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In John Weir's 2006 novel, *What I Did Wrong,* the narrator, Tom, a CUNY creative writing lecturer now in his forties, recounts his performance in a school play called *Impromptu.* Before he even delivers his first line—"Who are you? What do you want of me?"—a fellow pupil in the audience starts to jeer: "Shut up, faggot."[1] A chorus of invective follows, a cacophony of "queer bait" and "gay boy." It is clearly a traumatic memory—he returns to it several times—but it is also a dramatized moment of self-awareness in which the narrator realizes that his queer subjectivity will invariably oscillate between stage fright and the safety of theatrical distance. Though the line is addressed to another character on stage, it comes across both as a fourth-wall-breaking provocation to the audience—an invitation for the other boys to do their worst—and a self-questioning, transposed into the second person; or, as Tom glosses it, "a real moment [. . .] taking place in somebody's actual life in the guise of a performance about people searching for real moments in their actual lives" (96). It is an episode he will still be analyzing years later:

> I'm thinking, *There's my gay body.* It's my first postmodern moment. My classmates aren't just hectoring me, they're turning me post-structuralist, theoretical—French! I'm a "body" caught in a "contact zone," the "site" where seven hundred fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds discover their power. [. . .] I'm thinking, *Aren't they tacky?* Instead of fighting back, I'm critiquing them. Maybe that's what gay means: "Critic." My body is a text. I read it in the aqueous light of public display. (97)

Tom is not claiming to have had a teenage epiphany about the semiotics of embodiment here. Rather, he is applying to a primary "site" of trauma the theoretical frameworks

he has since learnt and taught. How is this experience, as remembered, postmodern? Or, to put it another way, how might the memory itself be so? Weir appears to conflate several versions of the postmodern here, several *idées reçues* about what a "postmodern moment" might constitute, but whether or not these can be adequately or accurately ascribed to the "postmodern" may be a moot point. The term here acts as a kind of shorthand for various theoretical commonplaces: body-as-text; subjectivity constituted through ideological interpellation; and a quasi-Foucauldian or quasi-Kristevan sense of identity formation, in which the self-identification of the homophobic audience depends upon the abjection of the boy on stage and the reassertion of binary or hierarchical power relations. It also plays with another textbook postmodern trademark: virtuality. There is nothing but representation here. Tom is a player, "wearing greasepaint and powder, eye shadow, eyeliner, lip liner, and rouge, straining and hot under the stage lights" (97). His "gay body" is a production, a projection, both subject and object. He is also an audience of one, watching the spectators watching him, caught in a web of relational performances with no original referent.

What happens next in the text might help the reader reinterpret its apparently postmodern positions or poses. Tom recounts,

> I watch my gay body float.
> But it isn't my body. I mean, it isn't *only* my body, it's also Zack's body, exposed and naked in the bathroom light, skimming the surface of the bathwater like a spindly-legged water bug, eighteen years from now, two weeks from death. (97)

Zack is Tom's best friend, dead from an AIDS-related illness, who interjects at many points in the present-day narrative. Tom's train of thought, then, connects an apparently bodiless body—his own, distanced and numbed—to the wasting frame of the person with AIDS (PWA). The "gay body" exposed to harm is, twenty years on, the HIV-positive body, lesioned and skeletal. Furthermore, it seems to belong to *both* Tom and Zack ("it isn't my body [...] it isn't *only* my body"); one body is literally incorporated into the other. The moment of union is brief, though. Tom "figured we would die together, that I could roll him up next to my heart and he would leave his body and stay with me, stay *as* me," but he is wrong: "Inside/outside: It's hard to maintain the conceit of merging with someone you love when his head is a fright-movie prop." Zack opens his mouth, but it is Tom who wants to "scream" (98). Tom both desires to be Zack and recoils from him. The reader might wonder whether the earlier memory of the "postmodern" body is a survival strategy, an attempt to deliberately keep the body unreal, for to acknowledge the materiality of head, hand, and leg is to stare death in the face.

This passage of *What I Did Wrong* is characteristic of John Weir's fiction. It gamely adopts postmodern poses only to then caution itself against turning them into reflexes. What Fredric Jameson famously termed the "waning of affect" suddenly waxes.[2] This is not just a feature of *What I Did Wrong;* it also marks Weir's only other published novel to date, the more archetypally postmodern *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket* (1989). But where *Eddie Socket* makes virtues of postmodern archness—as an antidote to the tragic mode, or as a way of limiting potential sentimentality—*What I Did Wrong* finds that archness wanting even as it finds itself defaulting to it. The seventeen years separating the two novels are key to understanding this shift. During that time, the postmodern arguably went from being the condition of the age to yesterday's news. "Let's just say: it's over," wrote Linda Hutcheon in 2002, noting that "the postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on [. . .] in our contemporary twenty-first-century world."[3] *What I Did Wrong,* from its apparently confessional title on, seems less invested in those "discursive strategies" *as* strategies, and rather more concerned with how they endure by force of habit or flash upon the mind in the rush of memory.

But there was another, more material historical shift between the publication of Weir's first and second novels: the passing of the American AIDS epidemic as a crisis, and the transition of HIV from critical diagnosis to chronic condition, with the advent in the mid-1990s of antiretroviral therapy. As the number of AIDS deaths in the USA fell sharply during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the generation of writers at the frontline of the AIDS crisis no longer had "irreversible declines" to chronicle; instead, they had, and continue to have, the space and time to work through what Ann Cvetkovich calls the "archive of feelings."[4]

Given the "affective turn" in literary theory in the 2000s, and the advent of what some critics have termed the "New Sincerity" in post-postmodern American fiction, the reader might wonder whether *What I Did Wrong* is pervaded by this ethos or zeitgeist. Indeed, the morphing of Tom's historicized "postmodern" body into that of his dead friend Zack might tempt the reader into thinking that the novel illustrates this shift almost diagrammatically, distancing itself from the postmodern just as the postmodern had previously acted to displace, distort, or decenter what preceded it. However, as Iain Williams has argued, the "New Sincerity" is in danger of seeming "retrograde," "predicated on recovering 'lost' ethical virtues in the wake of postmodernism"; it is often "conceived of as either a reactionary turn to or nostalgia for a 'pre-ironic' sincerity, or a 'post-postmodern' hybrid or synthesis of irony and sincerity."[5] As I will argue, *What I Did Wrong* neither expresses a longing for the "pre-ironic," nor synthesizes "irony and

sincerity," so much as it seeks to plot two historical continuities, and in some ways yoke them together: one between the postmodern and what follows it, and the other between the AIDS epidemic as an acute crisis within the gay community and the post-traumatic experience of it since 1996.

