

Gerald Murnane

Another World in This One

Edited by Anthony Uhlmann



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Gerald Murnane's Plain Style

Mark Byron

I learned that no thing in the world is one thing; that each thing in the world is two things at least, and probably many more than two things. I learned to find a queer pleasure in staring at a thing and dreaming of how many things it might be.¹

The role of grasslands in Gerald Murnane's fiction is as sustained and pronounced as his self-stated aversion to the coast and the ocean,² and his uneasy forbearance of mountain ranges. Murnane's narrative devotion to steppe-like ecologies provokes the question of style and how his narrative strategies might operate dialectically with his chosen geography. When thinking of how geography inflects prose style one might think of "oceanic" or "thalassan" style in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, or John Banville's *The Sea*, or even the sea of sand in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. Alternately, the mountainous topography in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* or Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* mediates allegory and symbolism with the rhetoric of geographical representation. Absent such symbolic inducements, the steppe, plain, grassland – unvaried topography neither desert nor littoral, neither urban nor rural, yet a strangely replenishing source for agriculture, husbandry, and the history of human migrations – provide Murnane's fictions with a distinct ground from which to produce his complex narrative meditations.

This essay takes Murnane's 1988 novel *Inland* as the quintessential performance of this "plain style". Several major works engage directly with the grasslands of

1 Gerald Murnane, *Inland* (1988; Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive, 2012), 48. All subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.

2 For example, in the essay "The Breathing Author", Murnane reports his inability to swim, beginning with a visit to the sea with his mother aged six months: "I began to scream as soon as I saw and heard the sea", in *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2005), 162.

Victoria and further afield – *The Plains* (1982) foremost among them – but one also finds references to the Patagonian pampas scattered across *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs* (2005) and other works.³ *Inland* situates steppe ecology as a specific means by which to think through Murnane’s familiar range of questions: what is it to write? For whom does the author write, and to whom does the narrator speak? How do the conditions of writing within narrative shape the effect of that narrative? By choosing three specific grassland zones – the Hungarian Great Alföld or Pannonian Plain, the Great Plains of South Dakota and northern Nebraska, and the vanishing grasslands of northern Melbourne County – *Inland* triangulates familiar narrative obsessions to create a generative poetics of the exclave. Each of these topographies is a kind of exclave, separated from a larger steppe formation but sharing its geomorphology: the Alföld or *Puszta* is a part of the Hungarian steppe exclave, itself an appendix to the great Eurasian steppe (the word *puszta*, a Slavic loan-word in Hungarian, is thus a member of a linguistic exclave); the replanted fields surrounding the South Dakotan Institute of Prairie Studies in *Inland* represent a manufactured exclave within the Great Plains of North America; and the northern grasslands of Melbourne County gesture towards a larger treeless space beyond Mount Macedon, and further afield, the Wimmera region beyond the Grampians. Each zone is a kind of subjunctive geography within which the narrator can productively engage in observing the world from the sides of his eyes, and indeed, in which the narrator himself is able to generate a provisional identity that spans the globe, at once in Szolnok County in the Hungarian *puszta* and in his “native district” in Melbourne County. By this careful calibration of geographic particularity with narrative method, *Inland* demonstrates how Murnane is not exactly a national writer, nor even a regional writer. Skirting specific forms of regionalism, the writing is not much concerned with vernacular, dialect, or local custom, but rather thought and modes of expression joining across vast distances, connected by a strange intimacy. This intimacy is literalised in “the girl from Bendigo Street”, whose fate in the narrator’s life becomes the embodiment of this exclave poetics.

3 One example is Murnane’s remembered ambitions in turning away from poetry to write his first novel: “I had hoped to write a novel about a young man growing up in a large bluestone house on a grazing property on a place resembling the pampas of Argentina. The young man would spend much of his time in the library of his house, looking out from beyond walls of books at immense grasslands.” See “The Cursing of Ivan Veliki”, in *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2005), 49.

Inland Topography

The narrative contours of *Inland* resemble those of the *puszta*, steppe, grassland: apparently uniform on the surface, but often disguising a deep history and ecology, cultivated over time, and recorded in the strata beneath the text surface. The narrator occupies an estate house in Szolnok County in the Hungarian *puszta* for the first quarter of the novel, observing his book-lined room and taking surreptitious glances from the window to the fields and estate workers outside. He writes to his editor, Anne Kristaly Gunnarsen, a native of Szolnok County, but who is resident in the Calvin O. Dahlberg Institute of Prairie Studies in the town of Ideal in Tripp County, South Dakota. The narrative then shifts almost uniformly to Melbourne County,⁴ where the narrator reflects upon his childhood and coming-of-age, recalling the influence of geography upon his rising amorous sensibilities, especially the proximity or otherwise of the Victorian grasslands in periods of transience. The central thematic focus of this larger portion of the narrative settles on the dawning affection he feels for “the girl from Bendigo Street”. Following his move away from the school at which they meet he loses touch with her, and his attempts, closer to the narrative present, to track down this nascent adolescent love interest come to nothing. The narrative concludes in Fawkner cemetery in Pascoe Vale, bordering the forest, where the narrator reflects on the girl from Bendigo Street. Her young brother’s grave acts as a kind of gnomon, orienting the narrator’s reflections on his youth and his processes of mourning what might have been. The final paragraph is a direct, if unmarked, quotation of the final paragraph in *Wuthering Heights* in which Lockwood – the recipient of Catherine and Heathcliff’s story in the frame narrative – contemplates the Yorkshire moors at the graveyard in which the novel’s two major protagonists are ultimately reunited in burial.⁵

