



Legitimising AIDS literature : The case for establishing AIDS writing as a literary genre.

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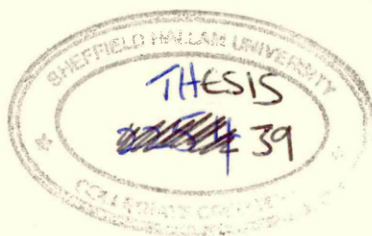
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**Legitimising AIDS Literature: the Case for Establishing
AIDS Writing as a Literary Genre**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Master of
Philosophy

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Abstract

The subject of this thesis is AIDS writing, broadly defined as British and American novels that are concerned with the medical conditions known as HIV and AIDS. These novels are mostly, although not exclusively, by and aimed at, gay men. My aim is to legitimise AIDS literature as an area of literary study through the use of genre theory. The writers and readers of AIDS writing have tended to come from marginalised groups and this has led, in part, to the critical silence that surrounds these texts. My aim is to challenge this neglect of a substantial body of writing and to present AIDS writing as a subject for serious literary consideration.

The thesis begins with an examination of the meaning of literary legitimacy and the ways in which previously marginalised texts have achieved literary status. I argue that being considered a literary genre is one way in which a group of texts can be seen to be worthy of literary study. The first chapter explores theories of genre to arrive at a useful working definition for this study. The second chapter examines the concept of AIDS writing as a genre and explores the main aspects of that genre. The third chapter moves on to discuss issues of authorship and legitimacy that have characterised the few previous studies of AIDS writing.

The main conclusion is that the connections between these texts, including subject matter and imagery, substantiate the consideration of AIDS writing as a literary genre. The establishment of AIDS writing as a genre is a means of legitimising it as an area for literary study and thus allowing that writing to gain literary status. As a consequence, the subject area of literary studies is broadened, and AIDS writing, and implicitly the ideologies contained within it, is afforded the importance conferred by having literary status.

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Introduction

In 1981, clusters of gay men in New York and San Francisco began to be diagnosed with rare diseases. These diseases were usually found only in those with suppressed immune systems, for example, chemotherapy patients. Young men were falling ill and dying while the medical profession looked on helplessly. In 1982, the phenomenon was given a name by the scientists studying it, GRID - Gay Related Immune Deficiency (Shilts 1987, 121). Cases were reported from around the USA and also from Europe. Intravenous drug users were also dying in large numbers but still the syndrome remained associated with gay men. In July 1982, it was recognised that growing numbers of people were dying from an epidemic which was given the name AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The acronym was decided upon by a meeting in Washington of various involved groups, including representatives from the Food and Drug Administration, the Centre for Disease Control, the blood transfusion industry and gay community groups (Shilts 1987, 171). This gave a cause of death, but it was not until the spring of 1984 that the virus that brought on the syndrome was officially recognised. HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus - transmitted through blood, semen and vaginal fluid and with an incubation period of usually 5 to 10 years was found to be the cause of AIDS (Shilts 1987, 593)¹. In 1986, American president Ronald Reagan made his first speech on the subject of AIDS. By this time, 36,058 Americans had been diagnosed and 20,849 had died of the disease (Shilts 1987, 596). At the time of writing (2000), even though with drug therapy it can be a manageable condition, there is still no cure for AIDS.

AIDS has had such a devastating effect on gay men that it has irrevocably changed gay communities and cultures. Gay men have used creative writing to explore their anger, their suffering and their loss and it is this writing that will be the focus of this study.

My study has one major objective: to demonstrate that AIDS literature, broadly defined as prose fiction exploring the subject of AIDS, is a legitimate area for literary study. Although in these necessarily careful politically-correct times, it is rare to find a

¹ Although commonly accepted, there is some doubt about the causative link between HIV and AIDS.

critic who openly refuses to consider AIDS writing as a literary genre in its own right, here I will be discussing the implicit assumptions that AIDS writing is by its very nature marginal, documentary and of special interest only: in short, not open to literary analysis. This thesis aims to focus on precisely those literary properties implicitly ignored by critics. It seems to me that there is an implicit homophobia in much criticism which ignores AIDS writing or segregates it in a 'gay writing' compound. This ghettoisation of AIDS writing constitutes a critical silence in many surveys of current literary trends and new writing. It is my aim in this thesis to discuss this critical silence and perform an 'archaeology' of the ways in which writings are marginalised. My aim is thus to argue for AIDS writing to be considered as a literary genre in its own right. In order to achieve this aim, I will first briefly explore how texts are legitimised as literary works, drawing on feminist literary theory, including theoretical works by Elaine Showalter (1982, 1988), Virginia Woolf (1929) and Judith Fetterley (1978). I will then go on to examine the concept of genre as it has been used in literary study. This is because of the use of genre as a tool for the establishment of literary status. Then, through close reading, I will endeavour to establish AIDS literature as a literary genre and therefore as a candidate for serious study.

In this introductory chapter, I will investigate the concept of literary legitimisation and how claims for legitimacy may be made for particular writing. I will do this by firstly discussing the notion of the canon and literary value. I will then show how certain feminist literary theories have challenged these ideas and brought changes to literary study. Finally, I will discuss gay and lesbian literary theory and the ways in which it has been influenced by feminist literary theories. I will conclude the introduction by detailing the structure of the thesis.

(i) Legitimacy, the Canon and Literary Value

There are several meanings for 'legitimate', including 'born in lawful wedlock; based in correct or acceptable principles of reasoning; ruling by hereditary right; in accordance with law' but also, 'conforming to established standards of usage; of or relating to serious drama as distinct from films, television, vaudeville' (*Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, 1986) and it is the latter definitions that I will be concentrating on in their relation to literary study, although the former definitions inflect the latter to some degree.

From these definitions then, for a literary text to be *legitimate*, it must conform to a particular standard and/or be considered serious, as distinct from more populist or light-

hearted forms of writing. This notion of legitimacy is closely linked to the theories of the canon that have been so important to literary study. Works of literature included in the canon are legitimised for study and in order to explore this process of legitimisation, it is necessary to understand what the canon is.

The word 'canon' comes from the Greek word meaning 'rod' or measuring instrument and has been used to mean a general standard (Guillory 1990, 273). It has been associated with the Bible and with the group of texts that are accepted by the Church to be authentic and which form the standard Christian Bible (the Apocryphal Bible includes other texts). In the context of literary study, the canon is a group of texts that have become known as the 'classics': those works of literature that are deemed to be the finest and the most worthy of serious study. The canon of English literature would include writing by William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, John Donne, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Wordsworth, and T.S. Eliot amongst others.² These are the texts that students of English usually study at school and university and would be published as classics and found in many bookshops under the headings *Classics* or *Literature*, as opposed to *Fiction*. Canonical texts are those which are considered to transcend the time of their writing and which are considered to be the best examples of creative writing.

The concept of the canon also assumes that there are different types of reading: there is reading for pleasure and reading for learning and appreciation of aesthetics; canonical texts are considered most suitable for the latter purpose. Students of literature are 'taught' to read a classic, whereas it is assumed that all literate people can read non-canonical texts. A notion that popular writing cannot be 'great' literature has led to the exclusion of many genres of writing from literary studies and this is something that I will briefly explore later in this introduction (section iii).

The canon has been the subject for much debate in literary studies, for example F. R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition* (1948), Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* (1983), Jan Gorak's *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea* (1991). Whilst there has been much discussion about why some authors are included and others excluded, there are no definitive answers. This canon has remained fairly stable, with some additions and removals in various eras, but why certain writers and

² There is a level of debate about which texts are included in this canon and some writers, for example Charles Dickens or D. H. Lawrence, have moved in and out of the canon with successive generations. However, the basic shape of the canon has not changed and writers such as William Shakespeare or Geoffrey Chaucer remain permanent members.

texts are privileged with membership of the canon and why others are not is not easily answered. Certainly, this canon consists mainly of dead, white, heterosexual, middle class males with only a few female writers, such as Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf. How this canon came to be formed and maintained, then, is an interesting question. It is highly improbable that a list of canonical authors was drawn up by an authoritative figure or figures but this group of writers and texts has continued to appear on university and school syllabi. It would appear to be accepted that these are *great works*, but why these texts and not others of their contemporaries have been chosen is unclear.³

The concepts of *canon* and *value* are closely linked. Texts that are canonical can be said to have literary 'value' and an investigation of the acquisition of literary value can show how canons are formed. The canon of English literature can be seen largely as a nineteenth century invention, concerned with upholding a tradition of greatness and history (Butler 1990, 12). Literature had begun to be seen as cultivating, 'humanising' and as a way of enabling a sense of order to permeate amongst those who read great works. As Terry Eagleton points out, literature in the nineteenth century was seen as possessing and expounding 'universal values'. Reading great literature was a way of absorbing middle class values and immersing oneself in English culture (Eagleton 1983, pp 24-28). These ideas were influential into the twentieth century and still have a bearing on how our society defines literature.

Literature would rehearse the masses in the habits of pluralistic thought and feeling, persuading them to acknowledge that more than one viewpoint than theirs existed - namely, that of their masters. It would communicate to them the moral riches of bourgeois civilisation, impress upon them a reverence for middle-class achievements, and, since reading is an essentially solitary, contemplative activity, curb in them any disruptive tendency to collective political action. It would give them a pride in their national language and literature: if scanty education and extensive hours of labour prevented them personally from producing a literary masterpiece, they could take pleasure in the thought that others of their own kind - English people - had done so. (Eagleton 1983, 25)

Thus, as the study of literature developed from the nineteenth century it became necessary to define what was being studied and why. English literature consisted of 'great works' that were important because they provided us with universal values, such

³ In recent years there have been changes to the canon of English Literature and some have argued that previously excluded writers, for example Toni Morrison or James Baldwin should be seen as 'canonical writers'. The concept of the canon, however much it is challenged, is still influential.

as decency and refinement (Eagleton 1983, 37). To say that these texts have universal appeal is to imply that all members of society can read and understand them. The aims and ideology of the text are not necessarily accessible to all readers, but they are seen as the 'proper' aspirations of all readers. This idea of great works continues today in the way that the canon influences the choice of which texts and which authors should be studied in schools and universities. Despite the challenges to the canon, for example from Feminist Literary criticism, which will be explored below, the writers and texts that are studied by students of English literature have not changed substantially. Students may now also have the option to study other writers, but a major aspect of English Studies remains the close reading of canonical texts. To be included within the canon is to have literary value and that value is connected with upholding particular ideas (Eagleton 1983, 24).

The formation of a canon is the result of a particular ideology, that of the dominant group. In the case of the canon of English literature, this ideology is the product of middle class Victorian values and culture, where literature is seen as the culture of a 'civilised' class of people, whose ethics and moral code should be the source of aspiration of the lower classes: "As a liberal, 'humanizing' pursuit, it could provide a potent antidote to political bigotry and ideological extremism." (Eagleton 1983, 25). These ethics, however, masquerade as 'universal values' and thus the particular class-based ideology behind the formation of the canon is disguised. The formation of a canon implies that a certain ideology takes precedence over any others:

canons are complicit with power; and canons are useful in that they enable us to handle otherwise unmanageable historical deposits. They do this by affirming that some works are more valuable than others, more worthy of minute attention. (Kermode 1990, 18)

Therefore, the importance of the concept of literary value is the major reason for the formation of a canon and the bestowing of literary legitimacy. Texts that are considered to be 'great literature' and which propound 'universal values' are candidates for literary value and therefore might be included in the canon of English Literature.

Another major influence in the development of the canon is the publishing industry. Most of these canonical texts are readily available in print, which is not the case for many of the texts that were published contemporaneously. For a text to be published is to place it in the public domain and the longer it remains there, the more opportunity there is for it to gain value. Canonical texts are usually widely known outside the

universities and wider public knowledge of a text would appear to be a factor in its canonical status. Literary classics are available for all to read and this adds to the notion that great literature is 'universal'.⁴ In having repeat print runs, these texts are accessible to all literate members of society; and through being the subject of film and television productions, even those who cannot read them can experience, albeit indirectly, works of great literature⁵. These texts are in the public arena and continue to claim a place in our culture.

As a result of publication, the texts that form the canon also have their status reinforced through commentary upon them. The importance of commentary has been highlighted in Michel Foucault's work on discourse which notes that 'discourses which are commented on by others are the discourses which we consider to have validity and worth' (Mills 1997, 67).

we may suspect that there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced: and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again. (Foucault, cited in Mills 1997, 67).

Thus, texts can gain literary legitimacy by having other texts, such as literary criticism, literary biography or scholarly research, written about them. They live again in the secondary text and so have their claims of value and greatness reinforced. To inspire further discourse would seem to be a sign of literary value. To comment on a text that already has claims to literary value is generally seen as a more worthwhile task than to study a more 'minor' text. As Sara Mills points out in her work on discourse and commentary: 'all researchers within literary studies recognise that one accrues status to oneself by working on valued texts: that is, canonical primary texts and/or theoretically complex works.' (Mills 1997, 68). The publishing industry also has a role to play here; if a text is in print, it is easier for researchers to research and to comment upon (ibid, 69). Therefore a vicious circle is formed; a text is studied because it is in print and because it is studied, it remains in print. If the text is studied, it is commented on and seen as having literary value, and thus its canonical status is consolidated. For texts

⁴ These texts are often produced in cheaper editions, for example Wordsworth Classics or Penguin Classics, and may have introductions and explanatory notes.

⁵ Film versions of classic texts include *Henry V* (1944), *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *Women in Love* (1970) or *Sense and Sensibility* (1995).

outside this circle of publishing and commentary, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to gain literary legitimacy.

Thus, it can be seen that a canon is not instituted by the whim of an individual, or group of individuals, but is the result of several factors, including the concept of value, commentary and the role of the publishing industry. There is clearly more that could be said in a more detailed analysis of how the canon of English Literature has been created, but for the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary only to work from the premise that this canon exists and has an influence over literary study (see for a full discussion, Kermode 1990, Williams 1977). At present, AIDS writing is not really considered to be 'literary writing' or worthy of study.⁶ It is the concept of the canon that works to exclude this writing. By utilising the theories of those who have sought to challenge the dominance of the canon, I aim to argue for the right of AIDS writing to be considered alongside other, more accepted, areas for literary study.

(ii) Feminist Literary Theory

The male dominance of the canon has been much attacked by certain feminist literary critics (Fetterley 1978, Showalter 1982, Moi 1985, Kaplan 1986). It is true that until the Eighteenth Century there were few women who had the education, income and leisure to engage in writing, but after this time, the numbers of women writers began to increase. However, only those female writers mentioned above (Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte and Emily Brontë) were usually considered to be great writers. The works of many female authors are now no longer available in print and, although popular at the time, are almost forgotten now (Showalter 1982, Spender and Todd 1989).⁷

The difficulties faced by women writers have been well documented (for example Showalter 1982, Warhol and Herndl 1991, Woolf 1929). Several, such as the Brontë sisters, adopted male pseudonyms in order to have their writing published in a strictly patriarchal society. This lack of access to publication and the difficulties in being taken seriously as writers is a major reason for the lack of female writers in the traditional

⁶ AIDS writing is often viewed by critics as autobiographical or political and having a limited readership which therefore makes it not possible to consider it as literary.

⁷ Examples include Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner or Storm Jameson (Showalter 1982). Other writers, including Aphra Behn, Charlotte Lennox and Mary Shelley, have only some of their texts in print, and their other writing is mostly ignored or seen as of special or restricted interest.

canon and it is something that feminist critics have worked hard to highlight and challenge.

Second Wave Feminist literary studies arose from the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, through which women began to question the society that they lived in and the restrictions it placed on their lives. This questioning was not limited to the social or economic sphere, but also began to challenge the world of academia. The male dominated world of universities found itself under attack as women began to demand that systems be re-evaluated and reworked.

Feminist literary criticism used the political arguments from the social struggle to challenge the patriarchal world of literary studies. It was not surprising that when men dominated universities, male writers and a phallocentric world view were seen as the norm. Feminism challenged this and the assumption that great literature was universal; it could not be universal when the thoughts and experiences of women writers, lecturers and students were largely ignored.

Feminist literary criticism is one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience. This enquiry holds two related premises about gender. One is that the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a cultural construct, and therefore a proper subject of study for any humanistic discipline. The second is that a male perspective, assumed to be 'universal', has dominated fields of knowledge, shaping their paradigms and methods. Feminist scholarship, then, has two concerns: it revises concepts previously thought universal but now seen as originating in particular cultures and serving particular purposes; and it restores a female perspective by extending knowledge about women's experience and contributions to culture. (Green and Kahn, 1985)

Feminist criticism in the 1980s concentrated on two main strands: feminist critique, which studies the portrayal of women in writing by men and gynocritics, which explores writing by women (Showalter 1988). The second strand has done the most to undercut the assumptions that have led to the continuation of the traditional canon by arguing for the place of women's writing within the syllabus. This has been done by looking at the reasons for the construction of the traditional canon and using the evidence of women's writing to challenge these reasons. Elaine Showalter, in 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' (1988) sees gynocentric feminist criticism as looking at 'difference', how women's writing differs from that by men (Showalter 1988, 336). She identifies four 'models of difference', which are 'biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural' and goes on to examine each (ibid 336). Biological criticism relates women's writing to the specifically female body, while linguistic criticism looks at how

women's language and use of language is different to that of men. Psychoanalytic criticism is concerned with a female notion of the self; and cultural criticism sees a specific female culture that is outside the mainstream or masculine culture, the 'wilderness' of Showalter's title (ibid pp. 336-351). Thus, an approach that concentrates on writing by women and what characterises that writing is an important aspect of feminist literary theory. It is an approach that puts women at the heart of the theory and in doing so, challenges the notion that a masculine perspective can be a universal one.

Feminist literary criticism has searched for, and found, previously forgotten women writers and feminist critics have argued for the consideration of these writers alongside the male writers found in the traditional canon. Publishers such as Virago, The Women's Press and Onlywomen Press have brought female writers to a wider reading public and encouraged women's writing. Feminist criticism is succeeding in changing the discipline of literary criticism and encourages the challenging of previous assumptions that the dominance of male writers in the canon is due to the superior quality of their writing.

Women writers were acknowledged to possess sentiment, refinement, tact, observation, domestic expertise, high moral tone and knowledge of female character; and thought to lack originality, intellectual training, abstract intelligence, humour, self-control and knowledge of male character. Male writers had most of the desirable qualities: power, breadth, distinctness, clarity, learning, abstract intelligence, shrewdness, experience, humour, knowledge of everybody's character and open mindedness. (Showalter 1982, 90)

The assumptions that women cannot write, or that they can only write in a certain way, about certain subjects are clearly false and feminist criticism has done much to prove this. As an example, women have long been characterised as the 'gentle sex', not suited to violent subjects, but novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1990) or even Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) show women to be quite capable of describing violence and violent subjects.

In 1929, Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own*, in which she explores the difficulties faced by women writers in a society where women are subordinate to men. Despite the great numbers of female characters in literature, there were few female writers, partly because of a lack of education and the leisure time to write and also because of a male assumption that women were incapable of producing 'great' literature. As Mailer states:

I doubt if there will be a really exciting woman writer until the first whore becomes a call girl and tells her tale. At the risk of making a dozen devoted enemies for life,

I can only say that the sniffs I get from the ink of the women are always fey, old-hat, tiny, too dykily psychotic, crippled, creepish, fashionable, frigid, outer-Baroque, or else bright and stillborn. Since I've never been able to read Virginia Woolf, and am sometimes willing to believe it can conceivably be my fault, this verdict may be taken fairly as the twisted tongue of a soured taste, at least by those readers who do not share with me the ground of departure - that a good novelist can do without everything by the remnant of his balls. (Norman Mailer, 1959)

Woolf famously argues that 'a woman needs money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (Woolf 1929, 7). She also lays the foundations for the arguments against the assumptions of what 'great' literature is:

And since a novel has this correspondence to real life, its values are to some extent those of real life. But it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. [. . .] This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop - everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists. (Woolf 1929, 81)

This differentiation between men's and women's writing on the basis of value has persisted. Woolf acknowledges the greater importance attached to masculine values which is a result of the male dominance of Western society that still continues.⁸ The masculine has been seen as not only the most important view, but as mentioned above, as the universal viewpoint, and the universal must, by definition, be more important and more worthy than the specific. Thus, the difficulties faced by women's writing highlighted by Woolf have not been consigned to history. The notion of value carries critical weight and, as has been already noted, value is not a neutral, inherent quality, but is inextricably linked to power and ideology. The group that is dominant in a society has the power to impose its values and to present them as the norm and therefore the most important, and so women writers have had to fight, not only to have their work published, but to have their subjects, their language and their culture valued.⁹

The feminist critics of the Women's Liberation Movement and after have carried on this dismantling of accepted 'truths' about writing. The importance of women's writing has been acknowledged and their writing re-evaluated. Feminist theory has

⁸ Since Woolf's time, the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s has exposed the way that patriarchy operates and has forced changes. However, patriarchy still exists and women are still not equal members of Western society. See Natasha Walter *The New Feminism* (1998).

⁹ See Dale Spender *Man-Made Language* (1980), Deborah Cameron *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (1985), Mary Daly *Gyn/Ecology* (1981).

argued for the legitimacy of women's writing by challenging the existing canon and by using the tools of literary theory and applying them to women's writing. Feminist theory argues that women's writing should not be dismissed purely because it is written by women. The subject matter, themes and style may be different from men's writing, but this does not make it inferior. In order to study this writing as 'serious' literature, it is necessary to re-examine notions of greatness and the canon and to look more critically at how these ideas have been perpetuated. Woolf's concerns about the differing public 'value' of texts by men and by women are echoed by more recent theorists:

When men write their stories of lust, guilt, triumph and disaster the world admires them for their honesty, candour and courage [. . .] Women's autobiographies are [therefore] often the stories of inner lives: not what we did, but who we loved and how we felt. And it is difficult to write about feelings which frequently render us ridiculous rather than achievements which lend us dignity. (Duncker 1992, 59)

Feminist theory has been characterised by questioning; questions such as 'why are there no women writers on this course?', 'who are the women who were/are writing?' and 'what is women's writing?' An important aspect of this has been 'reading as a woman' (Fetterley 1978). Instead of aiming for a seemingly objective, scientific criticism, feminist theory makes central the fact that women are writing and reading. It raises the status of women's writing and examines it as women's writing and does not ignore the cultural context of this writing.

One important theorist looking at the experience of reading as a woman is Judith Fetterley, whose work, *The Resisting Reader* (1978), engages with the problem, raised by Woolf, that the masculine has become synonymous with the universal, thus denying the voices of women.

To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness - not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimised in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male - to be universal, to be American - is to be *not female*. (Fetterley 1978, xiii)

Fetterley refers to the 'immasculation' undergone by women reading male texts, the experience of being 'made into men' as a result of the assumption that the ideal reader is male (ibid, xx). Women have been taught to read 'as men' and to value masculine ideals in a text while denying their own female perspective (ibid, xx) and as a result of

this, women must learn to resist the 'immasculation' and find the readings that are their own. Women need to 'unlearn' reading as men and learn to read as women. Of course, there is not only one way of reading as a woman, but it is important to recognise that a woman's readings can be different to reading as a man.

Fetterley's resisting readers can also be men, but they need to remember that while a man may be able to read as a feminist, he cannot read *as* a woman, only *like* a woman. Elaine Showalter examines this position in 'Critical Cross Dressing; Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year' (1987), citing Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982) as a starting point. Culler uses feminist theories to construct his own theories of reading strategies, but Showalter is concerned that men should not dominate feminist readings as they have already done with 'universal' readings. Men must first recognise their own position as men and their own roles in gender relationships before they can really take a feminist viewpoint:

But when male theorists borrow the language of feminist criticism without a willingness to explore the masculinist bias of their own reading system, we get a phallic "feminist" criticism that competes with women instead of breaking out of patriarchal bounds. (Showalter 1987, 127)

Thus feminist theorists have examined the process of reading, rather than searching for a single reading. Women have recognised their experiences of 'immasculation' and begun to challenge the readings produced in this way. There cannot be a single feminist reading of a text, even of texts that would seem to invite particular readings (Mills 1994, 31). However, it is clear that the work of feminist theorists such as Fetterley has encouraged women to question how they have been taught to read and how they can begin to read differently.

Feminist critics have given women's writing an important place in literary study and have changed the way in which this study is carried out. The concept of 'universal truth' defining what is 'great' literature has been challenged as those values that were seen as universal have been exposed as the values of a particular group and not society as a whole. It is acknowledged that to write as a woman is a different experience to writing as a man, and neither is superior (Woolf 1929, Duncker 1992). This emergence of feminist literary theory has altered traditional and institutionalised approaches to studying literature. Feminist and materialist critics such as Cora Kaplan in *Sea Changes* (1986) or Jonathan Dollimore in *Radical Tragedy* (1984) have questioned the circumstances of the production of the text and the ideologies it upholds or attacks.

Literary theory has changed from a passive appreciation of 'great art' to an active interrogation of the text and its context. The reader is no longer passive, but is, instead, the 'creator' of the text and the reader's own culture and ideology are just as important to their reading as those of the author.

[...] the text constructs a dominant reading which the reader deciphers according to discourses which she has already encountered, and this dominant reading will construct gendered subject positions for the reader. However, it is clear [...] that the reader is not addressed in a unified way and that she has a range of options available to her: s/he is part of a negotiated process over the meanings of the text and about the range of subject positions which she will adopt or resist. It will be in the interest of readers to recognise some of the subject positions and reject them, whilst others will be adopted. (Mills 1994, 34)

There has, of course, been resistance to this, as there has been to feminism in general.¹⁰ However, the academy has begun to accept the theories of feminist critics and university students are now taught courses on women's writing, which are included in mainstream literature programmes as well as specific women's studies programmes (such as those at Lancaster, Sheffield Hallam and Wolverhampton Universities). From being on the margins, feminist criticism and theory has dramatically altered, and has now become a part of literary study.¹¹

This strong opposition to the dominance of the traditional canon in literary studies has been partly responsible for a reconstruction of literary studies. Just as women have been searching for and establishing their place in literary discourse, so have other socially marginalised groups. Anti-racist politics and post-colonial theory have led to a re-examination of writing by non-white authors and the Gay Liberation movement has given rise to Gay and Lesbian Studies, for example the MA in Sexual Dissidence and Cultural Change at Sussex University.

Genres previously dismissed have also now begun to be examined as literary, for example, detective or science fiction is now deemed worthy of university level study. As the traditional canonical authors no longer dominate literary studies, there is room for the study of other writing. Recent writing is studied alongside much older texts and the hierarchy of the canon is holding less sway amongst academics. Film and television are also now subjects for criticism and debate and the rise of Cultural Studies has led to

¹⁰ See Susan Faludi *Backlash* (1992), London: Chatto & Windus.