Weir's experience of ACT UP might be illuminating here. In a 2010 interview with Sarah Schulman for the ACT UP Oral History Project, Weir recounts his days as an activist, from around 1988 to 1992. Having worked for GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis) as a buddy in the mid-1980s, Weir's involvement with ACT UP stemmed from his friendship with the writer David Feinberg. On initially meeting Feinberg, Weir had thought, "I'm going to keep this guy alive"; attending ACT UP meetings "was kind of to keep track of David."[6] Despite being committed to the group's principles, and even at one point being arrested for civil disobedience, Weir did not follow Feinberg in writing about it: "He wrote tons of stuff specifically about ACT UP and what it was like to be involved in it. And I wasn't really doing that" (28). As I will touch upon later, Feinberg's writing about AIDS—in particular the novels *Eighty-Sixed* (1988) and *Spontaneous Combustion* (1991), and the nonfiction collection *Queer and Loathing* (1994)—is often recognizably postmodern in its hyper-referential, ironic voice, and the arch, aphoristic Zack remembered in *What I Did Wrong* is based on him. Tom seeks to mourn and memorialize Zack, and Weir, Feinberg. But by mourning Feinberg in his novel, he is not claiming that the "postmodern" AIDS crisis has been superseded. His two novels do not sit on either side of a gap. My contention is that Weir's fictional representations of the early AIDS epidemic in the USA and its aftermath—the ways in which it is remembered, memorialized, historicized—offer a way of thinking about the transition from the postmodern to whatever might follow it, and in turn that the transition from the postmodern to what lies beyond it offers a way of thinking about changing representations of HIV/AIDS in America. I do not necessarily suggest that the postmodern has passed, though people have argued for its obsolescence since at least the early 1990s.[7] Nor do I propose that postmodern modes and tropes are somehow antithetical to the representation of emotion or affect. Rather, I suggest that a reading of *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket* and *What I Did Wrong* (novels that, respectively, come from the height of the early American AIDS epidemic and the era of HAART, or highly active antiretroviral therapy) can trace the line between an earlier AIDS writing in the dominant literary mode of its time—the postmodern in its various forms—and an affective response to that earlier writing, questioning what Edmund White once called a "rupture in meaning; a haemorrhage, an outrage."[8] While earlier fiction often sought to represent that "rupture," John Weir's more recent work seeks, if not to repair it, then to understand it by re-narrating it.

1. Postmodern AIDS

When the first AIDS cases were identified in 1981, they seemed to come out of a vacuum. Complacent meliorism regarding public health was commonplace. The WHO had declared the global eradication of smallpox barely a year earlier, the latest in a long line of medical triumphs; as the poet Thom Gunn mused in an interview, his was a "charmed generation" that "grew up with antibiotics," "spared" from epidemics until "AIDS hit us."[9] In order to understand this seemingly unprecedented public health disaster, many writers and theorists sought historical analogues. HIV-positive people were read through the lens of syphilitic pariahs of the late nineteenth century, the epidemic through the great plagues of medieval Europe, and the loss of countless young artists through the typology of the tubercular Romantic genius.[10] The fact remained, however, that this was a crisis with few, if any, parallels. AIDS rewrote medical, sociological and educational discourses as quickly as it claimed lives; from "safe sex" to a new versatility in the use of the word "epidemic," the crisis had a lasting effect on English usage.[11] Rather than being absorbed by precedent plagues, AIDS wrote itself into language and culture. It was thus read overwhelmingly as a symptom of the contemporary, a problem that seemed uniquely of its time—and its time was overwhelmingly that of the postmodern.[12]

While the fund of postmodernisms and postmodernities is almost inexhaustible, few of them were not co-opted into analyzing HIV / AIDS during the early years of the epidemic. Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome is, as the word "syndrome" indicates, not a disease but a condition that lays the body open to a host of opportunistic infections. It is not exactly clear when AIDS is diagnosed in an HIV-positive person; through the first two decades, the term "AIDS-related complex" covered those infections and diseases that did not qualify for what was known colloquially as "full-blown AIDS." These problems of medical definition are not exclusive to HIV or AIDS; terms change and diagnoses are revised as virologists or immunologists refine their knowledge. But in the 1980s and 1990s, the slipperiness of the condition, and the debate about whether it *was* a condition, led to HIV being read through vogueish theories of "virtuality." This was not to deny the materiality of HIV / AIDS, but rather to note that its painful physical realities were attended by interpretative gaps. After all, early blood tests detected only the *antibodies* to HIV; the virus was defined by what countered it. AIDS, then, was understandably a ready-made exemplar of postmodern proxies and simulacra. In *The Transparency of Evil* (1993), Jean Baudrillard writes of the "virtual and viral go[ing] hand in hand."[13] Postmodern sick-nesses—among which he includes terrorism, cancer, and warfare, as well as AIDS—have their "virulence" relayed by a media that allows "bodies and minds" to be "irradiated by

signals and images": AIDS for him was a typical malady of the information age.[14] While it may seem that such interpretations veer dangerously close to disembodying HIV, it is undeniable that the retrovirus, overwriting the DNA of human cells with its own genetic "information" via "reverse transcriptase," was (and is) figured even in the apparently neutral terms of biomedicine as a kind of metalanguage—William Burroughs's "the word is a virus" transcribed, reversed, and looped back in on itself.[15] The constant replication (a postmodern keyword if ever there was one) of alien genetic "information" within the blood of the host also seemed eerily aligned to the febrile media discourse surrounding AIDS in the early years of the epidemic, notably described by Paula A. Treichler as the "epidemic of signification."[16] Discourse and disease were one: perhaps the ultimate example of what Michel Foucault described as the "fundamental isomorphism of the structure of the disease and of the verbal form that circumscribes it."[17]