The narrative of *Inland* is conditioned upon the *negative event*. Things do happen to the narrator and are recorded and subject to reflection: his sequence of moving house during the formative years of adolescence certainly shapes the emotional contours of the novel, particularly its understated “plain style”, and the move away from the girl from Bendigo Street turns out to be the foundational trauma that precipitates access to the larger reservoir or field of memory. Yet it is understatement, lack of disclosure, and missed declarations of affection and desire,

4 Julian Murphy addresses the ambiguity of narration across the two parts of the novel: “it is never made entirely clear how the two narrators relate to each other; it remains possible that each may be a figment of the other’s imagination”. See Julian Murphy, “Being-in-Landscape: A Heideggerian Reading of Landscape in Gerald Murnane’s *Inland*”, *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 14, no. 3 (2014), 1.

5 The associations between Brontë’s novel and the graveyard are established halfway through the novel when the narrator provides a history of his having read *Wuthering Heights* nine and nineteen years previously (118-19).

all captured figuratively in the way the narrator indulges in “looking askance” at the physical world, that delineate the depth of feeling in the novel and have it play out a minor event of adolescence into the life-shaping anguish generative of such profound, and profoundly reticent, passion. In this sense *Inland* shares a sense of scale of youthful non-events with the story “Araby” in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, where a young boy misses his chance to buy a trinket at the city bazaar for Mangan’s sister who lives across the street, and who is likely unaware of his feelings for her. *Inland* achieves this combination of profundity and understatement by unifying the narrator’s preferred topography of the grassland with the narrative preoccupation of the self-conscious act of writing.

The narrator’s opening gambit sets the act of writing, and the first-person confession of the act, within the confines of the *puszta* on the Pannonian plains: “I am writing in the library of a manor-house, in a village I prefer not to name, near the town of Kunmadaras, in Szolnok County” (1). Situated in, but separated from, the grasslands of the Hungarian steppe, itself an exclave of the great Eurasian steppe, the narrator establishes a sense of displacement that provides visual perspective upon his surroundings, but equally in figurative terms on his own processes of memory and reportage. As Imre Salusinszky asserts: “More even than *The Plains*, *Inland* is a book written from and about the writer’s room”.⁶ The brief opening section of the narrative concludes with a clue to the hidden complexities running beneath the surface of grasslands, recorded memory, and textual landscapes: “Sometimes I am aware of more fields behind the first field, and of grasslands behind everything – indistinct grasslands under grey, sagging clouds” (1). The tone of this sentence is typical of much of the novel: any overt sense of affect is diminished, but the subtle strength of the narrator’s divinations (he nowhere questions the actuality of things hidden behind those things in plain sight) retains the potential for revelation, whether in a spiritual sense or in the ontological sense of Heidegger’s notion of *aletheia* or “unconcealment”.⁷

Murnane confesses to a technical understanding of writing rather than any conventional sense of poetics: “The task of this sort of writer is to report in the plainest language the images that most claim his attention from among the images in his mind and then to arrange his sentences and paragraphs (and, if applicable, his chapters) so as to suggest the connections between those images”.⁸ This reportage of an inner mindscape bears affinities with the strategies and tone of the *nouveau roman* – such as Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novel *La jalousie*, or even Samuel Beckett’s

6 Imre Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 75-76.

7 See Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 143-212.

8 Murnane, “The Breathing Author”, 169.

short prose piece *Le dépeupleur* or *The Lost Ones* – where affect is resisted at the text's surface only to emerge from its subterranean table at points of narrative stress. For Murnane this technical reportage elides the luxuries of psychoanalysis, casting the mind into a topography able to be read as landscape in all its hidden striations:

In my view, the place we commonly call the real world is surrounded by vast and possibly infinite landscape which is invisible to these eyes (points to eyes) but which I am able to apprehend by other means. The more I tell you about this landscape, the more inclined you might be to call it my mind.⁹

This ontological vagueness fusing inner and outer worlds, textual landscapes and the mental images from which they spring, also finds expression in the ambiguous transition between narrative subjects. The Hungarian manor-house occupant and the resident of Melbourne County are figures within the same narrative consciousness, blending narrative action with exposition and reportage, and observable from a third-person viewpoint that permits identities to fold into each other. Here again Beckett provides an analogy or model in his postwar novel *Molloy*, especially the opening scene in which an observer notes two figures approaching on a road and who then, in the novel's two parts, becomes one of those figures and writes the report of another.¹⁰

