just a game but one hungers so
> for ritual that's portable you can't walk out
>
> …
>
> back in LA I decided to keep a perfect
> circle and bury the jet in the grass above
> your folded arms so many along the way
>
> …
>
> at least you had no agony at the end the ring's
> all hidden and suddenly I'm moaning out loud this very
> specific moan the echo of you.
> ("Three Rings," Monette 29-31)

Monette vigorously rejects affectation where necessary, and these rings are no "cure." They alter the norms of dominant fashions of desire and dissociate themselves from protection of the body of Rog to the extent that they celebrate Platonic unity. We could question Monette's character, choosing to bury the cheap ring with Rog and excusing the lack of decoration on Rog's grave. But this aside, the rings he buys are fitting rejoinders to any

doubt about his relationship with Rog, and are not purifiers, but articles of acceptance. Moreover, and most important for my reading here, this appears to alter the traditional gestures of gathering flowers and remembering youth. The classical sense of rings as "sovereign," or healing, is re-inscribed with the notion of the ring as a symbolic confirmation of the impossibility of somatic recovery: "it's just / for the picturesque," as we have just read, "like keeping a stuffed cat" (Monette 30).

That latter statement pinpoints Monette's position on the edge of comedy and satirical anger; the stuffed cat is the memorial turned macabre, at once understandable and stupid. The flowers that are the absolute metaphor for the elegies sung to Lycidas or for the dead president are rejected by Monette: "pain is not a flower pain is a root / and its work is underground," he insists ("Gardenias," Monette 8). Pain, death, love, and sex all come together in AIDS elegy and in this image. Schenck notes that Hart Crane too "was very much aware of the peculiar eroticism—at once bridal and funereal—of the pastoral floral bouquet" (104). AIDS elegy cumulatively copes with its forebears and their desires for life and death. It may be that "in pastoral initiation poems from Theocritus to Milton, a man is treated to arcane lore and welcomed to mature poetic stature by a member of the same sex" (Schenck 103), but the homosocial initiation is now fearful as well as epiphanic. Whitman and Crane could not write of such tension, thus my earlier point that while we must work *through* earlier elegy, studies of that elegy will not lead us to a final understanding of AIDS elegy. It must be dealt with in its own right, for it is work about men who are connected not just by love, but by physical contact that has left an indelible mark. Monette here opens up to us his journey of exploration wherein AIDS is a discourse inscribed upon the body. From within, from "underground," from the "root," AIDS attacks. It puts out its petals, its lesions, but the bloom of course will die; there is always something unseen, something we are blinded against, something yet to come and envelop us.

That "something yet to come," Monette warns, is the spread of the disease. While the heterosexual order was denying the extent of AIDS, it was also frightened by the invisibility of homosexuality and its ability to infiltrate their ranks silently. AIDS thus created a visibility that could be equated with homosexuality. AIDS, while heightening awareness, has also enabled a new widening of the "fear gap" and an emphasis on a simplistic

homo/hetero binary society. But there is a second wave of invisibility called the future. So it is that Monette can look outside one morning and see that "half the city's Capri and half Buchenwald." So it is that he can make his "Belsen" prediction in a poem to which I alluded earlier:

> I had a self myself
> once but he died when do we leave the mirror
> and lie down in front of the tanks let them
> put two million of us away see how quick
> it looks like Belsen...
> ...for those who are not yet
> touched for soon the thing will ravish their women
> their jock sons lie in rows in the empty infield
> the scream in the streets will rise to a siren din
> and they will beg us to teach them how to bear it we
> who are losing our reason. ("Manifesto," Monette 41-42)

This is a vision of death "underground," of genocide unseen or unheeded, and according to this moment in the elegies it involves a selflessness, a giving up of identity (with the tensions that such a concept entails in the postmodern world) for the name of the community. It is a claim of expertise, a greatness that has been thrust upon the gay western community. In the end, Monette tells us, it is the (homosexual) survivors to whom the "ravaged" world will come for help. The old order will need the experience of what Monette and his fellow mourners have witnessed.[12] In the end the resurrection of the writer and not the dead one is the more powerful effect. This resurrected writer is the one who has witnessed, denied under the duress of loss, and returned via his own words to be witness of the past for future generations. As Woods says in his forward-looking essay, "Lamentation is itself an acknowledgment that the one who sheds tears *has a future*" (163, italics original). But Monette's moment of life is more vital than usual. Milton (or the swain) is not drowning as he sings for Lycidas. Monette on the other hand writes from "within" the cause of Rpg's death, since he was himself diagnosed with AIDS shortly after Rog. The concept of a "witness" is as transitory as words themselves.

