

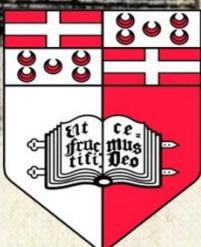
Et sic in infinitum

antae

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SOURCE Image: Robert Fludd, 1617. *Aus Exemplar*: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Rara, A 4917, p. 26.

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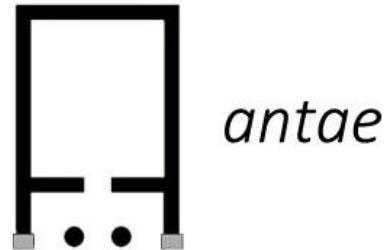
Editorial

Aaron Aquilina, Jeffrey Micallef

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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

Aaron Aquilina, Jeffrey Micallef

Lancaster University, University of Malta

Ha, ha! keep time: how sour sweet music is,
When time is broke and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives.
—Shakespeare, *Richard II*

Robert Fludd, a seventeenth-century physician and polymath, is the engraver of the dark, blank space that forms the cover of this issue. In trying to go back to the origin of the universe, to imagine *what* constituted it and *how*, he uses a blank space for the period prior to which the universe commenced. In other words, he locates it in a vast, unrepresentable locus—at every border of the black space there is engraved ‘Et sic in infinitum’: and like this to infinity.

It is an engraving that has got to do as much with the spatial as with the strictly temporal elements. We find a thematic connection with another 17th century author: Laurence Sterne, and his ‘The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman’, which similarly contains actual instances of this void that intentionally disrupt the proportionality of the novel’s layout.¹ In an interview Prof. Watkin gave with this journal, he stresses the importance retrospection plays in his work, and hence the need to find a space and a time, a dimension that Derrida terms a *topo-nomology*, from where one can look back to establish the “archontic dimension of domiciliation”.² Space, as Fludd’s engraving contends, remains inalienable from time, and, as the epigraph has it, it emerges that it is extremely difficult to ‘keep time’ when ‘time is broke and no proportion kept’.³

It is in light of these concerns about the formless and empty (and our all too human compulsion to shape) that, this year, the Department of English at the University of Malta hosted the ‘In Our Time’ symposium, by now a seminal annual event which marks the ever-growing investment in a healthy, local postgraduate lifestyle. The two-day symposium, held at the InterContinental Hotel over the 27th and 28th of March, featured keynote speakers Professor William Watkin, from Brunel University, London, and Professor Ivan Callus, from the hosting department. Callus, who delivered the first keynote address, spoke of the multifarious nuances of multimodality and monomodality in a paper entitled ‘Monomodality Forever (or For Now)’, while Watkin, in a paper entitled ‘The Time of Indifference: Mandelstam’s “Age”, Badiou’s “Event”, and Agamben’s “Contemporary”’, spoke of

¹ See Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, ed. by Graham Petrie (London, New York, NY: Penguin Group 1988), pp. 61, 62.

² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 3.

³ *Shakespeare: Five History Plays*, ed. by Tom Griffith (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), p. 200.

Agamben's and Badiou's reading of Mandelstam's poem, coaxing the paradoxes of the contemporaneous and the concept of "an age". Both addresses inspired enthusiastic questions in response to the astute insights of Callus and Watkin, and those who posed them were met with warmth and a genuine effort to help better the floor's understanding of Callus's and Watkin's research.

These were not isolated instances. Such annual symposia are always marked with a certain camaraderie and a collective effort to calm the jitters of first-time presenters. The catering is great, the post-symposium drinks are lively (to put it mildly), and the overall atmosphere is both familial and invigorating. This was represented in each of the panel sessions delivered. In all, there were thirteen panels, all running in parallel pairs or trios, with three presenters on each panel. These were as ranged as they were engaging; from 'The Influence of Politics' to 'Pop Culture of Our Time', from 'Gender Considerations' to 'Digital Literacies' or 'Victorian and Modernist Literary Constructs'. One of the most memorable must have been the academic panel, where Dr Aquilina, Prof. Stella Borg Barthet (both from the Department of English), Prof. Mark-Anthony Falzon (Department of Sociology), and Dr Mario Frendo (Department of Theatre Studies) discussed various intersecting themes centred around temporality.

As evidenced by the interdisciplinarity of the academic panel, the symposium welcomed submissions from across faculties, although most presenters hailed from a Cultural Studies or English department. The symposium not only encouraged presenters from other disciplines, but from other institutions, too. As in past symposia, there was a strong element of international influx, with presenters representing the Universities of Malta, Ljubljana, Amsterdam, Latvia, and Copenhagen, as well as Goldsmiths, King's College, Warwick, Leeds Trinity and Aberystwyth University.

The presenters were subsequently offered the opportunity to publish with this journal, which many have taken up in an honouring vote of confidence. This issue, in fact, features some of the finest submitted papers and acts upon its *modus operandi* of giving postgraduates a space to publish their academic voices, and also publishes an interview with Professor Watkin himself around the constructs of indifference, life, and death.

In this issue, time is of the essence. And yet what this "essence" is, or where its borders lie, seem not to be universally agreed upon; rather, the diverse papers often quietly interrupt each other in overlapping definitions of what time is or how it functions, or are even, at times, completely contradictory. Aptly, Joel White, from King's College, London, focuses on the breaks of time as interruption in a paper entitled 'Interrupting Tradition: Now-Time (*Jetzeit*) In and Out of the Theatre'. He explores the idea of how one can think and actualise the interruption of historical time and tradition, mediating his paper through Walter Benjamin's concept of *Jetzzzeit* and his idea of the tragic. As White writes, '[i]n tragedy, the death of the tragic hero determines the emergence of the new and marks a break between the pre-historical age of mythical laws and the new ethical and political community that emerges'. Looking at death not as tragic interruption but as something which, in the digital sphere, should not even happen at all, Renata Ntelia, from the University of Malta, presented her

paper 'Death in Digital Games: A Thanatological Approach'. In her examination of the simulation of death in games, Ntelia insightfully brings in notions of diegesis and the virtual (as opposed to the fictional), whereby players are given 'a new experience, a new way to act and a new way to die' on screen.

Similarly, and also from the University of Malta, Maria Cremona talks about the on-screen, albeit in terms of film rather than game theory. Her paper, entitled 'What's All the Fuss About Disney?: Narcissistic and Nostalgic Tendencies in Popular Disney Storyworlds', looks at the narcissistic recreations of the self through Disney, examining the 'fixed formula of controlled narcissism' in tandem with the aesthetics and economics of nostalgia. In her own words, 'nostalgic and narcissistic longings may be used as means of corporate strategy and control or as spaces of critical reflection and questioning about one's understanding of the self and past and present realities'. Haythem Bastawy, from Leeds Trinity University, presented a paper about 'Oscar Wilde: A Victorian Sage in a Modern Age' which also looks at re-creations of the self. Wilde's character is examined within the temporal context of the Modern, where self-dramatisation and aesthetic dandyism help Wilde act out a modern self without necessarily being implicated within it. Situating him in line with figures like Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin, Bastawy highlights Wilde as being temporally out of joint, where he 'mocks the hypocritical void of humanity'.

As evidenced by the articles published in this issue, a common conception of time, one set in definite terms, is perhaps too much to hope for. However, that may be no reason to despair; there is, Fludd reminds us, always more time.

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