Murnane's choice of the Hungarian Alföld as the setting for the first part of *Inland* folds this novel into an abiding theme recurring across several of his other works. The deep attraction of grasslands resides in the appearance of simplicity and the subtle indications of a hidden complexity beneath the uniformity of long grasses shaped by wind. He notes in the essay "Birds of the Puszta" that, as a youth, "I thought of plains whenever I wanted to think of something unremarkable at first sight but concealing much of meaning",¹¹ including "lost kingdoms" hidden from view. Taken literally, Murnane's childhood in Melbourne, Bendigo, and the Western Districts of Victoria was defined by the two rings of grassland around Melbourne, beyond which was "foreign territory". "Whenever I think of myself as being forced, for whatever reason, to flee from my native district, I think of myself as fleeing into the grasslands. In desperate circumstances I might flee as far as the outer grasslands, but I could never see myself as fleeing further" (57). Yet the security that comes with apparent topographic uniformity becomes more complex when matched with the inner landscapes of memory, and especially the memory

9 Murnane, "The Breathing Author", 177.

10 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, ed. Shane Weller (1951; London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 3-12.

11 Gerald Murnane, "Birds of the Puszta", in *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2005), 56. All subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.

of books. When composing *Inland*, Murnane remembers most clearly “what I call spaces-within-spaces” in the books of fiction he has read, providing a narrative cognate to the exclave geographies he invokes in his own fiction (60), or what he calls elsewhere, after Rilke, “a world floating like an island in the ocean of the self”.¹²

The narrator writes across actual and virtual distances separating the two grassland spaces in the first section of the novel – the Hungarian *puszta* and the South Dakotan Great Plains. This bridging act generates a series of anxieties and assertions, firstly in terms of the act and substance of writing.

The narrator reports that his editor, Anne Kristaly Gunnarsen, “was born where the River Sio, trickling from Lake Balaton, finds an unexpected partner in the River Sarviz from the north” (2). This geographical specificity, of a territory bounded by two waterways, deploys what Nicholas Birns calls “contrapuntal waves of alternate geographies to demonstrate the essential motility and transitivity of all landscapes, the association between sexual and geographical desire, the amorous and cartographic impulses”.¹³ It demarcates all the important places to appear in the novel as intermedial locations, and binds Anne to the narrator. He fears her disapproval in his writing: “I dislike what I have just written. I believe my editor too will dislike it when she reads it” (2). But his disapproval of her imagined husband animates him to a higher degree, calling into question the very integrity of the grassland in which the Institute is located. It is “not a real prairie” but rather a “wasteland” sown with seeds by the Institute’s scientists to mimic the conditions of virgin prairie: “Each summer, when the plants have grown to their full height, Gunnar T. Gunnarsen and his fellow scientists step gently in among the plants to count them” (3-4). This unlikely activity (nothing short of fraud in the narrator’s mind) is matched in Anne’s husband’s name: not only is it marked by a repetitive redundancy, its etymology also motivates the narrator to consider him an imagined figure of nemesis, from which an elaborate conspiracy is hatched. Gunnar attempts to sideline his wife from the editorial position attached to the Institute’s journal *Hinterland*, and, the narrator affirms, “has always wanted me dead” (12). The reader is given a clue to this burlesque fantasy in the name: Gunnar (“brave and bold”, warrior, fighter, from the Old Norse *gunnr* “war” and *arr* “warrior”) already contains *war* and *warrior*, and thus Gunnar T. Gunnarsen is “the war-warrior, son of war-warrior”.

12 Murnane, “The Cursing of Ivan Veliki”, 50.

13 Nicholas Birns, “Infinite Desires: Love and the Search for Truth in the Fiction of Gerald Murnane”, *Southerly* 55, no. 3 (1995), 48. Reflecting on the narratological influence of Marcel Proust upon *Inland*, Murnane notes the two paths of Guermantes and Méséglise in *Du côté de chez Swann*: “I remember the Narrator as a man made up mostly of landscapes and urged to study those landscapes until the impossible takes place in front of his eyes and the many landscapes and the two Ways merge to form the whole of a private country – his true homeland”. See “Birds of the Puszta”, 60.

Scholars often note the strong correlation between grasslands and the location of writing in Murnane's fiction and *Inland* in particular. On closer inspection, this relation is founded upon the specific topology of the exclave: the narrator is at liberty to write because, located at his desk in Szolnok County or in Melbourne County, he is able to view or imagine the grasslands that surround him; and the Calvin O. Dahlberg Institute of Prairie Studies produces the journal *Hinterland* as well as numerous reports in its steel and glass building set within, but separated from, the Great Plains of North Dakota. For the narrator, this poetics of the exclave allows him to imagine the confluence of writing and grasses:

When Anne Kristaly Gunnarsen signs a letter, her name reaches far out towards the centre of the page. If I look at her name for long enough, all her ens and esses turn into grass-stems and all the grass-stems lean as though a wind is blowing over them. If I stare at a page from Anne Kristaly Gunnarsen I can see words turning into grass – long, silken Magyar grass that would touch my thighs if I walked among it; short and brittle American grass that I could trample; and down below the tangle of stems, boneset or chokeberry or tiny reds and blues with no names in her language or mine. (11)

