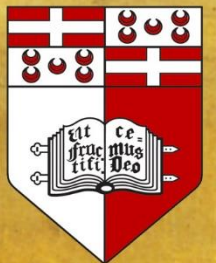


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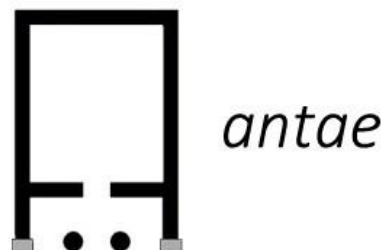
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Editorial

Christine Caruana, Elsa Fiott

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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

Christine Caruana, Elsa Fiott

University of Malta

Boredom makes time a problem. In order to prevent the onslaught of boredom, Plato construes his notion of an ideal society in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of free time, which hinders us from keeping busy perfecting the basic tasks required for our survival, and fuels, instead, a desire for something other.¹ In this manner, life becomes extravagantly complicated with what Plato terms ‘luxuries’: the spectrum of possibility, much like the spread of a peacock’s tail, a handicap.

This might strike the modern reader as paradoxical, when considering the commonplace understanding that modern life is too fast-paced and still plagued with boredom. A closer inspection of how we choose to define activity and distraction—through the lens of the Frankfurt school, for example—might confound Plato’s neat distinction between action and inaction, whilst still allowing his claim to gain traction. Boredom is thus not only linked to time, but also, to the concept of freedom, purpose, and contentment, and a post-Marxist perspective on contemporary life could serve to characterise boredom as symptomatic of a politically-induced lotus-eating.

Without the problematic light boredom sheds on its many sister concepts, boredom itself is already a handful. To return to the notion of time, however, one might contend that Bertrand Russell’s ‘In Praise of Idleness’ can be used to revise Plato’s drastic position, without ignoring his legitimate warning against the innocuous threat that boredom poses; boredom is not the result of free time, but of an *excess* of free time, whereby leisure and idleness—normally a welcome and necessary break from action—become atrophied into boredom, their evil twin, and the *enfant terrible* of existential crises.²

We do not need a definition for boredom because we know it too well. We have all found ourselves suspended in a passive and aimless waiting, until something sufficiently engaging or distracting breaks the mould. For many of us, boredom is a temporary and transient problem, where the word ‘until’ balances out the equation, and boredom remains one of many variables, rather than a definitive constant. More significantly, a specific type of boredom—malignant, chronic, insomniac, and insurmountable—gives time an unendurable weight, surpassing the breaking point of Heideggerian *Langweile*; this boredom does not care that “life is short” or that “we only live once”. The pervasive listlessness of boredom defies will and discipline, and gives substance to—without shaping the borders of—nothingness. To be bored is to wish (and even this wish is non-agential, inconsequential) for a strategy that kills

¹ See Plato, *The Republic*, ed. by G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. by Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

² See Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness and other essays* (London, and New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2004).

time. Here, the precept that gives time value and that makes wasting time uncommendable, is nullified.

Boredom makes the salutary motto ‘seize the day’ ring hollow, and replaces it, implacably, with seizure. In writing that ‘[a]ll the unhappiness of man arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their chamber’, Pascal drew attention to action, its compulsion, and its consequences; but this line of thought also sheds light on the fact that inaction is not necessarily peacefully idle or indolent; quiet stasis is ideal and tellingly opposed to the disturbed character that paralysis can assume.³

While boredom gives our daily concerns an insubstantial quality, the fact of boredom itself can be an unmoveable weight with its own centre of gravity, which is inverse, as it were, since boredom’s force of attraction simultaneously subsumes and repels. It is as if boredom is to be a penultimate state which destroys, by virtue of its very being, the possibility of any recourse forward or backward. And despite the blow that boredom deals potentiality, boredom bears the teeth-marks of disappointed prospects, rendering restlessness a not altogether incommensurate companion to shiftlessness. Boredom can sometimes have an unappeasable roving eye.

Still, boredom is vulnerable to rhetoricisation, and even though the oscillations may register only imperceptibly on the Richter scale, life still goes on. Boredom is no victor against time, and Julian Barnes’s observation in *The Sense of an Ending* displays the conundrum of being bored, in both its disavowal of and desire for the sense of possibility, with poignant concision:

‘Every Day is Sunday’—the words took me back to my own years of stagnancy, and that terrible waiting for life to begin. [...] ‘Every day is Sunday’—that wouldn’t make a bad epitaph, would it?⁴

And yet, boredom does not bore people, as this issue evidences. The selection of papers here engage with the topic of boredom without resolving the problem that boredom presents us with in a facile, antidotal manner. In this themed edition of *antae* on “boredom”, we are pleased to present a diverse collection of papers which approach the topic from standpoints that take the particularities of different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts into consideration. Indeed, we are also satisfied to note that our contributors have taken up the invitation for a fresher look at boredom that does not limit itself to the visions of nervous frustration which the topic might immediately conjure.

Ashar Foley’s paper, for instance, is an intriguing experiment in this aspect. Here, boredom is explored within the context of the “game” between writers and readers. Taking its cue from George Gissing’s novel *New Grub Street* (1891), Foley highlights the differences between the work of a writer who pursues the craft out of a genuine desire to write and that of a writer whose intentions are predominantly lucrative. Boredom, therefore, emerges as a significant element involved in the creation of more authentic literature. Nikolaus Lehner, on the other

³ Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées*, trans. by W.F. Trotter (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), p. 39.

⁴ Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p. 62.

hand, suggests that boredom is ubiquitous (albeit present to different degrees). Drawing on the work of philosophers like Nietzsche and Luhmann, he observes the relationship between subjectivity and ennui—a point that is very telling in relation to the emergence of consumerism.

The focus in Pedro Corga's paper starts off as more narrow given that Gonçao M. Tavares' *Uma Viagem à Índia* (2010) is the text he chooses to explore: a work that is widely regarded as a contemporary masterpiece within the canon of Portuguese literature (and Europe in general). The protagonist of the novel, however—(the very Bloomian...) Bloom—may be viewed as a study in boredom as he is characterized by the disease of postmodern exhaustion, apathy, and detachment. Any journey—not just Bloom's—is usually undertaken, one may presume, in the vague hope that it leads to some place (or even something) new: that which is not ordinary. In his paper, Manel Mula Ferrer explores precisely the “extra-ordinary” in relation to the personal. As he suggests, the extraordinary, or boredom's polar opposite, allows us to break the pattern of repetition and the predictability of flatness.

Significantly, however, not all human mobility may be called journeying; there is a movement, a perpetual (even ontological) wandering, that distances itself from such goals. This is state of the bored flâneur, the image of whom is so entrenched within the psyche of modernity. In his paper, Oliver Neto explores this by focussing on Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) and how the novel's story, as well as its mode of narration, build up the experience of boredom and provide an insight into its possible consequences within a specific historical context. In a paper that is perhaps more overtly engaged with philosophy, James Farrugia delves into the work of the Romanian philosopher and essayist E.M. Cioran in an attempt to reconcile the multifarious concepts of his work, ranging from nothingness to quietism, with the subject of boredom. In order to do so, Farrugia draws links with the (similarly existentialist) philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer and Martin Heidegger.

Characterised much less by boredom than by intellectual excitement, the SLSA-EU's Scale conference (held in Malta earlier this year) is reviewed in this issue by Aaron Aquilina. The conference, cosmopolitan in terms of both its participants and the eclectic range of ideas it explored, served as a rare opportunity for cross-disciplinary conversation (a deeply-held value by this journal) to take place.

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