Abjection and Compassion: Affective Corporeality in Patrick White's Fiction

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Summary

This article argues that the seemingly disparate affective and corporeal sensations of abjection and compassion significantly inform the fiction of Australian modernist, Patrick White. Focusing in particular on White's early novel *The Living and the Dead* ([1941]1977), a work often sidelined in critical discussions of his writing, it maintains that the dialectical tension between abjection and compassion that fascinates White informs his representations (and troubling) of subjectivity from the beginning of his oeuvre. Accordingly, the article identifies the importance of corporeality within White's fiction, an aspect of his work that has often been occluded within critical readings committed to his transcendentalism. With particular reference to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and various recent theoretical conceptions of affect, it suggests that White's characters' sublime, recurring and transient forfeitures of identity may be profoundly imbricated with their surrender to – as opposed to their transcendence of – embodiment. Finally, the article argues that White's persistent elaboration of affect as corporeal suggests a physicality of literature that evokes the reader's own embodied sense of compassion. Altogether, the article explores the ways in which White's fiction reclaims a focus on corporeality that he perceived as lost to an inherently narcissistic modern consciousness.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel beweer dat die oënskynlike ongelyksoortige affektiewe en liggaamlike sensasies van veragtelikheid en medelye die fiksie van die Australiese modernis Patrick White in beduidende mate vorm. Met die fokus spesifiek op White se vroeëre werk *The Living and the Dead* ([1941]1977), wat dikwels op die kantlyn gestoot is in kritiese besprekings van sy skryfwerk, voer die artikel aan dat die dialektiese spanning tussen veragtelikheid en medelye wat White fassineer, sy voorstellings van (en gemoeidheid met) subjektiwiteit van die begin van sy oeuvre af, onderlê. Dienooreenkomstig identifiseer die artikel die belangrikheid van liggaamlikheid in White se fiksie, 'n aspek van sy werk wat dikwels geabsorbeer word binne die kritiese lees van sy werke wat verbonde is aan sy transendentalisme. Met spesifieke verwysing na Julia Kristeva se teorie van veragtelikheid en verskeie onlangse teoretiese opvattings van affek, voer die artikel aan dat White se karakters se verhewe, repeterende en verganklike verbeurverklaring van identiteit in diepgaande mate oorvleuel met hulle oorgawe tot – in teenstelling met hulle transendensie van –

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beliggaming. Laastens voer die artikel aan dat White se volgehoue verwerking van affek as liggaamlik 'n fisikaliteit van letterkunde voorstel wat die leser se eie beliggaamde sin van medelye oproep. Gesamentlik gesien verken die artikel die maniere waarop White se fiksie 'n fokus op liggaamlikheid terugeis wat hy waargeneem het as verlore tot 'n inherente narsissistiese moderne bewussyn.

In Patrick White's *The Living and the Dead* ([1941]1977), two statements regarding the body are significant to an understanding of his treatment of corporeality: at one point Eden Standish realises that "[c]ompassion is oddly physical" (p. 146); at another, human existence is described as governed by the "abject dictatorship of the flesh" (p. 263). These quotations furnish a productive literary tension running throughout White's oeuvre. The first statement assumes that it is through our physicality that we conceive of the positions and experiences of others; it implies that our bodies are fundamental to our ability to sympathetically imagine. The second statement presumes, however, that our perception of the body is fraught and uncomfortable. The body's exigencies, it states, intrude upon our lives, demanding and unwanted. As Elizabeth Hunter realises in *The Eye of the Storm* (White [1973]1987), every moment is "roaring rushing you towards incurable illness old age death corruption" (p. 528), and indeed White's fiction repeatedly emphasises corporeal activity and the body's inexorable progression towards death. Both the functions of the body and its inevitable degeneration, beyond the control of human consciousness, may leave the subject feeling disempowered and psychologically severed from somatic experience. Unsurprisingly, then, the phrase "the abject dictatorship of the flesh" *personifies* physicality, distancing it from subjectivity and emphasising the conceptual division between mind and body. Further, its diction presciently, if unwittingly, gestures towards Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, developed in her seminal text, *Powers of Horror* (1982). In positing the construction of the seemingly self-sufficient subject in opposition to corporeality, Kristeva's writing has much in common with White's fiction, which, despite the dissociation of the subject from the body that the aforementioned phrase implies, continuously interrogates the arbitrary boundary that separates subjectivity from the corporeal.

This article elaborates on the affective dimensions of abjection and compassion in White's writing. It argues that both affects relate to the significance White ascribes to the dissolution of identity and thus to the transcendental or mystical focus of his work. Abjection, for White, involves the subject's rejection of corporeality, a disavowal which he associates with narcissism and prejudice. Compassion, on the other hand, requires the subject's acceptance of the shared corporeality of self and other, an acknowledgement opening the self to communal pathways of affective interaction. Specific characters within White's oeuvre are required to accept

the body, but this imperative is extended to the reader who is simultaneously called upon to engage with White's poetics of corporeality. [1]

The "Dictatorship" of Abjection

Kristeva's term "abjection" describes the primitive process that initiates and maintains the construction of subjectivity. Her theory outlines the phase of development in which the child acquires language and begins to take its place as a speaking subject within the symbolic order. For Kristeva, this involves the consolidation of a "clean and proper" self upon the tenuous repudiation of those corporeal aspects (or abjects) considered disorderly, unacceptable and anti-social (Kristeva 1982: 8). This involves the violent disgust response of abjection, which begins when the child first distinguishes between the inside and the outside of the body and correspondingly differentiates self from other, subject from object – oppositions necessary to the constitution of the body as a unified whole and the linking of subjectivity to the body's form and limits.

Kristeva's categories of the abject include bodily products, abhorred foodstuffs, the corpse and, for the infant (although the negative association, according to Kristeva, remains throughout life), the maternal body. These examples disturbingly and ambiguously cross the symbolic border of the body separating the internal from the external, thus troubling the image of a sealed-off, self-enclosed subjectivity deeply implicated with the image of the body. According to Kristeva, the abject is horrifying not because it is necessarily unclean in-and-of-itself but because it threatens the constructed and arbitrary borders maintaining neat, foreclosed subjectivity. It does not "respect borders, positions, rules", it "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 1982: 4), and must therefore be defensively defined as "radically separate [and] loathsome" (p. 2). Elizabeth Grosz explains: "[T]he subject must have a certain, if incomplete mastery of the abject; it must keep it in check and at a distance in order to define itself as a subject" (Grosz 1990: 87). Abjection, however, exposes the subject's threatened and provisional control over the disorderly elements of corporeality. It involves a horrifying confrontation with that which the subject has jettisoned in order to consolidate a stable sense of self within the symbolic order, a confrontation with that aspect of the self which threatens to undo the very notion of "self". It is, as Grosz maintains, the "unspoken of a stable speaking position, an abyss at

1. Andrew McCann's seminal reading of abjection in White's *Riders in the Chariot* focuses primarily on psychosocial dynamics wherein the abject "elucidates and undermines the very oppositions of that structure we might call a fiction of the normal" (McCann 1997: 145). This essay ignores White's fascination with abject outsider-figures in favour of his interest in his characters' abjection of corporeality.

the very borders of the subject's identity, a hole into which the subject may fall" (1990: 87). The abject, Kristeva explains, is "opposed to I" (Kristeva 1982: 1). It is "radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (p. 2), where subjectivity dissolves.

