

A New Tale Always Entertains

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*Whether it is a corrupt government official trying to solve their problems through indirect murder, or a sombre meditation which hauntingly likens life to a harsh winter, **ANTAE** lives up to its tagline as 'a journal for creative writing'.*

Having been joined by two of **ANTAE**'s associate editors, Ulaş Ersezen and Nikolai Zammit, the pair shared some reflections on the journal's first year after its rebranding, providing some details on the internal process of choosing which submitted works get set for publication, as well as the journal's overall role in providing a space and community for creative writing.

Originally an interdisciplinary journal for more academically inclined pieces of writing, **ANTAE** found its start with UM's Department of English in 2013 and moved successfully to publish an

impressive 20 issues across 7 volumes. The beauty of this detail, Zammit notes, is that the journal is 'very well recorded', preserving all of its legacy and current content through its webpage, free of charge and open to all. This, of course, persists even now. In its current rebranding, the journal has successfully published three issues of exclusively creative work. Authors who have made the cut come from all continents (minus Antarctica) and backgrounds, whether they are well-established and highly experienced, or perhaps newcomers to the scene, gifted with a budding talent. It's quite a comforting detail, especially when considering the move to creative writing. Prospective contributors

can assure themselves that their work, if published, will not only stand prominently in the issue it finds itself in, but that such work's presence will persist unwaveringly. **ANTAE**, like the strong pillars it takes its name from, will hence provide a firm foundation upon which writers may make their mark.

Editor-in-Chief Dr Aaron Aquilina from the Department of English has in fact taken steps to ensure that this rebranding of the journal is designed to be more writer-oriented and writer-minded. The ease of access to **ANTAE**'s catalogue in completeness is one such design, but **ANTAE** also works to streamline the process for authors with regard to moving their work from plan ➤



The ANTAE Team
Photo courtesy of the ANTAE Team

to product. The editors of the journal deliver consistent communication to ensure writers are kept in the loop at all times with how their work is faring in both the selection and publication processes. This goes beyond a simple acknowledgement of work being received to complete transparency on potential edits and suggestions made to pieces, which would then require approval from their respective authors prior to the issue's official unveiling.

Transparency, alongside fairness, is of chief importance for the journal, and the following contents may be a testament to this. Ersezen and Zammit had no reservations in sharing with me the internal process of the journal's workings in full, displaying an operation

that is fair yet competitive. With a team of editors sectioned into two groups, the intake of a particular issue is then split, with each half assigned at random to either of these groups. Following a rigorous review, the submissions then make their way to Aquilina, who, as the Editor-in-Chief, examines each work with his own fine focus. The numbers here matter. With each group being comprised of three editors, and Aquilina serving as a fourth at the final stage, a majority vote of approval must be reached for a work to be considered for publication. What these editors have at their disposal to aid them in such deliberation is nothing but the works in front of them. Names and accompanying biographical information

are phased out to ensure that each work is judged solely on its innate strengths and distinctive features. What may intrude, perhaps, are the internal biases of the editors themselves. Any one editor may be more inclined to a particular genre or style of writing than another. The quite sizeable number of editors, as well as the majority system, therefore seeks to combat this factor and ensure a more level playing field.

THE CORE IMPORTANCE: THE AUTHOR, THE WORLD

Each piece of prose, or line of poetry, paints a world that is spawned by its author and inevitably mirrors who they are. In a sense, it is the best form of expression as it represents

genuine authenticity. The team of *ANTAE* is not unaware of this. Ersezen notes that, interestingly, as the editors go through with their editing of the works entrusted to them, they tend to follow a principle which states 'edit as little as possible'. 'It is more so about just listening to the prose and poetry and less so about instructing the author,' Zammit says. This seems rather unexpected, but when one thinks about it, it makes a lot of sense. I had described the journal earlier on as being 'writer-minded' and 'writer-oriented', and as the editors are writers themselves, they recognise the value of a voice unfettered – of not bogging down a writer's intricate designs simply on the basis of making it 'clearer', as vague as a statement that may be. No writer really wants their work touched and supposedly 'made better' by an editor who may not entirely get the work's full intent.

The writer knows their work best, and it is upon this reasoning that, apart from editing some grammar and syntax, a work is left to be, hopefully, as the writer intended it to be. As Zammit notes, the underlying aim when it comes to editing a work is 'letting a text be what it wants to be'. Voice is invaluable, and *ANTAE* recognises this. Ersezen, fittingly, states that he likes a text 'that's not frightened of using language as it wants to use it'. It may be safe to say that authenticity will always be the prime quality *ANTAE* looks for in a text – of how sure of itself it is and how well it does that which it sets out to do – and the team will strive to preserve this to honour both the work and its author. It seems fitting then

that, at least in Zammit's method, he does not tend to administer any hard and fast guidelines when it comes to reviewing work. Instead, he posits a question back to the author – 'how was this supposed to make me feel?' – and he moves from there.

YOU MAKE A WORLD, AND THE WORLD MAKES YOU

Our writing is as much a product of our surroundings as it is an expression of ourselves. It would not be wrong to allow our daily lives to enter into the worlds we pen to paper. Such influence may often lead to the high notes in one's stories. Given this, perhaps it would be beneficial to complement our writing process with people who are equally passionate about their own worlds as we are about ours. Potentially, the best people for writers are other writers. Each person knows the craft in their own unique way, and this difference may perhaps be the key for most to both sharpen their strengths and identify what could do with a little polish. The editors at *ANTAE* know this better than most, I'd say, which is why Aquilina has taken the initiative to provide a support group for writers. Every month during the academic year, *ANTAE* hosts a minimum of one writing workshop, often centred on a particular aspect of writing and moderated by a volunteer who may be especially interested in the topic of the time. Writers are often given an opportunity to share their own writing with others at the workshop, and the mood is non-judgemental and constructive. Feeling welcomed is

what's most important to get people at the door and coming back, and *ANTAE* works hard to ensure this is so.

As such, continuing on the topic of feeling, perhaps feeling is the best indicator of a work's authenticity. But just like anything in the world, there are two sides – positive and negative, shortcomings and strengths, acceptance and rejection. As feeling may indicate the best aspects of a writer's work, feeling may also stop a writer from submitting their work at all. Zammit and Ersezen reflect on an obstacle often faced by those who've shown interest in writing yet never submitted – a fear of rejection. Their two cents is that this is simply a natural step for any writer, and not an exposure of weakness or inadequacy. They noted how there have been writers who were initially rejected who did not cease in spirit to submit work in later issues, and through trial and improvement, they were eventually accepted. The moral here is to keep on writing, and with the added benefit of being accessible to an international audience, the journal may be just the right space for writers, budding ones especially, to grow. 

Follow along and join *ANTAE*'s monthly pop-up workshops