¹¹ Unfortunately, many women's studies programmes are under threat of closure or being reduced to minor elements of a degree. They are also challenged by courses with more neutral, and less threatening titles, e.g. gender studies.

a broadening of the subject area of English Literary studies to include such subjects. Outside universities, however, the notion of the canon is still influential, with bookshops and libraries differentiating between 'literature' and 'fiction' as mentioned above. Large sections of writing are still ignored by those studying literature as they are not considered to be 'legitimate' areas of study. The subject area of literature has broadened, but there are still many texts that are excluded, for a number of reasons including not being considered serious enough, or only appealing to a specific audience.

(iii) The Durability of 'Value'

With the change in emphasis of literary studies and with the widening of its remit, there is still a need for structure in an academic discipline. The texts available for study may be more numerous and there may be more varied ways of theorising, but some aspects of the previous focus of English Studies remain. Close reading is still a means of examining texts and concepts such as genre are still important. And, despite the efforts to bring a greater equality into literary studies, the notion of *value* still remains.

Not all texts are considered equally important for literary study. Genres such as romantic fiction, science fiction or horror are not often studied in universities or reviewed in newspapers.¹² Some popular genres are still considered 'of less value' than other genres. Some texts may be less rewarding to certain readers than others, but, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, it is difficult to define value itself as it is hardly an objective judgement. In the case of literary value or merit, there is an assumption that there are readers with similar tastes and experiences who will all feel the same way about a particular text:

literary authority [. . .] tends to be vested differentially along lines of general social and cultural dominance (that is, the people whose judgements have institutional power are usually those who have social and cultural power otherwise). (Smith 1990, 184)

It would seem that to be widely read, rather than merely widely known, is for a text to lose its literary value.¹³ James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is regarded as having literary merit, but few people will have read it in its entirety, whereas very popular texts, such

¹² These are sometimes studied on optional third year courses, for example science fiction at Nottingham University, travel writing at Nottingham Trent University or romance, and children's literature at Sheffield Hallam University.

¹³ Of course, canonical writers may be extremely widely *known*, for example William Shakespeare or Emily and Charlotte Brontë, but their actual texts will not be so widely read. Most school children will read at least one Shakespeare text, but many of them will not consider it to be reading for pleasure.

as Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977) will rarely be found on a university syllabus. Of course, academia is not the sole arbiter of literary value, but as this is where literary theory is debated, and where the methods of studying canonical writing are developed, its rules and conventions are a useful guide when considering the legitimisation of a genre.

Thus, for a body of writing to be the subject for *legitimate* literary study, it must be seen as having literary value and not be merely popular. 'Great works' may have a substantial readership and being popular does not preclude literary merit, but the text needs to have more than popularity to be worthy of serious study. How this 'worth' is established is the basis for much debate and has been briefly mentioned above; however, there are still challenges to the traditional indicators of literary value, which include longevity, aesthetic value, subject matter and the author. It is much more difficult for more recent texts to gain literary legitimacy than it is for older texts. If a text is still in print after one hundred years, it has a stronger claim for literary status than a text that has been only recently published. If it is written by an author whose other texts are considered 'classic' it has a stronger case for 'classic status'. If the subject matter is considered by the dominant group to be important and valuable, then a text may gain literary merit.

Therefore, in the field of literary studies, despite challenges, the notion of the canon is still prevalent. There are still distinct 'types' of writing, one of which is classed as Literature and as important and all the rest as popular fiction which may be pleasant to read, but is not deemed worthy of close study. Despite the challenges to the canon by feminist theorists and others, notions of the canon still remain. The discipline of Cultural Studies may be seen as breaking new ground with its exploration of popular culture including pop music and television, but, although the subject matter may be easily accessible, the common methods of scrutiny, drawing heavily on postmodernist theory, are not.¹⁴ Literary Studies has become much more open to marginalised groups and other writing, but access to the status of literary value is not unrestricted and texts must meet certain requirements before being legitimised for study.

In order to claim legitimate status, or worthiness of study, for a body of writing, it is necessary, then, to demonstrate how it engages with existing literary structures.

¹⁴ The challenge of Cultural Studies can be seen in the effect it has had on most literature departments. Cultural Studies has forced many departments to consider teaching film, television and the media within their degree courses.

Furthermore, texts need not be by previously accepted canonical authors, but it must be possible to use literary theories and critical tools to study them. Literary study has accepted newer critical theories, such as feminist or materialist theories and these have broadened the methods of critical study. Theorists may, for example, examine the narrative structure or ideology of a text or may explore groups of texts. As stated earlier in this chapter, to study a text in this way is to give it 'literary worth', as the close academic study of a text implies its literary value.

Therefore, literary value can be conferred from two sources; from the canon or from the academy. And, legitimisation from one gives the text status within the other. If a text is the subject of serious academic study, then it may become canonical and if a text is included in the canon, it may be scrutinised by literary theorists. However, acceptance from the academy is often difficult for certain groups of writers. As mentioned above, the theorist must argue for the text's worthiness for study by placing it in the wider discourse of literature.

(iv) Gay and Lesbian Literary Theory

The aim of this study is to explore AIDS writing and to establish it as worthy of literary study - to legitimise it. There is a large body of writing that has come about because of the AIDS pandemic, but it has not been studied in any depth. There are a number of reasons for this; firstly, AIDS novels are not usually written by mainstream, established writers; secondly they are often released by small publishers and, probably most importantly, they usually tend to have gay and lesbian subject matter. For all the achievements of feminist literary theory, the world of academia has still not fully embraced the literature of marginalised groups. Although the concept of universal values may be being eroded, it would seem that some marginalised groups are more acceptable than others.¹⁵ Gay and lesbian literary theorists such as Joseph Bristow or Bonnie Zimmerman are still arguing for the place of gay and lesbian writing in literary study and for the writing to be included in mainstream study, rather than as a separate area, and as the AIDS writing I am using is by predominantly gay and lesbian writers, the case needs to be made for its inclusion in the realm of literary study.¹⁶

[...] it is fairly clear to see how canons of 'minority' writings – if we choose to call them that, and such labelling has its dangers – have been gradually forming since the 1970s and 1980s [...] But where do these disciplinary transformations leave lesbian and gay writing? And where, amid the residual moral-aestheticism of English studies, and the counter-cultural challenges of feminist and Black studies, might we locate lesbian and gay criticism? (Bristow, 2)

There is little published commentary on AIDS literature and the texts themselves are not widely available to read. With AIDS still being viewed in the West as a 'gay disease', the texts have perhaps been seen as only relevant to a gay audience and not mainstream texts. However, it could be argued that this large body of writing has echoes in earlier literary genres and constitutes an exploration of a very significant aspect of late twentieth century culture. AIDS has had a huge impact on sexual relationships as generations of heterosexuals and homosexuals come to sexual maturity in the shadow of HIV and AIDS. As AIDS has had a cultural impact, AIDS literature can also impact upon the study of literature. Thus the study of AIDS writing can enrich the literary arena.

¹⁵ For example, African-American writing or working class literature.

¹⁶ See Joseph Bristow (1992) *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* or Bonnie Zimmerman (1992) *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969 – 1989*.

Therefore, in order to legitimise AIDS literature in literary studies and to give it the status enjoyed by other groups of texts, I have chosen to argue for its status as a genre which can be related to other established literary genres. By using the critical concept of genre, AIDS literature can be examined as a literary phenomenon and on a par with other writing. As will be seen in chapter three, some theorists believe that AIDS writing should be separated from other writing because of its subject matter. As the writing describes a reality that is deeply distressing and that has great political significance, it has been felt that the writing deserves a special status, a status that is above criticism.¹⁷ To criticise AIDS writing and to subject it to the rigours of literary analysis is seen as churlish and insensitive to the plight of those affected by the illness. I will argue that this desire to 'protect' AIDS writing denies it a proper place in literary history, as to be examined critically is potentially to gain literary status and it is this granting of literary status to the body of AIDS writing that is the aim of this thesis.

As the Gay Rights movement grew from the rise of Feminism, so gay and lesbian studies have followed the feminist challenges to the world of academia. Gay and lesbian studies is a growing discipline and gay and lesbian literature has begun to be explored (see for example Bristow 1992, Fuss 1991). Queer theory, which is greatly influenced by postmodernist theory and which studies cultures from the margins of heterosexual society, has also grown during the last two decades. Whereas gay and lesbian theories are, like feminist theories, grounded in activism and critique of power structures, queer theory is a rejection of identity and a celebration of pluralism: 'for identity presupposes the prohibitions of meaning that allow determination while queer critique seeks to expose and disempower the very prohibitions that enable the system of identity' (Bredbeck 1995, 497).

The main focus of queer theory is on playfulness. It analyses the individual and queer theorists are connected by their rejection of identity politics (Sedgwick, Bredbeck 1995, Worth 1993).

The queer's function is to move beyond identity politics in order to destabilise the concept of normalcy precisely because such a concept requires an endlessly renewed fabrication of deviancy which in turn helps secure and sustain heterosexuality. (Worth 1993)

¹⁷ This idea will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three

Instead, experience is privileged over identity, which is an idea that has antecedents in essentialist theories, as Fuss (1986) has shown. Queer theory has been criticised for being paradoxically conservative and for rejecting the concept of identity in favour of the concept of 'performance'. The overthrow of oppressive political structures is now no longer the goal and the emphasis is on shock and difference: 'In the end, Sedgwick's queer politics is basically nothing more than the politics of shocking the sensibilities of the bourgeois reader by "performing difference".' (Morton 1993)

While queer theorists follow post-structuralist theory in the emphasis on 'difference', gay and lesbian theory follows very closely from feminist literary theory. Both gay and lesbian theory and feminist theory have argued for the voice of the marginalised to be heard in the mainstream and for the dismantling of the traditional canon as it is unrepresentative and colludes in oppressive practice. As important issues in feminist politics have been echoed in feminist literary study, for example women's language, so has gay and lesbian literary theory encompassed the important issues in gay and lesbian activism. An important focus in gay and lesbian communities and thereafter gay and lesbian studies, has been AIDS and its discourses. AIDS is a disease with a high profile and has become a social phenomenon. With the number of AIDS novels that have been written, it is also a literary one.

As gay and lesbian literary theory has found a place within English Studies, certain gay and lesbian texts have gained a quasi-canonical status. While they may not always be considered in the traditional canon of English Literature, it is clear that they have a special status in gay and lesbian studies. It would seem that as theories such as feminism attack the traditional hierarchies in English Studies, they create hierarchies of their own and canons are formed. These canons then go on to help legitimise the texts they contain for literary study. Canonical texts for gay and lesbian studies include Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* (1982) and *The Beautiful Room is Empty* (1988), Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) and Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1985). These are the texts that are considered, by both gay and lesbian critics and readers, to be gay and lesbian 'classics'. Even though they would be unlikely to be found in the traditional canon, they form part of the gay and lesbian canon and are therefore considered worthy of literary study by those examining and researching gay and lesbian literature. They have been legitimised through being well-known, available in print, and in the case of

Edmund White, by a writer who has written other literary, mainstream texts. They are also concerned with what may be seen as a legitimate subject matter; the realisation and acceptance of one's sexuality and the introduction of the characters to a gay or lesbian experience.¹⁸ They may be considered 'classics' mainly, however, for the fact that they are more widely known to the wider community than other texts by both gay and lesbian and heterosexual readers. The titles of these texts are signifiers of homosexuality. Thus, despite the challenges gay and lesbian theory pose for the typical canon as it seeks to legitimise gay and lesbian experiences and writing, it creates another canon of its own. Not all texts with gay or lesbian themes would be considered worthy of literary study and so there is a return to the notion of value.

For all its intangibility, 'value' is still a concept in literary theory. It may be dismissed as elitist, but institutionalised value still exists. No student of English Literature can read all texts that exist and so choices are made and the canon influences the choices that are made about which texts are studied and which texts are not. In choosing to study one text, there is an implied rejection of other texts and although this valuing may not always be articulated or recognised as such, it plays a role in literary study. It is this critical silence that I discuss in this thesis.

(v) Structure of this Thesis

Having considered the concept of the canon and of gaining literary legitimacy, I will now introduce the ideas that will become the focus of this study. Having chosen AIDS literature as the subject for study, I will argue for its classification as a genre. To do this, it is first necessary to define in Chapter One what is meant by the term genre and how AIDS writing fits into this definition. I will do this by investigating the notion of genre as analysed by different theorists and then I will draw my own conclusions and establish a working definition for this thesis. In Chapter Two I go on to explore AIDS writing as a genre, examining its key characteristics through close reading and seeing how it relates to other existing genres. Then, in Chapter Three, I investigate the other aspects of AIDS writing that give it value in literary study. The aim of this thesis is thus to argue for the legitimacy of AIDS writing as a subject for literary investigation, both now and as part of a programme of literary studies, because this substantial body of writing need not be as marginalised as it is at present.

¹⁸ This *bildungsroman* structure has been important to much 'classic' literature and is echoed in these gay and lesbian 'classics'.

Chapter One

Genre

One way of legitimising AIDS literature is through establishing it as a genre.¹⁹ The aim of this chapter is, firstly, to examine various existing theories of genre in order to formulate a definition of the term. Secondly, an examination of genre transgression will add to the argument for the validity of genre as a tool for literary study. The final aim is to link genre theory to my examination of AIDS literature. My aim is to sanction the study of AIDS literature by considering it as a genre and thereby linking it to other, more established, literary genres. Giving the study of AIDS literature parity with other areas of literary study is a way of legitimising it.

1.1 What is literature?

When studying literature, the first task is to establish the object of study. In other words, many theorists, for example Terry Eagleton (1993) or Northrop Frye (1957), feel it necessary to first ask ‘what is literature?’ before beginning any analysis of it. This problem would appear to make literary studies unique as a discipline as there is no real consensus as to what constitutes the body of work known as ‘literature’. Historians study the past, biologists study living organisms and mathematicians study numbers. Literature students, however, must first establish what it is that they are studying before they can begin to work.

Although the question ‘what is literature?’ may seem simple enough, there is little consensus on the answer. If literature means ‘the written word’, then surely telephone books and recipes must be included along with poetry and drama. Interesting as telephone books may be, they do not appear on many university reading lists, nor would the majority of students expect them to. While a university syllabus is not the ultimate in what constitutes literature, the texts that appear on it usually correspond to the general public’s idea of what literature is. Literature is, then, a *type* of restricted set of texts.

In *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1993), Terry Eagleton attempts to answer the question ‘what is literature?’. He points out that literature has been seen as a ‘fiction’ -

¹⁹ Another way might be drawing attention to its literary and aesthetic value, or by focusing on its ‘universal’ themes of tragedy and suffering, that is, arguing for its general rather than specific interest.

neither true nor false, an idea also presented by Tzvetan Todorov in *Genres in Discourse* (1978). However, not all fiction is literature and not all literature is fiction. After dismissing the notion of 'fiction', Todorov goes on to ask if literature is 'beautiful' or if it is a 'system', written in a 'literary language'. Eagleton explores the notion of *defamiliarisation* that is so important to Russian Formalism, but rejects it as a way of defining literature (Eagleton 1993, 5-7). It seems that defining literature linguistically is laden with pitfalls. As Eagleton points out, almost any writing can be read ambiguously:

Consider a prosaic, quite unambiguous statement like the one sometimes seen in the London underground system: 'Dogs must be carried on the escalator.' This is not perhaps quite as unambiguous as it seems at first sight: does it mean that you *must* carry a dog on the escalator? Are you likely to be banned from the escalator unless you can find some stray mongrel to clutch in your arms on the way up? [...] But even leaving such troubling ambiguities aside, it is surely obvious that the underground notice could be read as literature. (Eagleton 1993, 7)

This difficulty leads Eagleton on to considering other definitions of literature. Theorists, such as the Russian Formalists, have struggled over the concept of literariness, that is, the 'essence' of literature. This idea has been important for an *objective* theory of literature. Both Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and Todorov aim for an objective, in Frye's words, *scientific*, study of literature and this means that the object of study must be clearly defined. However, there would appear to be no inherent properties in a text that make it literature. The notion of a literary language would seem to be the best choice, but this language cannot be defined. Some texts are seen as literature and some are not. This is not because of their 'literary essence', but because of the subjective judgements of various groups including education institutions, publishers and reviewers.

As readers, we come to a definition of literature pragmatically. A text is treated as a literary work because it is perceived as such (Fish 1980). Our definitions of literature are culturally specific and may change as eras change. Writers are sometimes fashionable and at other times unfashionable and as such judgements are mainly subjective, they are liable to change. Rather than search, somewhat fruitlessly, for an objective definition of literature, it is better to accept that 'literariness' is largely a subjective, culturally specific term and is therefore slippery. Biologists do not spend

large amounts of time considering ‘what is biology?’²⁰ and while ‘what is literature?’ is an important consideration, there is no definitive answer. The judgements made on ‘literature’ are, as Eagleton points out, related to social ideologies (Eagleton 1993, 16), and are worthy of study, but my consideration will not be the ‘literariness’ of the texts that I choose. The question ‘what is literature’ will not be answered in this thesis and I will be using the term ‘writing’ rather than literature. I am not seeking to define my precise area of study. Rather, I am looking at the concept of genre and the application of this concept to prose fiction about AIDS.²¹

As my overall aim is to argue for the legitimacy of AIDS literature as a subject for serious study, I have begun by considering briefly the difficulties in defining literature. By using the term ‘writing’, I am not engaging in debate about the ‘literariness’ of novels about AIDS. This is a discussion that is also pertinent to the analysis of other types of writing, for example science fiction or autobiography, and is not specific the analysis to AIDS writing. Instead, I am arguing for the legitimacy of AIDS writing on the merits of its being a genre and able to be related to other genres.

1.2 Theories of Genre: Kinds and Modes

One of the most important commentators on the theory of genre is Alastair Fowler in *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1982).

Fowler sees the literary work as a means of communication between the author and the reader, by use of shared linguistic rules and special literary conventions (Fowler 1982, 20). Literature is thus structurally defined as a work written in our recognised literary *langue* (Saussure 1915). This langue has various codes, including rhythm and repetition, of which genre is one. For Fowler, genre is important as a means of communication between author and reader, rather than as a means of classifying texts. Genres are types, rather than classes, as they do not seem to have enough elements that can be common to all texts to perform a classificatory function. Their role is, instead, in interpretation. Fowler argues that for the writer, genres provide a means of support, supplying a literary matrix and a defined mental space. Genres are a framework around which the literary text is built.

²⁰ Biologists do however debate about the boundaries of that which can be studied by biologists, zoologists and botanists, for example, in relation to the analysis of yeast and fungi.

²¹ However the texts which I have chosen to study are ones which have been classified as literature by publishers.

Fowler points out the instability of genres, which is another contra-indication for viewing them as classes. Each time a genre is used, it is altered for the future, at least in literary works that have any 'artistic significance' (Fowler 1982, 23). With this inherent instability, genres are, perhaps, best seen as families, where resemblance can be ascertained from a literary tradition, rather than as a way to classify literary texts. Writers who write texts in a particular genre select characteristics from the genre's repertoire, so that texts can be seen as belonging to a particular family, but without all being identical, and by knowing this family, the reader has a means of interpreting the text.

Fowler sees *kinds* and *modes* as critical to an analysis of genre. Kinds are defined as historical or fixed genres (p. 56), for example, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy. Works conforming to a particular kind may have different characteristics, but they will also have characteristics in common, such as alliteration, theme, character, metre or occasion.

We can only say that a kind is a type of literary work of a definite size, marked by a complex of substantive and formal features that always include a distinctive (though not usually unique) external structure. Some kinds are recognisable by every competent reader. But the means of recognition remain obscure.
(Fowler, 74)

A kind is a type of literary work, for example epigram or satire, whereas a mode describes the tone or style of the work, for example comic or tragic. Thus a genre can usually be described by its kind and mode; a satiric novel, a revenge tragedy or a comic epic. A work will provide clues to its kind and mode and these clues are the characteristics of its genre.

As kinds typically include too many different texts to be accurately described as genres (the novel is a kind), it is modes that play the most important part in generic interpretation. Modes can be deduced from the title of the work - romances often have the name of the hero or heroine as their title - or often from the opening formula - 'once upon a time' being the usual opening for a fairy tale.

Some generic or modal indicators are stronger than others and Fowler examines some of these, citing allusions to a previous writer of a particular genre as a strong indicator of the mode of a literary work. Modes are structurally dependent and some kinds give rise to corresponding modal terms, for example elegy and elegiac, romance and romantic. Satire is described as a problematic mode, with satires that belong to

different kinds and satires combining with other genres, such as the novel *Catch 22* (Heller 1961), which is a satire and a novel. If, however, modes are not seen as corresponding only to specific kinds, this problem disappears. Satire can be seen as a mode that can apply to varying kinds, thus creating different genres; satiric novel, satiric or mock epic (Pope (1717), *The Rape of the Lock*).

Fowler, somewhat confusingly, describes kinds as being divided into subgenres. He switches terms frequently, referring in one instance to a kind and in the next to a genre. It would seem to be more understandable to see genres as having a mode and corresponding to a kind, rather than using differing literary terms for the same ideas. He sees the sonnet as a kind and the Elizabethan love sonnet as a subgenre, but here the term genre has disappeared altogether. Perhaps the sonnet is a kind and the love sonnet a genre, which can be subdivided into Petrarchan, Shakespearean and so on. The novel is a broad term and best described as a kind, and the different types of novel as genres, for example, the factory novel, the school story, the picaresque novel. Fowler does admit that because genres are so volatile the terminology we use to write about them is imprecise, but his own indecision makes his arguments difficult to follow. He uses the terms 'kind', 'mode' and 'genre' almost interchangeably, whereas viewing a genre as a combination of a mode and a kind is probably more apt.

Fowler gives examples of the origins of various genres, citing geographical location as a factor in establishing the genre a writer will use, for example the haiku, which has been an almost exclusively Japanese genre. Time is also picked out as being influential over genre choice. Genres change over time, as do generic titles. The term 'romance' has a very different meaning when used in reference to Medieval Literature than it does today, as does 'comedy'.

Fowler also examines how genres change. This can happen when new topics increase a genre's repertoire and also with aggregation, when collections can form a different genre to that of their constituents, as with Chaucer *Canterbury Tales*, which is a different genre to the tales which are part of it. Antigenres - such as the picaresque, which is a counter statement to the romance - can also become genres in their own right. Mixtures of genres and genres that include other genres, for example Renaissance tragedies that include masques, also alter genres.

Fowler points out that each cultural and historical period has certain genres more 'available' than others and that genres cannot be studied in isolation, but in relation to

other genres. He opposes too scientific an analysis of genre, preferring, as previously mentioned, to view them as means for interpretation, rather than classification.

Genres are better understood [...] through a study of their mutual relations, which actually affect writers and readers in a way that is not possible with locations on a chart. These relations are partly diachronic or dynamic (formation, combination, mixture), partly static (similarities, contrasts). But even the synchronic contrasts are not absolute or fixed. In the course of literary history, they will soon have been replaced by others only roughly equivalent. (Fowler 1982, 255)

Genres are, therefore, a means of communication, used by writers for writing and by readers for interpretation. For Fowler, genre operates in communication, interpretation and evaluation. He says, however, that knowledge of a genre's conventions is necessary in order to read a text properly. This begs the question - what is meant by 'properly'? There is one reading of a sonnet if its conventions are known and another if they are not, but how is a 'proper' reading to be judged? Fowler later says that interpretation is indeterminate and subjective, dependent on who is interpreting and when. Deduction of and knowledge about a particular genre can put a text in its historical context, but this knowledge may not be vital in order for a valid reading of a text. Genre is a means of communication with the reader, who may very well recognise the use of a genre, or indeed its transgression, but it is not necessary to devalue a reading where the reader has not recognised the characteristics of a genre. These readings should not be seen as 'improper', but merely different.

Leaving aside the notion of 'proper' readings, Fowler's very thorough examination of the concept of genre is an important contribution to genre theory. The term *genre* is often used with little consideration of what it means and Fowler looks at what genres are and how they change. His survey of the literature is detailed and comprehensive but still leaves questions unanswered. It is necessary to discover how genres work and why they are used.

1.3 Theories of Genre: Objective Criticism

Another important contribution to genre theory is that made by Northrop Frye, a theorist aiming for an objective view of literature.

Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957) is an attempt to bring order to the world of literary criticism. He dismisses the notion that the author has the definitive 'answer' to their text, saying that the author may comment on their work, but

that this commentary is no more important than that of anybody else; the author is just another critic of the work. Rather than relying on the thoughts of the author to analyse literary works, Frye emphasises the importance of the scientific nature of literary criticism. Literature is the *object*, not the *subject* of study, and literary criticism is what the reader learns in order to study this object.

In his argument for a science of literary criticism, Frye rejects value-judgements and the notion of taste. If criticism is to be a science, then it must be objective. There is no place for personal, emotive responses. Judgements can be made on criticism, but not vice versa. Criticism is not to prove a particular point, but to enable the work to be read and studied. He makes the point that criticism is quite separate from literature and that while classification has no place in literature, it has a role to play in the criticism of this literature.

Classification is an important part of scientific study and Frye begins with dividing 'fictions' or texts into five types of modes. Frye is very much influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics* and classifies 'fictions' according to the 'hero's power of action' (p. 33). There is *myth*, where the hero is superior to humans and the environment and is usually a divine being. Next is *romance*, where the hero is human, but superior to a degree to other humans and the environment, for example, folk tales, legends. The third mode is *high mimetic* in which the hero is often a leader and superior to other humans, but not to the environment. Examples of the high mimetic mode are epic or tragedy. Next is *low mimetic* where the hero is on the same level as the reader, such as in comedy or realist fiction. Finally there is the *ironic* mode, where the hero is inferior to the reader. Frye goes on to describe these modes as they relate to tragedy and then to comedy, giving five tragic modes and five comic modes. He sees these modes as forming a circle, with the ironic mode moving from low mimetic and back to myth.

Texts can combine modes: for example, plots from myths can reoccur in low mimetic texts. According to Frye, these modes are linked to social development, with myth being dominant during Classical times, romance during the Medieval Era, high mimetic belonging to the Renaissance, low mimetic to the Industrial Revolution and to Romanticism, and ironic to the Modern age, where form takes precedence over plot. This system gives Frye a neat means of classifying texts according to their plot and to their historical period. He does not call these modes 'genres', but uses them as broader terms, more as family than species.

In the fourth essay in his book, entitled 'Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres', Frye goes on to look in more detail at different 'species' of text. He begins by dividing the study of words into three areas: grammar (narrative), the syntax or order of words, logic (meaning), words arranged in a pattern, with significance and rhetoric, which consists of both ornamental speech (literature for its own sake) and persuasive speech (literature which reinforces arguments, manipulates emotions). This then allows Frye a definition of literature: 'literature may be described as the rhetorical organisation of grammar and logic' (p. 245). Now that Frye has classified literature, he goes on to describe genre.