According to Kristeva, then, the borders of the body symbolically function as the borders of the self. These boundaries, however, cannot be definitively maintained. They remain porous, opening the inside of the body to the outside world, and that which is abject therefore hovers ambiguously as something that the subject attempts to disavow, but which nevertheless remains fundamentally part of it. Excrement, for example, is expelled from the inside of the body to the outside. It becomes "other" in the process, an otherness strengthened by our understanding of waste as disgusting – as abject. Yet excrement cannot be definitively "other" because it is a part of the body that can never be finally expelled. It crosses the boundaries of the body, from the inside to the outside, but also defies such boundaries because it exists both internally and externally: "It is something rejected from which one does not part" (Kristeva 1982: 4). Thus abjection arises to ensure, impossibly, that an aspect of the self is severed via othering. This rejection corresponds with the notion of rigidly defined bodily boundaries separating the "inside" from the "outside" despite the body's inherent permeability.

Subjectivity is thus implicated with an image of an ideally discrete and orderly body, its thresholds symbolising the tentative borders of identity. However, the image of the body is merely an abstraction, a construction of the self emptied of the affect, viscerality, sensations, consumptions and excretions of the corporeal. Significantly, as Michael Bernstein observes, abjection is a process thus dependent upon "a fissure in the relationship between consciousness and corporality that arises at the most elemental levels of human response to the facts of physical existence itself" (Bernstein 1992: 28). Such a fissure is first evident during the "mirror stage" in infancy, famously theorised by Jacques Lacan. Lacan posits this interim phase as occurring between the infant's primitive, chaotic and engulfing experience of bodiliness and its eventual acquisition of a social identity founded in language. At this time, when the infant first imaginatively identifies with its own reflection, the Imaginary arises – one of Lacan's three "orders" or dimensions of the psyche, along with the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary is the order of ego formation, and as the infant's experience of its mirror image attests, it emerges out of the human fascination with form. In his explication of the development of the Imaginary, Lacan expands on Freud's theory that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego: it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface"; in other words, it may be regarded as a "mental projection of the surface of the body" and is thus a reflection of the body as seen from without (Freud 1923: 26). Lacan contends that when the infant first perceives itself in the mirror, it is enraptured by the vision of a unified

self – its body as others see it. This becomes the child's first understanding of its identity – an image of the body in totality, discordant with its experience of a diffuse self consisting of a series of disjointed body parts and movements, fragmentary in nature until an understanding of unification is attained via an encounter with the reflection. Lacan explains:

> The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality ... and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.
>
> (Lacan 1977: 4)

Through the mirror image the child's fragmented body becomes whole and the ego, accordingly, is first consolidated. Elizabeth Grosz elucidates: "[T]hrough the fantasy of a cohesive, stable identity, facilitated by its specular identification with its own image, [the child] is able to position itself as a subject within the space of its body" (Grosz 1990: 82). Identity thus comes into being via the *misrecognition* of a fictive, external "self" that represents a coherence that the subject can never attain. Because of the child's misrecognition of its image as itself, self and ego can never be unified, the ego remaining a merely imaginary identity prone to slippage and the threat of incoherence. Prepared for the acquisition of language, and the concurrent establishment of a social identity, the infant replaces its physical sense of itself with an image of the body severed from the experience of corporeality. This *image* of the body – unified, complete and external – cannot express the *sensations* of the body with their associations of internal fragmentation and disorder: "[T]he illusion of a corporeal coherence ... belies the child's own lived experience" (Grosz 1990: 82). Thus the physical, lived body will remain to some extent "other" to symbolisation, seeming, Daniel Punday writes, "to resist powerfully textual representation" (Punday 2003: viii). Patrick White's favoured characters frequently experience redemptive, visionary moments wherein their socialised identities – their senses of their reflected selves – are subject to dissolution. In these moments, as the coherence of subjectivity and the corresponding image of the body dissolve, the specificities of an incoherent, fragmented, "lived" corporeality are increasingly emphasised. White's writing posits a sublimity of the body, which foregrounds fragmentation and strains the representative capacity of language.

Kristeva's theory, growing out of Lacan's, recognises that the incoherence of corporeal experience threatens subjectivity. The ambivalence created by the impossibility of adequately rejecting the abject renders corporeality an ambiguous horror that threatens the limits of identity. Perpetually hovering at the borders of the constructed self, it ensures that identity is provisional,

unstable and open to dissolution. Thus Kristeva's observation: "The more or less beautiful image in which I behold or recognise myself rests upon an abjection that sunders it as soon as repression, the constant watchman, is relaxed" (1982: 13).

"The Constant Watchman": Elyot Standish and the Horror of Corporeality

From the outset of *The Living and the Dead*, abjection and the "constant watchman" of repression are emphasised via the male protagonist Elyot Standish's horror of corporeality (Kristeva 1982: 13). Elyot is the first of White's characters to exhibit the self-denial – in effect, the misrecognition of the self – that White associates with the repudiation of physicality. Life is bodily and Elyot cannot endure this: "Contact with the living moment, that you watched in your shirt-sleeves from an upper window, the vague formless moments in the street, made you recoil inside your shirt too conscious of your own confused flesh" (White [1941]1977: 174). Elyot is himself a watchman, protecting himself from the confusion and disorder of the body and watching it from an upper window perhaps representing his transcendental, seemingly disembodied consciousness.