FOR ALL THE RADICAL EXPRESSiONISTIC strokes in *Love Alone*, Monette is reinscribing dominant cultural forms on several levels. Finding useful words, we are seeing, is highly important. But phrasing, use of epigraphs, form of the whole poem, managing of a collection, and the drawing on apparent convention (and the necessary shifts that occur therein), are all instrumental in the multivalent form of communication in which Monette is engaged. Joseph Cady condones what he calls "immersive" writing about AIDS, writing that does not apologize for its style and content and does not overtly cater (or worse, pander) to the resistant reader. He writes,

> the quality that makes *Love Alone* the fullest and finest example so far of immersive AIDS writing is each poem's seemingly chaotic form, in which Monette consciously disrupts all traditional notions of focus, sequence, tone, and structure. (247)

The "seemingly" is important here. He goes on to quote the poem "Three Rings" at length, and to say that "Here, as in all of *Love Alone*, Monette matches his harrowing content with a harrowing style by upsetting every conventional expectation of order an audience might bring to a text" (249). This is a difficult assumption to make about an audience who has read through the poetic disruptions of the Modernist aesthetic or "minority" literatures; it is even doubtful in the light of the conventional texts with which I have been comparing Loue Alone. Deborah Landau would support Cady's feelings about Monette's text. She talks of Monette's poem, "Ed Dying" as having "an aggressively antilyrical style" (204)." She then goes on to say that this is exemplified by Monette's own proclamation that "I don't mean them [the *Love Alone* elegies] to be impregnable, though I admit I want them to allow no escape, like a hospital room, or indeed a mortal illness" ("Preface," Monette xii). This does not seem to be evidence for antilyricism, however. The lyric is often strictured, stanzaically and metrically confined; it forces the reader to remain within a small, formally-furnished room. If we want to divorce this poetry from traditional lyric, perhaps we should be thinking psychologically as well as physically or spatially. Within the room of the formal lyric, the enclosed structure can guide and comfort us in its containment. The enclosures of Monette's poems, however, frustrate our desire to break out, keeping us in maddening ratruns of missed opportunity and fading memory. The tightness of the room does not hold us together so much as force our minds to race while denying the body its rest.

In a way, *Love Alone* is ultimately structured. There could be no better holding pen, no stronger form, than a "stanza" (a room) that allows entry (for these poems certainly are *not* impregnable) but no exit until all the walls, the ceiling, and the floor have been examined or "scoured" (Monette ii), by which time the way out is revealed to be into another similar but shifted room (the next poem, the next Quilt panel) on this inevitable journey through death. Inscription is in itself a material form. Monette comes to realize this need for writing when, with Rog, he sees a marble block with Greek lettering. "'I hope somebody's recorded all this,' I said, realizing with a dull thrill of helplessness that this *was* the record, right here on this stone" ("Preface," Monette xii). Records of records of records can be made, but what we turn to in the end is always a substitute for the thing being recorded. There is no ultimate veracity in the mode of inscription; there is only hope for a transcendent signified. Since the "battle" of AIDS elegy is not simply to recover a single person (who will not return from the dead), but rather to recall all those dying from the disease, there is purpose to documenting experience. Textual intervention, then, the activity of making noise, avoiding deadly silence, will at some point be seen to have played a role in the cure that will come and the lives that will be saved.

This is why we can be more confident that AIDS elegy enacts a role quite different from other modes within the genre; and this is why we can be more positive about the real-world, cultural effectiveness of AIDS elegy. Responding to ActUp's silence = death slogan, Jason Tougaw writes,

> Silence = Death appears to offer a tidy formula for the decimation of a catastrophic plague. The implication is that if we speak, write, and act, we can defeat the epidemic. However, the discourses instigated by the trope as a call to arms almost always defy the apparent simplicity of a metaphor that takes the form of an equation. AIDS memoirs are constructed by the slogan at every turn, but as narratives they complicate and even repudiate its claims. (237)

The equation does not seem to attempt to claim all-encapsulating meaning, however, or a direct line to a "magic bullet." Rather, it aims toward Acting Up, Unleashing Power—a force to set textual precedent for those who do have the ability and skill to find a cure. Neither is this premise so radical or new. While not referring directly to AIDS, Karen Mills-Courts points out that silence = death as the inversion of language = life can be traced back to Plato's reading of textual work (22-23). To keep talking—as Stephen Hawking and Pink Floyd reminded us—is to know that one is in the semi-victorious state of surviving in the face of the multiple medical, physical, and political hindrances we have already talked of.