Frye describes the term genre as 'unpronounceable and alien' (p. 13), but never really defines his use of this term. As part of his scientific approach to literary criticism, he classifies texts into modes and then also into 'genres', which he views as specific kinds of verbal structures, dependent on the 'radical of presentation', for example, a drama is acted, while a novel is read (p. 246). For Frye, there are four genres, *epos*, which is written to be recited, *fiction*, which addresses a reader through a continuous narrative, *drama*, which conceals the author and which is an ensemble performance for an audience, and *lyric*, where the audience is concealed. Frye then goes on to describe these genres in more detail. He also links them to the modes mentioned previously, saying that myth and romance tend towards the epos genre, high mimetic to drama, low mimetic to fiction, an increased use of prose and the ironic mode has an empathy to lyric, where narrative and meaning are shown most literally as word order and word pattern.

Frye looks at each of these genres, examining some of the different subgenres found within them. Most interesting is his classification of prose fiction. He concludes that there are four types of prose fiction: *novel*, which is extroverted and personal, looking at human beings in society, *romance*, which is introverted and personal, about heroic inscrutable characters, *confession* or *fictional autobiography*, which is introverted and intellectual, where the reader has access to the protagonist's point of view, and *Menippean satire* or *anatomy*, which is extroverted and intellectual, and which deals with mental attitudes and has stylised, rather than naturalistic, characters. After these definitions, Frye goes on to say that prose fiction rarely concentrates on one single form, but combines all or some of them.

Frye's taxonomic systems are challenging, but have little to say on the meaning and function of the term 'genre'. He mentions the term rarely and while the final essay is

entitled the 'Theory of Genres', he makes no attempt to explain fully the concept and indeed hardly uses the term. He divides literature up into quite rigid categories, which means that every literary work must fit into one category or another. Apart from the problems of anomalous texts, there is no exploration of why genres exist or indeed what they are and how they work. Frye wants an absolute classificatory system in order to fit with his notion of literary criticism as a science, but this makes unclear what is left for study once the critic has allotted the text to its correct category. The theory of genres is more complicated than matching up texts and genres and before the term 'genre' is used, it is best to at least provide some explanation of what it means and how it is being used.

1.4 Theories of Genre: Discourse

Like Frye, Tzvetan Todorov leans towards an objective view of literature and discusses genre in two theoretical texts, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973) and *Genres in Discourse* (1978).

Todorov, like other commentators on genre, begins with consideration of what is meant by the term 'literature' (see page 25 in this thesis). In *Genres in Discourse*, he notes that 'literature' is a relatively new concept and examines some of its definitions. Todorov then asks if literature is 'beautiful' or if it is a 'system', written in a 'literary language'. Having drawn attention to the difficulties in defining literature, Todorov goes on to reject this attempt at definition and to suggest looking instead at literary discourses, or 'genres'. As mentioned previously, a definition of literature is very difficult and slippery and, also, subjective, something that is discouraged in the objective schools of criticism to which both Todorov and Frye belong.

In *The Fantastic*, however, Todorov says that in order to have a theory of genres, it is necessary to have a theory about what is a literary work. He does not really continue to define what is meant by a 'literary work', but mentions the three aspects of this work he considers it necessary to study; the verbal, the syntactic and the semantic. There is still, however, no concrete theory of literature and Todorov seems more comfortable discussing the notion of genre.

Todorov gives an explanation of genre as a 'class of text' (1990, 16). This then raises the question of what is a class or a text? Todorov's definition of a text appears to differ from that of literature and he defines a text linguistically. A text is a discourse and a discourse is a sequence of sentences, or, more precisely *utterances*. These utterances

are sentences addressed by one person to another in a certain time and a place, in other words, sentences with an *emunctatory context* (1990, 16).

When Todorov goes on to examine genre, he discusses some of the oppositions to genre theory. Firstly, there is the problem of whether or not genre study should be exhaustive, something Frye seems to be aiming towards. Todorov dismisses this, however, saying that it is not necessary to have read all the texts that constitute a particular genre in order to discuss it. The reader can read a number of texts and deduce a hypothesis and then alter it accordingly as new texts are read (1973, 3).

Another objection to the term genre is the matter of aesthetics. The value of a work of art could be because it is unique, different to all others, which would then make the study of genres redundant. Frye dismisses this idea with his scientific approach to literary theory, while Todorov insists that no text can be totally original and individual. Each text is related to others by literary history and a text may be very different from its predecessors, but this means that it changes the literary system, not that it stands alone from it (1973, 6).

Failing to recognize the existence of genres is equivalent to claiming that a literary work does not bear any relationship to already existing works. Genres are precisely those relay-points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature. (1973, 8)

Todorov's main interest is language. He claims that to reject genre is to reject language and a rejection of language cannot, quite obviously, be formulated. For Todorov, examining genre is examining literature as a linguistic system.

The literary genres are ... choices among discursive possibilities, choices that a given society has made conventional ... the genres of discourse depend quite as much on a society's linguistic raw material as on its historically circumscribed ideology. (1990, 10)

Genres, then, are based on 'discursive properties'. Todorov suggests that genres derive from speech acts that undergo transformation: for example, the novel is based on the act of telling, the sonnet on a declaration of love and the fantastic from ambiguities and uncertainty (1990, 21). This seems to be an interesting idea, but somewhat limiting, with the reader being forced to link unlikely genres to speech acts. Linking the novel to an act of telling may be valid, but this does not account for the varying types of novel. Surely the novel is a *kind*, rather than a genre.

Todorov rejects Frye's very specific categories of literature as arbitrary and insubstantial (1973, 15). He suggests instead two types of genres: *historical* genres, that are deduced from observations of literary history, and *theoretical* genres, deduced from literary theory. Todorov emphasises the importance of balancing the empirical and the theoretical. When deducing genres from theory, this must be reinforced by reference to specific texts and when deducing genres from literary history, this must be explained by theory: 'The definition of genres will therefore be a continual oscillation between the description of phenomena and abstract theory.' (1973, 21).

Todorov's main interest in genre, however, is with transgression. He defends the concept of genre by emphasising the effects of transgression. Against the notion that because a text transgresses a genre then the genre cannot exist, Todorov argues that act of transgression *proves* the existence of the genre. The norm must exist in order for the transgression to occur and this causes a re-examination of the genre. Each text, in transgressing the genre, creates a new 'norm' and influences future texts. The importance of transgression will be examined below.

While this theory of how genres change is interesting, Todorov does not arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. He stresses the importance of a theory of genres, but never actually presents one. Todorov is right, however, to emphasise the futility of searching for absolutes. Literary study can never hope to be exhaustive, otherwise there is no point to further study. However, this does not mean that there cannot be some attempt at solid theory. While Frye's theories of genre are exposed as too rigid and arbitrary, Todorov's theories seem to raise more questions than they can answer. Genre theory would appear to be slippery and in a constant state of flux, but, nevertheless, in order to utilise the concept of genre, there must be some idea, no matter how vague, of what it means.

1.5 Theories of Genre: Sociology and Intertextuality

Tony Bennett, in *Outside Literature* (1990), examines genre theory in the context of Marxist theories of the connection between literature and history. Bennett is critical of the privileged status of history in Marxist theory, where it is seen to explain all social phenomena. He points out that history cannot exist outside discourse, and therefore cannot be the concrete source from which discourse evolves. The signified cannot be seen as separate from the signifiers that produce it. He objects to the idea that literature exists to be explained, and that history is its explanation, maintaining that history (as a discipline), rather than being an ethereal point of universal reference, is, in fact,

[...] a specific discursive regime, governed by distinctive procedures, through which the maintenance/transformation of the past as a set of currently existing realities is regulated.

(Bennett 1990, 50)

His critique of genre theory leads on from his rejection of the 'history-literature' hierarchy. Marxist literary theory studies texts on a historical and material basis, and Marxist genre theory is what Bennett identifies as the 'sociology of genres'. It relies heavily on the *dominant* theory of genre. The Formalist critique of genre (to which Todorov belongs) is very much concerned with the notion of the *dominant*, that is, the element of a literary type that determines all other elements. (Dubrow 1982, 88-91) In a detective novel, the dominant might be the fact that a crime has been committed and it is this crime that affects all other elements of the story. All texts belonging to a certain genre must share the same dominant, and according to Bennett, the same historical context. This is because Marxist literary theory links social dominants to literary dominants, seeing literary dominants as appearing as a result of social dominants. For example, Renaissance tragedy as a genre is linked to the growing fragmentation of Elizabethan society and the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century is a result of the growth of capitalism and the ethic of the individual (Bennett 1990, 85-87). If literary dominants are thus linked to social dominants, then all texts defined as belonging to a particular genre must share the same links between literature and history. In other words, all novels must be influenced by the rise of capitalism. This is a positive theory of genre.

A negative theory of genre is also considered in Bennett's analysis, that of Anne Freadman in her essay 'Untitled: (On Genre)' (1988). Here, Freadman rejects genre positivity and its 'recipes' for genres. Following on from structuralist views on language, she sees genres, like signifiers, as being understood negatively. Just as structuralist linguistics says that readers understand 'cat', not because there is anything inherent in the signifier that links it to a particular animal, but because it is not 'hat' or 'car', so do we understand genres by what they are not; a romance is such because it is not a detective story, or an elegy.

[...] genre cannot be defined by a single not-statement, but rather that a generic definition ('definition' is, literally, 'the tracing of boundaries' rather than the discovery of an essence) arises as (or 'from') a series of contrasts which position 'this' kind in among other adjacent kinds of text.

(Freadman, 79)

She sees our understanding of genres constructed by absences and contrasts. Genres are not recognised by their inherent characteristics, but by the relationships between them and other genres.

Freadman acknowledges the failures of generic labels, as they cannot fully describe texts and texts may have more than one genre. She argues, however, that this is only a problem when 'the telos of classification is truth' (Freadman 1988, 94). For Freadman, classification is a tool for filing, where convenience and ease of use take precedence, rather than a means of establishing 'truth'.

Following on from Freadman's analysis, Bennett emphasises that genres are determined by reading practices and not by inherent features. In other words, they are constituted *intertextually*. Freadman's 'de-essentialising' of genres exposes them as constructs and therefore unstable, dependent on reading practices. This approach, however, makes literary history and the concept of genres unstable.

Analysing the uptake of literary texts in reading practices turns out to mean that attention should focus on the specific forms of intertextuality governing the composition of a given inter-generic field and attributing to this the power to determine the circumstantial forms in which literary texts are deployed. The role of genres in the social regulation of reading practices thus turns out to be an in variant one ('the governance of semiosis') whose accomplishment subordinates the role of extra-textual considerations - the particular occasions and uses of reading - the influence of a generalised form of intertextuality.
(Bennett 1990, 104)

Thus Freadman's analysis shows that traditional genre-positive theories are inadequate and that the assignment of texts to genre categories and these categories themselves are changeable, dependent on reading. It does not, however, look at how and why these changes occur. This approach does not look extrinsically to the text, something which Bennett feels is necessary for useful literary analysis. It also leaves something of a void. If the literary past is wholly deconstructed, then it is unclear what is left. If all is unstable, then there is difficulty in establishing an object of study.

Bennett concludes that literary and social relations should no longer be viewed as separate. Literature should instead be seen as one of a number of 'modes of sociality', a social process, phenomenon, like any other. In other words, literature is a discourse, which exists alongside other discourses. Bennett rejects the conventional Marxist view that literature always reacts to society, and instead sees it as a field of social relationships, which interacts with other fields. Literature is no longer seen as a reflection of social processes, but a social process itself. This analysis views literature as

involved in power relations and struggles, just as other social practices are, and therefore sees genre as a part of social relations, rather than a reflection of them (Bennett 1990, 102-108). Thus, genres are part of the reading process, sets of social relations which structure both reading and writing practices. They are not sharply defined collections of texts with dominant aspects, but rather a family of texts, regarded as distinct in a particular period of history. Although familial relationships may be loose, there does still exist a family of texts and texts can belong to more than one family, both synchronically and diachronically.

The 'sociology of genres' is rejected for its lack of recognition of intertextual relations. Texts belonging to one genre can be as different from each other as from texts belonging to other genres, making the link between social events and literary form tenuous if not impossible to maintain. The deconstructionist view of genre is inadequate because it fails to read extrinsically and because total instability is no basis for a genre theory. Bennett's conclusions are that instead of trying to define specific genres, theorists should concentrate rather on how these genres work, especially alongside other discourses. Genres cannot be definitively settled and to attempt to do so is to end up swimming in theoretical circles:

Indeed, the proper concern of genre theory is not to define genres - for this can only result in sets of institutionalised prescriptions for the regulation of contemporary reading practices - but to examine the composition and functioning of generic systems.
(Bennett 1990, 112)

1.6 Theories of Genre: Pragmatics

Eugenio Bolongaro, in his essay 'From Literariness to Genre: Establishing the Foundations for a theory of Literary Genres' (1992), also dismisses the idea of inherent characteristics of texts. His definition of literature is reached pragmatically. As readers, we bring a definition of literature to a text, a definition that is shaped by our culture. There is nothing inherent in the text that makes it 'literature'.

Concerning genre, Bolongaro points out the major problem with genre theory: we know how genres work, but we cannot say what they are. Rather than attempting, as other critics have done, to define genres, Bolongaro, like Bennett and Freedman, views them as filing systems, constituted in reading practices, rather than by authorial effort.

Once we accept that texts are not given, but constructed pragmatically, and that there is no *a priori* limit to the number of ways a text or a collection of text may be

constructed, genres appear in their true light: they are strategically deployed regulative schemes.
(Bolongaro 1992, 308)

Thus genres can have a practical use and it is the use that is important, rather than how they may be constructed or defined.

1.7 Theories of Genre: Communication

Theorists return to the notion of genre as communication. Genre is like a code: recognise the generic symbols and therein lies the key to the text. Once you have cracked the generic code, you have cracked the mystery of the text, but without an understanding of this code, you cannot have a true reading.

This idea of generic communication is used by Heather Dubrow in her overview of the topic, *Genre* (1982). Dubrow notes that, as readers, we have certain expectations of genres and presume that a text written in a particular genre will follow a particular pattern. A detective story will feature a crime and also a solution, while a romantic novel will describe a love affair with a happy ending. Like Todorov, Dubrow notes that these codes are rarely broken accidentally. When a genre is transgressed, it is usually as a means of commenting on the genre, rather than a mistake by the writer. The detective story with no solution is more often than not a challenge to the detective genre, rather than an omission on the part of the writer.

To adopt or to reject particular genres is, according to Dubrow, to make a statement about the writing produced. Selecting a genre not currently popular can be a way of referring back to a different age and tradition, while also rejecting those genres in contemporary use as inferior. Parody of a genre can, as Fowler points out, become a genre in its own right, while also engaging with the genre being parodied.

The selection of a particular genre usually sets the tone of the writing - for example, a sonnet may usually be about love - and to use a certain genre differently may challenge the reader to look again at the genre selected and to think about how appropriate or inappropriate it is to the content of the writing. For example, Wilfred Owen uses the sonnet form in his poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', a poem looking at more fitting memorials for the soldiers killed in the First World War, than traditional funerals. The use of a sonnet usually sets an emotional tone but instead of the traditional celebration of love, Owen is considering a very different subject, the slaughter of a generation of young men, the more usual writers of sonnets. Instead of trying to woo the

young women, these men have had their lives brutally cut short and Owen is looking for a memorial that reflects the specialness of their deaths. He is also using a very old genre and is possibly harking back to a time when agents of this slaughter, the guns and bombs, did not exist. As Dubrow points out, an author does not usually select a genre at random. The choosing of a particular genre to write in is as important as the words of the text themselves.

Selecting a literary form that is not currently popular can constitute a ringing statement that one is condemning and contemning much of the literature created by one's contemporaries and one's predecessors and offering something very different in its stead

(Dubrow 1982, 13)

Genres are seen as having specific rules which govern the way a text is written and read. They are almost a contract between reader and writer. The writer agrees to follow certain conventions and the reader agrees to recognise them. It becomes known that certain genres will contain certain aspects and not others, for example, comedy will contain no horror and no real violence, for if it does, it is a separate genre, that of black comedy.

These rules can be seen as applicable to genres other than literary genres. Mikhail Bakhtin discusses speech genres in his essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and shows how they, like literary genres, act as a means of communication. He argues that although we select our speech genres almost unconsciously, our communications with each other are still shaped by them.

We speak only in definitive speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*. Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skilfully *in practice*, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence *in theory*. [...] Even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms, sometimes rigid and trite ones, sometimes more flexible, plastic and creative ones (everyday communication also has creative genres at its disposal). (Bakhtin, 89)

Thus, for Bakhtin, genres are more than a means of literary classification, and are the means by which forms of communication are shaped. Genres are impossible to avoid as they are the means by which we communicate with each other. For Bakhtin, communication is unthinkable without genres – every articulation has its genre and it is through these genres that we understand each other.

1.8 Transgression

Genre transgression appears to be gaining in popularity, especially in film and these examples will clarify the effect that transgression has on the text and the reader. Quentin Tarantino, for example, plays with genre in his films *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994). *Reservoir Dogs* is a gangster film with no scenes of the gangsters' crimes. A robbery takes place, but the audience never sees it. He mixes extreme violence with casual humour and forces the audience to examine their preconceptions of cinematic violence. Likewise in *Pulp Fiction*, violent scenes are played for laughs, confronting us with the full reality of gunshot wounds while also eliciting chuckles.

Roberto Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), which is based on a Tarantino screenplay and which features Tarantino as an actor, also plays with genre. At first, it would appear to be similar to other Tarantino movies, which is interesting. The subversion of genre that characterises Tarantino's films has itself become a genre. The film begins with two brothers involved in a train of violent crime. They hijack a family on a touring holiday and as viewers, we feel that we know what will come next; this is a hostage film. On stopping at a bar in Mexico, however, the film changes dramatically. What was a gangster story becomes a somewhat overblown vampire film. The bar is full of vampires and the kidnappers and kidnappees must join forces to save their own lives. In keeping with *Pulp Fiction*, the action is fast and funny, but also violent and gory. The film changes genre very abruptly halfway through, which has the effect of startling the viewer, but also preparing us for plenty of surprises. Gangster films and vampire films may be genres with which we are familiar, but to see them put together in one film like this makes us draw comparisons between the two and examine a little more closely what it is that constitutes the 'rules' of each genre.

Another recent example of playing with genre in film is David Fincher's *Seven* (1995), which moves from being a buddy cop film, through to a serial killer drama and then to horror. The viewer's expectations are constantly confounded as we watch a scene we have seen many times before, yet played very differently. There is a chase through the streets, but this time, the policeman chasing is obviously nervous and scared of the gun he is carrying. Later, the killer is revealed to us, spoiling the suspense of the hunt for him. The final scenes, however, are completely unexpected and leave the audience in a state of shock and disbelief. We have not been led by the rest of the film to expect a horror ending and this disregard for generic convention is as much of a surprise as the actual action.

When the audience is aware of the rules of a genre, they can be assured as to what will and will not happen. When these rule are not adhered to, as in *Seven*, the audience is left without solid foundations of expectation. If the unexpected happens, if the action does not proceed as we have been led to believe that it will, then we must question what will happen next. We cannot be sure, for example, that good will triumph, or that the hero will survive to the end of the film and that lack of surety makes us nervous viewers. We can, however, deal with unexpected events as our previous experience in watching the film has encouraged us not to take for granted what will happen next. It is because we know the rules of the genres and because we know that they are being transgressed that we, as viewers, are prepared for the other surprises in store, even though they still shock us. It also makes us able to question the previous genre films that we have seen and maybe explore where our preconceptions have come from. *Seven* is a film that teases the viewer by setting up expectations and then challenging them. We have been used to formulaic cop movies and *Seven* delights in changing the formula and making us uncomfortable. It is a disturbing and unsettling film in which good does not win and whose ending is hardly conclusive, but it would not be so unsettling if there was no awareness in the audience of the generic norms which it flouts.

It is by overturning our generic expectations that a writer can induce in his reader a series of intellectual reflections and emotional experience very like those being enacted in and by the work itself. (Dubrow, 37)

This overturning of generic expectations is what Don DeLillo achieves in *White Noise* (1984). This novel seems a confusion of genres, none of which are satisfactorily followed through. It starts as a campus novel, but the majority of the action takes place off campus. This genre usually contains clever, self-conscious people who do worry about their failure to achieve success, but the 'hero' of *White Noise*, Jack Gladney, uses knowledge as a protection against learning. His children supply knowledge, whereas Jack supplies ignorance. In a search for a sustainable identity, he turns to Hitler's Germany and fascism, in a direct contrast to the usually liberal characters of a campus novel.

White Noise appears to change generic tack with the Airborne Toxic Event, where the town is threatened by a cloud of poisonous gas. With a disaster genre, it would be expected that the disaster would become more and more visible and terrifying as people attempt to escape from it. Here, however, the Airborne Toxic Event becomes more and

more *invisible*, and instead of a conclusion, we are left not knowing who has and has not escaped from this calamity.

The last section of the novel moves from a family fiction, to a revenge drama, but again DeLillo subverts the genre. We would expect the hero to find the villain and a battle to ensue, where either the hero or villain or both will die. In *White Noise*, Jack goes to kill the man who has slept with his wife, but refuses to admit that this is the reason. To him, his quest has nothing to do with revenge, even though this is how the action is presented. Jack does not kill his villain and ends up wounded himself. His plan fails, almost ridiculously, and again generic convention is transgressed.

White Noise constantly raises expectations about genre, but these expectations are not fulfilled. However, we as readers must be aware of the conventions in order to notice the lack of fulfilment. The title of the novel suggests atomisation, confusion and this is reflection in the lack of generic cohesion. DeLillo takes genres with which we are familiar, but refuses to present them to us as we would expect. His genres are unstable and that adds to the sense of fragmentation in the novel. Genre transgression helps to establish a tone for the text, but it relies on the reader's knowledge of the conventions to be transgressed.

Thus playing with genre and generic expectations is a means of establishing a tone, of disconcerting the reader. Writers who wish to challenge ideologies may use genre transgressions to encourage the reader to question established ideas, to think about why certain rules exist. A film like *Seven* is a challenge to blockbuster Hollywood action thrillers. It explores the nature of evil and presents us with a world where darkness wins out and where idealism and hope are useless. The world in *Seven* is where hardened cynics survive and where emotions and feeling can destroy you. This bleak picture is well painted by the genre transgressions which create a feeling of instability. The basic 'rules' of genre are being flouted and if these rules can be broken, what other 'truths' may be shattered?

The same can be said for *White Noise*. The characters are searching for meaning as their foundations slip away and reading the text feels like a search for meaning. Nothing is quite what it seems. Genres are hinted at, but not followed through, and it is difficult to pin down what exactly the novel is about. Of course, a work of fiction need not be about anything, but our cultural definition of a novel is that it is about something and we use genre to help us to discover what that might be.

Therefore the transgression of a genre can be seen as both subverting and reaffirming that genre. The reaffirmation occurs as the genre and its characteristics are brought to the fore and then subversion occurs when these characteristics change. In order for there to be transgression, however, there must be an understanding in the mind of the viewer or reader of what is being transgressed. If this is not so, then no transgression can be seen to have occurred.

These examples of genre transgression have shown the power of genre and of generic expectation. As stated above, knowing that a text belongs to a particular genre gives rise to certain expectations of it and subversion of these expectations creates unease in the reader. Without a concept of genre, this transgression would not be acknowledged. Therefore the continuation of genre transgression in writing and other media is an argument for the upholding of genre as a critical concept.

1.9 Genre as a way of reading

Genre can be seen as an irrelevance to the study of art. There can be reservations about the notion of genre as it would appear to be a logical, almost mathematical concept, something quite alien to the intuitive world of artistic endeavour. If each work of art is something unique, then the rules of genre are irrelevant. One work of art cannot be like another, so the concept of genre would seem to be redundant. This notion, with its privileging of *art*, ignores the fact that there are similarities between texts and that these similarities exist at no detriment to the 'worth' of the texts. No text can claim to be completely separate from all texts that have gone before and all texts that come after it. It is impossible to escape a literary history and culture if one writes and although a writer may strive for utmost originality, each text is related to the texts that have gone before, even if it is that it are totally different. Texts do not exist in a vacuum and have connections with each other and genre theory is a way of examining these connections. Genre theory looks at how texts engage with the reader and with each other and is a useful means of giving texts a cultural and historical framework.

A difficulty with genre theory is that it is often conceived of as being related to absolute truths. Northrop Frye wants absolutes in his quest for objective criticism, but, as pointed out earlier, a rigid, hierarchical classificatory system cannot cope with texts that simply do not fit (Frye 1957). When genres are seen as sets of rules governing what a text may or may not contain, immediately they are challenged. Genres can be seen as

'recipes' for texts, but as Anne Freadman points out, the same recipe can produce very different texts (Freadman 1988). Genre fiction need not read as though it has been written to a recipe, even though it contains similar elements to other texts. As has been argued, defining genres positively will always create difficulties as texts will usually vary and become difficult to classify exactly.

However, removing the need to classify absolutely from genre study allows us to make use of the concept of genre in relating texts to each other, in intertextuality. Looking for absolutes always creates difficulties, so instead, it would seem more profitable to see genre as a means of relating one text to another, rather than as a key to understanding one text in isolation. Genre theory interrelates texts and gives them a cultural setting. Analysis using the concept of genre gives texts a history, a cultural reference point, a discourse. Texts may be read in isolation, but they can also be read as part of a genre, a notion that can enrich a reading. Genre gives a context and a framework for a reading. This is not necessarily a definitive reading, for readers are free to have differing readings, but nevertheless, it gives another reading. When looking at a group of texts, using genre is a way of interrelating them, of finding common reference points and is therefore a useful critical tool for literary study.

From the existing genre theories examined, it can be seen that different theorists have differing concepts of what genre is and how it should be utilised. My interest in genre is as a connection between texts and as a way of establishing a particular group of texts. My study involves a certain group of texts and I am using genre theory as it is a relatively established means of forming literary groupings. It is also a concept that is acceptable to many literary theorists and my aim is to present AIDS writing as acceptable for literary theory. For my purposes, seeking a definitive text or grading texts according to their adherence to generic conventions is irrelevant. I am using genre as a way of grouping differing texts. They may differ quite strongly from each other, but as members of the same genre, there is an argument for relating them to each other. Another reader may assign these text to different genres; there are no absolutes. As Ross Chambers points out in 'Describing Genre', his analysis of Anne Freadman's work, a

text may designate its genre, through its plot, style, language and so on, but it can just as easily be assigned by the reader to another genre (Chambers 1993).²²

1.10 The Theoretical Perspectives Adopted in this Thesis

From examining the varied theories of genre presented above, it can be seen that there is only partial consensus on the meaning and use of the term 'genre'. That genre is a useful concept when studying literature is generally agreed; the ways in which genres are constituted, however, are subject to dispute.