AIDS's postmodernity was also diagnosed through analogies to, and alignments with, the politics of the later stages of the Cold War, isolated early on by theorists of the postmodern as its key geopolitical context.[18] On the most literal level, HIV played its part in the mutual paranoia of the superpowers. The USSR denied that AIDS had much, if anything, to do with the Soviet Union; it was dismissed as an American problem, either a retribution paid for the vices of market capitalism, or (as some Russian publications speculated) a biological weapon deliberately created in U.S. research laboratories.[19] Such blame games were nothing new, of course; syphilis had been the "French pox" to the British and the "British disease" to Tahitians. But beyond such conspiracy theories, plenty of AIDS writing, conscious of the complex and misleading ontology of the condition, drew parallels with this virtual conflict that had neither been officially declared nor decisively ended; to this political zeitgeist that denoted a multitude of offensives, a litany of sometimes only tenuously related campaigns.[20] Meanwhile, some depended upon a more specific "event" of the Cold War for a parallel to the trauma of the epidemic: the Vietnam War. It is not hard to see parallels. The chief fatalities were young men, and the enemies guerrilla fighters of almost viral stealth; both AIDS and Vietnam spawned highly charged activist campaigns. Two of the most prominent collections of AIDS essays from the first wave featured pieces that made either implicit or explicit connections between the epidemic and the most bitterly divisive military campaign in U.S. history. In Emmanuel S. Nelson's *AIDS: The Literary Response* (1992), Joseph Dewey declares AIDS to be "the first plague of the television age," echoing the common characterization of Vietnam as the first television war.[21] In Timothy Murphy and Suzanne Poirier's groundbreaking *Writing AIDS,* John M. Clum opens his essay by invoking America's military trauma: "As it was during the Vietnam War, the most important writing during the various battles being

waged in the age of AIDS is historical and political."[22] So pervasive was the perceived correspondence between Vietnam and AIDS that even the British could invoke it; in the words of the HIV-positive English journalist and novelist Oscar Moore, viruses were the "new Vietcong," and AIDS science "cell warfare along the Cold War model but fought in the jungle hot-zone of research labs."[23]

Other recognizably postmodern constructions of AIDS incorporated it into more generalized millennial fear or apocalyptic *Weltanschauung*. In *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989), Susan Sontag concluded that "the fantasies of doom that AIDS has inspired can't be explained by the calendar alone, or even by the very real danger the illness represents. There is also the need for an apocalyptic scenario that is specific to 'Western' society, and perhaps even more so to the United States."[24] Jacques Derrida concurred, calling AIDS "one of the most revealing and, what amounts to the same thing, one of the most 'apocalyptic' events facing humankind in the last decades of the twentieth century."[25] What the syndrome revealed, however, was the impossibility of revelation: it re-veils, obscures, and interferes with the progress toward knowledge. Such elusiveness might have been the most postmodern thing of all—at least until 1996, when David Ho demonstrated protease inhibitors and antiretroviral drugs to a stunned delegation at the 11th International AIDS Conference in Vancouver. Prior to these developments, AIDS had seemed an abrupt check to scientific advancement. Bewildering virologists and confounding medical progress, it was interpreted by some as being characteristic of the anti-Enlightenment turn: a syndrome of the Lyotardian age. Moreover, for many cultural theorists, the early epidemic brought under deconstructive scrutiny the hegemony of medical discourses per se, forcing scientists to assert their authority ever more forcefully in the laboratory and on the page. AIDS appears in Donna Haraway's landmark "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) as indicative of the "scary new networks" replacing old hierarchies and binaries with the "informatics of domination."[26] AIDS theorists such as Cindy Patton and Lee Edelman saw HIV not only as a deadly viral agent but as a disruption of privileged epistemologies; biomedical metanarrative was unraveling under the microscope.[27]

AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s, then, was often framed as metonymic: of late capitalism, of the semiotic turn, of the Cold War, of the incredulity toward metanarratives. But since HIV has become a manageable condition for the majority of U.S. citizens with health insurance, it has ceased to carry much symbolic weight in the American consciousness. It has become less a problem for the CDC than for NGOs and secretaries of state: it is now an epidemic predominantly identified with sub-Saharan Africa. It goes without saying that HIV/AIDS is still a huge problem in the USA, not least because the prevalence of infection tracks all too recognizable patterns of deprivation, but the early, pre-drug years

of the epidemic have since 1996 become a matter of historical record and, to some extent, revision. In the last ten years especially, there has been a steady stream of cinema and literature revisiting the crisis of AIDS's early years, from the Oscar-winning *Dallas Buyers' Club* (2014) to David France's activist history, *How to Survive a Plague* (2012). Writers who actively chronicled and confronted the epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s have recently revisited the period, seeking to make sense of the complex ways it is being historicized on the one hand and misremembered or even forgotten on the other. The work of Schulman is particularly important here. One of the most eloquent and enraged of early AIDS writers and activists, Schulman has in more recent times re-examined the epidemic's early days, keeping them in the collective cultural memory. In *The Gentrification of the Mind* (2012), she recalls driving in LA and happening upon a radio discussion of the early AIDS epidemic. Her response was almost visceral; she had to pull the car over. "This is the first time I've heard AIDS being historicized," she writes, "and there is something clean-cut about this telling, something wrong. Something. . . gentrified."[28] The experience led to her work with the ACT UP Oral History Project, and to make a film with Jim Hubbard, the ACT UP retrospective *United in Anger* (2012). Schulman thus contributes to a growing body of recently published work that seeks to recover the history of AIDS activism in America. It does not seek to recover *from* it; it does not propose a narrative in which HIV/AIDS is erased. People still live with it, and *re*live it, and any attempt to tell the story of the American epidemic in the past tense both platitudinizes (or "gentrifies," in Schulman's words) the epidemic and disrupts the ongoing work of mourning. Indeed, as many trauma theorists have noted, the construction of history itself can be a delayed response to trauma; in the words of Cathy Caruth, trauma permits "history to arise where immediate understanding may not."[29] A history of feelings might then be melancholic at base. Monica Pearl, for example, reads the Oral History Project as a melancholic response, for oral histories do not end; they can never claim to have or be the last word.[30]

Trauma, melancholy, loss: more recent queer theoretical work has revisited these states, and explored the affects that attend them. Insofar as there has been a perceivable affective turn in literary criticism and cultural theory in recent years, queer studies has been at the vanguard of that turn. Taking their cue from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* and Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings* (both 2003), scholars over the last decade or so have begun to explore the ways in which ACT UP and other AIDS activist organizations fused postmodern-inflected theory with affective responses to the crisis.[31] In "Public Feelings," Cvetkovich notes that most "queer" scholarship has never separated theory from emotion, but instead has recognized "affect and desire as the motive for intellectual projects." Citing Carolyn Dinshaw's work on medieval queerness, Cvet-

