antae

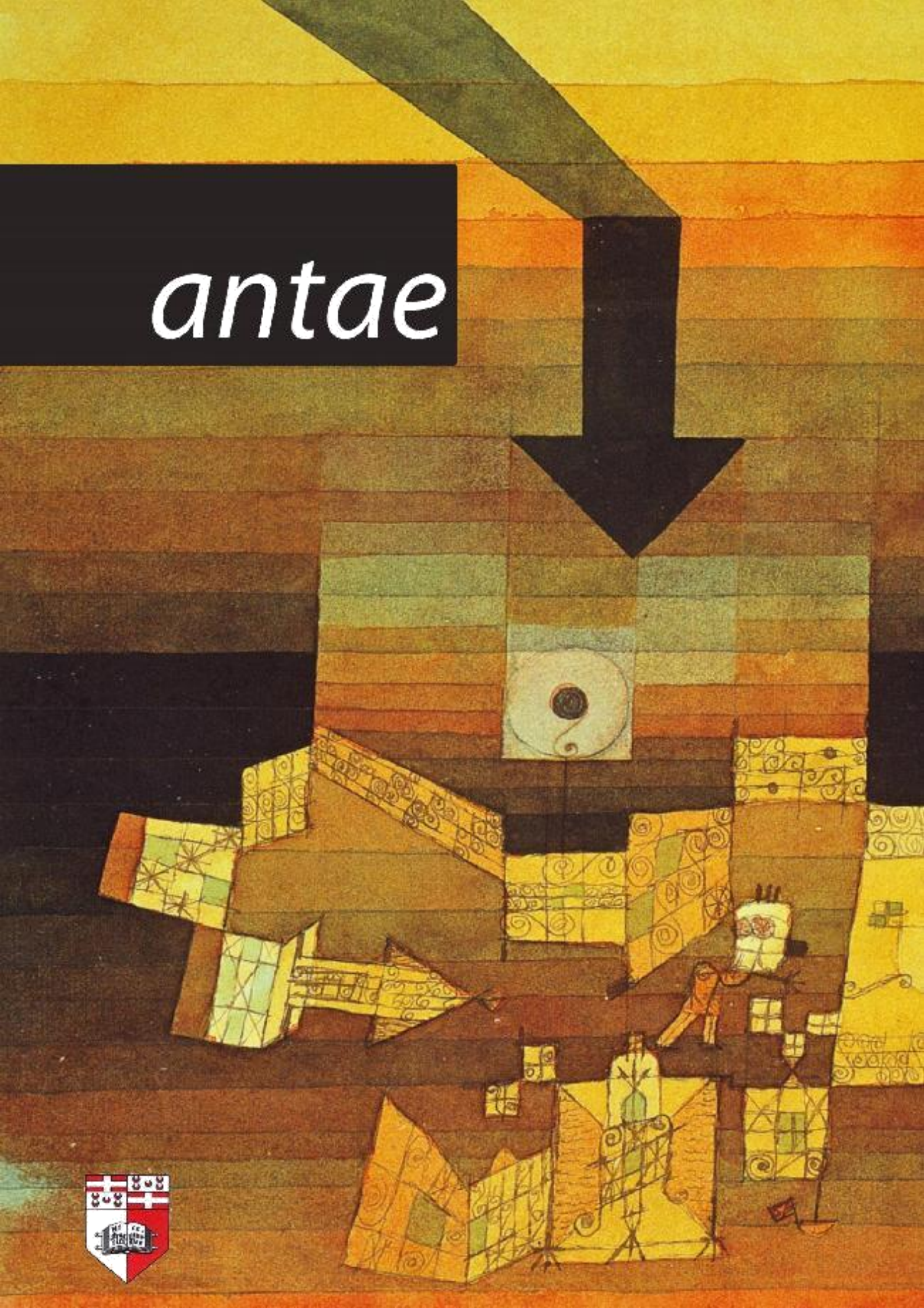


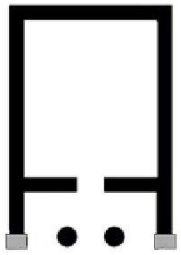
Table of Contents

SOURCE Image: Detail from Paul Klee, 'Affected Place', in *Paul Klee* (1922) <http://www.paulklee.net/affected-place.jsp> [accessed 24 June 2014]

Editorial

James Farrugia, Jeffrey Micallef

antae, Vol. 1, No. 2. (Jun., 2014), 65 – 71



antae *is an international refereed postgraduate journal aimed at exploring current issues and debates within English Studies, with a particular interest in literature, criticism and their various contemporary interfaces. Set up in 2013 by postgraduate students in the Department of English at the University of Malta, it welcomes submissions situated across the interdisciplinary spaces provided by diverse forms and expressions within narrative, poetry, theatre, literary theory, cultural criticism, media studies, digital cultures, philosophy and language studies. Creative writing is also accepted.*

Editorial

James Farrugia, Jeffrey Micallef

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History attests to the fact that monologic worlds are all too often the most self-destructive and, thankfully, short-lived forms of civilisation. Such worlds manifest themselves with worrying regularity, impacting every aspect of life. They lead to a full realisation of all five of Hobbes's famous epithets: solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. At heart, they constitute a failure of the imagination, a failure of language and of communication, in which the human capacity for intellect either slowly dissolves or is renounced, giving space instead to a single-minded severity that breeds polarity and extremism.