Genres are ways of articulating the connections between texts and of reducing a huge body of literature to a manageable area of study. The theorist cannot hope to examine all texts, and so genre is a practical concept and can give direction to literary study. Texts may be categorised into 'kinds' and those kinds arranged into genres which may or may not be constituted by sub-genres. Knowledge of the characteristics of particular genres gives the reader 'clues' as to the nature of the text and what to expect from it. Belonging to a particular genre may imply the subject matter or mood or form of the text and thus genre can be seen as a means of communication.

Therefore, as a result of examining these differing theories of genre, I am basing my definition of the term on the familial relationships introduced by Bennett (1990). With this view, genres result from connections between texts and are not prescriptors of texts. I am rejecting Frye's rigid taxonomy and instead using a sample of texts to illustrate my theory that AIDS writing constitutes a genre. Rather than fitting texts to a system that does not allow for deviation, my theory of genre allows for loose relationships between texts as it does not attempt to be definitive. This theory of genre is not absolute and texts are open to re-interpretation.

One more objection to the use of genre may be the problem of transgression. An absolute theory of genre, where texts are assigned to their own genre and no other, may break down in the face of genre transgression. However, a more pragmatic approach to genre, where it is a tool to aid study, sees transgression as a reinforcement of genre rather than a negation. In order for transgression to occur and to be acknowledged as such, it is necessary for a 'norm' to be recognisable. The following section aims to

²² Thus, in a sense, I am drawing attention to the instability of this theoretical move on my part, but my call for acknowledgement of AIDS writing as a genre should be seen as the first stage in a dialogue or argument with the literary-educational establishment about processes of exclusion and marginalisation.

explore some examples of genre transgression in order to argue that the act of transgression strengthens the case for the existence of genre.

1.11 Genre and AIDS Writing

The group of texts that I will be discussing have a particular concern and, in most cases, a particular subject matter. My study cannot hope to be exhaustive and so the texts selected represent certain aspects of the genre, but are not definitive. As previously mentioned, my own concept of genre is that of a family relationship between texts. The texts that form this genre are all related to each other, but are not identical. Some share certain characteristics, others share other characteristics. There are family traits shared amongst the texts, but not all have the same traits. They are, however, connected. These texts are all members of the same family, but cannot be said to share a 'generic DNA'. They also have links to other texts that are not considered part of this genre, as family members can 'marry into' other families. My use of the term genre is fairly and advisedly loose, unlike Frye's theory of genre, but not so loose that the term becomes irrelevant. I believe that these texts are linked through their generic allegiances.

This genre is AIDS writing. The link between the texts is the subject matter of a medical syndrome, but they cannot all be said to be *about* AIDS. Also, I am not attempting to study all texts that touch on AIDS. The texts I am using are concerned with representing lesbians and gay men. They do not all have lesbian or gay authors, but they deal with AIDS as it relates to lesbians and gay men. In some of the texts, AIDS is the focal point of the narrative, in others, it is barely mentioned, if at all. All these texts are, however, members of a genre that can be called *AIDS writing*.

In the critical texts concerned with AIDS literature, there has been an assumption that such a genre actually exists, with little consideration of the validity of this classification (Pastore 1993, Nelson 1993). It has been assumed that there is a genre, the 'genre of AIDS writing', and that this phrase is instantly recognisable as signifying a particular body of writing. This approach, with its assumption that AIDS writing automatically exists as a genre seems to me to be confused. I have examined the concept genre and varying genre theories and will now relate them to my analysis of AIDS writing.

Much previous genre theory, for example Frye (1957), does not seem applicable when looking at AIDS writing. There are no particular 'recipes' for an AIDS novel and it would be difficult to fit AIDS writing into Northrop Frye's classificatory structures. While there are aspects of this genre that are common to many texts, and these will be

explored in Chapter Two, it cannot be said that all texts forming the body known as AIDS writing have the same generic 'blueprint'.

There is no particular dominant, not even AIDS, as many texts belong to this genre, even those which are not directly 'about' AIDS. AIDS is not a social reality which is simply reflected in literature: rather, AIDS writing is a social reality. AIDS is a biomedical reality, but, it also has other realities, including cultural, literary and social realities. AIDS writing participates in the social arena and is not merely a reflection of it. Some AIDS writing is polemical and has a clear political agenda as to what needs to change in society. AIDS writing does not exist just because of biomedical AIDS, it exists alongside it. While it is true that without the medical condition, there would be no AIDS literature, AIDS writing can be seen as a literary discourse, rather than merely as a reaction to a medical phenomenon.

Looking at this genre, there seems little point in following Frye's thesis and neatly fitting AIDS writing into his categories. The mode is generally low mimetic and the genre is a combination of confession and novel. This categorisation does not, however, say much about the texts making up the genre. Frye's 'scientific' criticism is unsuitable for this study. AIDS novels cannot be read in a vacuum, for outside the world of fiction, there is the biomedical reality. AIDS affects real people and when reading a novel as a piece of AIDS writing, it is impossible to forget its place in the 'world of AIDS'. This is not to say that AIDS writing can only be examined during a period of history that includes the pandemic. Future readers will also analyse this writing, but will need knowledge of AIDS and its culture to make sense of it. AIDS writing should be read as part of an AIDS discourse, part of a world where AIDS is discussed and written about. AIDS writing is the literary aspect of this discourse and while it can be read in isolation, a richer reading is achieved through seeing it as part of a cultural experience.

Thus, my own use of the term genre means that AIDS writing is put in the context of a biomedical condition. The group of texts I am using all have a connection with AIDS, whether it be the focus of the narrative, or not mentioned at all, as in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming Pool Library* (1989). Their link is familial and, as will be seen, some share certain generic traits, and others share other generic traits. My aim is to argue for AIDS writing to be viewed as a genre and to explore some of the particular features of this genre.

As mentioned previously, my study does not hope to be exhaustive. Since the early 1980s there has emerged a substantial body of texts with AIDS as a major theme. As my

own approach to genre is not concerned with prescriptions and categorisation, I am not intending to analyse all texts concerned with AIDS. Instead, I am focusing on a relatively small number that have particular connections to each other. To analyse 'AIDS writing: the genre' is somewhat of a Sisyphean task and, as Todorov has pointed out, it is not necessary to read every text before producing a hypothesis (Todorov 1973, 3). Critical opinions are not set in stone, and may be revised as new texts are incorporated.

In order to give my study a clear focus, the texts I am using are by British and American writers. This means that there is a commonality of language and, to an extent, culture. They are mostly novels, which narrows down the selection of texts considerably. Furthermore, the texts are all concerned with AIDS as it affects one of the groups most hard hit by the syndrome, gay men. This is not to give credence to the notion that AIDS is a 'gay disease', but to reflect the fact that gay men have suffered as a result of AIDS, and that they have been the biggest contributors to the body of AIDS literature.

1.12 Gay and Lesbian Writing

Gay AIDS writing can be seen as a genre in its own right, and also as a subgenre of gay writing. As with defining literature, defining what is meant by gay and/or lesbian writing is problematic (Bristow 1992). If there is such a genre, and I believe that there is, stating what it consists of is not easy.

To remain with the familial model of genre, there is no need for definitive statements. However, Freadman's theory of 'not-statements' also becomes difficult. One could say that gay and lesbian writing is not written by heterosexuals, but some texts that can be considered as gay or lesbian do not necessarily have gay or lesbian authors, and not all texts with gay or lesbian authors are considered as gay or lesbian texts. Another problem with establishing genre through authorship is the decline of the authority of the author. Literary study has moved away from 'authors' and 'works' to a less rigid theory concerned with 'writers' and 'texts'. According to Roland Barthes (1977), the author is dead, and while this is not to be taken as literally true, the writer is no longer seen as having the ultimate 'answer' to the interpretation of the text – s/he can no longer be regarded as a text's sole position of intelligibility.

Having rejected the writer's sexuality as the main qualification for a definition, the next possibility is the subject matter. Is a gay or lesbian novel one that is about gay men

or lesbians? This would seem a better definition, but one that is also problematic. Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* (1989 - 1991) series features heterosexual characters as well as homosexual ones, but it can still be read as gay writing. A text does not have to solely deal with the gay or lesbian 'community' to qualify as a gay or lesbian novel. Instead, it would seem that the best meaning, although not a definitive one, is that the text concerns itself with representing the lives of lesbians and/or gay men. These texts do not always accentuate the positive, but usually try, in some way, to represent lesbians and gay men without portraying them as deviants. In other words, the tone is more or less supportive without ignoring the fact that lesbians and gay men can face problems in their lives and are not always 'good' people (Pearce 1996). My concern is not with fantasy novels, but with fiction that can be considered realist, to a greater or lesser degree.

The chosen texts, then, belong, though not solely, to a body of writing that can be called 'gay and lesbian writing'. Such a term is not ideal, consolidating as it does two groups with very different experiences and agendas, but it is useful as a way of denoting texts that have a concern with sexual marginality. Gay men and lesbians have both been persecuted as sexual outlaws and this is what enables writing by gay men and lesbians to be considered together.

The question 'what is gay and lesbian writing' and the difficulty of including the two together is explored in Joseph Bristow's 'Introduction' to *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (1992). Gay and lesbian writing is certainly not one defined field and, as Bristow also points out, the linking of lesbian and gay in this way is somewhat tenuous. Gender is the important difference and often lesbians and gay men would seem to have very little in common.

The mark of gender, given the cultural violence and the inequalities of power it sets in motion, is perhaps the most important distinction placed between lesbians and gay men. But both subordinated groups share parallel histories within a sexually prohibitive dominant culture, and these have inevitably brought us into the 'and' that both links and separates our sexual-political interests.

(Bristow 1992, 3)

Nevertheless, as Bristow emphasises, both lesbians and gay men have been persecuted for same-sex desire and both have been amalgamated as 'homosexuals'. There is, however, a value and a strength in lesbians and gay men working together and challenging the dominance of heterosexual values. Bristow brings together men and

women examining lesbian and gay texts, but remains aware of the gender differences between lesbians and gay men.

Bristow also acknowledges the importance of feminism; it has enabled lesbians to theorise their experience and has activated gay theory. The relationships between heterosexual and lesbian feminism and between gay men and feminism have not, however, been without conflict. While these difficulties cannot easily be resolved, it is important to accept that there is difference and to find ways to work together.

Jonathan Dollimore examines the 'outsider' status of lesbians and gay men by dealing with the history of 'perversion' as a concept. Dollimore begins with Freud's concept of the 'polymorphously perverse' infant and its subsequent sublimation of these perversions, which enable our culture to develop. Foucault also sees perversion as vital to the make up of modern society, but rather than being sublimated, it is constructed in order to be condemned; perversion is 'the product and vehicle of power' (Foucault 1978, cited in Dollimore, 1992: 10).

Perversion is defined as a departure from what is 'normal' (and therefore good) and in doing so, it is also subverting the normal. This definition involves the binary opposition of natural/unnatural, good/evil. Dollimore points out, however, that perversion has its origin in that which it subverts. In order to transgress, there must be something to deviate from. Both are mutually dependent. 'The shattering effect of perversion [...] is related to the fact that it originates internally to just those things it threatens. I call this the perverse dynamic.' (p. 12) The paradox is that the perverse is the total contradiction of the normal and yet it is inherent within it. Dollimore illustrates this with reference to the Christian philosophy of evil expounded by Augustine, who links the power of evil to the power of the good it turns away from. Christian tradition tackles the dependency of the natural and unnatural by having evil originate in Satan and therefore outside God. Satan is also a fallen angel, which tallies with the perverse dynamic: the perverse originates from the natural or good.

Finally, Dollimore concentrates on the most modern implications of perversion - its sexual implications. He describes how Freud looks on perversions as chaotic and subversive, as they challenge the dominance of heterosexual reproductive sex. Western civilisation is dependent on this sexual order and perversions subvert sexual difference and are more pleasurable than repressively ordered desires (and not just in the pleasure inherent in the act of transgression). Perversion cannot be eliminated, however, as it is

the sublimated basis of civilisation. Western culture repeatedly rejects perversion, but perversion is integral to its cultural development.

Dollimore's conclusion is that Freud's notion of sublimation must be challenged. In fact, perversions are used by modern capitalist society for displacement and distraction. While social crises are transferred into condemnations of sexuality, society is distracted from the problems at the heart of its culture. Dollimore wants an affirmation of the politics of the perverse, while remembering the brutality with which those classed as 'perverts' have been treated.

Dollimore examines why gay men and lesbians have been excluded from 'normal' society and it is this exclusion that adds weight to the argument that writing by lesbians and gay men can be considered as a genre in its own right. As the lives of lesbians and gay men have been hidden and ignored, so has gay and lesbian writing. As with women's writing before feminist theory gained credibility, the status of gay and lesbian writing has reflected the wider marginalisation experienced in society. True, this genre is somewhat large and varied and is perhaps better described, in Fowler's terminology, as a kind. With this body of writing considered to be a kind, then, it is conceivable that it may contain various genres.

These genres include, for example, 'coming out' stories (or rights of passage novels), erotica, detective stories and AIDS writing. None of these genres in themselves are exclusively gay or lesbian, but there are gay and lesbian versions of these genres, just as there are feminist detective novels and AIDS stories for children. In other words, these genres are found outside gay and lesbian writing and gay and lesbian texts may be more generally included in these genres, but the texts that are considered to be gay or lesbian can also be included in the more specific genres of gay and lesbian writing.

With gay and lesbian writing established as a kind, it is possible to consider AIDS writing as a genre within that kind. As previously mentioned, I see AIDS writing as a genre in its own right and gay and lesbian AIDS texts as a genre of gay and lesbian writing. There are links between the texts other than the fact that they are concerned with AIDS and it is these links that I will explore as an argument for AIDS writing to be viewed as a genre in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

AIDS Writing as a Genre

The aim of this chapter is to examine the aspects of AIDS writing that enable it to be seen as a genre. Following on from the previous chapter, I will first look at how other commentators have viewed the place of AIDS writing in modern literature. I will then examine some of the common metaphors found in AIDS writing with a view to establishing common links between texts. I will also compare this writing with other genres. It will then be seen that because of the links between the texts considered here and the differences between this writing and other genres, AIDS writing deserves to be viewed as a genre in its own right.

2.1 AIDS Writing and Notions of Genre

The view of AIDS writing as a genre in its own right is not taken up in most of the commentaries on AIDS writing. Joseph Dewey (1993), in 'Music for a Closing: Responses to AIDS in Three American Novels' (Nelson 1993), is more concerned with fitting AIDS literature into existing genres, rather than seeing it as a genre itself. He rejects the 'doomed youth' genre, (for example, war fiction) as people with AIDS are not dying for any particular ideal and any appeals to anger about the situation are pointless. Another rejected genre is that of 'dying young', for Dewey finds the emphasis on death itself, and not its agent, and philosophical musings on time and making the best use of it inappropriate to the situation of AIDS: 'the devastation of AIDS is far too immediate to permit such elegant transmutations.' (Dewey 26)

Dewey's analysis, however, is somewhat dismissive. He claims that the plague genre is also inappropriate, without examining the similarities between the perceptions and experiences of both Plague and AIDS, which is something I will consider later. He also assumes that AIDS writing must fit in with existing genres, without exploring the idea that AIDS writing may indeed comprise a genre in its own right. Genres evolve as society evolves and it is not inconceivable that AIDS writing as a genre may have ancestors in all the genres he has rejected. Finally, by the time this article was published, in 1992, there was a large enough body of AIDS writing available to at least warrant the definition of a phenomenon, if not a genre.

Other commentators have recognised the existence of a genre of AIDS writing, including Shaun O'Connell, whose article 'The Big One: Literature Discovers AIDS'

(1988), was one of the earliest to consider the body of literature growing alongside the epidemic. He looks at some early texts and then gives a detailed list of the characteristics of AIDS literature, which could be described as its generic conventions. This list is long and includes aspects such as nostalgia, the importance of the family, anti-bourgeois sentiments, ennoblement through suffering and artlessness or excessiveness (O'Connell 1988, 501). O'Connell's list is, however, too prescriptive and makes too many generalisations about AIDS writing. He also states the idea, often echoed in other commentaries, that AIDS writing has produced few 'works of literature', and the only examples of this are by those writers who have 'raised gay male literature from the celebration of uncloseted sexuality to the level of requiem'. (p. 502) He says that the majority of AIDS writing is 'raw, unpolished, angry, contentious' and sees this 'rawness' and anger as a barrier to being a 'work of literature'. Quite apart from the uneasy notions of value and canons that this judgement evokes (which I discussed in my Introduction), it seems somewhat irrelevant. For this study, what is important about AIDS writing is how it interacts with other discourses of AIDS, rather than how 'good' it is. Decisions about the merit (or lack of) of a text are too personal and too reminiscent of outdated humanist or Leavisite literary theory that concentrates on 'value' and 'worth' at the expense of any other considerations.

What interests me about AIDS writing is how it interacts with other social discourses and how these discourses appear in the texts. As has been said in Chapter One, AIDS is not just a biomedical condition, it is also a social, literary and cultural construct. Literary AIDS is not the same as biomedical AIDS and my interest is in how these discourses of AIDS collide.

The genre of AIDS writing includes a variety of texts; novels, drama, poetry and short stories.²³ This genre is dominated by middle class, white, gay men, as writers and subjects and, quite possibly, as readers. AIDS, of course, is not a middle class, white, gay disease, and it is interesting that the writing presents it as such. AIDS was first noted amongst middle class, white, gay men in New York (Shilts 1988), but other groups also bear the brunt of the disease. In the West, AIDS has been the disease of minorities: Intravenous drug users, gay men and haemophiliacs. It is now, also, a

²³ Some of the texts I will be considering take AIDS as their main focus, others place it in a more minor role. AIDS writing does not solely concern the disease as it affects gay men (HIV is a non-discriminatory virus), but as my research focus is gay and lesbian writing, I will be looking at gay and lesbian AIDS writing.

disease of poverty. In the rest of the world, particularly in Africa and Asia, where the majority of HIV infection occurs, AIDS is again a disease of the poor, no matter what their sexual orientation. Although AIDS is not a 'gay disease', AIDS writing would appear to present it as such. This raises interesting questions about reading and writing and whether or not heterosexual writers should use AIDS as a subject matter. Is it only the middle class white gay men who have the leisure and the financial stability to create 'art'? Do other affected groups, for example, IV drug users, not live long enough after an AIDS diagnosis to record their experience? Or, if they do, is nobody willing to read it? These are questions without easy answers. What I hope to do in the course of this chapter is to consider the question of who is writing and who is reading in my analysis of the genre of AIDS writing. The politics of AIDS writing are as important as the aesthetics and I hope to consider both.

2.2 AIDS and the Body

There are several significant links between the texts that make up the genre of AIDS writing. An important link is the imagery of AIDS that is used. There are certain metaphors of AIDS that appear in these texts and which are common enough to be seen as generic traits. By examining these metaphors and showing how they are to be found in these texts, I aim to establish them as evidence for there being a body of writing that is a genre.

One of the ways in which the discourses of AIDS have involved this association of a biomedical condition with a social situation is in notions of the body, which have appeared in both literary and other AIDS discourses. Images of the body and sickness are important to the genre of AIDS writing and to social thinking about AIDS.

The Cartesian idea of mind-body dualism, where the mind and the body are mutually incompatible elements no longer holds much credence. Mind and body interact and so cannot be mutually exclusive.²⁴ But while we may no longer speak of a *res cogitans* as totally distinct from a *res extensa*, we do still differentiate between mind and body. While thought is seen to involve a physical process in the brain, we still view ourselves as made up of two different entities; 'I', my mind, and the physical thing 'I' inhabit, my body. Phrases such as "My body is failing me" imply that I am separate

²⁴ See John Cottingham *Descartes* (1986) for a more detailed discussion of these ideas.

from my body, it is a possession of 'mine'. This can also work the other way round, with the mind, 'me', exerting influence over 'my body'. This philosophy gives rise to a certain hierarchy, with the mind at the top and the body, subordinate, below. This idea of hierarchy is common in the Christian tradition, with the idea of the body politic; the rational, intellectual mind (the government or the monarchy) must control the irrational, chaotic body (society or the people, the masses), or disaster and disorder will ensue. The mind is valued over the body and must govern the instincts and desires of the body for the whole to function correctly. When this system breaks down, when the mind is not strong enough or the body is too wilful, then the body sins. The body is associated with sin and is seen as being full of lusts and desires; and it is the potential which must be checked by the mind. This Christian tradition also goes on to see the sins of the body coming back to the body in the form of illness. Illness is viewed as a punishment. One's body is punished for its transgression and one's mind is tormented and disturbed by the experience of sickness and the knowledge that it has failed in its duty to exercise control over the body. This notion of illness as punishment for sin is a long standing and common one and has reappeared in the context of AIDS.

HIV is non-discriminatory, but has affected, in the West, mainly gay men and intravenous drug users as I mentioned earlier, and this has led to it being viewed, particularly by the Christian Right in the USA, as a Divine punishment. AIDS is seen as the price that gay men and junkies pay for their minds' lack of control over their bodies. They have misused their bodies - injecting drugs, engaging in anal sex - and their bodies are now being punished with AIDS. Although anyone can be at risk from HIV infection, because the virus was first noticed among gay men, the equation AIDS = gay has remained in many opinions about AIDS, and this syndrome is still being viewed as a 'gay plague'. Homosexuals are being punished, by God or by 'Nature', for their deviancy; AIDS is the physical manifestation of a sexual sickness. Their rational minds have failed to exert sufficient control over their wilful, lustful bodies (as though being homosexual can be 'overcome' if you put your mind to it) and the result is HIV infection and AIDS. This view of sexuality condones only married heterosexual, primarily reproductive, intercourse, and sees other forms of sex, to a greater or lesser degree, as sinful, with anal sex between men being the most heinous activity.

Returning to the body politic and mind-body hierarchy; while this is a traditional image of the body, there are other metaphors that bear consideration, particularly with respect to illness. In her book, *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1989), Susan Sontag explores

images of illness and particularly AIDS and how these images affect reactions to AIDS itself and to People with AIDS. The language of sickness and of AIDS is influential in society's attitudes to the condition and my aim is to use Sontag's ideas to examine more closely some of the metaphors of AIDS.

Apart from the body politic, the Christian tradition also views the body as a temple, a holy place because the spirit or soul resides therein, and which must not be defiled with sin. Another image, examined by Sontag, is that of the body as machine, a collection of interdependent mechanical parts or processes, where illness is a malfunction, something to be repaired. The body has also been pictured as a fortress, with infections as invading armies to be repelled and this military imagery is something I will return to later on. Further metaphors include the body as a shell, the outer casing for the mind, the location of the 'real self' and this notion of the mind as the self gives rise to another metaphor, that of the body as a garment, something you wear on top of your 'real self', as though the outside world must peer under this outer clothing to see the 'real' you. The body is seen as a protector and a mask, behind which lurks the self.

Metaphors concerning mind, body and illness continue in both writing and talking about AIDS. The metaphors of AIDS are repeated in AIDS writing and are common enough to be considered as generic indicators. Imagery of the body and AIDS have similarities to those concerned with other illnesses, but they bring into play more of the moral aspect of thinking about bodies and sickness. The old links between sin and sickness return in metaphors for AIDS.

2.3 AIDS and Images of War

Another popular metaphor, already mentioned, is AIDS as war. As Sontag points out, illness has often been viewed in terms of military metaphors, with the body mobilising 'defences' against the 'invading forces' of illness. This imagery seems particularly applicable to AIDS. Here the virus is a spy, a secret agent, infiltrating the body and destroying its defences, its immune system, from within, leaving it vulnerable to attack from any invader. The medical profession uses these metaphors with talk of invasion and repulsion, battles and struggles. These images, however, create a picture of the body as helpless, attacked on all sides and gives rise to talk of victims, something which is condemned by most of those working with AIDS and the people affected by it. 'Victim' implies helplessness, passivity and, dangerously, innocence, which in turn implies guilt, as Sontag says, moving the emphasis from the disease to the patient.

A further military metaphor is a 'war on AIDS'. There is talk of 'battle plans', 'counterattacks', 'fighting infection', 'armies' of doctors and drugs and, as Michael Sherry points out in his article 'The Language of War in AIDS Discourse' this metaphor is wholly appropriate to the USA (Sherry 1993). The US authorities understand war, seeing it as all important and if AIDS can be presented as a war to be fought with war, then they are more likely to be persuaded to take action. The USA is comfortable with the situation of war and cannot bear to lose one. American AIDS activists have, therefore taken advantage of this in their use of military language.

The frequency of usage of military metaphors in the context of AIDS also helps to link AIDS writing with other genres. Wars are catastrophic human events and as such have given rise to various literary genres. One genre that would seem appropriate, despite Joseph Dewey's misgivings as mentioned previously, is that of First World War poetry, and in particular the poems of Wilfred Owen.

Owen's concern in his poetry is young men and there is no consideration of the sufferings of women during the Great War (Owen 1920, 19). Owen concentrates on the deaths and suffering of young men, which is what gay AIDS writing does also. Just as Owen mourns the loss of a generation, so do many writers and commentators on AIDS. 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young' illustrates this as scores of young men are allowed to die because of the stubbornness of the old: 'Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him./But the old man would not so, but slew his son/And half the seed of Europe, one by one.' Here, the young soldiers are sacrificed to vanity and intractability; with AIDS, the young gay men are seen as being sacrificed to preserve heterosexual America. Much AIDS writing and commentary, for example *And The Band Played On* by Randy Shilts and the writing of Larry Kramer, blames the number of deaths on the tardiness of the response of the State. Both Owen's poem and this AIDS writing lay the culpability for the deaths of young men at the feet of their leaders.

Owen's preface to his poems states that the only subject that he feels he can write about is the war. There is no other subject: 'My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.' (Owen 1920, 31). The war is so terrible, so devastating that it overshadows any other subject. This can also be said for the role of AIDS. Several commentators on AIDS, for example Larry Kramer and Paul Monette, feel unable to write about any other subject. Monette says about *Love Alone*, his collection of elegies for his lover, that he would 'rather have this volume filed under AIDS than under Poetry, because if these words speak to anyone they are for those who are mad with

loss, to let them know they are not alone.’ (Monette 1988b). While Monette is quick to point out that he does not equate the suffering caused by AIDS to the slaughter of the First World War, he sees war as an appropriate metaphor for the times he is living in. It is Owen’s insistence on his role as witness being the point of his poetry, rather than aesthetics, that Monette relates to, and this is another point of reference between Owen’s poetry and AIDS literature.