kovich writes that "historical enquiry can be motivated by an affective relation between past and present rather than a causal one"—not so much a characteristically postmodern rejection of teleology as a post-Deleuzean favoring of rhizomes over roots.[32] Such understandings of the place of early AIDS activism and writing in queer history stress the synchronic over the diachronic. The early epidemic is ever present; it is not a forgotten history, even if AIDS in the present day is, as Penelope Ironstone-Catterall puts it, "assumed *to be over,* to be over and done, a remnant of history, or to be differently over, *over there,* away, a problem for ever distant others."[33] This synchronic, affective coexistence of past and present, the embeddedness of recent history within the current moment, might be read through trauma, or through the post-postmodern, or through Deleuzean anti-genealogies, but however it is theorized, it is noticeably prominent in much post-1996 American AIDS writing. Andrew Holleran's most recent book, for example, is entitled *Chronicle of a Plague, Revisited* (2008). In the 1980s, Holleran was responsible for some of the most eloquent writing on the epidemic, and his pieces for *Christopher Street* were collected as *Ground Zero* (1988), so-called because "it felt as if AIDS had exploded in New York like a bomb among gay men and left a crater in our lives."[34] In his introduction, he muses that "New York in 1983 now seem[s] as exotic as ancient Egypt," but his friends insisted that a new book was necessary to ensure that "this part of gay history was not forgotten."[35] That Holleran went further than merely republishing *Ground Zero* offers a way through that complex "aftermath"; the reader does not proceed through the original essays to this "aftermath," but instead begins with it, so reconstructing the epidemic alongside the writer. That conjunctive "and" in the subtitle denotes simultaneity, not causality. Just as the title of David France's film, *How to Survive a Plague,* suggests in its tense something ongoing, using past example as a guide to present and future activism, so too does Holleran's collection operate within past and present simultaneously; after all, that word "revisit" suggests the spectral threshold between the living and the dead, the visitants that haunt the pages.

It is within this context that I would like to place John Weir's *What I Did Wrong,* by reading it alongside its own ghost-text, Weir's only other published novel, *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket.* Eddie Socket does not live, but *Eddie Socket* does, visiting the pages of the later novel. To return to the passage of *What I Did Wrong* that I analyzed in the opening section, Tom's "postmodern body" morphs into Zack's: the pained, deteriorating body of the PWA. For Weir, the "postmodern" is shorthand for a kind of protective distancing, a set of strategies that keep feeling at bay. But if we read *Eddie Socket* and *What I Did Wrong* together, those strategies ultimately give way. *What I Did Wrong* abounds with affective connections to its predecessor that incorporate its apparently

"postmodern" positions within an ongoing history of the early American epidemic and its aftereffects; these positions must be incorporated and recuperated in order to resist the "gentrification" and "forgetting" that so concern Schulman, Holleran, and others.

2. Tragedy Reframed

First published in 1989, *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket* was one of the most important early AIDS novels, in that it both appeared to consolidate and complicate a generic pattern. The eponymous character is a New Jersey hopeful who, having been lured by New York, finds himself still living in an Eleventh Street walk-up fourth-floor apartment with his college roommate, Polly Plugg, seven years after graduation. They talk about art, literature and film, about their dreams and disappointments; but in the main, they discuss men. Eddie's current job is in data input; he is employed by Saul, who introduces him to his own long-term boyfriend, the self-possessed and slightly elusive Merrit Mather. Eddie has a very brief fling with Merrit—his first for two years—but is ultimately rejected. He then discovers that he has AIDS, and that he had contracted HIV unknowingly years before; the last section of the novel charts his decline, moving (as does the rest of the novel) between an unsentimental third-person account and the more emotional and questioning first-person narration of Saul.

As Steven F. Kruger notes in one of the few thoroughgoing pieces of literary criticism published on the novel, Weir appears to be tracing a familiar trajectory here, one established by Paul Reed in the earliest recognizable AIDS novel, *Facing It* (1984), and followed by much subsequent fiction: slow disintegration and inevitable death. But Kruger also rightly notes that *Eddie Socket* does not present this trajectory smoothly or predictably.[36] The first part of the novel ends with Eddie having sex with Merrit on vacation; the second part begins with the baldest of diagnoses: "Eddie Socket got it. AIDS."[37] A reader might presume causality here, but Weir does not allow for such neat logic. Nor does he trace any sexual history—the route of infection is never known, and Eddie himself does not speculate. The novel does not even end with Eddie's death, instead dealing with the complex reactions of those he has left behind: Eddie's mother, Polly, Saul, Merrit. It is rather like the finale of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, in which the Don's chilling defiance of the ghost of the Commendatore and subsequent descent into hell is immediately followed by a chorus of characters cheerfully contemplating their futures in bright major-key harmonies: the tragic mode delivered from itself at the eleventh hour.

This is *Eddie Socket*'s gamble: to use humor in many forms—irony, pastiche, puns, the camp aperçu—to write itself out of an easily identifiable narrative trajectory, even as

it appears to be cleaving to it. Although Edmund White, for example, cautioned against comedy in the age of AIDS,[38] some writers disagreed. In the Schulman interview, Weir recalls that he didn't think "treating it like a, like being funny about it was the wrong thing to do with it,"[39] and David Feinberg argued that comedy is a necessary good in calamitous times.[40] Feinberg regarded *Eddie Socket* as a successful example of this gallows humor; it could be said that *Socket* contributed to Feinberg's own ironic postmodern voice. Feinberg's postmodernism is part high theory, part late-capitalist, pop-culture surface: he quotes Barthes—"What I claim is to live to the full the contradiction of my time, which may well make sarcasm the condition of truth"[41]–then later, in an almost perfect demonstration of that "condition," asks "Has Madonna done enough for the AIDS crisis?"[42] Feinberg signs off his AIDS memoir, *Queer and Loathing,* with an ironic, densely allusive, po-mo wink:

> So this is the end, for now, of my *Trilogy of Terror.* Thank you for indulging me in my personal *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Diseased Jew Fag Pariah.* Thank you for listening to *The Absolutely True Confessions of a Guilty AIDS Victim.* This *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* has been brought to you by many corporate sponsors, including Burroughs Wellcome, Hoffmann-La Roche, Hemasuction, LifeStyle Urns™, and the Chubb Medical Group. Special thanks go to Senator Jesse Helms, John Cardinal O'Connor, former Representative William Dannemeyer, and the religious Right for their efforts in prolonging the epidemic. This concludes our presentation of *Chronicles of a Death Foretold.* Good-bye, and good luck.[43]

The style here is recognizably camp, in many of the senses identified by Susan Sontag: Feinberg absolutely "converts the frivolous into the serious."[44] It is also a satire of product placement in postmodernism, a cultural context in which everything comes with a commercial price tag and tie-in. Daniel Harris has written provocatively of the "kitschification" of AIDS during the 1990s—the red ribbon as celebrity accessory, the "marketing of compassion" that "sustains a number of flourishing cottage industries"[45]—and Feinberg's cable-TV punch line pokes fun at this apparently booming market. But Harris reads John Weir's similar tendency toward referential lists, along with the irony to which *Eddie Socket* so frequently defaults, as expressing a "phobia of kitsch," rather than deploying humor for defensive or reparative ends. While he concedes that Weir's novel is "compulsively jocular," it is still "flippant," "inoculated against [AIDS]," and Eddie's "theatrical attitudes" are read as diversionary tactics.[46]