Writing, then, is not artistic or creative cultural cure, but a tool with which to effect a constant awareness of the dead and the living and also a process of building an identity (or a pair of identities) that eventually moves beyond text.[14] We may see the activity of composition as substitutional or vitally actual. Mills-Courts details the conflict between two opinions on the role of writing as a process of truth-telling. Derrida's insistence, as Mills-Courts remarks, on the deferring signification of the word means that "words only seem to stand in truth's place"; "Heidegger, on the other hand, insists that truth 'is,' and that it 'happens in being composed'" (20). The conflict comes into focus when applied to AIDS elegy. Of course words are standing in place of medical truth, for we do not yet know the answers we seek. Words have also not provided Monette with required precision to get at "truths" of his emotional state, hence the substitution of rings, pinwheel, and finally a photograph (which I discuss below). However, if there is any purpose and solidity in human communication at all, then no understanding of what it means to face AIDS (whether it be an ultimate "truth" or only our poor compensation for it) is indeed happening in these acts of composition. The tension of searching for truths in an activity that may deny truth's discovery in its very process is apt for AIDS elegy. In the beginning, we realize, after rereading our own commitment to text, was not the word. My discussion of the "Word" to open part II needs this complementary consideration. The sign that the utterance forms is always infinitely removed from the referent, the primacy of which can never be appropriated by language. But this does not spell doom. Once we can dream that

> the world be a
> fragment like an ode on marble erasing in
> the rain sleep be our blue drink of life wide
> as a camera turned on the morning sky
> ("Dreaming of You," Monette 59)

we can understand that elegiac inscriptions have always been temporary in the sense that they will be washed away by the rain, and permanent in the sense that they will continue to be (re)written and to recall the memory of the world. This understanding of the history of elegy as a repetition ("Yet once more"(i), writes Milton in *Lycidas*, instead of "For the first time..."), and as a recording of something original (not as something *itself* original) allows Monette the freedom to appropriate and wield both the tropological excursions of classical elegy and late-twentieth century phenomenology as political and social—as well as personal—weapons. However, even carved rock erodes in the rain and weathers in the wind. Monette turns to a photograph in the end as the antithesis to this fading, as something that *develops* while he waits silently without words, something that absorbs light and colour to become and revivify, something that stops *motion* from leaving us with an empty text as Milton's swain seems to, but instead stops motion to leave us with the image of Rog and Paul that is the culmination and fruition of the textual work.

Monette makes the point in his Preface to *Love Alone* that these poems are for those who have experienced AIDS at first hand (xi). The enclosure that these poems construct might, after all, be comforting, even at its most violent and angry and desperate. The poems are consoling in their dedication, attention to detail, ritual, and ceremony; and most of all they comprise a piece of work that suspends one's life for the time that it is being read. For that time, the reader must spend it entirely with Rog alive, or with Monette alive. Like the desperate search for the "magic bullet," like the useless doctors running around, Monette's writing is a desperate will to the power of life in the word, understanding all the while the inevitable deferral of truth, answers, and comprehension.[15]

By the time we accompany Rog and Paul through the abbey in the Tuscan hills in the final poem, "Brother of the Mount of Olives" (Monette 60-65),

Monette has chiasmically dragged himself across the chaotic gulf between the "godly" (upper?) heterosexual order and the "underworld" of homo-eroticism. James Miller writes:

> Heaven has literally gone underground here. And if an underground heaven sounds like a paradox, something the Devil would think up to keep the Sodomites and the Sodoma-worshippers on their toes in the burning sands, don't be perplexed: it only exists in the anticlerical brink of AIDS fury reached by Monette with the spiritual counterpart of the "Spartacus Guide." (294)