Elyot's alienation from the physical is emphasised throughout the novel. Near its beginning, he witnesses a bus crash into a lurching drunkard. The episode is an important moment in his characterisation: it underscores his tendency to hover between a rigidly defensive hermetic alienation and the compelling desire to merge empathically with others. Prior to the accident, for example, Elyot has felt an odd sense of identification with this stranger, imagining that he "might have merged with the drunk, fumbling now in his pocket for the bus fare or else the price of another drink, wondering feebly at the back of those yellow eyeballs if he was really going to vomit, or fall, just fall into a receptive gutter" (White [1941]1977: 9). This transient identification quickly subsides into a sense of "remoteness" (p. 10), yet when the shocked bus driver assesses the cause of the accident – "[w]alkin' with his eyes shut" (p. 11) – the observation again elicits "some connexion" (p. 12). Elyot has indeed shut his eyes – firstly to the degraded corporeality of the drunkard, and, secondly, to the onset of death. Both disturb him because they are aspects of life that he cannot escape. In particular, the sight of the stranger's blood distresses him: "It trickled out thin and private. No one had any business looking at this stream of blood. But there it was" (p. 11). The exposed bodily fluid, compromising the division between the inside and the outside of the body, and also the division between himself and the stranger, horrifies Elyot. It weakens his sense of himself as a discrete subject gazing upon another individual. Aware that his corporeality unites him with the dying man, he is beset with abjection.

Elyot's dread of the body is suggested not only descriptively but also stylistically. The narration shifts rapidly and discomfortingly from third to first and second person as he observes the man's mouth, disturbingly magnified in his perception: "The lips of the man blew in and out. On the blood a glitter of whitish froth. And I am standing here for what, you asked, for the buried moment, for that second of connexion on the kerb that broke too easily" (p. 11). This rapid transposition serves three purposes. First, it indicates Elyot's disturbance and hasty attempt to distance himself from his own discomfiture – a seeming quirk in White's style therefore dramatises the character's divided responses. Second, it erodes the division between the focaliser and the reader: Elyot's awareness of the unifying inevitability of death is shared with the reader who is implicated with the abrupt appearance of the pronoun *I* and directly addressed with the pronoun *you*. Lastly, it dramatises the crisis of identity evoked by a sudden and horrifying confrontation with death.

Such apparent idiosyncrasies of style relate, then, to the importance of abjection in White's fiction. The distancing effect of the movement from first to second person suggests Elyot's very real concern with repudiating what is disturbing to him. Walking away from the accident, his fear of death threatens to surface and overwhelm him:

> Try as his conscience might to raise the dead, the dead continued to lie with folded hands. It was quite remote. But he continued to feel sick. Something had lodged itself in his stomach, forced downwards by the mind. And it was a struggle to keep it there.
>
> (White [1941]1977: 12)

The thought of the accident victim will continue to haunt Elyot throughout the novel, and the dying drunk becomes the literal embodiment of the corporeality and mortality he must face. Elyot cannot disassociate himself from the apparent stranger; instead, he feels himself uncannily splitting as he contemplates his own vulnerability: "[T]he face [of the drunkard] drifted behind his own, its lips blowing outward on unshaped words, trying to resist the shapelessness" ([1941]1977: 17). This is what Kristeva describes as a "weight of meaninglessness": Elyot is on the "edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if [he] acknowledge[s] [it] it annihilates [him]" (Kristeva 1982: 2).

Death Invading Life: The Impossibility of Binary Thinking

The Living and the Dead is an important novel in White's oeuvre because, as its title suggests, it engages with the symbolic importance of the body in the text and evinces, early on, White's prevailing concern with dualities. More importantly, however, it illustrates their inevitable dissolution. A

concern with death pervades the novel, most obviously as an analogue for Elyot's mode of living: a grim, enclosed, scholarly "devotion to dust". Elyot is the first of White's maligned intellectuals, a character overtly privileging mind over body. This is evident, for example, in a description of his long-running intellectual project, the authoring of a book on Françoise-Louise de Warens, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's benefactress and mistress:

> There was the monograph he was doing on Mme de Warens. In the searching light of afternoon it seemed sadly irrelevant, one more word from Elyot Standish, its opposition to the solid fact of Mme de Warens, a case of lives and the shadows of lives. There was a warmth and fullness about the life of Mme de Warens, that a Standish, even a Rousseau didn't destroy. There came back vividly, if unattached to any context, the sunlight on bare arms, the frosted road that the feet trod beneath spring trees, somewhere, he felt, the sea.
>
> (White [1941]1977: 221)

Although Elyot finds the body repulsive, he yearns for the corporeal dimension of life, which in this instance enters the text via the warm, feminine and embodied presence of de Warens. She exists, even in Elyot's mind, as a figure of sunlit physical solidity, a representative of the body exceeding his rationalism.

For White, the notion of the intellect as disembodied – a Cartesian consciousness severed from the living flesh – equates rationalist existence with death. White casts rationality as emerging at the expense of wakeful intuition, the latter a gift frequently endowed upon his most excessively embodied characters. In a letter of 1940, he discusses the title of his forthcoming book: "I'm thinking of calling the novel *The Living and the Dead*. I'm more and more conscious ... of people being divided into two categories – the people who are aware and the people who are – well – just dead" (White 1994a: 29).[2] In not recognising the lives of others, linked as they are to the body and mortality, and in resisting his own physicality, Elyot is himself spiritually "dead". Those who are "living" in the novel, however, are those characters that immerse themselves in the materiality of existence, not only in a celebratory manner, as emphasised by the warm physicality of Mme de Warens, but also in a manner that accepts, along with physicality, the inevitability of its dissolution and decay. These are the characters the novel describes as "positive" (White [1941]1977: 12): Eden (Elyot's sister), Julia Fallon, and Joe Barnett, whose ability to accept the

2. White's early writing is strongly influenced by the high modernists: Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence. The title *The Living and the Dead* also derives from the final words of James Joyce's story, "The Dead": "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end upon all the living and the dead" (Joyce 1994: 202).

body, emotion and the uncertain flux of existence opens them up to compassion.

Importantly, death is not merely a trope for existential torpor in *The Living and the Dead*. Literal death is a theme to which the text returns, and thus the body in its own right, in its stark materiality and not merely existing in White's fiction as symbol or trope, takes on significance. Sudden reminders of mortality arise to shake characters' complacency; for example, the bus accident described above, or the corpse of a dog from which Eden and Joe later recoil. The description of the latter draws attention to the horrifying materiality of death: "The guts hung out through the belly fur. The nose was wrinkled in a last shudder of pain" (p. 272). Joe's response to the carcass recalls Elyot's earlier reaction to the dying drunkard:

> Done for. The festoon of helpless guts torn out like the last existing privacy. The dog disgusted him, but he had to look, as if it had a bearing on himself, the sickness in his own stomach. He made himself look .... Man was born to this, no other dignity .... But there was a dignity he was jealous of, his own body, his privacy of thought. This was what made him tremble when he ... saw the body of the dead dog.
>
> (White [1941]1977: 270)

This, of course, is another instance of abjection. Joe's nausea arises from the "bearing" that the corpse of the dog has "on himself." Indeed, it bears down upon him relentlessly, the finality of death figured in the certainty of the sentence-phrase, "Done for". Joe steps back in horror, protecting his "own body, his privacy of thought", but the dog confronts him with the notion of the fallibility of the border between self and other, inner and outer, human and animal. As Elizabeth Grosz observes, the abject insists on the "subject's necessary relation to death, to animality, and to materiality, being the subject's recognition and refusal of its corporeality" (1990: 89). Joe's response here, moreover, reveals an important aspect of the theme of abjection in White's writing: a compassionate ethic revealing the equivalence of all – "Man was born to this, no other dignity".