Some of Owen’s concerns are also the concerns of those who take AIDS as their subject matter. One concern is how to mourn the dead, a matter that I will deal with in more depth later on, but will touch upon here. ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ deals with the issue of mourning as Owen searches for appropriate ways to grieve for the dead of Flanders. The deaths of these young men are too horrific for traditional funereal rites and so Owen looks for more fitting tributes from the environment of the trenches. These deaths are so premature and so bloody and so far removed from the day to day lives of most people that it is difficult to find a fitting memorial for these lives. This generation are being mown down in their thousands and it would be to insult them to give them a traditional, hopeful, peaceful funeral; as Owen states in ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’

No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, —
The shrill demented choirs of wailing shells:
And bugles calling to them from sad shires. (Owen 1920)

This difficulty in finding an appropriate way of mourning the dead is echoed in much AIDS writing and is another reinforcement of the metaphor of AIDS as war. The deaths of thousands of gay men from AIDS are so terrible and so wrong that it is also a struggle to find a way of mourning them that recognises the awfulness of their deaths. There is nothing noble or righteous in a hideous death and Owen recognises this in ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ (Owen 1920) as well as in his other war poems. When the deaths are so wrong and so devastating, we must mourn them differently is the message of Owen’s and Monette’s poetry, as AIDS is again talked of in military terms.

In Owen’s poetry, the main evil is the war. This war causes young men to be maimed and killed, by each other, and that is why it is wrong. With AIDS, young men are also being maimed and killed, but by a medical condition, not by each other. AIDS is seen as both the enemy and the whole war and looking at Owen’s poetry, there are echoes in AIDS writing of how he aims to bear witness to the suffering going on around

him. AIDS writing often employs the metaphor of war and comparisons with First World War poetry are an interesting angle on this metaphor.

Paul Monette in *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (1988) makes use of this AIDS-as-war metaphor to try to convey the state he is living in. *Borrowed Time* chronicles the time from the HIV positive diagnosis of Monette's lover Roger Horowitz up to Roger's death. In this memoir, Monette describes the gradual decline of his lover and also the gradual change in his own life. HIV changes their lives completely and the new life Monette finds himself in is so alien, so different, that he struggles to find an appropriate description of it.

His most recurrent metaphor, is that of war and living in a time of war. For Monette, AIDS itself is the enemy and he feels unequipped to fight it. Like the infantrymen of the First World War, Monette and Horowitz attempt to do battle, but they know that their chances of survival are slim:

[...] someone you know goes into the hospital, and suddenly you are at high noon in full battle gear. They have neglected to tell you that you will be issued no weapons of any sort. So you cobble together a weapon out of anything that lies at hand, like a prisoner honing a spoon handle into a stiletto. You fight tough, you fight dirty, but you cannot fight dirtier than it. (Monette 1988a, 2)

The sick and the bereaved are suffering the 'ravages of war' (p. 203) as those who are ill fight their illness as soldiers. For Monette, war seems the most apt image of AIDS. There is a struggle to beat the disease, to deny it victory, which means death. With AIDS also being a slow developing condition, imagery of battles and war seem more appropriate than a short fight. War is where two drastically opposed parties, here HIV and the human body, battle each other until there is an eventual victor. Monette knows that in the case of AIDS the virus will almost always be the victor, but he sees no reason not to fight. He and Roger may be on the losing side, but each minor battle won represents a small act of resistance and for Monette and his lover it is better to arm oneself with medical knowledge and drugs and attempt the fight, even though the final victor may be the disease.

Imagery of war also implies State involvement and the sense of a community under siege, which is certainly true of gay men, especially in America. Gay men are being attacked by, and because of, AIDS and appropriating the masculine language of war is seen as dismissing the 'victim' tag and, instead, encouraging direct action. When under

‘bombardment’, you can be a passive casualty, or you can retaliate, and the idea of retaliation and ‘fighting’ for your rights is an important one for the AIDS activist movement.

This talk of battles and waging wars may be very common in talking of AIDS, especially in America, but it is problematic. In a war there must be an enemy and it is all too easy for the state to turn from AIDS as the enemy to People with AIDS. As Sontag says of military language, “It overmobilizes, it overdescribes, and it powerfully contributes to the excommunicating and stigmatizing of the ill.” (Sontag 1989, 94) Military metaphors of AIDS may seem ideal to stir up action, but they are easily available to misuse. Encouraging aggression is dangerous - it can easily be turned from your ‘enemy’ back onto yourself.

Language is powerful and the language used in the context of AIDS is influential in how we, as a society, deal with it.²⁵ Images of war and invasion can move from dealing solely with the relations between body and disease and be used in a wider context of society and disease. AIDS is more than a condition affecting an individual body - it affects society. The virus ‘invades’ society as it ‘invades’ the body, spreading out as it does so. The language of invasion and infiltration is dangerous; all too easily, society is mobilised not against the disease, but against those with it. If People with HIV and AIDS can be removed from society then the threat and danger of this condition is removed also and this thinking has led to proposals of internment and even extermination of those who carry the virus.

2.4 AIDS and Plague: Stigmata

The most widespread metaphor for AIDS, however, is that of plague. Plague is a general term and has been applied to different diseases, including syphilis and AIDS. By the term plague, I will be referring to The Plague, the contagious disease that ravaged Europe in the middle ages and the seventeenth century - the Black Death (1345-1348) and the Great Plague (1665). These epidemics, particularly the Great Plague, had special meanings for the societies they affected, meanings which have echoes in our perceptions of syphilis, in previous centuries, and, more recently, AIDS.

²⁵ The link between language and power has been recognised by AIDS activists, particularly in the championing of the term PWA (Person With AIDS) as replacing ‘AIDS victim’ with all its connotations of innocence, passivity and guilt. Randy Shilts in *And The Band Played On*, his history of the AIDS epidemic dismisses this as “AIDSpeak” (Shilts 1988, 315), but the right to name themselves is an important reassertion of autonomy for the marginalised.

Plague has been seen as a punishment for collective wickedness, retribution (usually Divine) for the sins of the people. People have not used their minds to exert sufficient control over the whims of their bodies, and the terrible epidemic is their punishment, a punishment of the body. The Great Plague, Defoe's "Great Visitation", was viewed in its time as a Divine punishment, a collective judgement on hedonism and promiscuity - the sins of the flesh. In Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), his narrator, H.F., lays some of the blame on the riotous court of Charles II, who, when the plague had died out, carried on exactly as before, "tho' they did not want being told that their crying Vices might, without Breach of Charity, be said to have gone far, in bringing that terrible judgement on the whole Nation." (p. 16). Here, plague is viewed as a specific, God-sent punishment for bodies run wild, an idea echoed in Camus' *The Plague* (*La Peste*) (1947). Here, at the beginning of the epidemic, Father Paneloux's sermon to the people of Oran sums up the general attitude to plague and plague-like diseases. From his opening statement, "Calamity has come on you, my brethren, and my brethren, you deserved it" (p. 90), Paneloux goes on to describe plague as the punishment for disobeying Divine Will. God, he says, has tried compassion and waiting for repentance and is now taking revenge, and those who suffer have brought it on themselves through their sins and cannot be saved because Divine Will has ordered their suffering and death. Although this sounds callous in the extreme, it is not an uncommon Christian view of illness as punishment and has also been applied to syphilis and AIDS. Both have been seen as God's punishment for sins of the flesh and in this context, plague as a metaphor for AIDS is appropriate.

Syphilis, a disease of the poor and 'lewd', was viewed, like plague as a punishment for fornication, breaking God's law. AIDS has been viewed similarly, particularly by the Christian Fundamentalist Right, who see it as God's judgement on homosexuals for 'defying nature'. They have been 'deviant', using their bodies 'unnaturally' and now God is punishing their bodies with AIDS. The same can be said for IV drug users; they have injected 'poisonous' substances into their bodies, defiling the soul's receptacle, and now their bodies are punished with AIDS. Of course, this bigotry is challenged by PWAs who are neither gay men nor IV drug users, but the fundamentalists then go on to speak of 'innocent' and 'guilty' victims; it is because of the 'deviant' that 'normal' people are suffering, so they are not only blamed for their own illness, but for the illness of other people. The same happened with syphilis; only when it affected the 'elite' in society was the disease viewed sympathetically, it was no longer a punishment but an

unfortunate event, and 'bad' people were responsible for giving their 'sin-caused' disease to the innocent.

Metaphors of plague are common in AIDS literature. The syndrome is often referred to as either *a* plague or *the* plague, as in Edmund White's 'Palace Days' (1988) and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1992). AIDS is contrasted with other sexually transmitted diseases, which are now relatively easily treated and which were almost something to be proud of, a sign that one had a riotous sex life. With AIDS, however, the prognosis is bleaker: like the plague, there is no cure. Also, like plague, AIDS also marks you, both physically and socially; as Cindy Patton points out

AIDS marked bodies are already marked out by medical and popular discourse. The pretty-faced homosexual, the ritually scarified African, the needle-tracked drug user - bodies "naturally" marked different were now branded unnatural through the somatic revelations of AIDS symptomatology. (Patton 1990, 127).

Opportunist infections, such as cryptosporidiosis, cause weight loss, and, the most obvious marker of AIDS amongst gay men, the lesions of Kaposi's sarcoma. These purple lesions, 'like a rotting eggplant' (Monette 1992, 182), are reminiscent of the red buboes that give Bubonic Plague its name and they are the most recognisable physical symptom of AIDS.

In Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1845), the plague is also characterised by the red stains left on the body by blood flowing out of the pores. Poe's 'pestilence' is akin to AIDS in the revulsion it arouses in others and the stigmatising of the sick. Not only do people shun the sufferers out of horror and fear of infection, but out of disgust for their condition. Those with the plague, marked out as 'Other', can expect no sympathy from the healthy.

No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal - the redness and the horror of blood.[...] The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. (Poe 1845, 254)

It is the sight of Tom's lesions, coupled with his array of medication that alerts Susan to the fact that her brother-in-law has AIDS in *Halfway Home* (Monette 1992, 120) Tom uses his lesions as a weapon at first, confronting his estranged brother with the realities of AIDS, and later, they act as a signifier for AIDS when he confronts his brother's business partner with the facts of his condition as Jerry threatens him with a gun.

I felt the pressure of the barrel lift as his eyes darted from Brian to me. He gave me a second's blank stare, then shifted to the pale violet bull's-eye on my cheek. The gun still pointed, ready to blow my brains out, but now his nervous eyes were everywhere. The lesion on my shoulder, the one by my left nipple, the double one on my thigh. I watched it dawn on Jerry the same as it dawned on Susan a week ago, a kind of claustrophobic terror. He swayed a step backward.

"Don't worry, I won't sneeze on you," I declared, but not even trying to conceal the exhilaration of having shocked him. "Though if you're planning to use that"- I nodded toward the gun, a foot away now and trembling slightly - "I can't swear I won't *bleed*. I don't suppose you brought a rubber suit."

His eyes still raked me, inch by horrible inch. I could've told him there were eight altogether, plus two lumps between my toes, as yet not showing any color. Blooming, Robison called it. But I wasn't feeling especially leprous, despite the appalled intensity of Jerry's gaze. No, the opposite: I was charged with a drunken thrill of power, because I had just upturned the chessboard. (*Halfway Home*, 229)

At other points in the novel, however, Tom resents the very visible reminder of his illness that his lesions offer. With all the stress of the sudden arrival of his brother's family, he resents the fact that he is dying: 'I brushed my hair in the mirror, a scowl of irritation at the KS spot on my cheek. I didn't have time for AIDS right now.' (*Halfway Home*, 110) At times, he wants those around him to be aware of his 'set apart' status, for example his family, and he also uses his lesions for theatrical effect when performing as Miss Jesus (*Halfway Home*, 258). At other points, however, the glaring physical reminders of the weakening of his body are too much for Tom to cope with and he covers or tries to ignore his KS.

2.5 AIDS and Plague: Communities

Another way in which AIDS is characterised as analogous to plague, is that it is an epidemic disease, with large numbers of PWAs at any one time. This helps to create a notion of a community 'under siege', which links with the previously mentioned military metaphors. Indeed, at one point in *Halfway Home*, Tom refers to those outside the 'community' of gay men affected by HIV and AIDS as 'civilians' (p. 186), implying that his 'circle' are involved in some kind of warfare. The novel emphasises the gulf between those who have experienced HIV infection first hand and those whose lives seem to be untouched by it, for example Tom's first conversation with his brother where Brian says 'It just hasn't touched our world'(ibid, 17). Monette seems insistent that 'straight America' has no experience of AIDS and this only serves to emphasise the isolation of those who do. AIDS seems to have helped to unify a loose 'gay community', creating some sort of solidarity between those whose lives are so strongly influenced by HIV and AIDS.

In *Borrowed Time*, Monette writes of ‘those of us on the moon of AIDS’ as though life under the shadow of HIV is so far removed from the lives of every body else that it is like living on another planet and the only people that he can have true understanding with are fellow ‘moonfolk’ (Monette 1988a, 83, 164).

Joseph Olshan’s *Nightswimmer* (1994) also gives the sense of what one character calls ‘a wartime mentality’; a group of people pulling together in view of a common ‘enemy’. Here, the ‘gay community’ in New York has death at its heart. The living are seen as surrounded by the dying and the souls of the dead, making death seem all encapsulating, inescapable. Everyone speculates about everyone, wondering who is HIV positive or who is sick. There is a sense of innocence lost, everything is full of meaning. The characters are constantly looking for indications of illness; swollen lymph glands, night sweats and so on and there is a fear of discrimination holding people back from being tested for HIV antibodies, terrified of ‘viral apartheid’(Olshan, 84). Any untimely death is assumed to be as a result of AIDS; “... a friend of mine passed away. The funeral was held in his hometown.” “Young?” I said, which tactfully meant ‘AIDS?’ You nodded.’ (ibid, 57). AIDS is referred to as ‘the plague’(ibid, 206) and all through the novel, gay men in New York are unable to live without AIDS as a constant shadow.

I was thinking about the ‘Morning Party’ going on right then in Fire Island. Thinking about the parade of men who’d worked out for this day, and even shaved their chests for the occasion. Thinking how the Morning Party must also be the *Mourning Party* inasmuch as while there were thousands of men dancing, there were also, hovering above them, the thousands of souls of the newly dead who had danced on that beach just a year or two before.(Olshan 1994, 3)

2.6 AIDS and Plague: Death

As with much plague literature and associated art, death is personified and is presented as a character in the midst of those affected by the disease. There is no escaping the dying that is going on. Even if someone is not affected directly, those around them are. The figure of Death, pictured often as a corpse or a skeleton, appears in much literature and art as a reminder of mortality. Death is usually masculine and is a signifier not only for physical death, but for dramatic change.²⁶

Other plague writing also features the personification of Death, most notably ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ by Edgar Allen Poe (1845). Here, the Red Death appears as a

masked figure at Prince Prospero's ball, as a manifestation of the plague raging outside and as the bringer of physical death to the revellers inside. He is described as 'tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave.' (Poe 1845, 258), and his presence emphasises the inescapability of both the plague and of mortality itself. Poe's plague seems very close to AIDS in that it is inescapable. The social and cultural discourses of AIDS mean that it casts a shadow over sexual and social relations.

In Oscar Moore's *A Matter of Life and Sex* (1992), also, Death appears in personified form. The novel is a history of Hugo's life, told as he lies dying. Few details are given about his illness, but what is emphasised is a gradual decay. Throughout the novel there are images of decay and pollution, and this is epitomised in Hugo's slow bodily destruction. Hugo accepts the fact that he is dying, seeing AIDS almost as a natural progression. There is almost an implication that he is dying as a result of being gay, as though AIDS were a 'gay disease'. There seems to be an acceptance of early death as the future for gay men. Hugo's sexuality seems to be 'essential', he emphasises that this is not a life he would have *chosen*, he is not really 'glad to be gay'. Instead, death is presented as the inevitable result of homosexuality: 'It was a future with loneliness sewn into the seam and death woven into the fabric, unseen until too late, a single sinister thread.' (Moore, 144) Hugo blames his libido for his situation, but he has no anger, no sense of injustice. As with the plague, he sees his death as fate, one that cannot be altered (Moore, 145).

In hospital, Hugo encounters the figure of death, who is almost like a child's imaginary friend. Only Hugo is aware of him, and he serves as a reminder of death in the midst of life. Death is very close by for Hugo, and he is not resistant to it. He is merely waiting for his life to leave his body, to turn from a corpse-like figure, to an actual corpse.

He lay next to death, staring it in the face. It wasn't quite an embrace. Hugo was too fragile to think of anything so physical. It was a patient, quiet, silent co-existence, interrupted by the sting of his bedsores, and by the sympathy of visitors. He couldn't remember when death entered the room. Whether he snuck in behind the nice Scottish nurse who still managed to keep a smile [...] Whether he arrived with one of the welfare visitors...

When visitors came, and few did now, death seemed to slip across the room and sit among the lilies on the cabinet in the corner, staring at them through the petals

26 The cover for the Oxford University Press 1990 paperback edition of Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* features an woodcut where the figure of Death stands opposite the entrance to the plague-stricken city, arms raised in triumph.

like some cynical gargoyle [...] He was dying in a miasma of pollen and oxygen from the cylinder by his bed, and he and death were sharing a joke at the expense of his callers: winking as his mother talked about her friends at the other end of her street, sniggering as Cynthia suggested she hire some home helps to get his flat cleaned up and fretted about the unpaid bills piling up on his doorstep.

‘What difference does it make?’ said Hugo, staring death in the eye through the lilies. ‘I’ll be dead soon’...

They knew he was going to die [...] He looked at these emaciated limbs, sore and shrivelled like some poverty photograph on an Oxfam ad and he saw a corpse waiting to take over. (Moore 1992, 230-231)

At the end of the novel, Hugo dreams his own death. He retreats from the physical world into an almost imaginary world, where he is a guest at his own funeral, becoming invisible to all his friends. This is Hugo’s passage from life to death, which is completed after he acknowledges the presence of his mother. (Moore, 315-322)

This representation of death that seems common to plague writing appears in other AIDS texts, for example, ‘A Small Spade’ (Mars-Jones, 1988), where death is not a personification, but an architectural phenomenon.

A tiled corridor filled with doctors and nurses opened off every room he would ever share with Neil. He has always known it was there, but today the door to it had briefly been opened. (p.118)

Despite the similarities of AIDS to the Plague, however, AIDS writing does not emphasise death as much as other plague writings. In their article ‘Death and its Rituals in Novels on AIDS’ (1993) Lévy and Nouss see AIDS writing as presenting ‘but a poor symbolic elaboration of death’s figurations’; suggesting that this could be because of a number of reasons, for example the novelty of the syndrome, western attitudes to death or the fact that as AIDS seems to only affect certain groups, society is reluctant to ‘integrate the phenomenon into its collective imagination.’ (Levy & Nouss, 52)

All of these explanations could be valid, with the Western taboo against death being an important factor. In an age when science and technology have banished previously feared diseases, our society has almost begun to believe that death can be conquered. The medical profession is idealised, with people believing they have it in their power to save us from anything. Doctors are expected to have all the answers and when they do not, as is the case with AIDS, they have been accused of withholding information and of wanting people to die. As Sharon Mayes points out in her article ‘It can Happen: An Essay on the Denial of AIDS’ (1993) scientists have been almost deified and it has been hard to believe that they cannot cure AIDS. Western society does not experience death on the scale of previous generations. Fewer younger people die

and older people tend to die in hospital, so contact with the dying is limited. This factor enables us to 'shut death away', as though to hide the fact is to prevent it from happening. AIDS, however, has forced many to face up to the prospect of younger people dying and this seems to be so distasteful that we articulate it as little as possible, remaining trapped in the 'denial phase' that is common to terminally ill patients.²⁷ While it would appear that we are living in a 'time of plague', we are still unable to accept the fact of death. Many AIDS texts deal with the concept of death, but few dare to articulate the processes of death and dying. There is no dispute about the terminal nature of AIDS in AIDS writing, but the writers still cannot write about the actual dying.

Along with the emphasis on death in plague writing, there is also the apocalyptic nature of plague discourses which finds an echo in AIDS discourses. Pestilence is one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the communities affected by plague have often seen it as a herald of the end of the world. Indeed, an epidemic disease for which there appears to be no cure fits well into notions about the end of the world. AIDS discourses, particularly those of right wing fundamentalists, see the syndrome as apocalyptic. This is possibly because of the timing of the epidemic, approaching the Millennium, and also as it has been viewed as the punishment for degeneracy, a possible forerunner of the punishments to come.

Sarah Schulman's *People in Trouble* (1990) sees AIDS in terms of the Apocalypse. AIDS is seen as a sign that this world, at least, is coming to an end, AIDS being too much of a catastrophe for anything to be the same again: 'It was the beginning of the end of the world, but not everyone noticed right away.' (Schulman, 1) and 'It had been a hallucinatory hot summer with AIDS wastes and other signs of the Apocalypse washing up on the beaches.' (Schulman, 12) In Schulman's novel AIDS is apocalyptic not in the Biblical sense, but more in a figurative sense. The known world is coming to an end; AIDS is changing irrevocably the way we relate to each other and the old world must come to an end. It is unacceptable to pretend to live in isolation and watch other people suffer. AIDS has become everyone's problem and no solution can be found until this fact is recognised.

27 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) *On Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan Co. In this book, Ross establishes five stages through which the dying patient may go; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. While these stages are not prescriptive, these ideas are still important in the field of palliative medicine.

For Paul Monette also, in *Borrowed Time*, AIDS is apocalyptic. AIDS is the very worst thing, the nadir and nothing can compare to its horror; 'I am the same way now myself, ready to jump out of my skin if someone gets testy or whiny about anything less apocalyptic than AIDS.' (p. 305).

Another point of contact for AIDS discourses and those of plague are the difficulties in naming the disease. Defoe mentions the burial records in the beginning of the epidemic stating cause of death as 'Feaver, Spotted-Feaver, and Teeth' as people were reluctant to acknowledge the existence of such a terrifying thing as plague (Defoe 1722, 6). Several AIDS texts also refuse to name the syndrome. The venereologist in Paul Bailey's *Sugar Cane* calls it the 'awful acronym' and in the same novel, a rent boy refers to 'dying from the dreaded'. (Bailey 1994, 210, 218) AIDS is never mentioned in *The Way We Live Now* (Sontag 1991) and is instead inferred from descriptions of its 'inexorable course' and the importance that the main character (also unnamed) attaches to being able to say its name, making it less mysterious and powerful (p. 18).

2.7 AIDS and Plague: Mythology

A final link between AIDS writing and plague discourses is the creation of a mythology. Situations which are terrible and which are beyond comprehension give rise to myths as a way of understanding and therefore controlling what is happening. Defoe writes of 'Stories, that People continually frighted one another with.' and goes on to dismiss them: 'In the next Place, of what Part soever you heard the Story, the Particulars were always the same, [...] so that it was apparent, at least to my Judgment, that there was more of Tale than of Truth in those Things.' (Defoe 1722, 84-85). One particular rumour, that people would deliberately infect others is several times refuted by the narrator.

And this was in Part, the Reason of the general Notion, of scandal rather, which went about of the Temper of People infected; Namely, that they did not take the least care, or make any Scruple of infecting others; tho' I cannot say, but there might be some Truth in it too, but not so general as was reported [...] I am very well satisfy'd, that it cannot be reconcil'd to Religion and Principle, any more than it can be to Generosity and Humanity; but I may speak of that again. (Defoe 1722, 54)

Camus also writes of the importance of rumour in a time of plague, particularly concerning antidotes, and while he does not mention deliberate infection, the idea is present in the actions of segregation (Camus 1947).

AIDS has given rise to its own myths and folklore. The most prominent again concerns deliberate infection.²⁸ Early on in the epidemic, the story circulated of the vengeful woman, deliberately infecting men. This urban legend, told in several different versions, concerns a man who meets a woman in a bar or a club and who has sex with her at his apartment. In the morning, she is gone, but there is a message written in red lipstick on the bathroom mirror, reading 'Welcome to the AIDS Club', or 'Welcome to the World of AIDS'. Gary Alan Fine (1987) has explored this myth, noting the fact that it concerns a vengeful woman, which is probably why it has such resonance for the men who tell it. She, a 'modern succubus', has the power and her actions, while linked to general fears of vengeful 'AIDS spreaders', also demonstrate the fears men have of powerful women.

While this story is accepted as apocryphal, Randy Shilts takes a similar story, but presents it as fact. *And The Band Played On* makes continual reference to Gaetan Dugas, the Canadian air steward who has been named as Patient Zero, or the man who brought AIDS to North America and to whom some of the first cases were traced. In Shilts' 'death-driven' narrative' (Nunokawa 1991, 3), Dugas is demonised, repeatedly accused of irresponsibly spreading infection. Dugas becomes, for Shilts, a modern version of 'Typhoid Mary', the cause of all infection²⁹. Shilts' narrative, while claiming to be a history, also involves the fictionalisation of events. Dugas, who is unable to defend himself, is repeatedly reported as relentlessly promiscuous, continuing to have sex, even when warned that he is spreading the virus. On one occasion, Shilts presents a rumour, of a man who tells his partner, after they have had sex, that he could have contracted gay cancer, a story reminiscent of the previously mentioned myth.

²⁸ The mythological figure of the vengeful carrier has been used as justification for suggestions of incarcerating the HIV positive to 'protect' the general population. Stanislaw Andreski (1989) in the appendix on AIDS to *Syphilis, Puritanism and Witchhunts* also uses an unattributed quotation by an unnamed male prostitute as evidence of this phenomenon:

We can conclude that no hope can be placed in any method of containing Aids [sic] which must rely on altruism among the carriers [...] the good effects of restraint on the part of the conscientious will be outweighed by the behaviour of the malicious who deliberately want to infect others – often as many as possible – out of the desire for diffuse vengeance. This sentiment was expressed by a male prostitute interviewed in London who said: 'They have fucked me to death, so I'll fuck them to death.' (p.157)

²⁹ 'In 1906, in New York City, a poor Irish cook named Mary Mallon had become notorious as Typhoid Mary, a silent carrier who sowed disease and destruction in her wake [...] she infected fifty people before being forcibly committed to a hospital in 1915.' (Karlen 1995, 152, 210)

Back in the bathhouse, when the moaning stopped, the young man rolled over on his back for a cigarette. Gaetan Dugas reached up for the lights, turning up the rheostat slowly so his partner's eyes would have time to adjust. He then made a point of eyeing the purple lesions on his chest. "Gay cancer," he said, almost as if he were talking to himself. "Maybe you'll get it too." (Shilts 1988, 198)

Dugas is referred to as 'prowling' and is presented as a stereotype of gay sexuality: 'Sex wasn't just sex to Gaetan; sex was who Gaetan was - it was the basis of his identity.' (p. 251). Shilts even goes on to report suggestions that Dugas be incarcerated to prevent him 'spreading' the disease and is uncritical of these suggestions (p. 200, 262). Later, Dugas is described as 'a sociopath, driven by self-hatred and inner turmoil', as though he deliberately murders his sexual partners and as though he does not suffer himself (p. 413). Shilts does not reinforce his claims with any factual evidence, but relies on hearsay and rumour, even though he aims to present his account as an example of his journalistic integrity. The rumours of a malicious infector, full of revengeful desires, are taken by Shilts as fact, and, even as he reports Dugas' death, Shilts reminds the reader, yet again of Dugas' culpability in the spread of HIV and AIDS in North America.