But there is more to it than this. Why do I say this is a "chiasmic" journey? Because at first this poem tropes on the return journey (Hell to Heaven) by portraying a move from the light Hills of Tuscany down into the dark abbey, and then, as the narrative develops, we realize the move is one, paradoxically, of enlightenment—conservative Catholic Hills to the subversive Brother John-guided underground. Yes, it is a heaven underground, but far from existing only in the "AIDS fury reached by Monette," this is the moment when we are finally confronted with solid structures of recovery, truths deep within the political arena of orthodox religion. We have a poem that places itself consciously in a location of upturned phenomenology. We follow Paul and Rog through a sequence of pragmatic, ideologically confrontational re-inscriptions: speech versus books; temporary speech versus xeroxable papers/ writing; speech versus painting; the look versus the touch; literature versus photography:

> and we patter round the cloister in his wake
> duck through a door up a stone stairs and peer
> through a grill wrought like a curtain of ivy
> into the library its great vellum folios
> solid as tombstones nobody copying out
> or illuminating today unless perhaps
> all of that has died and there's a Xerox
> glowing green in the abbot's study John
> pokes you to look at the door carvings it seems
> he is not a bookish man but who has time
> to read any more we must descend and see
> the frescoes fifty years without the world
> pray work pray work and yet such drunken gaiety.
> ("Brother of the Mount of Olives," Monette 61-62)

Recalling the arguable objection against elegy's ineffectiveness, we can see that if elegy must *do* something, become something *else* to be effective, then here is where Monette's strongest effort to perform a new, metamorphic apotheosis occurs. As though words have been exhausted, used up, and worn out by their rough ride through the improvisation and tough poetic terrain of *Love Alone*, Monette's AIDS elegies bail out of the structures of textuality that have been the vehicle up to now and turn to the care of tropologies and iconographies, of visual representation and semiotic ambivalences. James Miller's sharp "Monette's underground heaven is as exclusionary as any dreamed up by the Cistercians in Dante's day or the Calvinists in Milton's" (295) may be true, but that is not Monette's concern; the Calvinists can have their heaven, the Cistercians theirs, and Paul and Rog and John and all the Sodoma-lovers theirs. In this sense it could be argued that Monette finally alienates the "denying" reader (Cady 246, 250), or the heterosexual reader, but that is not quite right. For all his rage, Monette cannot entirely leave the orthodoxy of his genre. The deconstruction of his lexical vehicle of life (which has taken the reader through the elegies) at just the point of death (the underground journey), and the subsequent return to the surface (the rebirth) in blasts of light-filled images, is precisely the process of classical elegy. It is itself troped upon in this instant, however, by a reinvested history of homoeroticism as telescoped into the fresco of naked Jesus, and the figure of the silent monk, Brother John, as they drive away:

> gasping anew at the cloister's painted wall
> clutching my hand before the bare-clad Jesus
> bound at the pillar by the painter so-called
> Sodoma the parted lips the love-glazed eyes
> JUST WHAT KIND OF MEN ARE WE TALKING ABOUT
> are we the heirs of them or they our secret
> fathers and how many of our kind lie beneath
> the cypress alley crowning the hill beyond

…
we wave him off
and leap in the car we're late for Rome flap
open the map
…
in the breeze a hooded monk is walking
head bent over his book of hours in passing
I see that it's John wave and grin rividerci.
("Brother of the Mount of Olives," Monette 62, 63, 64)

Monette takes on the familiar inversion of Silence = Death to Sound = Life and makes it vital in the final elegy. Like Wilfred Owen, with whom he tentatively aligns himself in the Preface, Monette has proved that poetics are never divorced from politics (whether personal or public), and thus personal observation literally speaks to public or institutional dogma. Brother John chats away to Paul and Rog in Italian, yet the communicative achievement is not in the comprehension of the tongue ("no matter we spoke no Italian") but in the gesture that speech is being performed at all:

...the real thing monks in Benedictine white
pressing olives and gliding about in hooded
silence Benedict having commanded *shh*
along with his gaunt motto *ora et labora*
pray work but our particular brother John
couldn't stop chattering not from the moment
he met us grinning at the cloister door seventy
years olive-cheeked bald and guileless no matter
we spoke no Italian he led us gesturing left and
right at peeling frescoes
…
as the old monk takes my arm I'm certain now
that he likes touching us that we are a world
inside him whether he knows or not not that
I felt molested I can take care of myself
but a blind and ancient hunger not unspeakable
unsayable you think he knew about us Rog
how could he not pick up the intersect
the way we laughed the glint in our eyes as we
played our Italian for four hands.
("Brother of the Mount of Olives," Monette 60, 62)

It is not just a matter of this "sound" meaning "life," however, but a matter of the dominant cultural sound (the modern vernacular of the Roman Church) being dispensed with. If silence within a dominant language = death, then the silence that follows the exhaustion and expiration of that lame language = *new* life.