The narrative introduces a visitor, a writer, into the room in Szolnok County. What follows is a merging and reversal of roles of narrator and interlocutor in a deft narratological game. But what is of significance in terms of narrative topography is the method by which the different locations in the narrative are triangulated with the reader's position, effected through the repetition of André Maurois' famous phrase (eventually given in full on p. 130) concerning the power of Proust's sensory imagination, "the scent of invisible yet enduring lilacs". The visitor has never and will never see America but wishes "to breathe with ecstasy, through the curtain of the falling rain, the scent of invisible yet enduring dream-prairies" (27); the narrator reflects on the visitor's wish "to breathe with ecstasy, through the curtain of the falling rain, the scent of invisible yet enduring ghosts of places" (28), conflating Tolna County, Tripp County and Melbourne County; he then addresses his adversary, Gunnar T. Gunnarsen, who writes of his wife never seeing the Great Alföld "but who breathes in ecstasy, through the curtain of the falling rain, the scent of invisible yet enduring lands sloping gently between the Sio and the Sarviz" (31). This rhetorical formula then makes the decisive shift in the novel, transporting the narrator from Szolnok County to Melbourne County: "I have never seen, nor will I ever see, Tolna County; I cannot even breathe, through the curtain of the falling rain, the scent of invisible yet enduring beds of streams" (43).

With the narrator's writing position shifting to Melbourne County for much of the remainder of *Inland* – aside from one or two brief interludes – a new mode of

charting an inner landscape develops from recording the space between waterways at each significant location in the narrator's history. He writes in the present tense from a position between Russell Creek and the Hopkins River (somewhere near the Victorian coastal town of Warnambool), and, noting the waterways that define the region in which the Institute of Prairie Studies is located, turns the narrative to the recollection of his youth, bounded in his "native district" by the Merri River and the Moonee Ponds Creek (and thus taking in much of northern Melbourne including Brunswick, Coburg, and the grasslands of Craigieburn). Later the narrator provides a detailed account of his peripatetic youth, largely the result of his father's attempts to escape his gambling debts, by demarcating the waterways between which his family moved: starting in 1944 with a move to Bendigo – "My father and his wife and sons lived for four years in three different rented cottages between Bendigo Creek and Huntly Race" (131) – to the sale in 1960 of the house between Scotchman's Creek and Elster Creek and subsequent move to the Western Districts between Sutherland's Creek and Hovell's Creek, where his father was to die soon afterwards (136).

All those empty spaces [in the map of one's life], reader, are our grasslands. In all those grassy places see and dream and remember and dream of themselves having seen and dreamed and remembered all the men you have dreamed you might have been and all the men you dream you may yet become. (64)

This ability to plumb the regions between hydrological landmarks, turning empty spaces on one's life map into fertile grasslands of memory and writing, has the narrator declare: "With all my notes, I might have become a scientist of the depths of language ... I might have studied the soil and even the rock under the language of my homeland" (68-69). Language is a geological formation open to a chthonic hermeneutics, where innate knowledge of the dialect of one's "native district" becomes a central feature of all language. This becomes more widely significant when considering the looming presence, just out of view, of the Eurasian steppe as the home of Proto-Indo-European and thus the archaic progenitor of all Indo-European languages, including English – but, crucially, not Hungarian, thus allowing its deployment as a language of displacement.

This geomorphology shapes the central focus of the narrative: the narrator's youthful relationship with the girl from Bendigo Street. As they begin to spend time together in his "native district", the narrator gently attempts to understand her: "every few days she rewarded me by telling me quietly something that was unimportant in itself but seemed a message from beneath the surface of her" (96). Matters of surface (words) and depth (feeling) complicate the mutual implication of grasslands and written language. The pivotal moment in their relationship comes

when the girl from Bendigo Street relays a message to the narrator via the girl from Bendigo: "*She says she likes you very much*". The narrator reacts in the register of surfaces and depths, using these indices as ways of navigating his own words and his understanding of those of his beloved:

When I hear the silence that comes between my own words sometimes, I think of prairies or plains – as though all my words are being spoken from grasslands. But whenever I hear the silence that comes between the first five and the last two of the seven words spoken to me by the girl from Bendigo, I think of depths. (107)

This sense of undiscovered depths governs the relationship through to its final moments, when the narrator makes it known that his family will be leaving his "native district" for "the district between the Ovens and Reedy Creek" (167) and the girl from Bendigo Street asks the distance involved. As the narrator reflects on this moment in a nearby cemetery many years later, he understands that the depth of unstated words carries as much significance as the grassland topography of written words: "The girl has asked me her question as though it was a small matter to her, but I had read in her face that it was not a small matter to her, and I have not forgotten today what I read in her face" (167). The narrative becomes an understated elegy, based on subtle exchanges between two solitary adolescents, borne upon a substrate of deep feeling: the rock and soil that give the grassland its topographical distinction.