In any event, there's no doubt that Gaetan played a key role in spreading the new virus from one end of the United States to the other. The bathhouse controversy, peaking so dramatically in San Francisco on the morning of his death, was also linked directly to Gaetan's own exploits in those sex palaces and his recalcitrance in changing his ways. At one time, Gaetan had been what every man wanted from gay life: by the time he died, he had become what every man feared. (Shilts 1988, 439)

Not only is Dugas among those whom HIV infection has killed, but, unlike the others, he is presented as responsible for not only his own death, but those of others. Dugas is the mythical figure so feared in plague discourses, the vengeful infector. This figure is, however, *mythical*, and, although Dugas cannot defend himself from Shilts' unfounded (but popular) allegations, several commentators have cast doubt on this story.³⁰ There has also been a film, *Zero Patience*, a musical about AIDS which seeks to examine attitudes to the illness and to exonerate Dugas.

³⁰ See, for example, Nunokawa (1991) and also Douglas Crimp (1988a) 'How to have Promiscuity in an Epidemic', in Crimp (1988) and Judith Williamson (1989) 'Every Virus Tells a Story: The meanings of HIV and AIDS', in Watney and Carter (1989)

Another aspect of the mythology of AIDS is the theories concerning its origins. It has always been thought that terrible diseases must have foreign origins; something as awful as plague or AIDS cannot possibly have come from here. Plague was seen as something associated with the Mediterranean and Defoe's narrator mentions the rumours of it being rife in Europe. Syphilis was also seen as a foreign disease and was referred to as the 'French pox', while the French, interestingly, called it 'la maladie Anglaise'. With AIDS, the main beliefs seem to be that it is African in origin, while there are some rumours about it having been created as a biological weapon in Maryland (Gilman 1988). Many Europeans, however, see HIV as being transmitted from North America. These theories are summarised in Arno Karlen's *Plague's Progress: A Social History of Man and Disease* (1995).

Inevitably, rumors of conspiracy and assault began to circulate, like medieval tales of plague-ridden corpses flung over city walls to poison the populace. Some of the tales have persisted. The disease was started by drug abuse. It was divine retribution for homosexuality and prostitution. Mutations caused by nuclear testing turned a harmless virus into a killer. Malaria experiments accidentally infected researchers with a virus from primates, and they spread it. HIV was engineered by the U.S. government to undermine Communist countries. It arose from genetic recombination in viruses in the monkey kidneys used to make polio vaccine for Third World nations. Many black Americans believe that HIV is a government invention devised to wipe them out, the drug AZT part of a plot to poison them, and condom education a genocidal ruse.

There is no good evidence for these ideas, and much against them. The more one knows about HIV, the less one can believe that anyone smart enough to engineer a virus would be dumb enough to try it with HIV. It is one of nature's most unusual and, till recently, most baffling microbes. (pp. 186-187)

Randy Shilts, possibly in order to deflect views that AIDS is a 'gay plague', repeatedly emphasises the supposed African origins of the syndrome. He presents Africa as a homogenous country, which is primitive, illiterate and rife with disease: 'The African connection immediately suggested a viral agent; Africa was where new diseases tended to germinate.' (Shilts 1988, 103). Shilts ignores the fact that Africa is a continent, made up of 53 different countries, and generalises continually about the people of this continent, which he calls 'black Africa'. He speaks of heterosexual promiscuity, untreated venereal disease and assumes that the countries of Africa are unable to produce any accurate statistics concerning HIV infection and AIDS-related deaths. (Shilts 1988, 500, 512, 49).

Shilts is not alone in racist assumptions about Africa and AIDS. Theories about African AIDS exaggerate the scale of the problem and present the continent as dirty and germ-ridden, with a barely civilised population who regularly indulge in promiscuous sex and ritual scarification, and who use anal sex as a method of birth control. Western views of African AIDS also ignore the West's own responsibility for the economic situation of many African countries.³¹

Thus a desire from people to separate themselves from this terrible disease by blaming it on others is typical of AIDS discourses and of discourses of plague. The characters in Andrew Holleran's short story 'Friends at Evening' (1986) also discuss the origin of HIV, referring to it as a 'virus from Kinshasa' (p. 109). They are looking for someone to blame for Louis' death, and having considered sex, the baths, the pleasures of his penis and his desire to be the first to do everything, they turn to Africa: "Africa is what killed them," said Ned. "Africa killed Louis. We are infected with a disease that got started in the garbage dump of a slum in Zaire." [...] "Curtis thinks Africa killed Louis too." (pp. 105, 111). AIDS cannot just be the result of infection with a virus; there must be something to blame. Hugo, in *A Matter of Life and Sex*, finds his libido guilty (Moore 1992, 144) and Holleran's characters blame Africa.

2.8 AIDS and Plague: Conclusions

Looking at AIDS as a plague seems the most appropriate metaphor, especially in the context of plague as a punishment for 'carnal sin'. Bodies with AIDS are bodies that have transgressed, by taking in an alien substance. In the case of gay men, it is the reception of semen in anal intercourse, and in the case of IV drug users, it is narcotics injected into the bloodstream. This idea can be widened to include all PWAs; they have all taken into their bodies, either knowingly or unknowingly, a 'bad' substance, infected sexual fluid or infected blood. The result of this reception is a gradual decay of the body with opportunistic infections, as though taking in one 'bad' substance opens the door to all other 'bad' substances - bacteria and viruses.

The notion of 'bad' substances links with metaphors of HIV as pollutant, poison. HIV is referred to as a time bomb, lurking and ticking away inside the body, no one knowing when it might explode into AIDS. AIDS writing talks of the virus as a "murderous germ" (Leavitt 1990a, 12), "a lazy seed, this century plant of death" (White

³¹ for a detailed critique of Western assumptions about AIDS and Africa, see Cindy Patton, 'The Myth of African AIDS' in Patton (1990).

1988b, 207), both images evoking the sense of something small and malevolent, waiting to surprise the infected by turning into something uncontrollable and lethal. There are also images of poison and contagion. Blood, once seen as a vital fluid, life giving and sustaining, is now potentially lethal, a carrier of death. Contact with blood is feared and the substance demonised; the blood of someone with HIV is 'bad blood'. To know that what is running through their veins is irreversibly contaminated, heightens the fear and uncertainty of the characters in these texts and makes them very conscious of their potential to infect others. Words like 'poison' and 'toxic waste' occur, and even when not referring directly to AIDS, are instant reminders of it and the reactions of others to it. This feeling of being a potential assassin is common to many characters in AIDS writing, for example Ray in "An Oracle" (White 1988a), who refers to himself as "carrying death inside him"(p. 257), and also Nathan in "A Place I've Never Been" (Leavitt 1990a), who says; "Every time I see someone I'm attracted to I go into a cold sweat. And I imagine they're dead, that if I touch them, the part of them I touch will die." (p. 17). Possible HIV infection has made Nathan view himself as a carrier of death, with the ability to pass this death to others, and it terrifies him. The blood in his body, the essential life giving fluid could contain something capable of killing him and anyone else that comes into intimate contact with it and it is this knowledge that helps to create some of the barriers of AIDS - the infected withdrawing from the uninfected so that they cannot be responsible for spreading death.

This idea of barriers, both physical and emotional, is common to the history of the Plague and of AIDS. The infected become, sometimes quite literally, 'untouchables'. Although anyone who takes a little time to learn about AIDS knows that you cannot contract HIV through casual contact, fear creates irrational behaviour, and many people are still too frightened to touch a person with AIDS. The knowledge of HIV seropositivity also makes many people class themselves as 'untouchable', shunning bodily contact with others, fearing accidental contamination.

During the Great Plague, houses where infection was reported were shut up, to ensure that healthy bodies would avoid contact with sick bodies (Defoe 1722). As Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* makes clear, however, people in these houses were mostly desperate to escape and if successful, often, in running away, carried the plague further afield than would have been the case if they had not had their liberty forcibly curtailed. Defoe mentions the desolate streets, as people try to avoid any contact with

possible plague carriers, for example, crossing the road to avoid meeting anyone else whilst away from the sanctuary of their homes.

In Camus's *The Plague*, physical barriers are even more evident as the town of Oran is closed and the segregation of the sick from the healthy is strictly enforced. Tarrou's diary notes people trying to avoid bodily contact on the trams (Camus 1947, 100) and once on the streets, keeping as much distance between them and others as possible. Those who have had close contact with anyone coming down with plague are strictly quarantined in camps and live in a kind of limbo between the healthy and the sick, and are referred to as "human jetsam". These physical barriers are hard to bear, the enforced separations from families, from friends, from the healthy and from the rest of the plague-free world. The bodies of the sick and potentially sick must not come into contact with the healthy and while this is a possible condemnation of many, now unable to leave Oran, to death from the plague, in a utilitarian philosophy, it stops the plague from spreading further.

Few commentators on AIDS writing have looked at the links between AIDS and plague. Joseph Dewey, as mentioned above, dismisses the 'plague genre' as the most appropriate for AIDS writing, and the only other main article concerning these links is by Laurel Brodsley in the same collection. Brodsley (1993) examines the structure of Defoe's text, seeing it as not only an account of events, but a piece of social analysis and didacticism. Brodsley sees Defoe's text as similar to Shilts' in structure as both try to present the history of a disease not yet fully understood at the time of writing. Both also attempt to separate fact from fiction, something that Shilts is not particularly successful at. Both Shilts and Defoe, and also Camus, follow a similar structure in their presentations of communities in the grip of an epidemic and Brodsley makes a good case for their inclusion under the same generic title. My interest, however, is in how the discourses of AIDS and of plague collide. As mentioned above, AIDS exists as a biomedical phenomenon, as well as a cultural and social one. I see the links between AIDS and plague as more than just a matter of similarities in narrative structure. As Sontag points out, and as the texts bear witness to, plague as metaphor for AIDS seems particularly appropriate (Sontag 1989, 44). AIDS and plague are viewed and represented similarly, and while the discourses of plague are not, of course, identical to those of AIDS, they do appear to be related.

Both genres employ 'witnesses' and in doing so, look at the role of the writer. These are narratives of contemporary events, telling the present reader how it is and the

future reader how it will be. AIDS writing is telling of a 'people in trouble' and presenting the reality of living through an epidemic. Where AIDS writing differs, however, from previous 'plague texts' is in the proximity of the 'witness' to the disease. Defoe's witness, H.F., is living in London during the time of its 'Visitation', but he does not actually contract plague himself. He can present a detailed picture of life during this time, but cannot give a first hand account of being struck by the disease. Camus' witness, Rieux, is closer than H.F. as he is a doctor treating those with plague and experiences the losses of those close to him. One aspect of plague is that its duration is brief and so narrators have little time to record their experiences. HIV, however, has an incubation period of up to ten years, or sometimes longer, and PWAs usually live about two years after the first onset of symptoms, so there is conceivably more time for the 'witness' to record their experience of HIV and AIDS.

The earlier AIDS texts, while witnessing the times, had few narrators who had either HIV or AIDS. There was still some distance between the actual events and their narration. More recently, however, stories of AIDS are being told in the first person, giving the reader a more immediate picture of 'living with AIDS', for example, Tom Shaheen in *Halfway Home*, who, whilst telling the story of his reunion with his brother, is also telling the story of living with AIDS. There is an urgency in AIDS narratives, a sense that all this must be written down straightaway, so that no one can forget what is happening. Even those texts which are not really 'about' AIDS are testament to the time of AIDS, for example Alan Hollinghurst's *The Folding Star* (1995), and Joseph Olshan's *Nightswimmer* (1994). It is probable that all gay novels since the early 1980s are AIDS novels, whether they tackle AIDS as the main subject matter or not.

2.9 AIDS and Elegy

Looking at AIDS as a genre, it is possible to see that it could fall into other genres, something that I briefly examined at the beginning of this chapter. AIDS writing has links with other genres, it can be considered to be part of other genres, notwithstanding its own peculiarities. One genre that AIDS writing may be associated with is elegy. AIDS being a (usually) terminal condition means that AIDS writing is concerned with death and mourning, as is elegy. Elegy would seem to be a fitting genre for this growing body of writing and by looking at one of the most well-known English language elegies, Tennyson's *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, it can be seen whether this is indeed a useful classification for AIDS writing.

In Memoriam concerns the death of Arthur Hallam, who was Tennyson's closest friend and soon to be brother-in-law. Hallam died of a brain haemorrhage in 1833, whilst on holiday in Italy. He was 22 years old. Tennyson was devastated by his death and it was this loss that was crucial in shaping Tennyson's poetry. Tennyson and Hallam's relationship was an ideal friendship, involving love, respect and mutual interest. When Hallam died, Tennyson lost not only his friend, but his ideal reader. *In Memoriam* was published in 1850 as an elegy (it consists of 131 lyrics, all with the rhyme scheme A B B A, a circular scheme that avoids closure). Tennyson refers to *In Memoriam* as both impersonal and personal at the same time, beginning with loss and moving to a consolation at the end. Tennyson felt, however, that the poem was more hopeful than he himself was. *In Memoriam* is concerned with love and loss, faith and doubt, grief and consolation. The themes of absence and loss in the poem are reminiscent of love poetry and the separation from Hallam is seen as a separation from a loved one, someone much dearer to the poet than a friend. *In Memoriam* insists on the absolute physicality of death and the pointlessness of wishing for reunion. The dead are gone from us and we cannot bring them back. *In Memoriam* records a process of grief and is committed to continuity and public duty.

Although *In Memoriam* is more concerned with doubt than faith, it follows the pattern of elegy as it moves from grief to consolation. Tennyson's main concern is the loss and how to bear it and loss is crucial to the elegiac genre:

[...] elegy is specifically about what is missing and also about what is more certainly known to have been formerly possessed. It is a crucial and intimate human situation removed, very often to the abstracted world of pastoral. What is missing may be a particular person, or a particular quality of life, or it may be both. (Smith 1977, 9)

With *In Memoriam* representing elegy, a comparison can be made with AIDS writing and it can be seen what links there are between the two.

One point of comparison is the relationship between Tennyson and Hallam and the relationships between men in gay AIDS writing. Tennyson writes as a bereaved widow, someone that has lost a lover and it is true that both men had a close emotional relationship. It is not known if this relationship was sexual and it is doubtful if either would have considered themselves to be 'homosexual', but the love between the two as described in *In Memoriam* certainly has resonances of the Greek idealising of love between men (Sinfield 1986, 128). This is in keeping with genre of elegy, which is usually concerned with a male associate and a relationship between men, a relationship of equals, rather than a relationship between a man and a woman (Smith 1977, 41).

Hallam is mourned in the poem as the ideal of manhood. His masculinity is praised and his life is seen as an example, both to Tennyson himself and to others. Hallam is described as having 'manhood fused with female grace' (Tennyson 1850, cix) and this 'worship' of manhood is reminiscent of gay culture. Much gay writing centres on a celebration of masculinity and AIDS writing is no exception. The lives of men are celebrated, as is love between men. *In Memoriam* praises the life of one man and also the love between two men, and in this, there is a link with gay writing.

A further connection between *In Memoriam* and AIDS literature is the view of nature propounded in the poem. Hallam's death is as a result of a sudden event inside the body, not an infection, but the loss of his life is seen as part of nature's cruelty. Tennyson's picture of nature has similarities to Darwin's theories of evolution and he writes of the natural world's lack of regard for any single life. The fittest survive and the others die and no one life appears to be of greater importance than any other. Sections liv to lvi speak of 'Nature red in tooth and claw', who cares for no life in particular and is indifferent to individual deaths. Species and individuals die and others take their place and the personification of nature sheds no tears. Hallam's life seems to be of no more importance than the life of an insect and both die. This indiscriminate fact of death is highlighted in Tennyson's anguish at the premature death of his friend as he tries to cope with the fact the Hallam could not be spared, no matter how great a man he was and how much he was loved.

These sentiments are also found in AIDS writing. AIDS has been viewed as 'nature's revenge' on homosexuals and much effort has been put into consideration of where the disease might have come from. Despite the fact that AIDS does not

exclusively affect gay men, it has been viewed as a 'gay disease' and seen as something come from nature to kill them. The terrible finality of death and dreadful things that AIDS does to the human body are railed against in AIDS literature as the worth of an individual proves to be no prophylactic. This is similar to Tennyson's own horror at Nature's indifference to life and is another point of contact between the two writings.

In Memoriam is an example of elegy and on a first comparison, it would seem that AIDS writing could be considered as part of the genre of elegy. However, elegy is concerned with grief and with mourning, not the actual process of death. Nor is elegy much concerned with disease and AIDS writing is dominated by the fact of illness. While elegy, for example *In Memoriam*, may take an individual death as a starting point, the main focus is on a wider picture of human death and coming to terms with the end of life. This would seem to be the biggest point of departure with AIDS writing. AIDS politics and AIDS writing are usually concerned with individual lives and deaths and the importance of remembering individuals that have died. Elegy moves from grief to consolation and there is little consolation to be found in the writing about AIDS that I am looking at. The end of suffering is the only consolation in AIDS-related deaths and the writers rarely take comfort in seeing death as part of life. AIDS has taken too many young gay men for the natural cycle of life and death to be consoling. While the prevailing mood in AIDS literature is anger at the disease and the indifference of the world, there can be little comfort in the knowledge that all lives will end and the world will continue. AIDS is associated with marginalised groups and has been viewed as a 'lifestyle' disease and this separates writing on AIDS from the genre of elegy. AIDS writing can be seen as elegiac, in that it often mourns the end of life and deals with the processes of grief, but it is not, in my opinion, elegy as we perceive the genre to be.

2.10 AIDS Writing as a Genre: Conclusions

Through analysing the major metaphors in AIDS writing and finding commonality between the texts that make up this body of writing, it can be seen that there are strong links between the texts. I have used my exploration of the imagery of AIDS writing as a way of establishing it as a genre. Metaphors are repeated in these texts and the imagery of AIDS writing demonstrates how these texts share characteristics. As shown in the previous chapter, genre is a way of reading and understanding texts and of grouping texts together. These texts are all linked because of their association with AIDS, but they share more than that. They share imagery and that imagery both binds them together and relates them to other genres. AIDS writing is shown as an identifiable

group of texts, a group that can be compared with other groups of texts. This writing may have similarities with other genres, for example plague writing and elegy, but it is also different enough from them to be considered as a genre in its own right.

Chapter Three

AIDS Writing: Authorship and Legitimacy

In this chapter, I will firstly explore the commentary on AIDS writing that has sought to protect it from critical analysis. Emphasis has been placed on AIDS as a gay experience and this has led to the use of the Holocaust as a metaphor for AIDS and I will examine the arguments against this. I will then explore the importance of AIDS and the body to AIDS writing and the problems of control of the body by the medical establishment. Following on from the investigation of elegy as an appropriate genre in the previous chapter, my aim is show how AIDS writing performs the role of a public act of mourning. Finally, I aim to posit AIDS writing as a political act for gay men. By examining these aspects of AIDS writing and establishing further the links between the texts, I intend to reinforce the notion that AIDS writing constitutes a literary genre, and deserves to be considered in literary study.

3.1 AIDS Writing and Value: Protecting the Genre

One of the most important aspects of AIDS writing commentary is the question of authorship and legitimacy. While, on one hand, maintaining that AIDS is not a 'gay disease', many commentators on gay AIDS narratives seem to want to insist on the specific 'gayness' of AIDS, as if only gay men really understand the full horror of the epidemic and as if only they can write about it with authority. In his 'Introduction' to *AIDS: The Literary Response*, Emmanuel S. Nelson makes the point that:

The reaction of gay artists to AIDS is bound to differ, even fundamentally so, from that of nongay writers: AIDS, to gay men, is a gravely personal issue. It is too real to be easily metaphorized or elegantly aestheticized. Many of them do not have to imagine the horror, for they live in the midst of a holocaust. (Nelson 1993a)

Quite apart from Nelson's use of the term 'holocaust', which I will examine later, he is assuming that only gay men can understand AIDS. This insularity, the ignoring of the fact that gay men are not the only people to suffer HIV infection and AIDS, is common to many of those who comment on AIDS writing. There seems to be a need to claim for AIDS writing a special place in the field of literature. AIDS must be seen as the catastrophe to end all catastrophes and thus any criticism of the literature of AIDS must be careful to preserve the special status of this disease. This idea is, I believe, part of the reason for the resistance to aligning AIDS writing with any other genres; to see AIDS writing on a par with other genres would be to lessen its status. While AIDS

writing is unusual in the fact that the 'writing' of the epidemic happens simultaneously and not retrospectively, as with much plague writing, for example Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). This fact of creating a literary discourse at the same time as social events occur is not unique.³² AIDS is a terrible disease, but there are other diseases causing equal or greater devastation, and to treat AIDS writing as sacred literature whose 'quality may be uneven, but [whose] authenticity ... can rarely be contested' (Nelson 1993a, 3) is to return to the restrictive notions of authorial authority and 'inherent value'.

This notion of value is repeated by Judith Laurence Pastore in an essay in the collection *AIDS: The Literary Response*. She states that, because of the serious nature of AIDS as a subject matter, commenting on it is a delicate matter: 'No matter how inferior a work on AIDS may be, if it helps alleviate suffering and prejudice, it still has intrinsic value.' (Pastore 1993a, 40) Pastore also assumes that only those affected by AIDS, and I take that to read 'gay men', can write about it with any legitimacy.

As with a man writing about the life of a woman, or a white about the black experience, heterosexuals who have not lost a loved one to AIDS and/or do not risk getting the disease themselves have a lot more trouble proving their credentials to those - Sontag, forgive me - on the front lines. (p. 40)

Pastore is positing AIDS as a 'gay disease', forgetting that HIV does not discriminate and that anyone can contract the virus. Gay men are not the only group to suffer as a result of HIV infection and they are not the only people who have lost loved ones to AIDS. By Pastore's logic, only gay men can write about AIDS and therefore only men can write about men and so on. If she assumes that only immediate experience legitimises writing, then gay men cannot write about women or heterosexuality, or even straight men, which would clearly be disputed by many gay writers.

Pastore's ideas of authorial integrity find an echo in Michael Denny's essay 'AIDS Writing and the Creation of a Gay Culture' (1993). Here, he asks if straight readers can really understand gay writing about AIDS, as if it were an exclusively gay experience. After a somewhat patronising anecdote about his joy at seeing a young black girl reading Toni Morrison because it would have greatest impact on her, Denny goes on to congratulate himself on participating in black culture, through the 'remarkable burst of superb writing by African-American women' (p.50), without

³² For example, poetry of the First World War.

explaining why he thinks that this is 'remarkable'. Denneny assumes that there is a homogenous 'gay culture' and that this is distinct from any other culture,

there are psychic distances, between, for instance, the souls of black folk in America and the dominant American culture, between an emerging gay sensibility and straight America, between those who are living through the maelstrom of AIDS and the rest of the country. (p. 52)

Ignoring Denneny's patronising appropriation of the term 'black folk' to give the impression that he really is 'participating in black culture', my objection is to how he manages to divide people rather too neatly into mutually exclusive homogenous groups, something that ignores the reality of society, especially concerning AIDS. To repeat, AIDS is *not* a 'gay disease' and People with AIDS are not all gay. While my focus is on gay and lesbian AIDS writing, I am constantly aware that gay men, while undoubtedly hard hit by HIV infection, cannot claim HIV and AIDS, and their discourses, as exclusively 'their own'.

AIDS writing is clearly a genre which arouses a great sense of protectiveness amongst its commentators. This can be partly attributed to the old attitudes and prejudices that AIDS has reawakened in Western society. AIDS was for a long time ignored by the American authorities and there had been nearly 21 000 deaths from AIDS-related infections by the time President Reagan made his first speech about the epidemic (Shilts 1988, 596). The history of the AIDS epidemic and the disastrous tardiness of national governments in taking action has been well documented and it is clear what results this inaction had.³³ Because AIDS was first noticed amongst stigmatised groups of people, for example gay men and IV drug users, it has become associated with stigma, and indeed, has served to reinforce prejudice. Oppressed groups of people have had the burden of AIDS itself and of AIDS as a signifier for deviance added to their experience of oppression, as Simon Watney says, 'Wherever we look in the world, it is invariably the case that people's experience of HIV infection and disease faithfully duplicates their social and economic situation *before* the epidemic began.' (Watney 1989a) HIV and social exclusion have been almost synonymous and the discourses of AIDS that associate the disease with particular groups have influenced the

³³ See for example Randy Shilts (1988) *And The Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic* for a history of the American epidemic and for a history of AIDS in Britain, Simon Garfield (1994) *The End of Innocence: Britain in the Time of AIDS*.

literary discourses of AIDS. Like the marginalised groups that have been most affected by AIDS, texts concerned with AIDS have also been marginalised and seen as meant for only a particular audience.

3.2 The Holocaust as a metaphor

One metaphor for AIDS which is seemingly growing in popularity amongst gay commentators on AIDS discourses is that of AIDS as holocaust. Larry Kramer has used it (and tried to defend it) on numerous occasions, and it has also been used by several others.³⁴ It is a problematic metaphor and one which I will look at in depth.

The actual meaning of the word 'holocaust' is 'great destruction' and is associated with fire, coming from the Latin term *holocaustum*, meaning 'whole burnt offering' (*Collins Dictionary of the English Language* 1986). Since World War Two, the term 'Holocaust' has meant the mass murder of around six million Jews as the 'Final Solution' of the government of Nazi Germany. The Hebrew word for this is *Shoah*, which literally means 'destruction'. Gay commentators have found the experience of the AIDS epidemic analogous to that of European Jewry during the 1940s and have used the example of Nazi persecution of homosexuals during the Third Reich as proof of the link between AIDS and the Holocaust. Kramer has repeatedly used this metaphor to stir up anger about the treatment of AIDS and People with AIDS by the American government, for example, 'AIDS is our holocaust and Reagan is our Hitler. New York is our Auschwitz'. (Kramer 1995, 173) Another who equates AIDS and the Holocaust is Leo Bersani, in his essay 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' when he discusses the American government's delaying of legislation to prevent employment discrimination against People with HIV and AIDS.