The self-destructive stalemate we are witnessing in Syria and, more recently, Iraq, is a painful rejoinder to the dangers of monologic thought. Essentially, it is the exclusion of human reciprocation and otherness; the other who is [also] wholly other ('*tout autre est tout autre*').[1] Resolution cannot be achieved precisely because of such exclusion. This, more often than not, stems from a conscious or unconscious unwillingness to attempt to understand or even *see* the other side, and the obverse relationship that must necessarily be factored in if the war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) is to be avoided. Those at the centre always have much to lose in the drive for an irenic compact, a dialogic outcome. This outcome, then, necessitates that that the centre allows for the 'play of its elements inside the total form', so if there is an *a priori* policy of exclusion, the entire edifice, like an unsupported structure, collapses under the weight of its own inelasticity. [2] It is vital then that the centre *is* its own resistance, absorbing any tensions that arise from within itself.

A robust defence of dialogic thought is here the starting point of a defence of one of *antae*'s gestures: a belief in the value of interdisciplinarity. Indeed, as was outlined in the editorial of the first issue, antae refers to that which is in-between, to that which is seldom found except in the plural, both a limited *and* limiting plural, solidifying the opposition between left and right and in so doing connoting a perceivable symmetry.

Interdisciplinarity is perhaps easier to defend intellectually than institutionally, since, unfortunately, an institution often serves to repress rather than generate ideologies, and tends towards imposing itself upon its own processes and outputs. There are various gambits and responses which one might come up with in order to adequately convey the importance of such a stand in response to this problem.

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[1] Jaques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Will (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.97.

[2] Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 351-370 (p. 352).

The primacy of the apolitical is important here. The defence of territory in academic institutions can be called "political", in the sense of (a perceived and actual) power struggle, for reputation, funding, the solidifying of various academic niches whose borders are carefully maintained so as remain as "unthreatened" as possible. Such an approach might lead to either of two things: academic output which, though well-researched, is too self-reliant on its own canon and jargon, and too inward-looking, so that it can only ever achieve so much in its output; or academic stagnation brought about by reformulations of what has been done and said before.

This is not to suggest the 'end' of different disciplines; just as this is not the end of 'territories', whatever these might be. It is healthy to have opposition, and even tension, across the perceived binary divides. As the historian Niall Ferguson has rightly noted in his work *Civilization: The Six Killer Apps of Western Power*, the reason for China's relative lack of scientific progress from the fifteenth century onwards was brought about by a lengthy period of inward-looking isolationism, which left it prey to a Europe that overlapped and overran itself into scientific progress.[3] It is such inward-looking isolationism that should be avoided. Academic autarky will simply not do.

There is a richness of perspective in interdisciplinary study that cannot be gained otherwise. It is, or ought to be, *a plural both limited and limiting*, that is, an interdisciplinarity that allows for the full weight of variety and plurality whilst not impeding the very diversity that gives it strength. In such a manner, what one ends up with is not a superficial and unitary standardisation of several academic fields, but a symbiotic exchange that enriches the disciplines it consults. Moreover, as has already been pointed out, this would be an interdisciplinary context that invites its own deconstruction, its own decentralisation. Even if one recognises the practical difficulties of application involved in such an enterprise, the *raison d'être* of academic investigation is sidelined if in the pursuit of 'practicality' or 'ease of application', the foremost concern no longer remains that of furthering one's insight into the matter at hand whilst referring, when possible and applicable, to what is on offer in the entire academic world. This might seem like an obvious point to make, but looking at the politics of academia, one would not necessarily conclude that this was so.

A clear emphasis should therefore be made on the variety of perspectives which academia can potentially bring. It is a call for the dialogic, for a polymathic approach. The monologic approach encourages a monopoly of specialisation, and this leads to both academic and intellectual atrophy. There should be no *cordon sanitaire* between academic disciplines, but neither should there be a dissolution of the perceived borders between them. One should trace the periphery but do so in a manner that takes account of the hinterland of the subject to ensure that the integrity of both disciplines will be respected.

[3] Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The Six Killer Apps of Western Power* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

We should not constrict ourselves to the limited purview that is sometimes to be found in academia. As Robert Heinlein says, 'specialization is for insects'.[4]

Such a variety of perspective in evidence is in this second issue as well. Indeed, Nicholas Roe's interview in this journal, with regard to his new biography on Keats, both questions the viability of a singular notion of romanticism, as well as the various personal dissatisfactions that helped shape the output of Keats's poetry. Rather than a neat definition within set parameters, 'Romanticism' is an evolving discipline within English studies, and Keats is no different. His fragmentary poems may even alter the pre-supposed biographies on his life, complementing or challenging them, as Roe suggests.

Melvin Chen's paper offers an interesting insight into the non-human world of insects, using Marc Estrin's novel as an example of what he terms 'magic agential realism'. Chen's paper is not only evidence of interdisciplinary interests. It also displays a concern with speciecism in a manner that challenges the borders of the (post)human, further accentuating the need for interdisciplinarity even within a particular discourse. Meanwhile, Sergio Muscat's paper furthers the polyphonic outline of the editorial in dealing with the concepts of fragmentation and reconstruction in the field of portraiture. This paper thus challenges the notion of completeness, while the value of the solitary but relational fragment is brought to light. In Mario Aquilina's paper, fragmentation happens, as it were, at the borders of a literary criticism that has not yet been fully able to adapt itself to 'new realities, like digital games and playable media', which is outside the traditional borders of the genre. Aquilina argues that electronic literature, with its inherent playfulness, performative dynamics and 'claim to literariness', allows precisely for the kind of interdisciplinary 'incursions' needed for the two discourses of literature and digital games to create a more reflective space for study.

'Encountering Malta II – British Writers and the Mediterranean 1760-1840: Literature, Landscapes, Politics', the conference which took place last January and is reviewed in this issue, is yet again another example of interdisciplinary output, with the disciplines of law, science and music, being among those consulted in a conference ostensibly centred around the writings of the Romantic period.

[4] Robert A. Heinelin, *Time Enough for Love* (New York, NY: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1988), p. 248

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