The memory detailed in this poem comes to Monette while looking through words on a page (Rog's letters) and relating his experiences through words on a page. Monette comes across the vital hidden message: an undeveloped film, communication to be deciphered. The film reveals a whole narrative. Monette gets the film developed, then sits

... on the curb poring over
prints of Christmas '83 till I hit paydirt
three shots of the hermit abbey on the moors
southeast of Siena our final crisscross
of the Tuscan hills before the sack of Rome
unplanned it was just that we couldn't bear
to leave the region quite the Green Guide barely
gave it a nod *minor Renaissance pile*
but the real thing monks in Benedictine white.
("Brother of the Mount of Olives," Monette 60)

The revelation in the Abbey is an expanded version of Monette's enlightenment after coming across the roll of film. Monette finds that the bordered, enclosed space of the photographic frame is a room that captivates him in the way he wants us to be captivated in his sequence of elegies ("I want them to allow no escape"). The shift that this discovery entails—from text to iconic image—brings the inevitable ending of elegy, which is a double awareness: first, the transcendent achievement of memory and honour done to the dead and comfort of the self, with the coming together of the two subjects—"we were the song" (Monette 65), writes Monette in the very last

line; and second, the devastating inadequacy of the textual and tokenistic process of elegy—"it doesn't get easier Rog" (Monette 64). Seen in this light, "Brother of the Mount of Olives" confirms something we have known all along: the secondary nature of words, the insufficiency of language, and the failure of elegiac language, whether heterosexually prescribed (and proscriptive) or homoerotically described and re-inscribed in Edelman's homographic shift.

This final poem may well be the finest in the book. That Monette ends his sequence of elegies with the story of an underground "religious" journey—an Orphic or Virgilian descent—with a guide, a comprehension of some sense of the self in the context of a beloved other, and a conflict of pain and success, is an exquisite stroke of closural deftness. In reading "we were the song," we see Paul and Rog leaving Tuscany, rather like Milton's uncouth swain twitching his mantle blue and walking away—or rather, it would be like the swain if Monette had discarded the language without giving us the photograph. Elegy is always autobiographical lament, and all poetry is essentially the epitaph of the writer. An elegy is that peculiar text that re-presents the dead person, positing (not entirely truthfully) him as the primary subject of the poem; at the same time elegy publishes the name of the author, and eternalizes it.[16] Through a reading of Eve's self-recognition moment in *Paradise Lost* and then the mirrored representation of heterosexuals and homosexuals by homosexual writers, Edelman cleverly points out the narcissism inherent in Monette's own work, which plays against Monette's own apparent bashing of narcissists in the poem, "Manifesto" (Edelman 101-11). Indeed, that Monette is writing about himself as much as Rog is clear throughout *Love Alone*, and that he is in danger at many points of re-inscribing not a new aesthetic of subjectivity, but the very condemning discourse of the powers that be, is evident in many places. Take the poem, "The Very Same," for example. In this poem "an idiot cousin / once-removed" tells Paul that it is "*time to turn / the page*." After a brief put-down of this cousin's lifestyle, Monette protests "BUT THIS IS MY PAGE IT CANNOT BE TURNED" (Monette 20). Of course, the cousin did not say "time to turn your page, Paul," but Monette cannot get away from the fact that this book details himself, investigates precisely his *own* page, and not that upon which Rog inscribed himself. His romantic cry at the end cannot divert us from this self-love:

> oh what a page Rog how can they not see
> I am only still here to be with you
> my best my only page scribbled on cirrus
> the high air soaring in its every word
> ("The Very Same," Monette 21).