At the very least, such things as the Justice Department's near recommendation that people with AIDS be thrown out of their jobs suggest that if Edwin Meese would not hold a gun to the head of a man with AIDS, he might not find the murder of a gay man with AIDS (or without AIDS?) intolerable or unbearable. And this is precisely what can be said of millions of fine Germans who never participated in the murder of Jews (and of homosexuals), but who failed to find the idea of the holocaust unbearable. (Bersani 1988, 201)

One problem with this use of the Holocaust is that it equates AIDS with genocide. This therefore implies that gay men form an ethnic group, with its echoes of theories of

³⁴ See Larry Kramer (1995) *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist*. London: Cassell. Other examples include Emmanuel S. Nelson (1993a) and Marilyn Chandler (1991) 'Voices from the Front: AIDS in Autobiography', *Autobiography Studies*, 6:1, 54-64

essentialism and it erases the specificity of the Holocaust. It also implies that only gay men develop AIDS. Both of these implications are clearly untrue. There may be such a loose 'gay community', but there is hardly a gay race.³⁵ Bersani's linking of the murder of Jews and of homosexuals, while politically inflammatory, is also historically inaccurate. As Les Wright points out, while homosexuals were imprisoned under the Nazi regime, they were sent to camps, along with others, including Jehovah's Witnesses and political prisoners, for *re-education*, not as part of a systematic project of extermination (Wright 1993). Wright also makes it clear that German homophobia was not exclusive to the Third Reich. The *Final Solution* was the project for the extinction of the Jewish people, a project of genocide and was not concerned with any other persecuted group. Auschwitz, to which Kramer so emotively refers, was, like Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka, a death camp for Jews, not a prison camp such as Dachau. There was no systematic annihilation of homosexuals during the Third Reich and so the claiming of the Jewish and gay experience of Nazi Germany by Bersani is historically false, a point which is also made by Les Wright.

Gay men fall unconsciously into the "me too" victim mentality. Contemporary gay countermemory automatically assumes that all the horrible things that happened to the Jews happened to gay men too, without reflecting on the historical truth or on the viability of simply appropriating the counter-strategies of "Never forget". (p. 54)

Another problem with the AIDS as Holocaust metaphor is the implication of 'gay genocide', a deliberate act. Kramer talks freely of 'murderers' and 'genocide', calling AIDS the 'systematic, planned annihilation of some others with the avowed purpose of eradicating an undesirable portion of the population.' (Kramer 1995, 263) If this were true, the unspecified annihilators have failed dramatically to eradicate homosexuality and have caused much 'friendly fire', inflicting a growing number of casualties on their 'own side'. The US is a country rife with conspiracy theorists, but to claim AIDS as a weapon of genocide is dangerously misleading. Kramer sees the (gay) experience of AIDS as the same as the Jewish experience of the Holocaust and uses the word 'holocaust' to describe how AIDS is affecting gay men. William Hoffman has criticised Kramer's conflation of AIDS and the Holocaust (Isser 1992), pointing out how the social experience of AIDS does not mirror that of the persecution of the Jews, and that

³⁵ It should be noted that the Jews are a religious group composed of a very diverse group of ethnicities and nationalities and they too should not be seen to constitute a race.

the most fundamental flaw in Kramer's analogies is that 'they correlate a murderous political regime to an apolitical microscopic virus' (p. 56). AIDS is the result of infection with a non-discriminatory virus, and while gay men have indeed been amongst those who have suffered and who continue to suffer as a result of both HIV infection and the prejudice this calls forth, it cannot be said that HIV is a weapon of a deliberate genocide. I find the use of the analogy between AIDS and the Holocaust guilty of sensationalism and insularity. AIDS is not gay genocide - it does not only affect gay men. While Kramer, Bersani and others may arouse the passions of readers by their simplistic analogies, these are fallacious uses of emotive language. The two events do not compare and claiming they do only adds to the misunderstanding and misinformation that populate discourses on HIV and AIDS. Les Wright refers to gay genocide as a trope, and his essay summarises the problems created by its use.

Gay genocide generates a collective gay counter-memory, codifying the collective experience of oppression and establishing a moral yardstick by which to plot the acute degree of pain created by oppression ... The gay movement's adoption of Jewish persecution at the hands of German Nazis is a specious argument and reveals dangerous epistemological slippage. And the production of discourses about AIDS by gay men has assured posterity that it will be remembered as a gay disease in spite of our every effort to resist that valorization. (Wright 1993, 68)

3.3 Barriers to Infection: Safer Sex

Despite the fact that AIDS is not a disease exclusive to gay men, it has been gay health programmes that have initiated early responses to it. Once the methods of HIV transmission were known, it became possible to develop strategies to prevent more infection. As AIDS is associated with sexual activity, AIDS writing is conscious of the importance of gay sexuality and also the need to protect each other from infection.

Instead of social segregation, the way to prevent HIV transmission is by more intimate barriers. There need be no restriction on bodily contact, only on bodily fluids, in other words, safer sex. This has often sounded like a constraint, a list of "don'ts", but it is a way of keeping sexual contact between people and making it as risk-free as possible. It may seem like a strange concept, a set of rules trying to govern an area of 'unrule', the mind trying to control the body's desires, but with sex being seen as a potentially fatal activity, there is a need to retain a positive view of it. The barriers involved in Safer Sex are usually condoms and dental dams, a thin barrier of latex to prevent actual fluid exchange. What is needed is not the creation of a climate of fear and the construction of mental and physical barriers between people. Instead, the promotion

of safer sex and clear guidelines about safe and unsafe activities is the way to tackle the spread of HIV. One of the tragedies of AIDS is that future transmission of HIV is almost totally preventable. The transmission methods are known and therefore can be avoided, but until the majority of people see that they too are at risk, sexual behaviour will not change. In talking about AIDS, there must be an emphasis on retaining physical and sexual contact with others. Information about AIDS must be sex-affirmative and encourage people to take sensible precautions, and not create a climate where any contact between bodies is shunned. Bodily contact is important to human beings, being held and being loved by someone else's body makes people feel safe and strong and a 'meeting of bodies' surely encourages a 'meeting of minds'. Intimacy on a physical level affects intimacy on a mental level, and understanding between members of a society should be encouraged, not discouraged by making people terrified to touch each other.

AIDS writing is beginning to tackle safer sex, painting a picture of a "gay community" having to totally reassess sex and sexual behaviour. Gone are the descriptions of bathhouses and anonymous sex, except in retrospect. Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming Pool Library* (1989) is set in 1983, 'the last summer of its kind there was ever to be' (p. 3) and although there are many examples of unsafe sex in the book, there is also a sense of foreboding; a time of carefree sex is coming to an end. Other texts chronicle a change in sexual behaviour. The later novels in Armistead Maupin's *Tales of The City* (1989-1991) series show a San Francisco where the bathhouses have now been replaced by phone sex and 'jerk-off' parties, while in Neil Bartlett's *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* (1992), though no particular time setting is given, the patrons of the bar emphasise the importance of safer sex and are presented with condoms when they leave. Phone sex as a replacement for physical sex features in Joseph Olshan's *Nightswimmer* (1994), a novel that is very much concerned with a community adapting to the 'new rules', with safer sex prostitution and dilemmas about testing. Erotic safer sex, however, does not feature so much in these novels. Safer sex has an image of being less spontaneous and intimate than the 'real thing', but some writers of erotica are aiming to change this view, notably John Preston (ed.) *Hot Living: Erotic Stories About Safer Sex* (1985).

In Preston's *Introduction* to this collection he remarks that 'Everyone insisted that sensible sex was *boring*. It had to be; it was good for you ...' (Preston 1985, 9). The aim of this book is to eroticise safer sex, both to demonstrate safer sex practices and to make

them sexy. Preston feels that gay men must rethink their sexual behaviour and embrace safer sex as a way of protecting the men they love:

This volume is certainly not inclusive. You certainly still have many other options. There's a lot to play with here; there's more in your head. There are fantasies to explore and there are games to play with a sense of joy. Sex has always been a special means of communication and self-affirmation for gay men. The idea that it was going to be denied us by AIDS was one of the greatest concerns we had. It was no simple question about celibacy, it was a question of one of our means of life affirmation being stolen from us.

We were in a psychic winter. Our mourning, residues of our socially enforced guilt, and our fear, all produced a sense of despair when the AIDS crisis began. The crisis is far from over. But we can be better prepared to answer the crisis if we can regain some of the sense of empowerment and validation that sex gives us. That's the purpose of this book.

It's up to you how to use it. (Preston 1985,13)

AIDS is present in the background of all the stories in *Hot Living*. The disease itself, however, is hardly mentioned. AIDS is acknowledged but not dwelt upon. These stories concentrate on living and loving rather than sickness and dying. There is little anger at the devastation wreaked by HIV and AIDS but an acceptance that this is the 'way we live now' and this is how best to 'get on with it'.

The stories are a celebration of gay sexuality and a practical guide to safer sex. Here, sex is a good thing, rather than a means of transmission of a deadly virus. In John Preston's 'Champagne', an older man teaches his younger lover to enjoy safer sex and to stop feeling that this is second best to the sex that went on pre-AIDS. Readers are encouraged to see safer sex not as restrictive, but liberating, allowing men to love each other and enjoy each other's bodies without transmitting HIV.

The stories in this anthology try to dispel the idea that unsafe sex was 'hotter' than safer sex and demonstrate how men can have sex with each other safely and erotically. Tenderness and concern for one's partner are encouraged and safer sex is presented as a fun thing to do, rather than second best. For the characters (and for anyone sexually active) safer sex is the only option if HIV infection is to be avoided and so it is celebrated. Safer sex is now the *only* sex and so we must learn to eroticise and not dismiss it. The texts that make up the genre of AIDS writing mostly seek to celebrate gay sexuality and to rid it of the connection with death that has been made in so much mainstream commentary on AIDS.

Sensible precautions and the avoidance of contact with blood or with sexual fluids are the ways to prevent HIV transmission. However, even though the majority of the population in the West should be aware of this, AIDS still provokes panic in many people.

3.4 The Physicality of Disease: Bodies with AIDS

AIDS seems to be replacing cancer as the disease that is most dreaded. With cancer, people can adopt a certain fatalism; it is the result of cells in the body mutating and while the risk of developing certain cancers can be reduced by behavioural and dietary changes, the inner workings of the body are, in the end, autonomous, free from the jurisdiction of the mind. You cannot 'catch' cancer as a result of contact with others. Some cancers can also be successfully treated. With AIDS, however, the terrifying disease with, as yet, no cure, it is other human beings who can transmit the virus to us. We can control our own contact with other humans, but what frightens us is that we cannot control their contact with us. People can try to avoid most scenarios where HIV infection is possible, for example unsafe sex, but cannot always control 'chance events'. The dominant, white, non drug-using heterosexual society has not felt the decimation caused by AIDS that has been manifest in other areas of society and is very fearful of it happening. This society is pictured as an island, surrounded by a disease-filled sea, building ever greater defences against a possible tidal wave. This sea is the bodies of people with AIDS.

AIDS is not one of the 'intellectual' diseases that has been so feared, especially in the USA, such as communism or feminism; it is a physical disease, hence the interest of heterosexual society or 'heterosoc' (Jarman 1993) with PWAs is not with their minds, their personalities, their opinions, but with their bodies. It is not PWAs so much that our society fears, but BWAs - Bodies With AIDS. This fear has also operated through synecdoche: blood with AIDS, semen with AIDS, as though people with HIV and AIDS exist only in terms of bodily fluids.

Much AIDS writing concentrates on the contrasts between sick and healthy bodies, as the 'stigmata' of AIDS help to marginalise the sick. In *Nightswimmer*, Joseph Olshan explores the cult of the body beautiful and its ironies. The eponymous nightswimmers are risk takers and this seems analogous to the behaviour of gay men - swimming out into the unknown, sex as pleasure, but also as danger. The community is obsessed with physical appearance, which contrasts sharply with the debilitation and collapse caused by AIDS. There is a sense of circularity; these lovingly sculptured and maintained

bodies can be ravaged by a force lurking behind the creation of these beautiful bodies. This sharp contrast between sick and healthy is emphasised by the poster Will recognises in Greg's apartment, comparing a healthy T-cell to a diseased one (Olshan 1994, 79). This poster is typical of the philosophy that if you concentrate enough on the healthy, the beautiful, then the sick and the wasted can be banished from the picture. These men, through their actions of shaving bodily hair, visiting the gym and developing and maintaining perfect muscles are creating a vision of youth, which is the antithesis of AIDS; health, vitality and beauty being contrasted with sickness, wasting away and dying. This illusion of youth, however is no barrier to the disease - AIDS so often kills the young.

This desperation to conform to the prescription of the perfect body seems to be an attempt to ward off the future. Youth is prized and with it health, and there is no thought of what will happen when the 'body beautiful' ages and becomes the 'body wrinkly'. A shallow self-centredness exists amongst these men, with the only real communication between them being sexual. This obsession with physical perfection seems to be a kind of talismanic armour against the ravages of AIDS, as though by emphasising your healthiness, you become almost immune, something sensed by Will as he watches the men at the Morning Party.

Never before had I been so aware of the pressure to pursue physical perfection, to be unblemished and youthful at the dance. I could even understand why people were tempted into and consumed by the triangle - the New York - Fire Island - South Beach triangle. But then some cloud heads crossed the sun and the stain of a shadow drifted over the crowd, and I grew aware of the thinnest of membranes separating us from the rest of the world: the false belief that pumping up would be our protective armor against the plague. And I remembered that the death sentence of Narcissus was wasting away. (Olshan 1994, 206)

The main protagonist of Olshan's novel is looking for love, for something more than the endless round of bars and pick-ups. Sex is having to be negotiated differently as a result of HIV and AIDS, and with sex being so potentially hazardous, Will is beginning to look for companionship and love, as well as a sexual encounter. There is an emptiness in the gym culture, which seems inappropriate in this most profound of times. Having been badly hurt, Will knows that there is more to life than looking good, and, having seen the devastation caused by AIDS, he knows how fleeting the illusion of invulnerability is.

The contrast between sick and healthy bodies is also emphasised in Adam Mars-Jones' 'A Small Spade' (1988). Bernard is HIV negative while Neil has been diagnosed as HIV positive. The tension throughout the story is created by the constant watching and waiting involved with a disease like AIDS; waiting for the body to betray the first symptoms, checking for lymph node swelling - a sign of a troubled immune system. Bernard fears the onset of dementia (p. 85) and feels he must always be on duty, watching Neil for signs of tiredness (p. 98). There is an atmosphere of vigil, the healthy watching the sick for the first auguries of their decline. When Neil gets a splinter embedded under his nail, Bernard is the one nervous of any contamination, while Neil is relatively calm. It is Bernard who is angry and defensive at the hospital, watching the staff for any signs of ignorance and prejudice. The incident at the hospital reinforces the anticipation and fear of an unknown future that is central to so much AIDS writing. Although Bernard is not the one waiting for his immune system to collapse, he suddenly realises the full implications of this disease. He has tried to empathise with Neil, but it is only now that he realises what is in store for both of them.

The contrast between the sick and the healthy is further demonstrated in AIDS writing that concentrates on the effects on those who have gone on to develop the disease. In 'Remission' (Mars-Jones 1988a), the narrator has two 'lovers', helpers who care for him like a lover would, and their health is a stark contrast to his frailty, especially when Rory sits in the bath with him (p. 187). Their health supports his weak and sick body and the juxtaposition of the two serves to emphasise their opposition. In 'Gravity' (Leavitt 1990b), Theo's mother Sylvia is fit and healthy, and not afraid of her son's illness. She uses her strength to protect him and demonstrates her confidence and belief in him, by throwing a heavy, expensive crystal bowl, without warning, for him to catch, not even appearing relieved when he does catch it. Her action gives her strength and renews her pride in Theo and also some of his pride in himself. In front of the shop owners, nervous of Theo and his illness, they prove that Theo is still alive and that despite his weakness and wasted appearance, he is still someone that can have trust placed in him, rather than having to place all his trust in others.

Sarah Schulman also looks at the contact between those infected with HIV and those who are not in *People in Trouble* (1990). AIDS being a very visible disease, in the New York society the sick are easily distinguished from the healthy. With a disease that is spread by intimate contact, barriers can go up between people and Schulman emphasises the importance of maintaining physical contact (Schulman 1990, 102) -

especially for those who are HIV negative to show solidarity with those infected. The mother kissing her son's face when it is covered in sores (Schulman 1990, 45) and the T-shirt saying "I have AIDS - Hug Me" (ibid, 73), are part of a movement to fight fear and prejudice and to increase physical contact. Those as yet unaffected by AIDS are the most ignorant and terrified, fearful of any contact with People With AIDS (PWAs), including using the same eating utensils and breathing the same air (Schulman 1990, 123). These people are trying to keep AIDS at a distance and are proposing quarantine and segregation to keep themselves free from infection. This idea of keeping the virus so far away that it cannot affect you has links with the body builders in Olshan's *Nightswimmer*. Both novels look at the idea that banishing all links with AIDS, including PWAs, from your life is a protection against infection, as though not thinking about the disease creates an immunity to it. The healthy are rejecting the sick, lest their own health be compromised.

In Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time* (1988a), while Monette does not fear contact with his lover, Roger, he also experiences the notion that not mentioning AIDS or death can somehow make it go away. All his and Roger's efforts are concentrated on keeping Roger healthy and he dares not mention death for fear of inviting it.

As I write this it sounds, even to me, as if I was living a total illusion. And I wonder if Roger felt it as strongly as I, that to talk about death at all was to leave a door unlatched. Jaimee and I were so bullheaded certain we'd beat it. I think she and I set the tone from here on, the held breath as we passed the graveyard. Though Roger would sometimes get snappish at us - "I don't need any more pep talks" - I never had the sense that he was any more eager than Jaimee or I to talk about the end. Perhaps he held it all in for us, deeper than he wanted to. A chill of guilt still shivers through both of us that we didn't let him speak. "What were you supposed to say about death?" Sam asks me now. "That it sucks? Don't worry, you all knew that." (Monette 1988a, 269-270)

Bodies with AIDS are also depicted as ageing bodies, where youth has been transformed into age. In 'Slim' (Mars-Jones 1988b), Buddy tells the narrator to think of himself as having had 50 years added to his age and he sees his illness as a barrier - cutting him off from youth and health. He must live in the realm of the sick, the dying and the carers and is excluded from the rest of the world going on without him: "...getting Slim only involves being exiled from the young, the well, the real." (p. 10)

Luke, in Edmund White's 'Running on Empty' (1988c), also feels that he is ageing rapidly. He wonders how soon his body will begin to grow weaker or even suddenly collapse. When he visits elderly relatives, he no longer sees them as strange, alien, but

realises how much they have in common: "... today there was no distance between him and this woman. In a month or a week he could be as blind, less cogent, weaker." (p. 305) The relatives he is with do not know he is ill, and so he cannot tell them how he feels to be nearing the end of his life. They see him as young, strong and in control, instead of at the mercy of a lethal virus.

This sudden change from youth to age continues in Sarah Schulman's *People in Trouble* (1990). The conditions of AIDS are similar to those of old age, for example dementia and pneumonia. The picture painted is one of young people old before their time, dying when they should be living. The illness is particularly shocking because its effects are so disconcerting. We do not expect young people to develop dementia: "He got old very fast. He said the telephone was on fire." (Schulman 1990, 45). Youth is so closely associated with health, that serious illness must be an ageing mechanism; we cannot accept the death of the young, so in order for us to understand their deaths, they must become aged. The ageing qualities of AIDS serve to reinforce the isolation of the sick from the young who are *a priori* healthy. AIDS separates the sick not only from those unaffected, but also from a part of themselves. These are people cut off from the expected life experience and, also, from their age: "You could tell it was AIDS because they were too thin or weak for their age." (Schulman 1990, 212) One of the distinguishing feature of AIDS is its separation abilities. It cocoons the sick, cutting them off from the 'normal' functioning world they used to live in and quarantining them amongst the weak, the dying and the prematurely aged. Youth and its energy and aspirations are banished.

Schulman's novel also looks at illness as affecting the body, but separate from the *person*. While the description *PWA* rejects the notion of passive 'victims', there is still the problem of being defined by your illness, your body's collapse. *People in Trouble* makes the point that having AIDS is only one facet of somebody's existence and that behind the illness remains a 'real' person; ""Excuse me," she said, looking past the man's lesions to see his real face." (Schulman 1990, 85), but, in contradiction, there is also the idea that illness is a part of you. People are 'represented' to the world through their bodies and these bodies are an integral part of them: "It was hard to believe this raw, bleeding skin was Scott and not just something laid on top of him." (Schulman 1990, 145). Schulman seems to want to argue on one hand that there is a 'person' or 'soul' separate from their disease and on the other hand that it is a *person* who has AIDS and not just a body. She uses both as political points, arguing that behind the

body remains a living person and also that this person is suffering. Although these two arguments seem conflicting, they do not create a sense of falseness in the novel, but, rather, go to emphasise the conflicting emotions and arguments associated with a disease with the stigma of AIDS.

In AIDS writing, the illness is seen as invading and conquering the bodies of the sick and also as establishing a regime. Instead of being in control of your body, it is controlling you and how you live your life. In 'Slim', the narrator feels his life is rationed; his body has limitations and he sees his activities in terms of "coupons" that he only has a fixed amount of to "spend" - "I'll tick him off one of these days, tear off a coupon and splurge some energy." (Mars-Jones 1988b, 8). He feels his life is no longer his and he is overwhelmed by care, for example Buddy's hugs and his worries about him, the constant attention from doctors: "Neglect is what I dream of. I long for the doctors to find me boring, to give me one almighty pill and say Next please." (p. 9). He takes control by using language, the power to name. He calls his disease "Slim" (the Ugandan name for AIDS) and his lesions "blackcurrants". He tells colleagues he has "cancer". By calling *his* disease *his* name he exercises a small control in a situation where he is controlled by the disease *and* by its treatment.

In 'Gravity', Theo also needs to make choices and to exercise control. He has the choice to stay alive or to go blind and as his illness is terminal, chooses to keep his sight (Leavitt 1990b, 76). Here, he has power, controlling the uncontrolled decline of his body. He is still, however, controlled by a medical regime that keeps his body functioning. His life is dictated by his illness and the treatment for it, the drugs, drips and catheters ensuring no escape from the reminders that his body is failing.

Neil, in 'A Small Spade' (Mars-Jones 1988), is also constantly aware of the restrictions imposed on him by his HIV positive status, but is not as resentful. He is presently asymptomatic and is concentrating on postponing the onset of AIDS as long as possible. He has to obey the demands of his body, for example making sure he rests, eating whenever he is hungry. He also stops smoking and takes up yoga and swimming, in order to give his illness no opportunity to take advantage of him. He fears what he cannot control - the cold weather in England and worries about catching colds. He tries to make himself look 'well' for photographs to send to his family in New Zealand and while he fears any attack on his body's health, is almost defiant, determined that he will remain the one in control, not AIDS.

This notion of illness as 'regime' also occurs in other AIDS writing and can be compared with the body builders in Olshan's *Nightswimmer*. They too have a strict regime of fitness, like the AIDS regime of medication and regulating behaviours, and they also pay constant attention to their bodies, only their end purpose is maximum desirability, not evading death.

In contrast, the central character of 'The Way We Live Now' (Sontag 1991) appears to have very little control over his situation. Indeed, he does not even have a name or a voice, and his story is narrated by his friends, who all try to control how he confronts his illness. A leitmotif throughout the story is the fact that he eats a lot of chocolate, which infantilises him, making him seem even more helpless.

The medical establishment contributes to this feeling of being controlled and dependent. Some PWAs reject conventional medicine, trying anything to take charge of their uncontrollable bodies, such as creative visualisation or macrobiotic diets, while most feel powerless at the 'mercy' of doctors who do not know how to stop their illness. It is the doctors who have knowledge and power and who can give or withhold treatment and often, especially in Schulman's *People in Trouble*, it is those who are ill who must fight to be treated. Daisy takes on a drug company that refuses to treat women, in case of lawsuits resulting from birth defects. She defends her right to take a drug she wants, but the drug company remains in control. They decide who has access to this drug and who has not. *People in Trouble* is full of PWAs who want to make their own decisions about their own bodies and who want to make an informed choice about, and to try, any treatment that may help, but who are constantly having to battle a medical establishment that will not relinquish power.

Both Fabian and Daisy were dead by Thanksgiving. Fabian had wanted a drug called M-Reg One. But the FDA had killed it in phase-three trials. Daisy ended up on AZT, which she couldn't really tolerate and her legs went so numb that she could barely walk. They both died angry. (Schulman 1990, 226)

Tom, in *Halfway Home* (Monette 1992), also feels the power of the medical establishment. When he has to go into hospital for tests, he sees it as 'giving up my name and self' (Monette 1992, 186). He is powerless as he has to submit to the hospital regime. Once in the institution, he is at the 'mercy' of the medical staff and has to fight hard to retain any sense of control. He has seen his friends die in these places and he is determined to retain as much autonomy as possible. He does, however, have respect for Robison, his doctor, whom he accepts as being often helpless in the face of a still little

understood syndrome. Robison has had much experience of gay men dying of AIDS and so Tom feels an affinity with him, even as he fears the control of the medical world. There is a sense, in several gay discourses on AIDS, of a terrible irony. With gay liberation, gay men and lesbians had finally shaken off the pathological definitions of homosexuality and the subjection of gay men and lesbians to the medical gaze, and now, with the appearance of AIDS, gay men are once again under the control of doctors.

Thus descriptions of the physicality of AIDS are an important link between these texts. AIDS writing is greatly concerned with the physical reality of the disease and much emphasis is placed on descriptions of bodies with AIDS. Images of disease are common to these texts and these common images add weight to the argument for considering AIDS writing, firstly as a genre, and secondly as a genre that is worthy of literary study.

3.5 The Role of Mourning

AIDS writing, then, explores the experience of living with HIV and AIDS, but, as AIDS is usually a terminal condition, there is also the issue of dying and mourning. The characters in AIDS novels must cope with the sickness around them and also the aftermath of an AIDS-related death.

As examined in the previous chapter, AIDS writing has similarities with elegy, but is different enough not to be part of that genre. However, it does perform an elegiac role. Not only are these texts bearing witness to the time of AIDS, but they are also mourning those killed by the syndrome. The Names Project is an example of the importance of naming the dead and remembering them.³⁶ People who have died as a result of AIDS are commemorated on six foot by three foot panels (the size of a grave) by their friends and relatives. Some panels just bear a name, others have details about the person's life. They are joined together to form a giant quilt, which acts as both a work of mourning, and as a political statement, emphasising the sheer number of those who have died.

Much AIDS writing also performs this public act of mourning. Some texts are eulogies for a particular loved one, and other texts are elegiac in tone, with a more general sense of mourning. There is also a concern for the survivors, some of those who grieve are ill themselves, while others are watching all their friends die.

³⁶ The Names Project was set up in San Francisco in 1987 and now has branches in over 40 countries. In 1989 it was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

One text focusing on mourning is Paul Monette's *Love Alone: Eighteen Elegies for Rog* (1988), a series of poems written after his lover's death. Like some of the sections of *In Memoriam*, these poems were written just after the death of the man they concern and although Arthur Hallam may not have been the poet's lover, both sets of verses speak of the bereavement experienced at the death of a loved one.