I would suggest that the novel's postmodern poses are so overstated as to be not just self-conscious, but self-critiquing. From early on, the reader learns that the name on Eddie's birth certificate is Waldo Jeffers. He has taken the name Eddie Socket in hom-

age to his roommate Polly Plugg. The Plugg-Socket gag is almost cartoonish—indeed, Polly is "sometimes pixilated like a cartoon character"[47]—or else it initially encourages the reader to expect an allegory of some sort. It has sexual associations, though these amount to little once we learn that Eddie has not been with a man for two years. His mother tuts ruefully at his adopted name: "What does Eddie Socket make you think of? General Electric." "That's the point," says Eddie.[48] He welcomes being a commodity, and revels in his superficiality; he is a billboard, not a book. As such, he lives "in quotes," as he frequently puts it.[49] He is a postmodern cliché: nothing comes without inverted commas. He asks Polly whether her wardrobe is "entirely in quotes"; she replies that it is "entirely on credit" and "thoroughly in earnest." Everything is virtual, from the clothes they wear to the money that pays for them; ironic detachment is both habit and habitus.

Eddie's catchphrase, "Who am I quoting?" is the novel's refrain, a rhetorical question that follows every witticism or allusion he makes, deliberate or accidental. His first line in the novel, "I want a hero," both expresses a desire for a model of behavior he never finds, and goads the reader into questioning Eddie's own status in the novel that bears his name. If we know that he is citing the first line of Byron's *Don Juan,* it becomes all the more ironic: mock epic, in fact. "Who am I quoting" is at the same time a note to self, a question directed at the characters around him, and an in-joke from Weir to the reader. Eddie first meets Merrit Mather when Saul introduces him in a cinema lobby. Merrit and Saul have just come from the funeral of their friend Horatio, and are still carrying his ashes around with them. Merrit remarks "I guess [. . .] nothing's quite what it seems tonight"; Eddie immediately answers, "Seems, I know not seems [. . .] Who am I quoting?"[50] An astute reader might recognize this snippet of *Hamlet,* but Merrit does not pick up on it, and it is not even certain that Eddie realizes what he is quoting. Nevertheless, here is the dead Horatio overhearing a line of the great tragedy, quoted unwittingly by an antihero who is not Prince Hamlet, nor is meant to be. The sublime and ridiculous are in close proximity, and this is the kind of bathos we might associate with the tragicomic, or else with satire, or else with camp. Such generic playfulness might also be considered postmodern. While literary allusion might gesture toward the depths, here it operates on the surface, or rather *as* a surface. Eddie is a repository of lines, but none of them signify anything outside of the moment of quotation. They do not reach backward or project forward to create any linear or sequential logic; they exemplify intertextuality rather than influence.

The *Hamlet* reference is only one such example. Weir names all of his chapters after other texts, quotations, or works of art.[51] The very first is dubbed "La Bohème," from which the reader might plot a vague equivalence between the tragic *verismo* of Puccini's

blockbuster and the already expected "irreversible decline" of *Eddie Socket*'s own penniless Village artists.[52] It is, of course, an arch gesture. Tragedy is set up from the beginning, in both the novel's title and that of its first chapter. But here, Puccini's *fin de siècle* fatalism can only be accessed secondhand; the novel's tragic moves are simulacra, "in quotes," history repeating second time around as farce. Saul voices this later in the novel, musing that AIDS cannot be tragic in the theatrical sense because "it doesn't play for all these twenty-eight-year-olds to die. They have to learn about their lives, they have to have catharsis." He goes on to think, "I guess that makes this comedy. Or maybe a tragedy reframed?"[53] "Reframed" by scare quotes, the tragic is perhaps a pose adopted by the characters, but the novel itself is also tragedy "reframed"; in playing with overstatement, and in writing to a title that indicates a genre the novel can only mime, Weir seems to suggest that representing AIDS requires a negotiation of the space between postmodern irony and tragic sincerity.

> *Eddie Socket,* then, is a text that often itches to escape its own distancing devices; those chapter titles come *without* quotation marks, after all. Early on, Eddie is described as being "trapped between an overwhelming sense of entitlement and the paralyzing suspicion that his actions, whatever they were, wouldn't reverberate" (2). But after his diagnosis, he is particularly aware that his obsessive name-checking and quoting disengages him from others, and, ultimately, from himself. Initially, he is ready for his "Oscar acceptance speech" but not for dealing with the emotional fallout of his diagnosis.[54] But when Eddie then strolls to the Williamsburg Bridge to gaze at Manhattan and think on the words of one of his idols, F. Scott Fitzgerald, he has a kind of half-epiphany:

> He stared at Manhattan, and the whole priapic length of the island glinted back at him and Eddie thought, *That's it, that's the one, the dick.* He gave head to New York, he thought, and it had given him AIDS. And if that was an irrelevant thought, well, then, the hell with it, he couldn't do any better. "New York made me," he said, "AIDS undid me. Who am I quoting?" He turned to Queens, and watched the Domino Sugar sign. He said, "I thirst. Who am I quoting?" He stared at the sign, which was red and white and blue and blinked an indifferent response.[55]

Eddie has been infected by the virus of postmodern culture, consumed by consumerism. The Domino Sugar refinery sign is a chilling update of Dr T.J. Eckleburg in *The Great Gatsby*, "blink[ing]" like the disembodied eyes that watch over the Valley of Ashes. It is red, white and blue—emblematic of the American establishment, and perhaps of the "indifferen[ce]" of the government to AIDS. But this is not just an empty *cri de coeur* hurled over the East River; it is also a frustrated appeal for salvation. "I thirst" echoes

Christ's words on the cross, as narrated in John 19:28. While Christ is given a cup of vinegar, Eddie is not obliged. There is no God to hear him, only godless neon. As with his Shakespearean rag, it seems that Eddie has no real sense of the provenance of his allusion here. Two repetitions of "who am I quoting?"[56] in quick succession seem to ask another question: "Who am I?" Where earlier Eddie had resorted to Walt Whitman for reassurance—"I am large, I contain multitudes"[57]—here he feels diminished, not only by his HIV status but also by his inability to have an authentic experience. Weir writes that "he had always thought of himself as being in touch, but now he saw that he had buried all his feelings underneath a glossy sheen of easy alienation." After his diagnosis, he knowingly cites Susan Sontag, wondering whether "death was going to be in quotes, too."[58] He ends up realizing, paradoxically, that if death *is* ironized in this way, then he wants to die, "to feel something that mattered." His potential death becomes a release from inauthenticity, his first firsthand experience.