Death forces White's characters to acknowledge mortality, a recognition that opens an abyss at the centre of existence, swallowing subjectivity and exposing a chasm of meaninglessness within symbolisation. This is evident when Elyot scrutinises the face of his mother Catherine's corpse, towards the end of the novel:

> It had the simplicity that was still impossible to grasp, the immensity or simplicity, it was all one, in front of which man wavered, did not completely understand. Soon people would begin to say the kind of things they say about death, to wallow in their own sympathy, or shudder at their own repulsion. But death was a silence best left intact. Dying and death, he said. Dying. It did not fit the mouth.
>
> (White [1941]1977: 335-336)

Again, dichotomies and borders are emphasised as eroding as the indeterminacy of abjection is emphasised. Elyot experiences "immensity" and "simplicity" simultaneously. Further, meaning eludes him in his inability to "completely understand", just as the uncertainty of subjectivity is foregrounded in the description of "man waver[ing]". Language, moreover, cannot contain the excess of this experience: dying does not "fit the mouth".

White's characters, always on the border of an abyss of meaninglessness paradoxically linked to a plethora of sublime, inarticulable meaning, are frequently aware of the limits of their bodies and identities in relation to death, which intrudes as a horror perpetually underlining the present. In *Voss*, for example, Laura Trevelyan discovers her servant Rose Portion's corpse in a moment in which the vigour and excitement of her youthful energy is replaced with her sudden realisation of its inevitable decline:

> [T]he girl who had arrived breathless, blooming with expectation and the roses she had pinned at her throat, was herself turned yellow by the hot wind of death. She was chafing her arms for some time beside the bed. She was gulping uglily, and touching the poor, living hair of the dead woman, her friend and servant.
>
> (White 1994b: 234)

Such death-invading life emphasises White's interest in relating death to the living subject. For the most part, his descriptions of death are focalised through the consciousness of a living character confronted with a sense of abjection that is sometimes related to a feeling of sacred sublimity, a unified merging of self and other that White identifies not only with horror but also with love. At Rose Portion's funeral, for example, Laura's proximity to the "terrible body of the dead woman, with its steady nostrils and its curved hands" (White 1994b: 235), allows her to experience a temporary dissolution of the self:

> [I]t had been exhilarating to know that terrestrial safety is not assured, and that solid earth does eventually swirl beneath the feet. Then when the wind had cut the last shred of flesh from the girl's bones, and was whistling in the little cage that remained, she began even to experience a shrill happiness, to sing the wounds her flesh would never suffer .... It appeared that pure happiness must await the final crumbling, when love would enter into love, becoming an endlessness, blowing at last, indivisible, indistinguishable, over the brown earth.
>
> (White 1994b: 235)

The shattering awareness of death involves the heady relinquishment of the provisional self. From such a state, Laura must "resume ... her body" (p. 235), or at least her socialised self, which defends against such dissolution as the passage above describes. Ironically, it is in confronting the body that

Laura apparently loses her body: the inevitability of death that Rose's corpse presents to her encourages her experience of transcendence precisely because it ruptures her sense of identity – the *image* of the body protected from corporeality.

While White's characters may strain towards such moments of revelation, they also resolutely resist them. Like Elyot Standish, they may shore themselves up against the ever-present threat of mortality, and thus erect a tenuous conceptual shield between death and their living selves. Kristeva argues that bodily waste – in particular the utmost form thereof, the corpse – exemplifies the blurring of the boundary between interior and exterior, being and non-being. The corpse, according to Kristeva, is "death infecting life" (Kristeva 1982: 4) and therefore the horrifying reminder of the inevitable outcome of our corporeality. It confronts us with the ultimately futile struggle to maintain ourselves as neat entities unsullied by the bodily waste we expel and from which we turn away. As Kristeva observes, the corpse "does not *signify* death", but *is* death: "In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (p. 3). The corpse swallows up the safe distance created by the distinction between reference and referent. In its meaningless materiality it is utterly excessive and devours the fragile speaking subject and its flimsy signification: "the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything" (p. 3).

White's fiction thematises encroaching borders, showing, however, that in confronting the abject, his characters and readers may experience a sense of redemptive integration. This involves the temporary forfeiture of subjectivity and a corresponding dissolution of conceptual structures. While many of White's characters, like Elyot Standish, resist such experience, his "positive" (White [1941]1977: 12) characters differ because they acknowledge the disturbing aspects of existence – most notably death. Like many of White's questing, philosophical protagonists, Elyot ultimately recognises that he has the "choice of the two ways, of the living or the dead" (p. 305), and like other characters of denial in the novel and in White's oeuvre in general, he gravitates towards the latter:

> You wanted instinctively to close the eyes, like Adelaide and Gerald, like Muriel, or the ranks of the red suburban houses, smothered in a plush complacency. Because the alternative, to recognise the pulse beyond the membrane, the sick heartbeat, or the gangrenous growth, this was too much, even at the risk of sacrificing awareness, and the other moments, the drunken, disorderly passions of existence, that created but at the same time consumed.
>
> (White [1941]1977: 305)

Here, abject bodily imagery – the "sick heartbeat", the "gangrenous growth" – stands in for a wordless horror present beyond a border of protection characters erect between themselves and this omnipresent threat. The boundary between Elyot's stable self and those objects that threaten it is imaged as a "membrane", soft tissue both permeable and fragile. Thus even the border that he sets in place to consolidate and stabilise his sense of self bespeaks mortality and fallibility, an awareness that is simply "too much" to fathom or accept. Equally threatening, however, are the "drunken, disorderly passions of existence" (which retrospectively ascribe a symbolic function to the drunkard of the opening episode) – the creative yet simultaneously *consuming* psychosexual drives. Elyot recognises what is for him, and for many other characters in White's oeuvre, the fundamental challenge of life: "To recognise the sickness and accept the ecstasy" ([1941]1977: 305), and to yield to devourment and dissolution in the process.