"Monette is not trying to resurrect Roger with this memoir," Murphy reminds us, and "neither does he mistake writing for taxidermy. It is not Roger's life that Monette is trying to hold on to here; it is his *goodness*" (313, original italics). Indeed, what Monette is doing—as I suggested earlier—is writing for himself. I do not mean by this to say that these are *not* elegies *for* Rog. What I am saying is that Miller is right to say "a kind of poetic therapy" (266) is going on. And this is arguably as strong a reason for elegy as is the memorial for the dead; this is why we invent alternative memorials such as the NAMES project, and this is why authors, for all their suppression, appear named in their texts and pictured in photographs.

From Monette's own testimony of the nature of Rog, we can be sure that Rog needed no such memoir. He gave his memories away ("Preface," Monette xi). He did not need them written in stone; this whole work is spawned of Monette's personal phobia of erasure, and his pathology of the transitory nature of discourse. It is such a pathology that allows us—*pace* Sontag, as Stevenson says (243)—to consider these poems in metaphoric terms without sacrificing the seriousness of AIDS. From filling up shelves with AIDS books to covering city centres with the elegiac Quilt, AIDS elegy faces up to reality and to those denying reality in ways that previous elegy does not (have to). "I don't pretend to have written the anthem of my people" ("Preface," Monette xi), says Monette, but AIDS elegy can never avoid speaking at large. Such consideration opens up doors in *Loue Alone* to the history of elegy and allows us to forgive Monette his self-indulgent moments by reflecting on the fact that AIDS elegy always "becomes a vehicle for cultural criticism rather than self-validation" alone (Duncan 23)." Affect leads to action: we see the contribution to a real-world movement of politically active documentation when we feel grievously the physicality, the despair, and the ineluctable inscriptions of AIDS within modern literary and social discourses of the body.

NOTES

1. For a detailed and rewarding examination of teaching gay literature to the "resisting reader" in the undergraduate classroom, see Barbara Frey Waxman and Eleanor Byington, "Teaching Paul Monette's Memoir/Manifesto to Resistant Readers," *College Literature* 24 (1997): 156-70.
2. My reading of the effects of Monette's powerful anger fundamentally disagrees with Susan E. Hill's reading of his memoir, *Borrowed Time*, of which she writes, "Monette uses textual strategies that appear to bridge the gap between himself and his reader in order to subvert them; exploiting the difference between himself and his readers, he simultaneously discloses and withholds spiritual meaning. Estranged from culture, the public expression of Monette's spiritual life is based not on common humanity, but on an individual's isolation" (157). I think this separates Monette from an implied "normative" spirituality and culture, nominated "common humanity," that is itself separationist.
3. I am thinking of the multiple voices in *Lycidas*, and the sharp breaks between voices; the self-reflection and pained question-asking in *In Memoriam*; and the claim of the poet to be at a loss for words and break off his quest to name Gregory in Yeats's elegy. I shall use *Lycidas* as a reference text for traditional elegy in this paper. However, as I am arguing, the very notion of an orthodox, traditional, stable elegy is suspect. See Stanley Fish, for instance, for a reading of *Lycidas* that foregrounds the poem's cynical awareness of its own conventionality and transgressions. For a recent brief revisiting of the issue of traditional versus ."postmodern" elegy, see Roger Platizky, "Elegies in a Different Key: Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Paul Monette's *Love Alone*," *Midwest Quarterly* 43 (2002): 346-54.
4. *Elégies manquées* is Abbie Findlay Potts's term. See *The Elegiac Mode: Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists* (Ithaca: Comell UP, 1967) 244.
5. Gregory Woods points out another specific reason to consider AIDS writing vital: "The notorious volatility and inaccuracy of written responses to AIDS—notably in the press and on toilet walls—have underscored, in the eyes of those whose communities have been affected, the need for a considered and considerate literature of the crisis" (158).
6. Roy Flannagan points out the possibility that changes in Lycidas between the Trinity Manuscript version and 1638 publication of *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago* on the one hand, and the 1645 edition of the poems on the other, were based on their dangerous, heterodox nature (*Riverside Milton* 98).
7. Peter Sacks has argued an alternative position that American elegists in particular have taken on the role of the child-like speaker, under pressure from a traditional elegiac figure of authority (314-15). He goes on to ask how Whitman, a poet of brotherhood and democracy, could write "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" without reinstating such an overbearing figure (316). It may be the most successful aspect of Monette's elegies that they achieve this brotherhood and in the process call in sympathy from many quarters, all the while vitriolically rejecting the legitimacy of authoritarian figures.
8. See Roy C. Strong, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963), for a descriptive, summarizing essay that draws on Sontag's book to discuss selected poems of loss.
9. Stevenson is citing Tom Young, "Crutches in the Sun, "*The James White Review* 6.3 (1989): 8.
10. The NAMES Project memorial Quilt was first displayed in 1988 to provide a record of those who have died of AIDS and bring together a community of AIDS mourners. Mark Doty's "The Wings" emphasizes the directness of the woven "elegies"—the memorial panels—in the Quilt:

> In the Exhibition Hall each unfurled
> three-by-five field bears
> in awkward or accomplished embroidery
>
> a name, every banner stitched to another
> and another. They're reading
> the unthinkable catalog of the names,
>
> so many they blur, become
> a single music pronounced with difficulty
> over the microphone, become a pronoun,
>
> become You. (44)

Especially important, as Deborah Landau points out, is the second person employed in the tenth line (and again at the end of the poem, not quoted here) (212). "You" are drawn into the text at this point rather as one is when observing the Quilt. The experience of walking from section to section is extraordinarily evocative of textual elegy. Learned modes of mourning, such as written epitaphs and floral motifs, are sewn in with items of clothing and memorabilia. The latter trend is picked up on in many of the sections, giving an increased sense of community to the many individuals represented by the "Names." For an extended "reading" of the Quilt and quotations from its founder, Cleve Jones, see Judy Elsley, "The Rhetoric of the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt: Reading the Text(ile)," in Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., AIDS: *The Literary Response* (New York: Twayne, 1992) 187-96.

10. Barthes writes, "Pop art thus features a philosophical quality of things, which we may call *facticity*: the *factitious* is the character of what exists as fact and appears stripped of any justification: not only are the objects represented by pop art factitious, but tkey incarnate the very concept of facticity—that by which, in spite of themselves, they begin to signify again: they signify that they signify nothing" (Barthes 202). The objects thus secrete importance regardless of the endeavour to

deny meaning. This may relate *to* the usefulness of Kleenex and brand names for Monette. Of course, these items are actually useful and serve a purpose; however, they are ineffective at the primary purpose of keeping Rog alive and thus stand as sterile objects. In their very iconic uselessness, however, they are imbued with meaning: they speak to the ineffectiveness of the world, of mass production, and by contrast highlight the necessity of humanity, love, and the non-sterile touch.

12. This kind of claim is open to objections of privileging white, affluent men in the "Western" world. It implies a superiority and primacy of experience that is not true in the worldwide historical picture of AIDS. It is justified, perhaps, since the context of the west is necessary for the prophecy, the west where developments in medicine and care imply the rescue of the masses, while doing nothing for ubiquitous grief.
13. "Ed Dying" is collected in Michael Klein, ed., *Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Ports Respond to AIDS* (New York: Crown, 1989} 172-74.
14. See Langdon Hammer for a discussion of artistic cultural production as substitute for political action.
15. Once more this radical truth is also conventional. Foucault reminds us, in "What is an Author?," thatwriting's connection to death is an extension of its role in survival, in deferring death, as exemplified in TKe *Arabian Nights* (Foucault "What" 1623-24).
16. Barbara Herrnstein Smith writes of the narcissism of the poetic speaker in *Lycidas*, "in focusing on the character of the speaker himself," the "coda" "emphasizes that quality of the poem that associates it more closely with dramatic monologue than formal elegy, and it allows the reader to relate the earlier resolution to particular personal motives and circumstances." Smith wisely adds, "By 'personal' I do not mean 'autobiographical.' The relation of the elegist to John Milton is another matter altogether. As always, I am speaking here of the fictional person whose utterance the poem represents. And Milton himself, by introducing a framing conclusion evidently written by someone other than 'the uncouth swain,' certainly emphasizes this fiction" (194 n.). We cannot claim so much distance between the poetic speaker and the author in Monette's poems; indeed, he is writing monologues and they are largely about himself—a fact he is not hiding.
17. See also Derek Duncan's engagement with Leo Bersani's objection to art as a culturally redemptive force, '"Solemn Geographies' AIDS and the Contours of Autobiography," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 15 (2000): 22-36.