Such Romantic or transcendental longings are hinted at throughout; for every Warholish pose or television slogan, there is a wistful invocation of the Lost Generation or a wish for Yeats's cloths of heaven.[59] Weir ultimately removes the "quotes" from Eddie in the final stages of the novel. "There was no getting round his sentimentality," he writes; "Eddie Socket was a sentimentalist. He was not 'in quotes' [. . .] He had merely been embarrassed by his own romanticism."[60] The critic Reed Woodhouse, who on first read dismissed *Eddie Socket* as the "Gen-X whining" of a "ridiculous antihero,"[61] likens this return to "romanticism" to the revelatory affair between Gurov and Anna in Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog," which similarly charts the transition from "love in quotes" to "love for real."[62] It is possible to read this as a turn from irony to sincerity, but as in much of Weir's writing, the two are not oppositional; they are complementary. For example, in a piece for Mark Simpson's provocative collection *Anti-Gay,* Weir argues that taking refuge in cinema is a form of denial: "It's an appalling death. Everybody seems to be forgetting that. It isn't like a Tom Hanks movie—you don't get hugged by Antonio Banderas and gently expire while Joanne Woodward weeps for you in the corner. It takes forever, and you won't win an Oscar for putting yourself through it."[63] This mode—a kind of elegiac wisecracking that nevertheless cautions against gossipy reference-spotting—is already apparent in *Eddie Socket,* but it pervades *What I Did Wrong* consistently, becoming its dominant voice. In confronting the death of Zack—AKA David Feinberg—Weir more fully interrogates his own postmodern stylings. There is affection for the raised eyebrows of the 1980s and early 1990s, but ultimately this affection is not born of nostalgia. Rather, it comes from a need to plot a historical, affective continuity between the living and the dead. *What I Did Wrong,* then, may be post-postmodern in that it postdates the dominance

of the literary mode; but it is not "post" in the sense of *over,* for the work of mourning here is a continual process that seeks constant connection to the lost.

3. The Past is Not a Foreign Country

Tom, the narrator of *What I Did Wrong,* is a gay author and university creative writing lecturer. The novel mostly follows the rekindling of his old friendship with Richie, an athletic Irish-Italian with whom Tom engages in a kind of nostalgic high-school banter. Richie sometimes plays the wise toughie, at other times the anti-intellectual country cousin. Tom has also developed a crush on his student, Justin, a "welkin-eyed [. . .] Billy Budd" (16) who worships Radiohead, writes poetry and reads Melville obsessively. Through all of this, Tom's dead friend Zack is a constant presence, and a reminder of the recent past. Tom revisits his ACT UP days with Zack—"We were queer radicals!" he recalls (136), the exclamation mark both reminiscent of activist confrontation and indicative of a certain disbelief that those days are long gone—and aligns his friend's character with postmodern values or attitudes. Zack had "a scowling face with eyebrows so arched they put everything he said into quotes" (59); he was a believer in "surface, not substance" (27). So far, so Eddie Socket—but Zack's particular "arch[ed]ness" is squarely in the past, and the postmodern appears to be too. This is made brutally clear by Weir in a comical scene involving Richie, who attends one of Tom's faculty parties against his better judgment. Afterward, Richie recounts growing tired of all the theoretical discussion: "It's one thing to listen to their postwhatever babble. Post this, post that. 'Lemme bang your head against the wall,' I told this guy, 'and then we can finish our conversation postsurgery'" (22). He then drunkenly undoes his fly, pulls out his penis and shouts "Deconstruct this, motherfucker!" It is a joke at the expense of the academy, and of the postmodern, though not at the expense of Zack's own particular brand of postmodern political engagement; Zack and Richie actually share a disregard for received ideas, but of course by the year 2000 the postmodern might itself be seen to be an establishment position.

     What I Did Wrong's pomo-skepticism—its own arched eyebrow—is most apparent in its continuities and discontinuities with Weir's earlier novel, and in particular its differing approach to intertextuality and influence. *What I Did Wrong* shares many references with *Eddie Socket,* and sometimes even draws on the same lines of text. This auto-intertextuality is not self-plagiarism; it is a revision of *Eddie Socket,* correcting to some extent the earlier novel's reflexive referentiality. At the same time, Weir does not appear to be judging his earlier work. Rather, it is incorporated into its successor; the body of one text is contained within the other. One of the most striking examples of

this occurs at the novel's most intertextual moment. Tom is considering how he might write about Justin, and he plays a little parlor game in his head, going through a canon of queer writers one by one, speculating about how they would narrate his situation. Genet, Wilde, Stein, and Woolf get a look-in, as do more recent figures such as Edmund White and Dennis Cooper. There are also some rather neat queer inversions: "In Proust, he's a girl; in Tennessee Williams, I'm the girl; in Colette, we're both girls" (16). As he comes to the end of this daydream, Tom says out loud, "I want a hero." For just this moment, he is Eddie Socket in the bath, uttering his first line in Weir's first novel. The ghost of Zack immediately deflates Tom's idealism with an acid rejoinder: "You want to *masturbate,* is what you *want*" (16). This is undeniably funny to anyone familiar with *Eddie Socket,* for Weir seems to be accusing himself of textual self-pleasuring; not so much an anxiety as an autoerotics of influence. But it is also a poignant moment. As if calling upon the epic muse—and indeed, we know that he is invoking Byron beneath his own self-quotation—Tom summons Zack. Zack is both the "hero" he seeks and the voice of skepticism toward heroism. The memory of Zack, then, allows Tom, and Weir, to occupy both these positions: to be "postmodern" but also sincere and emotionally connected.

What I Did Wrong's synergies with other writings and writers are just as nuanced and constructive. As a writer and teacher, Tom is as liable to quote Fitzgerald, Whitman or Hemingway as Eddie Socket is. The difference is that Tom always knows his sources, and he favors influence over haphazard intertextuality; he *desires* lineage, literary or otherwise. The twenty-eight year-old Eddie has no past, and no future; his quotations are evanescent and disconnected. Tom has both, but his future depends on how he comes to terms with his grief for Zack. As such, he looks to literature for continuities, not for catchy lines appropriate for passing moments. From the very beginning of *What I Did Wrong,* other works of literature call up Zack's ghost, mediating between the living and the dead. The novel is bookended by scenes in which Tom reads *Ravelstein,* Saul Bellow's last published novel. The reader is not privy to any of his thoughts about the book—he never finishes it—but he does explain that *Ravelstein* is "about a dead guy. Everybody's got one. Mine's Zack" (3). Zack's introduction, then, is through the work of another writer memorializing someone dying from an AIDS-related illness. Bellow's work calls up the voice of Tom's lost friend; where in *Eddie Socket,* literary references do little more than foster an ambience, or spark surface connections, in *What I Did Wrong,* they both create and respond to the internal moods of the narrator. For example, in the earlier novel, Eddie decides he wants to be buried in Woodlawn Cemetery next to Herman Melville. He is drawn to the story of Melville's love for Nathaniel Hawthorne, and in an extrapolation of queer readings, imagines Hawthorne's rejection leading not only to the composition of