Understanding Plain Style

The operations of plain style in *Inland* have given rise to a variety of interpretations of the novel and its author's motivations for writing it. Sue Gillett has identified the way *Inland* privileges its male figures at the expense of the female figures – although this reading risks missing the genuine loss mourned towards the novel's end, and disregards the import of extended quotations from Gyula Illyés' *People of the Puszta* (1936) that sets up an affinity with female characters and their limited choices.¹⁴ Ken Gelder sees in Murnane's prose evidence of a kind of "monomania", rarefied in style and content, and abetted by the support of such conservative critics as Imre Salusinszky and Peter Craven.¹⁵ In his groundbreaking monograph, Salusinszky identifies the aesthetic of "the plains" that has directed Murnane's

14 Sue Gillett, "Loving and Hating the *Inland* Reader: Postmodern Ploys or Romantic Reaction", in *A Sense of Audience: Essays in Postcolonial Literatures*, ed. William McGaw, special edition of *Span* 30 (1990), 59-68.

15 Ken Gelder, "Politics and Monomania: The Rarefied World of Contemporary Australian Literary Culture", *Overland* 184 (2006), 48-56.

vision, “an imaginary space that describes what he sees both at the furthest edges of his external awareness and when he looks deepest into himself”, likening this consistency of vision to that of William Blake.¹⁶ This psychological depth opens Murnane’s work to phenomenological interpretations, and for Salusinszky corrals a particular intellectual lineage – Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Samuel Beckett through to Thomas Bernhard and Paul Auster, as well as a disposition towards philosophical writing reminiscent of Thomas Carlyle, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and especially Jacques Derrida.¹⁷

Murnane’s writing invites psychological readings, although Salusinszky chooses not to draw upon the theories of Freud, Lacan, Klein, or indeed any other mode of psychoanalysis. Instead, following the literary phenomenological tradition stemming from Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*, emphasis is placed upon the way the mind (presumably the narrator’s mind) confronts reality: “Murnane’s books are about the adventure of consciousness, finding itself in a world but never quite knowing the extent to which that world is real”.¹⁸ In this sense, place, and Melbourne in particular, becomes a kind of allegorical function. Given the etymological origins of the term allegory – the Greek *ἀλληγορία* combines *ἄλλος* (other) *ἀγορεύω* (to speak) to mean “other voicing” – Murnane’s allegories, and *Inland* in particular, are then acts of ventriloquism in relation to their “actual” geographical settings:

The point is really that in this, by now, habitual opening gesture of an exact physical placing, there is hidden something much more important than Hungary anyway: the words, “I am writing”. This is where *Inland* comes from: not from Hungary or – other sites in the book – America or Melbourne, but from a writing-table in a library.¹⁹

This view leads Salusinszky to consider the narrative of *Inland* to be split between two writing subjects, giving “a phenomenological account of what it is to write, as both narrators remind us of the physical activity of writing as an inscriptive process, and of writing as the process of constructing one sentence after another”.²⁰ The mental experiences of these subjects such as dream, fantasy and imagination, are thus subordinated to memory, where the mind is a theatre of memory. This view of narration installs a kind of crypto-author or ur-narrator whose memory

16 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 1.

17 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 2-3.

18 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 2.

19 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 75-76.

20 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 76.

coordinates the elegiac fabric of the novel. In the act of writing, the personae within *Inland* absent themselves and leave behind “inscriptions upon the tiny tombstones that are the pages and spines of books”.²¹

For Salusinszky, the framing of the act of writing is self-referentially elegiac, where writing is a kind of dying for the reader, and loving someone is to hold them in loving memory, drawing upon Derrida's work on the mutually generative nature of mourning and love.²² Other aspects of Derrida's work are invoked to structure an understanding of *Inland*: the novel as a postcard destined never to reach its recipient; inversions of depth (grasslands) and surface (ponds) in a chiasmic logic; the boundaries of death culminating in the Gospel of Matthew recited on the last Sunday in the Church year after Pentecost, suggesting an ontological apocalypse; and the translation of words across languages, and back (such as the case of American terms “translated” into Hungarian in the first section, but presented to us in English) as a system of *différance*, supplementarity, or even an economy of substitution embodied in the *pharmakon*. Salusinszky's focus on mourning, elegy and eschatology as the abiding themes of *Inland* leads him to consider the novel's terrain as a psychogeography, “the native district of consciousness” enabled by a phenomenological reduction in the narrator's act of writing.²³ The reader is able to make sense of the bifurcated narrative at the pivot point where the narrator burns the letter from the girl from Bendigo:

Out of a funeral – a burning and interring and casting upon waters of remains – begins a writing, a writing that will produce the further remains called *Inland* ... a love-letter from the second narrator to his childhood girlfriend, which he begins by writing as if he were a mid-century Hungarian landowner who has participated in the exploitation of a girl in a book. In a reversal of the Landscape sequence the second narrator has written the first.²⁴

This is an elegant and plausible reading of the novel, although by seeking to sublimate the material conditions of the narrative, its navigation between bodies of moving water in several locales across the globe, and its gravitational pull towards grassland ecologies, this kind of interpretive structure risks missing the force of Murnane's exclave poetics.

21 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 77.

22 Specific works of relevance include: *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (1994; London: Verso, 1997), and *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), among others.

23 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 79.