"Oddly Physical": Compassion

At the beginning of this article two phrases from *The Living and the Dead* were identified as significant to an understanding of White's treatment of corporeality. The first – the "abject dictatorship of the flesh" (White [1941]1977: 263) – contributes to the argument above. The second – "compassion is oddly physical" (p. 146) – provides one possible explanation for White's emphasis on abjection: the two affects function together as opposing yet related responses to corporeality. Abjection – a violent disgust response – holds the threat of physical existence and corruption at bay, while compassion submits to it, dramatising the ethical significance White ascribes to acknowledging the body. *The Living and the Dead* represents compassion as a feeling engendering the movement from the "form" of identity to the "shapelessness" of its dispersal, a noun borrowed from the description of Elyot's dread regarding the face of the drunkard drifting behind his own (p. 17). For White, compassion occurs when the subject succumbs to the supposed dictatorship of the flesh – thereby intuiting the body as a fundamental aspect of the self – and simultaneously experiences, via shared corporeality, the essential sameness of "self" and "other".

This is perhaps most notable in *Riders in the Chariot* ([1961]2002), in which the novel's four "seeker[s]" (p. 103) are unified in their compassion for each other as physical beings. Recalling Elyot's horror of the blood of the dying drunkard, a fascination with blood unites two of the visionaries: the Jewish Mordecai Himmelfarb and the Aboriginal Alf Dubbo. Himmelfarb cuts his hand: "The blood ran out of the wound in long vanishing veils. At moments the effect was strangely, fascinatingly beautiful .... So it seemed to appear also to the blackfellow" (p. 281). Arguably, the

moment's beauty inheres in the compassionate understanding of shared embodiment, a moment that White underscores by emphasising an aesthetic of the body wherein the "long vanishing veils of blood" become, via descriptive metaphor, the poetic language of the text itself.

Critics have not always noted White's emphasis upon an aesthetics of corporeal compassion: Brian McFarlane, for example, argues that a "movement towards pity in White is almost always subverted by his obsessive need to underline the physical horror of the flesh – greening, yellowing, purpling, greying, wrinkling, sagging, scarred and rotting" (McFarlane 1977: 37). For White, however, compassion is indeed oddly physical and the focus on the flesh that McFarlane observes is in fact integral to the novel's affective emphasis. This emphasis is supported by the imagery of physical integration underscoring the characters' understandings of each other. The ugly, stunted Mary Hare has encountered the Aboriginal Alf Dubbo in the following manner:

> Once she had entered through his eyes, and at first glance recognized familiar furniture, and once again she had entered in, and their souls had stroked each other with reassuring feathers, but very briefly, for each had suddenly taken fright.
>
> (White [1961]2002: 79)

Mary is able to temporarily and metaphorically "enter" Dubbo's body because the two are similarly ostracised as a result of their "unacceptable" physicality. Their shared experience of exclusion allows them to attain a visionary empathy. For White, "entrance" into another's subjectivity is premised upon compassion, when characters feel in their own bodies the pain and suffering of another. Both Hare and Dubbo, moreover, are aware of the importance of the body: Hare through her physical immersion in landscape and the painter Dubbo through his understanding of the "bleeding" of corporeality into art. This recognition differentiates White's favoured characters (like Hare and Dubbo) from characters like Elyot Standish, who deny the body and who are, for the most part, consequently associated with a kind of death-in-life. In White's fiction the compassionate recognition of the constitutive importance of the body is comparable to what results for Kristeva from the relaxation of abjection or repression: the forfeiture of identity. Indeed, the "more or less beautiful image" of the self that Kristeva describes (1982: 13) is repeatedly sundered in White's fiction, often to redemptive effect.

The significance of the forfeiture of identity in White has frequently been linked to his interest in a transcendentalism or spiritualism that seems to require the severing of soul and body. I want to shift this understanding, however, to suggest that the moments in which White's characters transcend their identities, and seemingly the material world, are in fact deeply imbricated with his close attention to corporeality. In White, the "beautiful

image" that characters create of themselves receives significant focus. Narcissism is one of his primary concerns, figured in his writing as the ego's defence against, firstly, the corporeality that subjectivity abjects and, secondly, the selflessness associated with compassion. As Kristeva writes, abjection "*is a precondition of narcissism*. It is coexistent with it and causes it to be permanently brittle" (1982: 13; Kristeva's italics). Furthermore, she describes it as a "*narcissistic crisis*": abjection is "witness to the ephemeral aspect of the state called 'narcissism'", precisely because the borders of the self are threatened (p. 13). White's understanding of the narcissistic crisis of abjection is evident in the egotistical Hurtle Duffield's compulsion to smear excrement on his self-portrait in *The Vivisector* (1970). Here, Hurtle's self-image – and what may be read as either its defilement or, in White's recuperation of the body, its augmentation – emphasises the inextricable link of the subject to its undermining abjects. Narcissism defends against the abject, but it also, as White emphasises, resists the selfless experience of compassion.

In *The Eye of the Storm*, Elizabeth Hunter dwells upon the threats to her overweening ego. Existing for the most part in a miasma of self, she lives according to a practical and defensive ethic: "*one can drown in compassion if one answers every call it's another way of suicide*" (White [1973]1987: 476). Nevertheless, like many of White's characters, she is eventually drawn into the selfless experience of "love", occurring as relational or transcendental in his fiction, and premised upon the acknowledgement of the constitutive significance of corporeality.[3] Indeed, "love", for White, is a form of "suicide", associated as it is with a merging with "otherness" his texts continuously work towards and promote. In this respect, it is comparable to confronting the abject – in fact, as Dorothy de Lascabanes thinks to herself in *The Eye of the Storm*: "Love and disgust are one ... the same shooting pain in both mind and body. Love: she must learn love" (White [1973]1987: 391). Dorothy realises that love and disgust both bring about a sense of one's potentially uncomfortable interrelation with the external world. Love, however, is the positive acceptance of one's relation to otherness and, in vowing to "learn love", Dorothy suggests the preferability of the loss of ego to the disgust-response that maintains it. The closing sentences of White's last-published work, *Three Uneasy Pieces* (1987), provide his final words on the subject of love, and on the importance of replacing the narcissistic "I" with a compassionate "we":

> I who was once the reason for the world's existence am no longer this sterile end-all, As the world darkens, the evil in me is dying. I understand. Along with the prisoners, sufferers, survivors. It is no longer I it is we

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3. Although I use the term "transcendental", I would like to temper its connotations of "rising above" the phenomenal world to suggest White's focus on a *bodily* transcendentalism or *somatic* spiritualism.