In his preface, Monette says that writing the poems 'quite literally kept me alive' and they are as much about the process of grieving as they are memories of the man who has died. The poems are 'mad with loss' (Monette 1988a) as they attempt to express the trauma of Horwitz's dying and the totality of Monette's grief.

In the poems Monette recalls the time leading up to his lover's death and how he began to mourn for him before he was dead. Horwitz's death was anticipated, unlike Arthur Hallam's, and so *Love Alone* deals with the terrible decline that AIDS inflicts upon the body as well as the days that follow a loved one's death. His lover's loss of sight and struggle to survive are noted, along with Monette's guilt at surviving him. Like Tennyson, Monette muses on death and how it is for the one that is dead and tries to cope with life continuing despite his devastating loss. Where *Love Alone* differs most greatly from *In Memoriam*, however, is in the lack of consolation. Although Monette can feel the happiness of the memories of his life with Roger, he cannot be consoled in his death. Their love was good and this is celebrated in the poems, but there is too much anger at the injustice of his lover's death for Monette to feel really consoled. He knows that he too will die of the same disease, but he does not hope for reconciliation. Instead, he hopes for others to fight the bureaucracy and indifference associated with AIDS, while he himself starts saying goodbye to the life he has known up to now.

Love Alone is about grief and the process of mourning, but the poems are not really elegies. Monette uses the term 'elegies' in his title, but the poems lack the universality and move to consolation that typify elegy. It may be that these poems, in refusing the traditions of elegy are transforming the genre. In transgressing the conventions of elegy, there is a transformation of the genre of elegy. However, these poems bear more relation to the genre of AIDS writing. They are elegiac in as much as they are concerned with death and with mourning, but the death in question is from a specific condition and that is what can perhaps set them apart from other elegies. AIDS as a cause of death is a phenomenon in literature that deals with death and is a reason for setting these texts apart. This writing may be elegiac, but the elegiac is only one aspect of this body of writing.

Mourning is only one aspect of AIDS writing; however, it is an important aspect. It is impossible to write about a fatal illness without contemplating how that fatality impacts upon the world. One novel that concentrates on the aftermath of an AIDS related death is Christopher Bram's *In Memory of Angel Clare* (1989). Bram writes about the way a group of friends deal with the death of one of their number and how different the experience of bereavement is for the dead man's younger lover.

Clarence has died and while his friends deal with the loss, they feel themselves burdened by the presence of his lover, Michael. Michael is much younger and they find him irritating. He has little in common with them apart from Clarence and while they wish to rid themselves of his company, he clings to them as the only link he has with Clarence.

Nobody actively disliked Michael, and they weren't indifferent to his situation. They had been touched at first to see such loyalty to their friend, then worried when Michael's mourning continued. Then they became irritated. Jack often questioned the emotions beneath the irritation. Being bored with Michael was natural enough, but he wondered if they were annoyed and sometimes angry because Michael was behaving in a way they felt they should behave. A friend had died and yet they went on with their lives. (Bram 1989, 34)

Michael wonders about his relationship with Clarence and whether it was real love or not. His life is empty and directionless now Clarence is dead and he has difficulty in communicating with Clarence's friends, as Clarence is all they have in common with him. Clarence's death has severed the link between Michael and these people and he feels betrayed by their rejection of him. Eventually, he decides to kill himself, partly so that they will realise how much his lover's death has affected him and how real his grief is. He chooses to slit his wrists at Jack's flat as Jack was Clarence's best friend. His death will validate his behaviour and also punish these people for doubting his sincerity.

Although Michael attempts suicide, Jack saves him. From then on, no-one in this circle of friends feels able to exclude him for fear of what he might do. Because Michael has survived, they must retain contact with him, and he feels good to be accepted into this group. Although he is young, he has gained a maturity and respect through having cared for his lover as he died and also through having come so close to death himself. He knows these people are uneasy with him and he relishes this, enjoying the power of being able to cause unease:

When he arrived [...] Michael sensed each of the couples drawing a little closer together, not literally but with brief glances and subtle adjustments of posture - as if Michael were the Spirit of Loneliness, the End of Love, even the Angel of Death.

He had not felt bad about that. It gave him a feeling of power, and having power, Michael could be comfortable. (p. 287)

Michael has been bereaved by AIDS and it has also projected him into a world that he would not otherwise have been part of. Although Clarence and Michael were lovers, they were forced into a more serious relationship through Clarence's illness and now Clarence is dead and the intensity is gone, Michael needs to find a meaning to his life. Thwarted in his attempt to kill himself, he delights in his ability to touch the guilt felt by those around him.

Before his death, Clarence wonders how this intense relationship with Michael developed and he even resents Michael's presence. He sees his death as setting Michael free, but instead, Clarence's death entwines Michael even more in his life and the lives of his friends. AIDS has caused Clarence to die, but it has also caused irrevocable changes in the lives of his lover and his friends. Michael mourns for Clarence and for himself and eventually his extreme act of grief achieves for him the acceptance he craves.

Not all the mourning in AIDS writing is for individuals who have died. There is also a sense of nostalgia, of mourning a lost, carefree past. The past is a time of sexual freedom and it contrasts sharply with the present discourses of sex, where sex and death are almost inextricably linked. John M. Clum points out how the time before AIDS is now seen as tainted; carefree sex cannot now be thought of without thinking of what was to come (Clum 1990). Clum emphasises the need to reaffirm the past, to cleanse sex of its associations with death. He sees memory and desire as vital to living through the time of AIDS. The younger generation have no 'golden past', no memories of a time when sex was a celebratory act. In *Nightswimmer*, Will senses the age difference between himself and Greg most keenly when he uses AIDS as a time marker: 'Greg was young enough never to have known sex without its direct correlation to dying.' (Olshan 1994, 79) Bob, in *People in Trouble*, also thinks of time in terms of 'before AIDS' and 'now', feeling a strong nostalgia for the time 'before': 'Oh Lord, let those glory days be with us once again. Oh unknown dick, oh joy, oh most angelic thought.' (Schulman 1990, 157). 'Justice', the AIDS activist group in the novel, also aim to make their campaigns 'sex-affirmative', to rid the past of its associations with death.

Dave Royle's 'Safe as Houses' in his collection *Pleasing the Punters* (1990) revolves around the contrast in experience and outlook between gay men who have adjusted their behaviour as a result of AIDS and the younger generation who have never

known anything different. Brian is looking for danger when he goes out, and is happy to mix pleasure with pain. He feels constrained by the safer sex 'rules' and sometimes 'bends' them. Donald is much younger and is appalled at the risky behaviour of some older men. He seems to hold Brian's generation responsible for the devastation of AIDS and for the constraints necessary in his own sex life. When he persuades Brian to let him massage him, he is critical of his partner's lifestyle and also his liking for 'danger'. Donald tells him that he will experience something much more dangerous than sex with a stranger and then kills him. For Brian, it is not HIV that is the real risk, but another human being. Donald, for all his emphasis on 'safe' behaviour is the real danger but Brian does not see this. His desire for sex overcomes any misgivings that he has and Donald knows he will act in this way. He punishes Brian for his lack of caution just as he sees AIDS as a result of a lack of caution among gay men in general.

Clum recognises this strong need in AIDS narratives to reclaim the past, to celebrate the sex that was, and is, such a strong part of gay identity. Tom, in *Halfway Home*, feels cheated that his brother cannot see him in his 'glory', when he was beautiful and sexy, the time before AIDS. In his relationship with Gray, however, he becomes a sexual being once again and feels strongly that he has reclaimed something that was lost. Through being able to have a relationship with the man he loves, Tom regains a sense of self. Through being able to participate in sexual activity, he has gained a small victory over AIDS; the syndrome may be destroying his body, but it cannot take away the pleasures of sex. Tom is one of the older generation Clum speaks of, those who can remember the sex-affirmative past and who can therefore have some more hope for the future. This memory and its associated desire are, for Clum, one of the most important aspects of gay AIDS writing: 'For both generations the urge to remember and affirm remains as a culture dwindles. It is that almost obsessive focus on memory - memory of desire - that is a central characteristic of gay literature in the Age of AIDS.' (Clum 1990, 667).

This mourning is important to AIDS writing, but as Gregory Woods (1993) points out, it is important both to mourn and to fight. Elegy is an important aspect of AIDS writing, but it must not be its only function: 'Every elegy should bear a caveat: tears alone make a soggy memorial.' (Woods 1993, 166)

3.6 AIDS Writing as a Political Act

These texts, part of the literary discourse of AIDS, form representations of a time of 'plague'. They are not separate from, nor are they mere reflections of the other

discourses of AIDS. Instead, they form part of a broader AIDS discourse, an attempt to articulate the experiences of living during such an epidemic. There is no doubt that these texts are sites of political debate and may be viewed as political acts, but, with an issue as sensitive as AIDS, there have been criticisms that all the literary discourse of AIDS can be of no practical use. The discourses of AIDS, while important, have been dismissed as idle chattering while people are dying. AIDS seems to be a disease that lends itself to theorising, something that several commentators are uncomfortable with.

The phenomena of AIDS representation are fully conducive to poststructural analysis in their foregrounding of the human body's fate as a site of the articulation of power, in their attention the regulatory functions of social order, and in their placement of the illness as the latest in an intertextual series of allegorized, socially constructed diseases. To be sure, with its ready assimilation to prior symbolic structures, AIDS may well be the disease that poststructuralism would have had to invent if it did not, in all its horror, already exist. (Morrison 1993, 171)

While some of the theorising of AIDS and its discourses is challenging, it can seem somewhat peripheral when compared to the actual effects the syndrome is having on communities. It is important to remember, however, that language is a powerful tool and to understand how the dominant ideology uses language is to understand how to fight it.

Language use is very important to AIDS activism and Lee Edelman has deconstructed one important slogan, ACT-UP's 'Silence = Death'. (Edelman 1989) Through examining the slogan, Edelman demonstrates its circularity. He sees it as a call to theory, rather than as a call to action. 'Silence = Death' seems to be asking AIDS activists to produce discourse to fight the other discourses. The 'war on AIDS' is now presented as a linguistic rather than a physical one.

It calls for the production of discourse, the production of more text, as a mode of defense against the opportunism of medical and legislative responses to the epidemic. But what can be said beyond the need to speak? What discourse can this call to discourse desire? Just what is the discourse of defense that will immunize the gay body politic against the opportunistic infections of demagogic rhetoric? (pp. 310-311)

At the end of his article, however, Edelman questions the ethics of analysis that makes AIDS the 'material for intellectual arabesques that inscribe those horrors within the neutralizing conventions of literary criticism', but concludes that 'discourse, alas, is the only defense with which we can counteract discourse, and there is no available discourse on AIDS that is not itself diseased' (p. 316).

As James Morrison points out, however, the discourses of AIDS are of little importance when confronted with the actuality of the disease. To a PWA, the social construction of a disease bears no resemblance to its organic reality. The theories of AIDS are certainly producing some important starting points for intellectual debate, but have little relevance in the face of an epidemic for those struggling with the disease. Perhaps the theorising of the 'meaning' of AIDS is a luxury only those not immersed in the daily reality of AIDS can afford.

One point to remember is that language and metaphor are powerful weapons, especially when used by those in power. The equation 'Gay = AIDS' has been used by homophobes to link the epidemic with gay men and thus to stigmatise them, just as gay rights campaigners have begun to make progress. This linking of homosexuality and AIDS also, as previously mentioned, serves to dismiss those people with HIV and AIDS who are not gay. The discourses of AIDS (the social, the literary, the biomedical), are important to how we understand the syndrome and to how we work to counteract it. Obviously AIDS must be treated as a biological reality, but in trying to prevent the spread of HIV infection and in ensuring that people with HIV and AIDS are not further harmed by social attitudes, then these discourses must be understood and harmful discourses challenged. One way of doing this would be to write about AIDS and AIDS writing and theory can be seen as a political act, adding to the discourses already present and challenging oppressive ideas. AIDS writing can be seen as activism, as an act of subversion, working to undermine the dominant white, middle class heteropatriarchal views of AIDS and People With AIDS.

Thus, AIDS writing can be viewed as a genre, the literary reality of AIDS existing along with its other realities. I believe that the discourses of plague and the discourses of AIDS have similarities and in seeing how plague discourses are informed, it is possible to understand their influence on and kinship with AIDS discourses. While Sontag is admirable in her attempt to rid talking of illness of all metaphor, it would seem that this is an impossible task. AIDS invites metaphor and its usage cannot really be avoided. Indeed, some of the metaphors of AIDS and the body serve to illuminate the ideology that creates them. In order to subvert oppressive ideologies, it is necessary to first understand them and the harmful metaphors of AIDS cannot be undermined while they are ignored. Perhaps what is needed are better metaphors for illness, so that it is easier to understand it and to empathise with those who are ill. AIDS writing provides

us with these new, challenging metaphors and it is by understanding these metaphors and how they have arisen that we can start to critique those that are harmful.

In conclusion, it is important to realise the profound influence AIDS has had on Western society. It has demonised marginalised groups - gay men, intravenous drug users, prostitutes - and made them the focus for all its fears and neuroses. Furthermore, it has made terrifying the natural fluids of the body - blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and, to an extent, saliva. Blood, in particular, has been made the lethal substance; the sight of blood no longer just fills people with nausea or revulsion, but with dread. Instead of accepting AIDS as a terrible blow that has struck the whole of society and organising together to eventually banish it, it has been made into a thing of nightmare, a lurking menace, threatening the most fragile bonds that hold a society together.

While AIDS is classed as the end result of 'deviant' behaviour, the rest of 'normal' society can relax, believing itself immune to it. As long as AIDS is the 'gay plague', the disease of junkies and Africans, the spread will continue. AIDS is not a 'lifestyle' disease, it is the result of infection with a virus, something that could happen to anyone. If the virus is to be contained then heterosexuals must realise that they too can contract HIV and take steps to protect themselves and others. It is only by accepting the body and its desires and banishing the notion of sin from disease that any progress will be made to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Conclusion

AIDS literature is a substantial body of work. The texts that form this grouping are varied, but share common issues. All of them are concerned to explore the medical syndrome AIDS and it is for this main reason that I have considered them in relation to each other. My aim has been to establish AIDS writing as a genre and then to examine the major aspects of this generic configuration. Having argued for the consideration of AIDS writing as a genre, I will finally examine the implications that this has for literary study in general.

This thesis has been focused on AIDS writing, but in the process of examining this body of work I have been forced to interrogate certain fundamental notions which underpin literary study and I have been led to question their 'obviousness' or their neutrality. This thesis has examined the exclusionary process at work in literary studies, whereby seemingly neutral notions such as value, the canon and genre can be seen to maintain the status quo and ensure that new texts and genres are not studied. Thus these notions are less positive terms than a constellation of exclusions. I have also been forced to consider the nature of 'literariness' at the present moment – if a text is by a minority writer, openly political in theme and written in a realist style, then it will not be considered to be literary. Thus my focus on AIDS writing has a wide range of implications for AIDS writing itself, for genre theory, but perhaps most importantly of all for literary study in general.

4.1 Implications for AIDS Writing

There has been little literary criticism concerned with AIDS writing and this is one of the reasons for making the case for AIDS writing to have literary status. Although there is no real movement arguing against literary legitimacy for AIDS writing, the sheer lack of serious critical study of this group of texts is an indication that AIDS writing has not been viewed by the university as worthy of serious consideration. The aim of this thesis, thus, has been to argue, through the examination of genre, for literary legitimacy for this body of writing.

If AIDS writing is established as a genre, this then has implications for writing as a whole. Genre is a recognised term in literary study and is an accepted means of studying a number of texts together. For a body of writing to be categorised a genre signifies that

it has moved towards literary legitimacy. Thus, arguing for AIDS writing to be a genre is also arguing for it to have literary status, to be worthy of literary study.

In making the case for AIDS writing as a genre, I have also looked at its relationship with other genres. The links between AIDS writing and other genres help to give the writing a place in the broader literary discourse. AIDS writing should not be examined in isolation, but in a context of literary history. If AIDS writing can be related to other genres that already have literary legitimacy, then its literary status is strengthened. If AIDS writing can be seen to have a place in literary history, then it can be seen as worthy of scholarly interest.

Alongside relating the genre of AIDS writing to other genres, I have also explored the major aspects of that genre. AIDS novels have common themes and my analysis shows that it is possible to use the tools of literary study to read AIDS writing. Examining the imagery or the themes of a text are commonly accepted literary investigatory methods, and to use these methods to investigate AIDS literature is another means of conferring literary status upon it. If the body of writing can be studied as other, more established, genres are studied, then this body of writing will have a stronger claim for literary legitimacy. By using academic methods of enquiry, academic status can begin to be established; whereas if a body of writing is not open to the techniques of literary criticism, such as exploration of metaphor or ideology, then the task of claiming literary status for the writing is made more difficult.

Therefore, the arguments made in this thesis have helped to establish AIDS writing as a genre and as a worthy subject matter for literary study. Other commentators, (Pastore 1993, Nelson 1993a) however, have not considered AIDS writing as part of a wider literary tradition. Their study of AIDS literature has suffered from an insistence that AIDS writing is not suitable for academic scrutiny in the way that other genres might be. This is a result of seeing AIDS literature as separate from the texts available for scholarly exploration due to its subject matter. As explored in chapter three, AIDS writing has been viewed as somehow 'untouchable' by literary criticism because of the harrowing reality that it represents. However, traumatic subject matter does not mean that the writing is beyond analysis: despite its harrowing subject matter, Holocaust literature is now considered worthy of literary study.³⁷ AIDS writing is barely removed from the experiences documented, but there should be no special pleading for this

³⁷ See for example Sue Vice (2000) *Holocaust Fiction*, London: Routledge.

writing. To want exemption from literary criticism for AIDS writing is to isolate it from literary discourse and to remove the possibility of acceptance for AIDS writing as a serious literary genre. In order for AIDS writing to gain literary status, to put it on equal terms with other genres, AIDS writing must be available for scrutiny and criticism. To argue for AIDS writing as a genre and to explore it as other genres are explored is to give it legitimacy and therefore a place in literary culture.

4.2 Implications for Genre Theory

The establishment of AIDS writing as a genre also has implications for genre theory. This thesis began with an exploration of theories of genre and, while it is difficult to arrive at an exact working definition of the term, I have proposed a model of genre that my arguments have been based on. This model sees the texts that constitute a genre as having a familial relationship with each other and sharing family characteristics with the other texts of that genre. These texts are all related and although they may share characteristics with texts belonging to other genres, together they share more characteristics with each other, including subject matter, style and imagery. They share kinship as AIDS novels because they have all come about because of the AIDS pandemic and while they may be influenced by, and linked to, other genres, they can also be seen as constituting a separate genre.

Therefore, this study has not only argued for AIDS writing to be considered as a genre, but has also proposed a model of genre, drawn from the ideas of other genre theorists, for example Todorov (1973, 1990), defining genres through language, or Fowler (1982), examining genres as a means of communication. Investigating the justification for considering AIDS writing to be a genre opens up the question of how genres come into existence and how new genres relate to older genres. AIDS writing can be seen as having a quite obvious point of origin in the biomedical disease, but it has developed as a result of its relationship to other genres, sharing, for example, the imagery and sense of witness from plague writing, or the sense of mourning from elegy.

AIDS writing tends to follow a tradition of realism which is quite unlike much other contemporary writing. Whereas the influence of postmodernism has been strong in recent novel writing, AIDS writing can almost be seen as a reaction to that. The experiments with structure, language and genre which characterise postmodern writing are not generally found in AIDS novels. The genre of AIDS writing can almost be seen

as a reaction to the playfulness and irony of postmodernist texts, for example Jeanette Winterson *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) or Don DeLillo *White Noise* (1984). Postmodern writing often uses several genres as part of a playing with structure and is marked by a lack of political commitment, whereas AIDS writing echoes other previous genres, such as radical feminist writing of the 1960s and 1970s, and has a strong political focus. Much AIDS writing follows an activist tradition, where the writing is a political act and the subject matter takes precedence over the form.

AIDS writing as a genre has connections to other genres in literary history and its rejection of contemporary genres helps to distinguish it as a separate genre. It is a new genre in literary history and the strong connections between the texts serve to reinforce the arguments for the use of genre as a critical concept. The fact that new genres do evolve and take their place in literary discourse shows that genre is still a relevant notion and a useful means of grouping and analysing texts. As mentioned above, establishing a body of writing as a genre gives it literary legitimacy and thus this legitimising aspect of genre shows genre theory to have a useful place in literary study. Rather than merely allocating texts to various genres, my study has shown that using the notion of genre can help to establish a place for a body of writing in a literary culture and to re-examine the relationships within that culture.³⁸

4.3 Implications for Literary Study

Having stated the implications of this thesis for both the body of writing in question and for the specific study of genre, I will now explore how it may affect literary study in general.

AIDS writing is a new genre and with its claim for literary status substantiated through this thesis, it can take its place in literary history. There does not appear to have been a conscious effort to exclude AIDS writing from the arena of literary study, but the lack of critical commentary on these texts is an indication that they have not been seen as a proper subject for literary theorists. Therefore, I have aimed to establish AIDS writing as a worthy part of literary discourse. Thus the subject area for literary study is broadened and also modified. This process of modification is ongoing as new genres arrive and older texts are 'rediscovered' and literature is an area that is constantly evolving. A student of literature can never hope to *know* all about the subject as it is

³⁸ Inevitably, establishing this body of writing as a genre is only the first stage in AIDS writing being accepted by the academic establishment for study. There are a number of 'gatekeepers' who would have to accept the argument of this thesis. (Cameron 1990)

always broadening and a major way that this is done is through genre. Genres are established and explored and the relationships that exist between texts within a genre and between genres give rise to new avenues for literary study. The confirmation of AIDS writing as a genre gives a new area for literary consideration and so this thesis enlarges the subject area for the study of literature.

However, as mentioned above, AIDS writing should not be looked at in isolation and the establishment of AIDS writing as a genre does more than simply broaden the subject area. AIDS writing has links to other genres, and these relationships are also worthy of examination. Other genres can be re-evaluated in the light of AIDS writing, just as the genre of AIDS writing can be studied in the context of other genres. For example, AIDS literature has some similarities to First World War poetry and both can be examined for their political portrayal of the deaths of young men. The study of one genre can be much enhanced by reference to other genres, as the texts are no longer being read in isolation, but as part of a literary discourse. One genre may have given rise to another or may have dramatically transformed another and these links can be explored through studying genres in the context of other genres.

As AIDS writing is a recent genre, which has close links to a social reality, the evolution of the genre can be studied as an example of the development of a genre. Early AIDS writing, for example Holleran (1996) or Monette (1988a) has been full of anger and the need to alert a seemingly uncaring society to the devastation unfolding amongst gay men. Later novels, however, are more concerned with the portrayal of a community adjusting to the reality of living with HIV and AIDS, for example Olshan (1994). AIDS has become a factor in gay lives and much gay writing reflects this. HIV and AIDS are a daily reality for many gay men and so gay writing cannot ignore this. Indeed, there may be fewer novels specifically about AIDS, but the disease has a presence in most contemporary gay writing, whether stated or not.

Thus, the addition of the genre of AIDS writing to the realm of literary study allows it to be investigated as a literary phenomenon and also poses a challenge to literary studies. For AIDS writing is a contemporary genre and does not have the weight of criticism behind it that other genres have. I have argued for it to be considered as a genre, but it will need scholars to study and write about it for it to reinforce its claim for

literary status. Critical study is vital if AIDS writing is to be properly established as an area for academic study. The production of secondary texts helps to make the case for a genre to be established and seen as having literary value. The genre of AIDS writing needs to become a subject for literary debate in order for it to gain literary status.

So, the case has been made for the consideration of AIDS writing as a worthy area for literary study. With a previous marginalised body of writing being presented as a genre, as part of the literary landscape, possibilities for other groups of texts are raised, for example, other previously marginalised genres, for example lesbian science fiction, horror fiction or detective novels. Arguing for the consideration of a body of writing as a genre and putting it in context with other genres gives it literary status and these methods may be used with other groups of texts, particularly those whose 'newness' would seem to preclude them from the arena of literary study. Genres that are not taken seriously due to their relative recentness can be argued to be part of the literary culture through the genre theories that I have utilised.

4.4 New Directions for Literary Theory

Thus, as demonstrated in this thesis, a relatively recent body of writing can be incorporated into the realm of literary study through genre theory. This then presents the opportunity for other marginalised groups of texts to be established as genres and to gain literary status through the application of literary theories. Far from being outdated, the concept of genre is a valuable tool for bringing newer writing into the literary world.

As stated before, despite the work of marginalised groups in challenging the status quo, there remains a dominant heteropatriarchal ideology at work in our society. It is very difficult for new ideas and new areas of study to enter into the arena of literary studies and there is a certain conservatism at work in universities. Nearly thirty years after the Women's Liberation Movement, women's writing is still often taught as an optional course and is not fully integrated into an English studies curriculum. Marginalised texts may now be studied, but they are studied at the margins of the subject area.

The lack of mainstream publishing and the lack of courses available for students at university level in this area means that AIDS writing is not yet being seen as worthy of literary study. My aim has been to argue for the legitimacy of AIDS writing as a subject for literary investigation. Furthermore, this conclusion shows that this process of

legitimation may also be followed for other marginalised writing. The subject area of literature is always changing and expanding and as new areas of study arise, more established areas of study can be questioned. The role of the scholar is to question and to investigate and with new genres being legitimised for study, the questions and the investigations continue and the role of the scholar is reinforced.

This thesis has examined the nature and the application of genre in literary study. A close examination of AIDS writing has demonstrated that it can be seen as a literary genre and therefore as worthy of scholarly study. However, it does not automatically follow that AIDS writing will become a closely studied area of literature. As my introduction explains, notions of the canon and value are still influential in literary studies and will not be so easily dismissed. This thesis has argued for the inclusion of AIDS writing in the literary discourse, but one thesis is not enough to change the way that literature is studied. In order for AIDS writing to be properly acknowledged as an area for literary study, there must be a greater readership and more analysis of the writing. This calls for action from publishers and from university English departments. While individuals can put together arguments for the establishment of previously marginalised texts as worthy literary genres, without the support of those who can influence literary canons, these genres will remain marginalised and the area of literary studies will be deprived of whole bodies of writing that may enhance the experience of studying literature.

The subject of English Literature is not a static one. As more texts are written and read, then the subject area broadens. The aim of this thesis has been to broaden the subject area through the consideration of AIDS literature as a serious literary genre. In doing this, the established literary canon has been called into question. An exploration of how texts can be included in the literary realm draws attention to the fact that texts have been excluded and therefore a questioning of the exclusionary processes can begin. Thus, this thesis has presented an argument for the establishment of AIDS writing as an area for serious literary study and in doing so, has challenged the existing literary order. Just as previously marginalised groups are fighting for a place in society, so can previously marginalised texts become part of literary culture. However, in order for this to happen, challenges to the existing order must be made and this thesis is only the first step.

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