24 Salusinszky, *Gerald Murnane*, 80.

Characters are situated in landscape in the novel, even as they are mediated by memory, desire, mourning and mystification. This immersion in the world is sublimated by Salusinszky into a textual system and the condition of writing, and by Julian Murphy into an “ontological world” whereby a Heideggerian Being-in-the-world may take effect.²⁵ Murphy gives these two “worlds” equal weight, distinguishing Murnane’s use of landscape from any conventional metaphorical usage, and following Harald Fawkner, identifies how the narrator’s reported perception shapes the construction of the self. This process is most prominent for Murphy in the novel’s “second beginning” in Melbourne County, the narrator’s native district and location for his Being-in-the-world. The wind throughout *Inland* permits reflection on its “ancestral path” and to its indication of an extended geographic zone beyond the narrator’s ken. Wind erases boundaries, including that between the human body and its environment.

Murphy’s Heideggerian analysis of *Inland* tends to foreground Murnane’s “two worlds” – here the physical and the ontological worlds:

The narrator’s awareness that his physical body is within the physical world is accompanied by an awareness that his Self is also enmeshed in the world of Being. Such a conceptualisation of the Self-within-world aligns with Heidegger’s notion of Being-in-the-world, in which the individual comes into existence already in the world.²⁶

This analysis is restrictive in that it implies a body in the world that bears some kind of coherence or continuity, where the narrator of *Inland* takes the liberty of moving between scenes of writing in Melbourne and Hungary, in order to conduct the work of memory and commemoration. In a cognate sense, Salusinszky’s refraction of Murnane’s writing strategies by way of Derrida also invokes a separation of perception and its inscription in the supplemental logic of the text. Despite this, there has been a sustained interest in how Murnane’s fiction squares with more classical positions in phenomenology. Harald Fawkner’s incisive analysis of *Inland*, among Murnane’s other novels, engages with a sense of the world in a state of “givenness” – an underlying ontological condition not dissimilar to Heidegger’s notion of “worlding”, but with a sharper sense of the modes of perception in navigating and understanding that world.²⁷ Lena Sundin has also shown how the

25 Julian Murphy, “Being-in-Landscape: A Heideggerian Reading of Landscape in Gerald Murnane’s *Inland*”, *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 14, no. 3 (2014), 2.

26 Murphy, “Being-in-Landscape”, 9.

27 Harald Fawkner, *Grasses That Have No Fields: From Gerald Murnane’s Inland to a Phenomenology of Isogonic Constitution* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2006).

narrative threads of *Inland* bear affinities with bodily processes of respiration and its mingling of body with elements of world.²⁸

Lastly, Paul Genoni identifies the reception of Murnane's writing in recent years within the framework of global literature. Despite the challenges of Australian literary production shifting the burden to popular genres and a rising "international" style, dispersed niche audiences can arise, "to whom access to global culture is a means of both self-identifying and associating with others who share similar tastes or interests irrespective of their national affiliations."²⁹ Genoni claims Murnane to be Australia's first "postnational" writer, "to whom that landscape serves as a gateway to the images that reside deep within his own consciousness rather than as a component of the processes of geo-political annexation and social enculturation by which the nation was formed."³⁰ Murnane may be able to claim Australian credentials by virtue of his lack of international travel, yet his work tempers any entrenched notion of Australia in its refractory view and allegorical inducements, such as the "Inner Australia" in *The Plains*. Genoni's evaluation is framed by the question of postcoloniality: "As used by Murnane these images – primarily those associated with landscape, exploration, space, emptiness, home – cohere to produce a remarkable examination of an individual suffering the trauma of exile, with all that term implies for a postcolonial nation."³¹ This view also aligns neatly with the notion of Murnane's writing as exclave fiction, separated from a larger body (the nation, the Eurasian steppe, "Australian literature") but sharing its expansive tectonics.

Exclave Poetics

Inland's gnomic text surface and narrative profile therefore invoke inventive modes of reading: deploying philosophical frameworks from the Heideggerian, to phenomenology and deconstruction; and refracting the novel through the lens of World Literature, as well as regional and post-national literary formations. The structure of the novel in two mostly separate sections of dissimilar size, narrated by non-identical writing subjectivities, mimics the geography of *Inland's* first section:

28 Lena Sundin, *Iconicity in the Writing Process: Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse and Gerald Murnane's Inland* (Göteborg: Göteborg University, 2004), 118; quoted in Murphy, "Being-in-Landscape", 9.

29 Paul Genoni, "The Global Reception of Post-national Literary Fiction: The Case of Gerald Murnane", *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australia Literature* 9, Special Issue (2009), 2.

30 Genoni, "Global Reception", 6.

31 Paul Genoni, "Gerald Murnane", in *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), 302.

the Alföld or Pannonian Plain as an exclave of the Eurasian steppe. This morphological and symbolic affinity between narrative and geography resonates as a method by which to understand the narrative of youthful desire, prevarication, loss, and profound mourning that emerges from the plain style of the narrative's surface to become its most identifiable feature. How this exclave poetics functions depends on understanding the properties and significance of the exclave itself, and its relation to the larger topographic body to which it is appended and from which it is separated. The word *exclave* derives from the Latin *clavis* or "key", suggesting in the context of *Inland* not only a term of geographical separation but also an index or guide to unlocking certain kinds of knowledge, perception and experience.