> It is we who hold the secret of existence
> we who control the world
> WE.
>
> (White 1987: 59)

White favours an open-ended plurality over the solipsism of the individual will; his fiction is not primarily concerned with "the incurable loneliness of the soul", as G.A. Wilkes has argued (Wilkes 1970: 33). While his characters are often isolated and frustrated by their inability to express themselves to others, White's writing, Bill Ashcroft observes, works towards a "synthesis of self and other" (Ashcroft 1978: 132). This merging of the self with the external world or with other individuals constitutes what Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden have recently identified as the theme of "sacredness" in his work, which may be linked to the prevalence of the theme of love. White does not limit his definition of "love". As George Core observes, the emotion "in all its manifestations and guises – primitive, civilized, banal, sacramental, narcissistic, familial, mundane, romantic, carnal, platonic, natural, unnatural – is the encompassing theme of White's fiction" (Core 1977: 766-767).

The forfeiture of the self is productive in White's writing, particularly when it is linked to a compassionate understanding associated with spiritual illumination or "love". Characters may merge empathetically in moments of loving understanding, wherein the physical experience of another informs a mirroring physical response in the self. The episode from *The Living and the Dead* in which Elyot Standish attempts to distance himself from the horrifying bodiliness of the drunken stranger is productively juxtaposed against a later episode during which his sister, Eden, discovers that "[c]ompassion is oddly physical" (White [1941]1977: 146). Her experience vouches for the corporeal basis of empathy and allows her to shed her self-enclosed identity. Eden's experience is entirely contrary to Elyot's – her development from the despised enclosure of her identity to the ecstatic identification with another is evident in the following passage. Here her experience involves the acceptance, indeed the metaphorical incorporation, of a seemingly distasteful physicality:

> It made you sick, the business of being Eden Standish .... And then against the iron fence, the man in the macintosh, the voice half frozen, half liquid with the words of the Welsh singing, that she heard, not so much her ear, as right inside her, she was listening to it with her whole body, that became the contorted body of the man, sick inside the greenish macintosh. Feeling a scurry of grit on her face, she told herself she was sentimental. She was listening to the singing of a Welsh cripple. She was moved by the sick pallor of the face, the bones of a singing face, and the red inflamed boss that grew from the side of the nose. She could walk, was already walking away .... And it went on inside her, the singing, the voices of faces in the street, that flowed past her, melting with her own face. She had seen something for the

> first time. Her legs trembled when she closed the door, afraid to move from this discovery, a singing and revulsion in her own body.
>
> (White [1941]1977: 146)

Initially sickened by her enclosure within her identity (the "business of being Eden Standish"), Eden feels her body becoming that of the singing cripple, and finds herself incorporating his wordless song of anguish and despair. Increasingly, she is associated with formlessness: the limits of her body blur with another's, she merges with the crowd, and she "melts" into humanity. Moreover, she has "seen something for the first time", suggesting that this unification with others constitutes an epiphanic experience – one of White's moments of visionary illumination. As it is with Eden, White's characters may find the borders of the self dissolving during such instances of compassionate understanding, but they may also deliquesce into the landscape, into music, into death, into a "somatic spirituality".[4] In such moments of forfeiture the inevitable corporeality of existence is emphasised. For White, formlessness is an analogue for flux, incomprehension, death, obliteration, the dissolution of the fragile boundaries of the self, and the ongoing subliminal pulses and processes of the body. It allows, moreover, for the amorphous, conjoining experience of empathy. Thus Himmelfarb of *Riders in the Chariot* understands that, to realise "lovingkindness" (White [1961] 2002: 204), he must incorporate the experiences of others, "as all rivers must finally mingle with the shapeless sea, so he might receive into his own formlessness the blind souls of men, which lunged and twisted in their efforts to arrive at some unspecified end" (p. 204).

As Eden's experience attests, it is via the body that White promotes the ethic of empathy existing between self and other within his fiction and, moreover, between the reader and the text. The emphasis on compassion as physical highlights the affective aspect of his writing. Moira Gatens argues that affect causes us to "question commonsense notions of the privacy or 'integrity' of bodies through exposing the breaches in the borders between self and other evidenced by the contagiousness of 'collective' affects" (Gatens 2004: 115). Indeed, compassion is an excellent example of a feeling that passes between bodies. Eden's experience of the singing cripple

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4. We might look again to Joyce's "The Dead" as a possible source of White's inspiration. Here the protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, considers the limits of his subjectivity in relation to death:

> His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling.
>
> (Joyce 1994: 202)

specifically emphasises the "contagion" of affect: the "contorted body ... sick inside the greenish macintosh", the "sick pallor of the face", the "bones", and the "red, inflamed boss" suggest that her feeling of empathy – during which she imaginatively transforms into this body – is comparable to the contraction of disease of a kind.

The word compassion, derived from the term "fellow suffering" in the original Latin (*com* and *pati*), itself suggests the contagion of shared feeling. Sophie Ratcliffe notes that *compassion* (so important to the significance White ascribes to the body) is one of a number of cognate terms for *sympathy*, existing alongside *empathy* and *pity* (Ratcliffe 2008: 8-9). These terms, however, are not entirely interchangeable. "Pity", writes Martha Nussbaum, whilst initially serving as a synonym for sympathy or compassion, has "recently come to have nuances of condescension and superiority to the sufferer" (Nussbaum 2001: 301). Perhaps this is why McFarlane, quoted earlier, cannot reconcile "pity" in White with his simultaneous emphasis upon the "physical horror of the flesh" (McFarlane 1977: 37): White seeks parity between "self" and "other" and invokes the body as a "great leveller"; his fiction requires empathy between characters (and reader) rather than the unequal response of pity. Suzanne Keen distinguishes between "the spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling as *empathy*" and "the more complex, differentiated feeling for another as *sympathy*" (Keen 2007: 4). The spontaneous and visceral response of empathy may give rise to the more complex, cerebral response of sympathy. White's characters, it seems, experience the gut reactions of compassion and empathy. They are arrested by their bodily responses to their environment and to others, reactions which they seldom rationalise, as the example of Eden Standish attests. Arguably, then, sympathetic understanding and moral response are left to the reader. If there is a moral message in White's fiction, however, or at least one that remains paramount for *this* reader, it is the injunction to acknowledge corporeality, for it is in bodily signs and sensations, and indeed in the acceptance of the importance of the body to consciousness, that White's ethics and spiritual philosophy inhere.