Moby-Dick but also to some disease or other: AIDS, but not AIDS. In *What I Did Wrong,* Tom visits Woodlawn Cemetery with his student, Justin, a Melville devotee. Justin finds the grave, muttering "Yo, Herman" with apparently little irony (75). The moment is strangely therapeutic for Tom. He notices that Justin has a tattoo on his back of a shark cresting a wave; not the great white whale, but a titan of the ocean nevertheless. He imagines hitching a ride on the shark, but it is not a sexual image so much as one that leads him straight back to Zack, and just as he protests to the reader his "foolish[ness]" in thinking he can actually *be* Zack, he concludes all the same that "he wouldn't let me go. He held me at arm's length, never closer than that, but never any further" (177). Justin, meanwhile, has been inspired. Soon after he pays his respects to Melville, he pens a poem, "Ahab's Other Leg," whose closing lines have a profound effect on Tom:

> *This is the song of things that don't come back*
> *because they never went away, the poem of the act*
> *of the uneaten leg. Stand on it. See*
> *how it holds you up.* (238)

The lines of influence here run from Melville through Tom to Justin, and from Justin to Tom, and both of these lines invoke Zack. One limb morphs into another, as the "arm's length" becomes the leg to "stand on." Zack is thus both a literal in*fluence,* flowing into Tom and in turn redirecting the flow of Tom's own feelings, and a body incorporated (and thus re-embodied) within Tom's.

In *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity,* Monica Pearl has argued that for many gay men in the years following the height of the early epidemic in the USA, mourning, in the Freudian sense, has not been possible. The rate of loss was so high, and the losses so deep and far-reaching, that there was no time to take stock during the 1980s and 1990s. She proposes that melancholia has been the pervasive condition of post-1996 queer experience; that it has, in fact, become normalized. Loss is "always already happening" and it is not easy, or even possible, for those who have gone through multiple, frequent griefs to incorporate the lost object(s) into the ego.[64] *What I Did Wrong,* however, is a work of supreme mourning, for Zack *is* incorporated into Tom. He speaks to him, and *through* him. Where Eddie Socket only has his "pig"—a conscience that pops up like a stage devil in a morality play to advise or tempt him—Tom has no need of such genies, for the specter of Zack is not an invention but a continuation. *What I Did Wrong* is big enough to enfold *Eddie Socket;* in mourning his previous novel, and setting up affective connections to it—limbs and branches reaching back—Tom finds a way to mourn Zack, Weir finds a

way to mourn Feinberg, and (perhaps most important of all), Weir finds a way to write about the history of the early AIDS epidemic without historicizing it.

"The past is not a foreign country," says Tom, drawing on the famous opening line of L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, a novel that warns against the seductions of nostalgia (203). In recounting that past, Weir realizes that

> Zack died anyway, and I changed my mind, because it turned out nothing kept him alive: not our strident "identity politics," not all our talk in the late eighties and early nineties of "queer empowerment," which we inherited from the "gay liberation movement" of the 1970s. Those quotes are not self-conscious but cozy. Irony is conservative, after all. It's a way of preserving the past, storing your innocence in a display case long after you realize that the hope itself might have been the inciting crisis in your string of irretrievable losses. (46)

Many thinkers and theorists have suggested that the particular ironies or ironic strategies that attended the postmodern have become markers of a period sensibility, and no longer apply in the twenty-first century; they have given way to the New Sincerity, or were buried in the rubble of the World Trade Center; they have been superseded by renewed sociological and cultural-critical interest in affect and trauma, or been proved inadequate to the task of interpreting the new world order.[65] AIDS, of course, continues; we ignore or forget it at our peril. But it does seem that more recent recollections of the early epidemic have begun to question the readiness with which so many constructed it as a "postmodern" crisis. Some of this can be explained by the pervasiveness of postmodernism during the early years of the epidemic—a question of contemporaneity. More intriguing, though, is the way in which a comparison of AIDS writing from the early years of the epidemic with post-antiretroviral texts might reveal the transition from one dominant textual or representative mode to another.

This in turn might help us to re-examine early AIDS writing, not in order to historicize it, but to incorporate it within an ongoing understanding of how representations of this human catastrophe might indicate or even exemplify a shift in cultural values. In the Sarah Schulman interview, Weir expresses dismay that the students he teaches know nothing about AIDS, that "it's evaporated from the U.S. national dialogue, altogether. It's like a theme park you can go visit, maybe, if you want to. And that's so enraging."[66] That way Baudrillard lies: history as hyperreality. It is better, perhaps, to historicize the hyperreal, to resist erecting a *cordon sanitaire* around the early AIDS epidemic, to refrain from placing it behind museum glass. Better, perhaps, to stand with Tom in the rain at

the end of *What I Did Wrong,* summoning a revenant James Joyce, recognizing the present moment as continuous with and comprised of its many histories: "the skyline of Manhattan. The missing and the dead."

Notes

1. John Weir, *What I Did Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 95. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
2. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92.
3. Linda Hutcheon, "Epilogue," in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2005), 166, 181.
4. See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
5. Iain Williams, "(New) Sincerity in David Foster Wallace's 'Octet,'" *Critique* 56, no. 3 (2015): 301, fn.5.
6. John Weir, interview by Sarah Schulman, June 24, 2010, http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/ images/weir,pdf, 18.
7. See, for example, Heide Ziegler, ed., *The End of Postmodernism: New Directions* (Stuttgart: M & P Verlag, 1993); Hal Foster, "Postmodernism in Parallax," *October* 63 (Winter 1993): 7.
8. Edmund White, interview by Richard Canning, in *Gay Fiction Speaks: Conversations with Gay Novelists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 106.
9. Christopher Hennessy, *Outside the Lines: Talking with Contemporary Poets* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 13.
10. The most comprehensive comparisons between AIDS and its forebears remain Sander L. Gilman's: see Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) and *Sexuality—An Illustrated History* (New York: John Wiley, 1989). AIDS-as-plague produced a voluminous debate over the social, religious and political consequences of the epidemic: see especially Arien Mack, ed., *In Time of Plague: The History and Social Consequences of Lethal Epidemic Disease* (New York: New York University Press, 1991) and Barbara Fass Leavy, *To Blight with Plague: Studies in a Literary Theme* (New York: New York University Press, 1992). For discussions of AIDS as a disease with a curious propensity for killing artists, see especially Thomas Avena, ed., *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994); Susan Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York: Allen Lane, 1989); Andrea R. Vaucher, ed., *Muses from Chaos and Ash: AIDS, Artists and Art* (New York: Grove Press, 1993); Edmund White, ed., *Loss Within Loss: Artists in the Age of AIDS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).
11. See Linda Singer, *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory and Politics in the Age of Epidemic* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 29, for examples of the epidemic of "epidemics" that claimed headlines in the wake of AIDS, including "epidemics" of child abuse, pornography and teenage pregnancy.