The Eurasian steppe is comprised almost entirely of grassland, giving it a particular ecological profile: "Natural grassland occurs in situations too arid for the development of closed forest, but not so adverse as to prevent the development of a closed perennial herbaceous layer that is lacking in desert".³² This common vision of the steppe is of undifferentiated marginal land, not rich enough for sustained agriculture, and although often treeless, insufficiently arid to be classed as desert. The vast Eurasian steppe, home to Turkic, Mongol, Altaic and other groups, has long cast a shadow over the civilisations of Europe, Persia and China. Its essential mystery arises in its sheer size: the word itself derives from the Russian word *степь* and the Ukrainian word *степ* ("grassy plain"), applied to the vast Siberian territories far beyond the Ural Mountains and the western Russian cultural centres. As an ecological region of temperate grasslands and savannas, the Eurasian steppe includes parts of Romania and an exclave portion (the Pannonian Steppe or *puszta*) in Hungary, but is most commonly associated with the territories of Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, as well as Xinjiang and parts of Manchuria in China. The climate is semi-arid: hot summers and cold winters, and the poor soil supports grazing animals such as goats, sheep, camels and occasionally yaks. Steppe geography also occurs in southern Africa (*veld*) and North America (prairie, great plains), although these regions are rarely referred to by this term. Perhaps the most striking characteristic across geography, culture and climate is the unexpected diversity and richness lurking within an otherwise unprepossessing ecology. This is equally rich material for verbal and visual representation, and clearly a vital resource for Murnane's fiction, by which to suggest hidden depths to apparently uniform surfaces, whether of memory, affect, mourning, testimony, or the representation of these in written narrative.

Removed from both coast and mountains, the steppe has marked the location of a threat to urban civilisation since at least Roman times, where its seemingly

32 R.T. Coupland, "The Nature of Grassland", in *Grassland Ecosystems of the World*, ed. R.T. Coupland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 23.

autochthonous inhabitants emerge from its vast spaces to visit chaos upon the centres of culture. These marauders – on horseback, by caravan or on foot – appear without warning with the promise of an ever-replenishing force. They came to represent a counterpoint to settled civilisation, and often projected an image of potential collapse lurking within the cultures they were deemed to threaten. The abject twinning of the steppe peoples with the citizens of Rome, Byzantium, Baghdad and Vienna sends an echo across history back to the origins of language itself. The widely accepted Kurgan Hypothesis – the Russian word *курган* (*kurgan*) refers to the *tumuli* or burial mounds characteristic of this culture – states that the family of Indo-European languages originated in the migrations from the Eurasian steppe in the fourth millennium BCE, from which Proto-Indo-Europeans flourished and dispersed west and south. The Kurgan people of the Pontic steppe, north of the Black Sea, are also believed to have brought the domesticated horse to Europe,³³ and coupled with some of the earliest known uses of the wheel, developed the warrior's chariot.³⁴ Later migrations from this area include the Celtic tribes that were to settle Western Europe and the British Isles from the eighth century BCE. Unfairly depicted as *barbaroi* by the Romans, such groups were instrumental in advancing matters of astronomy, and gold and silver smithing.

This topography, of vast wilderness that disguises many of the foundational technologies of civilisation, provides Murnane with a fertile store of images and historical resonances by which to develop his own narrative preoccupations in *Inland*. Yet his focus centres upon the Pannonian exclave rather than the Eurasian steppe itself, and on the Hungarian people and language (which of course does not belong to the Indo-European family of languages but to the Finno-Ugric family). The early establishment of Gunnar T. Gunnarsen as a potential rival and hostile presence in the narrative of *Inland* can be understood very clearly in the context of steppe grasslands: his name confers a Norwegian (and thus Indo-European)

33 Murnane's affinity with horses and the racing industry is a prominent aspect of his persona that needs little elaboration. However, his reflections on the origins of horse husbandry in the Eurasian grasslands combine with the racing industry in his first attempts at literary composition: an epic poem with the title "Ivan Veliki", set on the steppes of Central Asia. Murnane reports finding the word "Veliki" in a racebook: "My hero's surname was actually the name of a mare, but the word brought to my mind an image of a young man striding through tall grass". The grass itself produces a kind of exclave poetics, linking the Hungarian *puszta* with Melbourne County: "I saw that the grass of the steppes was the same grass that I had often seen on the vacant blocks of land along the Houghton Road, East Oakleigh". "The Cursing of Ivan Veliki", 45 and 48.