White's Affective Dimension

Thus far I have highlighted two affective dimensions of White's writing as they appear in his early novel *The Living and the Dead*: disgust or abjection – which Kristeva describes as a "twisted braid of affects" (1982: 1) – and compassion, both experienced as somatic sensations associated in one way or another with the dissolution of the "sterile end-all" or "evil" of enclosed subjectivity (White 1987: 59). White is an author of affect par excellence. This is due, firstly, to his emphasis on what he viewed as the necessary transcendence of solipsism and the merging of self and other in moments of shared or celebratory corporeality, and secondly, to the high pitches of

emotional intensity he attains via physical description. In their recent introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg argue that affect is "found in those intensities that pass body to body … in those resonances that circulate about [and] between … bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (Seigworth & Gregg 2010: 1). This is a "rhizomatic", Deleuzian formulation: indeed, Gilles Deleuze notes the dynamic affective interactions between bodies as fundamental to a definition of the body itself: "A body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality" (Deleuze 1992: 625). Accordingly, Seigworth and Gregg describe affect as an "*in-between-ness*" (2010: 1), defining it as a "palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between 'bodies' (bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect)" (2010: 2). The "force-encounters" and "intensities" passing between bodies are often evident in White's writing. In *Riders in the Chariot*, for example, the intensity of hatred between Mary Hare, who resents her father's withholding of love, and Norbert Hare, who despises his daughter's irredeemable ugliness, is described as follows:

> [T]heir emotions were whirling, the spokes of whitest light smashing, the hooks grappling together, hatefully.
>
> The sweat was running down her body, she could feel, in molten streams. She caught sight of his tightening mouth, and his throat strung with gristle.
>
> (White [1961]2002: 71)

White is indeed interested in the "ebbs and swells" of corporeal intensities and resonances, consistently elaborating the premise that affect is physical. The implication of broiling feeling is important in his depictions of characters often "dehydrated by an excess of emotion both concentrated and suppressed" (White [1979]1995: 68). His writing seldom describes emotion without focusing on the body itself: "intense conviction", he tells us, "will sometimes best express itself through the ungainliness of spontaneity" (White [1961]2002: 14). Character affect is for the most part suggested via corporeal signs, sometimes minute and sometimes expressionistically distorted. Thus Harry Heseltine notes that we come to "the inner lives of [White's] characters as much through their hands, their skin, their breathing, as through anything else" (Heseltine 1992: 393). Indeed, emotion in White is often concentrated at the surface of the body, and thus for many of his characters "[o]nly a membrane is stretched between … feelings and exposure" (White [1961]2002: 371). Brigid Rooney elegantly articulates the metonymic facility that the skin exhibits in White's writing:

> It is White's habit – consonant with his theatrical modes of representation – to attend to discomforts of the skin, to focus on the bodily surface of characters – their mannerisms, style, prudishness, habits. Tongues and teeth, awkwardly set or clashing, recur in asides, reminding us of characters' physical limits, and ratcheting up the grating tensions of sociability.
>
> (Rooney 2010: 15)

What Rooney names White's "epidermal preoccupation" ensures that "surfaces paradoxically become sites of intensity of feeling" (2010: 15). Indeed a description of Eadie Twyborn with "blotched and raddled, leathery skin constantly boiling over in the past with emotion, resentment, frustration, curdled passion" (White [1979]1995: 393) is one example attesting to the importance of bodily surfaces in White's writing. A description of Ruth Godbold is another: "She blushed red, all over her thick, creamy skin. It could have been blotting paper" (White [1961]2002: 283). In his inscription of emotion on the skin, White suggests the importance of *reading* in the process of gaining empathetic understanding. The body itself becomes a text via which affect is communicated and gleaned. Indeed, Mary Hare, of *Riders in the Chariot*, indicating the importance of a corporeal hermeneutics, notes the "extraordinary, revealing faces of men and women" (White [1961]2002: 36). Bodily scrutiny is frequently endorsed in White's fiction.

Dirk Klopper's argument for the significance of the body in biography may be extended to the importance of the body in literature in general. Where subjectivity is depicted, what is required is

> a mode of representation that simultaneously internalises the external fact, inscribing it as part of the psychic experience of the subject, and externalises the inner psychic experience, making it discernable and interpretable to the reader. Because it is the body that mediates the relation between external event and inner apprehension, what is required, then, is a way of figuring the body ....
>
> (Klopper 2004: 84)

This description attests to the importance of the body in the communication and sharing of affect. It also postulates an erosion of the dichotomies of inner/outer and mind/body. As Elizabeth Grosz contends, "Only if the body's psychical interior is projected outwards and its material externality is introjected as necessary conditions of subjectivity, can the dualism of our Cartesian heritage be challenged" (Grosz 1990: 82). Literature reveals this projection and introjection as fundamental conditions of characterisation and hence subjectivity. White, for example, is aware of the body's mediating role between "external" events and environments and "inner" psychic realities and has, accordingly, adopted a way of figuring the body that emphasises, in particular, the externalisation of internal dynamics. Corporeal descriptions of White's characters are often more psychologically

than physically descriptive. Despite minute physical detailing, the reader ultimately accrues fragmented impressions of character bodies. Rather than describing a consolidated overall image (necessarily associated with socialised identity), White focuses his attention on physical minutiae and contortions of the body, which correspond at the time to the character's psychological state. Thus Voss's initial warming to Laura Trevelyan, occurring when he recognises a correspondence between her character and his own, is registered via the narrative focus on his hands. He is described as opening up to Laura by "[u]nlocking his bony hands, because the niece [Laura] was also, then, something of a stranger" (White 1994b: 12). In *The Tree of Man*, Amy Parker's eyelids emblematise the chasm between herself and her husband: "She was closed, he saw. He was perpetually looking at her eyelids, as she walked or sat with these drawn down, in a dream" (White [1955]1956: 303). In *Riders in the Chariot*, Mrs Jolley reveals her frustration physically: Her "white teeth ... were growing visibly impatient. Her dimple came and went in flickers" ([1961]2002: 51). Such imagery as the "hot, rubbery lumps of ... exasperated lips" recurs (p. 393) – hands, eyelids, pores, throats, teeth, lips and hair figure the internal realities of White's characters, inciting the reader to interpret the body as the locus of emotional and psychological responses. The implication, therefore, is that these responses are experienced as visceral, as somatic – by the character described, but also by the reader, who, faced with corporeal description, must respond with an awareness of physicality, which is itself an increased physical awareness.