12. See Mirko D. Grmek, *History of AIDS: Emergence and Origin of a Modern Pandemic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), ix.

13. Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil,* trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), 63.

14. Ibid., 36.

15. William Burroughs, "Ten Years and a Billion Dollars," in *The Adding Machine: Collected Essays* (London: John Calder, 1985), 48–52.

16. Paula A. Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 31–70.

17. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception,* trans. A.M. Sheridan (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003), 116.

18. See, for example, Dick Hebdige, "Postmodernism and 'The Other Side,'" *Journal of Communication Enquiry* 10, no.2 (Summer 1986): 78.

19. For evidence of the USSR's claims about AIDS as biological conspiracy, see Grmek, *History of AIDS,* 149. For a discussion of Russian theories that read AIDS as a reflection of late capitalism, see Dorothy Nelkin and Sander L. Gilman, "Placing Blame for Devastating Diseases," in *In Time of Plague: The History and Social Consequences of Lethal Epidemic Disease* (New York: New York University Press, 1991)*,* 39–56.

20. See Jacqueline Foertsch, *Enemies Within: The Cold War and the AIDS Crisis in Literature, Film and Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 9. See also Shaun O'Connell, "The Big One: Literature Discovers AIDS," *New England Journal of Public Policy: Special Issue on AIDS* (Winter / Spring 1988): 488.

21. Joseph Dewey, "Music for a Closing: Responses to AIDS in Three American Novels," in *AIDS: The Literary Response,* ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (New York: Twayne, 1992), 24.

22. John M. Clum, "'And Once I Had It All': AIDS Narratives and Memories of an American Dream," in *Writing AIDS,* ed. Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 200.

23. Oscar Moore, *PWA: Looking AIDS in the Face* (London: Picador, 1996), 88. For a comprehensive book-length study of Vietnam and AIDS, see Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 16.

24. Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors*, 86. See also Richard Dellamora, *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Thomas L. Long, *AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005); and Steven F. Kruger, *AIDS Narratives: Gender and Sexuality, Fiction and Science* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 76

25. Jacques Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs: An Interview," trans. Michael Israel, *Differences* 5, no.1 (1993): 5–6.

26. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Rout-

ledge, 1991), 159. Cf. Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse," *Differences* 1 (Winter 1989): 3–43.

27. Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Lee Edelman, "The Plague of Discourse: Politics, Literary Theory and AIDS," in *Displacing Homophobia,* ed. Ronald R. Butters et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 290. See also Julia Epstein, *Altered Conditions: Disease, Medicine and Storytelling* (New York: Routledge, 1995); John H. Gagnon, "Epidemics and Researchers: AIDS and the Practice of Social Studies," in *The Time of AIDS: Social Analysis, Theory and Method,* ed. Gilbert Herdt and Shirley Lindenbaum (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 27–40; Eric Savoy, "Reading at Risk: The Mortification of AIDS," *Minnesota Review* (Spring/Summer 1993): 65–83.

28. Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 2.

29. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

30. Monica B. Pearl, *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity: The Literature of Loss* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 143–64.

31. See Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

32. Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 463. See also Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). For a useful introduction to the Deleuzean spirit that animates much recent queer scholarship, see Michael O'Rourke and Noreen Giffney, Preface to David V. Ruffolo, *Post-Queer Politics* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), ix–xii.

33. Penelope Ironstone-Catterall, "Between Affective Histories and Public Rhetorics: AIDS, Activism and the Problem of Address," *Canadian Online Journal of Queer Studies in Education* 2, no. 1 (2006), http://jqstudies.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/jqstudies/article/view/3282/1412

34. Andrew Holleran, *Chronicle of a Plague, Revisited: AIDS and its Aftermath* (New York: Da Capo, 2008), 1.

35. Ibid., 2.

36. Kruger, *AIDS Narratives,* 163–204.

37. Weir, *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket* (New York: Insight Out, 2001), 99.

38. White, "Esthetics and Loss," reprinted in *The Burning Library: Essays,* ed. David Bergman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 216.

39. Weir, Schulman interview, 14.

40. David B. Feinberg, "AIDS and Humor," in *Queer and Loathing: Rants and Raves of a Raging AIDS Clone* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 85. He cites Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* as an important precedent here, and alongside Weir's novel mentions Paul Monette's *Afterlife* and Peter McGehee's *Boys Like Us,* amongst others.

41. Ibid., 87.

42. Feinberg, *Queer and Loathing*, 173.

43. Ibid., 275.

44. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 2001), 276.

45. Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: Ballantine, 1997), 220: see especially the chapter titled "The Kitschification of AIDS," 219–238.

46. Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, 23.

47. Weir, *Eddie Socket*, 7.

48. Ibid., 70.

49. Ibid., 8.

50. Ibid., 19.

51. Some examples include "The Company She Keeps," "Tea and Sympathy," and "On the Waterfront."

52. Jonathan Larson went on to create a contemporary version of *La Bohème* dealing with the AIDS epidemic, the musical *Rent,* which premiered in 1996.

53. Weir, *Eddie Socket*, 199.

54. Ibid., 100.

55. Ibid., 106.

56. Ibid., 106.

57. Ibid., 32.

58. Ibid., 106.

59. The penultimate chapter is indeed called "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven." The final chapter, in tribute to Elizabeth Bishop, is called "The Art of Losing."

60. Weir, *Eddie Socket,* 217.

61. Reed Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace: A Canon of Gay Fiction, 1945–1995* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 206.

62. Ibid., 210.

63. Weir, "Is There Life After Sex?," in *Anti-Gay,* ed. Mark Simpson (London: Freedom, 1996), 25. The movie to which he is referring here is *Philadelphia* (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1993).

64. Pearl, *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity*, 17.

65. See, for example, Julian Baggini, "Death of an Idea," *Prospect* (September 2002), 10; Stanley Fish, "Can Postmodernists Condemn Terrorism? Don't Blame Relativism," *The Responsive Community* (Summer 2002): 27–31; Fish, "Postmodern Warfare: The Ignorance of our Warrior Intellectuals," *Harper's Magazine* (July 2002): 33–40; Julia Keller, "After the Attack, Postmodernism Loses Its Glib Grip," *Chicago Tribune,* September 27, 2001.

66. Weir, Schulman interview, 45.