

antae



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Table of Contents

Editorial

James Farrugia, Irene Scicluna: *University of Malta* 1

“You want to mess with people’s heads”: An Interview with Jim Crace

The *antae* Editorial Board: *University of Malta* 5

Performance and Authentic Expression: The Soliloquies in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

Sephora Gauci: *University of Malta* 15

Corporeal Gender: Feeling Gender in First Person Trans* Narratives

Natasha Frost: *University of Edinburgh* 28

A Man, Burning: Communicative Suffering and the Ethics of Images

Marko Stamenkovic: *University of Ghent* 36

‘Style Matters’: *The Event of Style in Literature* Book Review

The *antae* Editorial Board: *University of Malta* 58

Anniversary Seminar on Foucault and Derrida: Theory and Practice — Review

Christine Caruana, James Farrugia: *University of Malta* 63

The Humanities on Migration — Conference Review

Aaron Aquilina: *Lancaster University* 68

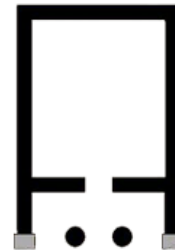
About Our Contributors

73

Editorial

James Farrugia, Irene Scicluna

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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

James Farrugia, Irene Scicluna

University of Malta

For last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words await another voice.

T.S. Eliot¹

'I'm going to steal the landscape. It is not going to be Malta. It's going to be an appropriation of Malta; the theft of Malta.' Jim Crace's novel *Being Dead*, winner of the 2000 National Book Critics Circle Award, is centred on an otherwise normal couple, except for the fact that they are recently deceased and decomposing by a Welsh cliffside. In an interview with *antae*, Crace expresses an affinity for the Maltese islands, as he speaks fondly of the people, the scale, and particularly, the cliff-dotted landscape. Malta will thus find itself a part of the indeterminate yet intimate Craceland—a topographical inspiration in terms of its 'porous landscape sitting on blue clay with no rivers or lakes, with plenty of water all around it.' As the opening quote indicates, Crace playfully, but strongly, suggests that there will be the familiar presence of Malta in his next novel, set to be about poverty.

Landscape is one of the subjects of our interview with Crace; besides this, the interview touches upon many other things, including the nature of creative writing, chronological remoteness and peripateticism in Crace's writing process, the familiarity and uncanniness of death, the role of animals and how their deaths relate to us, how his personal background features in his novel-writing, and the importance of political ideology in literature.

* * *

The rest of this issue centres around questions of performance and performativity as reconfigured through notions of style, politics, gender and theatre. It was in his poem 'September 1, 1939' that W.H. Auden wrote: 'All I have is a voice'.² Broadly defined, voice, like tone, can be at once irreverent and serious, discernible and indefinable, needling and caring; it is that which marks out the most overflowing contours of the self which we present to the world which we inhabit by happenstance or choosing—and it is through performance that we enact voice.

Richard Poirier, an American literary critic, has asserted that literary works should not be looked at as finished products, 'but as performance, another dimension of action endowed

¹ T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 205.

² W.H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), p. 97.

with a ‘beautiful liberating instability’.³ Indeed, performance necessitates continuous, enduring and even reciprocal action, one that permeates both actor and spectator—where the spectator, in a penetrating moment of ‘communicative competence’, becomes an integral part of the event being acted.⁴ This raises questions about the very nature of performance: what can be performed? How instrumental is the audience on the ultimate, acted result? Can performance be passive? It is the openness and mutability of performance that gives this issue its main reflective drive, bringing together various mediums of actuation. Yet the goal in all these manifestations of “actor-spectator” relationship remains the same: some relatable form of communicative competence, and perhaps even experience.

This play on performance is evident in Dr Mario Aquilina’s book *The Event of Style in Literature*, a review of which is featured in this issue. Aquilina considers the particular question of literariness, in the course of which he engages in a conceptual rereading of style as a fluid and performative variable. As he explores the various possible meanings that literary theorists such as Hans-George Gadamer, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida have given to style over time, he argues that style can have no fixed definition(s) and is without a necessary, determinate goal. It is due to this non-teleocratic feature of style that it ‘creates its readers performatively’. Aquilina also astutely elaborates on the process of engaging with style as he discusses Derrida’s and Blanchot’s thoughts with relation to Paul Celan’s ‘poetry of singularisation’. More crucially is the thought that Aquilina brings to the fore midway through book, that style is that which ‘creates its readers performatively’.

Meanwhile, in her paper ‘Performance and Authentic Expression: The Soliloquies in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*’, Sephora Gauci deals with another “actor-spectator” relation, this time between the audience and the soliloquist, specifically in the context of the implied participation in an individual’s innermost concerns (Hamlet in this case), where even the most intimate moment is turned into a public demonstration. Gauci also raises the question regarding what authenticity can be found in such insightful outbursts, or whether they may come across as somewhat forced, or as it were, without authentic feeling.

A very different take on “performance” can be found in Marko Stamenkovic’s intriguing paper, ‘A Man Burning: Communicative Suffering and the Ethics of Images’. Stamenkovic’s work takes an infamous example of a photographed act of self-immolation from the Vietnam War and tries to build towards a positive ethics of imagery with respect to the ‘constructive’ suffering communicated in an act of political protest. His focus is specifically on the fact that in such acts of contextualised self-immolation, one can ‘perform a political function’, but only if there is a ‘transformation’ of sorts as a result of this communicative act. This, according to Stamenkovic, requires a ‘responsive gaze’; or, in other words, a properly reciprocal relationship between the agent performing the political act and the audience witnessing it.

In Natasha Frost’s paper ‘Corporeal Gender: Feeling Gender in First Person Trans* Narratives’, the issue of performance comes to the fore through a complex prism of gender, where the main concern is with finding an alternative performative space in which the

³ Alessandro Portelli, *The Text and the Voice: Writing, Speaking, Democracy, and American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 22.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 22.

communication of the subject is contested and revised through the establishment of 'new languages of feeling'. Indeed, Frost contrasts Judith Butler's position, that is, that performativity 'contests the very notion of subject', with the idea that the self is understood as an immutable and inexpressible essence. In these regards, Frost's paper serves as a sharp rendering of distinct approaches to understanding gender, all the while with reference to the material physicality of the body and the over-arching theoretical frameworks of gender itself.

This issue also features reviews of the 'Anniversary Seminar on Foucault and Derrida: Theory and Practice', and 'The Humanities on Migration', two conferences which took place in December 2014 and February 2015 respectively. Both events were marked by their wide span of disciplines and the participation of several representatives from various humanities departments. Given the obvious links to the multitude of pressing present-day issues that these conferences covered—panoptical society, the formational importance of education, the (de)construction of the immensely polarising worlds around, the ever-present phenomenon of migration, racism, and more—it is no wonder that feelings of exasperation come about, as Professor Dominic Fenech (Dean of the Faculty of Arts) pointed out in 'The Humanities on Migration' conference, when one is, repeatedly at that, questioned and prodded about the 'relevance' of the humanities.

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