Seigworth and Gregg refer to affect as those "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing", the "vital forces" offering "persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms" (2010: 1). White deliberately evades a literature of "conscious knowing", seeking instead a language of intuition, poetry, suggestion, and bodiliness. For White, rational consciousness relies on the suppression of corporeal instinct, thereby splitting the self. His fiction seeks to bemuse Kristeva's "constant watchman" of repression and to recuperate those aspects of existence denied by modern consciousness. Abjection is therefore an important focus of his work, along with the contrasting yet related affect of compassion.

Finally, does a focus on affect have any political worth? For Seigworth and Gregg, the political dimensions of affect inhere in the

> ethico-aesthetics of a body's capacity for becoming sensitive to the "manner" of a world: finding (or not) the coordinating rhythms that precipitate newness or change while also holding close to the ... continuities that pass in the slim interval between "*how* to affect" and "*how* to be affected".
>
> (Seigworth & Gregg 2010: 14-15)

This may or may not be a marked or dramatic performance of ethicality: after all, "affect transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed" (2010: 2). In fact, affect may to some extent be solipsistic. As Sophie Ratcliffe argues, "there are limits to our sympathetic comprehension" which stem to some degree "from the sense of our mental confinement" (Ratcliffe 2008: 4). With his focus on narcissistic enclosure, White is aware of this. Yet he is also aware that in recognising affect in another – moreover, in feeling it as a shared sense of viscerality or embodiment – it becomes part of a wider system of interconnectivity, of bodies in communion. Furthermore, it may provide some explanation for why it is that we read: to experience the feelings of another, to purify the threat of abject corporeality, to exist in that space of imaginative "*in-between-ness*," to become, for a time, a confluence of self and other, and to experience, particularly when exposed to an author like White, the odd physicality of compassion.

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Editorial Note

1 *Review Section*

The editors of *JLS/TLW* have decided to replace the review section with a review essay section and announcements of new books, thereby achieving two objectives. Firstly, we hope to provide authors with the opportunity of developing their comments into comprehensive critiques of particular topics or fields of study. Secondly, we aim at rendering a service to our readers by reporting on the latest publications pertaining to literary theory.

We envisage review essays in which one or more books on a specific subject will be discussed and which will, by implication, preferably constitute a reappraisal of some aspect of literary theory. Review essays should be the same length as articles to qualify as "overview articles" which, contrary to "ordinary" reviews, can be considered for subsidy in terms of categories specified by the Department of National Education. Should review essays be accepted for publication in an accredited journal, they will qualify for subsidy after being subjected to the same selection process valid for all articles submitted to *JLS/TLW*.

We invite contributions to the review essay section. If you need further information, please contact either the editors or the review editor. We hope to create a forum for debate and discussion on issues of a literary-theoretical nature and which have bearing on the present and future of literary studies in South Africa.

2 *Special Issues: General Guidelines*

The editors wish to encourage initiatives and proposals for future special issues of *JLS/TLW*. While the journal has, as its specific focus, research within literary theory, this discipline continues to make connections with a variety of other disciplines, practices and sites of intellectual interest. Broadly, literary theory occupies a central position within current research into forms of human knowledge, the technologies of culture and meaning, and the relation between language and power. The range of topics and problems which could be located within these fields of inquiry is enormous. Moreover, as South African universities and their academic departments undergo accelerated change, new pedagogical imperatives and possibilities require scholarly attention.

JLS/TLW may act as a forum for a range of positions and interests which intersects with the concerns of literary theory, methodology and criticism. Furthermore, it is anticipated that special issues may attract topical and focused debate in response to the papers presented, in subsequent issues of the journal.

Redaksionele nota

1 *Resensieafdeling*

Die redaksie van *JLS/TLW* het besluit om die resensieafdeling te verander om voorsiening te maak vir afdelings oor sowel resensieartikels as die aankondiging van nuwe boeke. Ons hoop om twee doelwitte met hierdie verandering te bereik. In die eerste plek wil ons outeurs graag die geleentheid bied om hulle kommentaar te ontwikkel tot uitgebreide kritieke van spesifieke onderwerpe of studieterreine. In die tweede plek wil ons 'n diens aan lesers lewer deur verslag te doen van resente literêr-teoretiese publikasies.

Ons stel resensieartikels in die vooruitsig waarin die bespreking van een of meer resente boeke oor 'n spesifieke onderwerp, verkieslik 'n hertaksering van een of ander literêr-teoretiese aspek, sal impliseer. Die lengte van dergelike resensieartikels moet ooreenstem met die lengte van artikels ten einde te kan kwalifiseer as "oorsigartikels" wat, anders as wat die geval is met "gewone" resensies, oorweegbaar is vir subsidie in ooreenstemming met die kategorieë wat deur die Departement van Nasionale Opvoeding gespesifiseer is. Aangesien resensieartikels wat in geakkrediteerde tydskrifte geplaas word in aanmerking kom vir subsidie, sal hierdie bydraes ook onderhewig wees aan dieselfde keuringsproses wat geld vir enige artikel wat aan die tydskrif vir publikasie voorgelê word.

Ons nooi medewerkers uit om resensieartikels voor te lê. Indien u verdere inligting verlang, kontak asseblief die redakteurs of die resensieredakteur. Ons hoop om 'n debatsforum te skep vir die bespreking van vraagstukke van 'n literêr-teoretiese aard, wat ook betrekking het op die huidige en toekomstige aard van literatuurstudie in Suid-Afrika.

2 *Spesiale uitgawes: Algemene riglyne*

Die redaksie wil graag inisiatiewe en voorstelle vir toekomstige spesiale uitgawes van *JLS/TLW* aanmoedig. Die tydskrif het wel navorsing binne die literêre teorie as spesifieke fokus, dog dit het ook raakpunte met 'n verskeidenheid ander dissiplines, praktyke en terreine van algemene belang. In die breë gesien, beklee literêre teorie 'n sentrale plek ten opsigte van die huidige bestel rakende fasette van mensekennis, die tegnologieë van kultuur en betekenis, en die relasie tussen taal en magsoorwig. Moontlikhede vir die bespreking van onderwerpe en probleme aangaande die onderhawige terreine is legio. Aangesien Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite en hulle akademiese departemente tans teen 'n versnelde pas veranderinge ondergaan, noop die nuwe pedagogiese imperatiewe en moontlikhede kundige bemoeienis.

Die *JLS/TLW* kan dus as 'n forum dien vir standpunte en spitspunte wat die belange van literêre teorie, metodologie en kritiek by mekaar kan uitbring. Spesiale uitgawes word in die vooruitsig gestel wat, in antwoord op die gepubliseerde artikels, aktuele en doelgerigte debat sal uitlok wat in die daaropvolgende uitgawes van die tydskrif sal verskyn.