34 There is an enormous specialist literature on these topics of horse husbandry, the emergence of the wheel, and the development of Proto-Indo-European, spanning several scholarly fields such as anthropology, linguistics and archaeology, among others. For a comprehensive overview of these topics and how they illustrate the convergence of technical mastery in multiple fields, see David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

heritage as well as a direct reference to a warrior ancestry in its meaning, thus combining two kinds of historical marauding forces: the Norse Vikings and the nomadic steppe peoples. Murnane's fascination with the Hungarian language, and his legendary acquisition of it later in life, thus serves specific purposes in the novel. In his essay "The Angel's Son: Why I Learned Hungarian Late in Life", he expands on the range of the language as a source of thinking about topography, the history of migrations, and the history of languages:

I understand that scholars have for long debated the precise origins of the language – and of the Hungarian people themselves. It can be safely said that the language is a very old language. The main body of the Hungarian people brought the language through the Carpathians and into Central Europe in the ninth century of the modern era, but language and people had travelled before then an immense distance during many centuries from their place of origin somewhere in Asia. I like sometimes to look at my atlas and to read aloud the name of the city of Alma Ata in Kazakhstan. What I hear are two Hungarian words meaning 'Father of Apples'. Likewise the 'Bator' in the name of the capital city of Mongolia is the Hungarian word for 'brave'. Many Hungarian words and expressions set me wondering about the mysterious centuries before the people and their language arrived in Europe. I mention here only a Hungarian name for the Milky Way: hadak útja, the soldiers' road.³⁵

This long quotation demonstrates Murnane's thinking across space and time, taking in vast narratives of human migrations and the melding of cultures and languages. Yet in keeping with his exclave poetics, the major source looming beneath the narrative surface is the poet Gyula Illyés' study of local Hungarian culture, *Puszták Népe* (1936) or *People of the Puszta* (1967). Murnane refers to the first photographs of Hungarians he saw as a boy, presumably in a newspaper, which provoked his interest in the Hungarian *puszta*, as well as a photograph of a wedding party of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania containing an outsized effigy of the bridegroom lodged in the trees above.³⁶ Murnane reports that "most of the details" in this latter photograph "are important items in *Inland* ... The white farm buildings, the poplar-shaped trees, the American girl behind the camera". He also claims that the effigy, rather than the bridegroom, "is the narrator of my book" (63). But it is *People of the Puszta* in which the grasslands of Eurasia and the Hungarian national identity converge for Murnane: "The book had such an effect on me that I later

35 Gerald Murnane, "The Angel's Son: Why I Learned Hungarian Late in Life", in *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs*, 219-20.

36 Murnane, "Birds of the Puszta", 62-63.

wrote a book of my own in order to relieve my feelings. Any reader interested in this matter is referred to *Inland*, 1988”³⁷ The Magyar migrations from Central Asia retain the ancestral memory of origins for a people hemmed in by mountains: “The trampled *puszta*, the actual grassland of Hungary, was not for the Hungarians their grassland of last recourse. When the Hungarians stared at the *puszta* they might have been dreaming of another grassland far away – a grassland of grasslands” (64). This essentialist or mythical mode of thinking about the Eurasian steppe captures the exclave poetics Murnane deploys in the Hungarian aspects of *Inland*.

This geomorphology, itself based on hidden continuities across physical barriers – namely the Carpathian Mountains separating the Pannonian Plain from the Eurasian steppe – is generative of the entire narrative. Once the narrator shifts to a different visage in the larger section of the novel set in Melbourne County, the focus shifts from one female figure to another: from the farm worker courted by her co-worker, exploited by her supervisor, and observed by the narrator from his manor-house window, to the girl from Bendigo Street. These two figures are separated in geographic and narrative terms, but are also bound together by virtue of the narrator’s inner landscape expressed in his writing on loose pages:

Two details from *People of the Puszta* stayed with me afterwards until I was driven to turn them into a book of fiction ... an account of the drowning of a young woman in a well and the author’s penetrating as a man the libraries and drawing rooms of the same manor houses that had seemed awesome fastnesses when he had been the son of oppressed farm labourers. (65)

Crossing between Murnane’s source text, his reading of it, and its deployment in the first section of *Inland*, is a carefully constructed event Nicholas Birns calls the library epiphany: “rendered through the medium of books or language, but its ultimate significance is emotional; books are vehicles of cognition, passports to a variety of rich experience located beyond their covers, if in practice unrealizable outside them”³⁸ *Inland* goes further than this: the initial narrator rehearses the elements of the epiphany, but gives way to the Melburnian narrator, whose epiphany moves along like the waterways in his story, parallel to the reading position, and ultimately outside the covers of a book in the grounds of the Fawkner cemetery. This is the novel’s major formal breakthrough, where landscape, configured as an exclave, supersedes the library as a site of revelation. This final scene also obliquely absorbs the first section of the novel. As the narrator wanders the graveyard looking for the right words, he comes across the grave of a Finnish

37 Murnane, “The Angel’s Son”, 218.

38 Birns, “Infinite Desires”, 54.

immigrant. This site, memorial to a native speaker of another branch of the Finno-Ugric family of languages, elicits the most visceral expression of emotion in the novel, and in the narrator's adult life:

I wept in a way that I have never wept for any person I have met during my life. I wept for only a few minutes but violently, in the way that I weep sometimes for a man or a woman in a book that I have just read to its end. (169)

That this moment and its record should capture the reading experience – we too have just read to the end of *Inland* – absorbs the reader into the same exclave poetics.

In his ethnographic study of the region's inhabitants, Illyés describes the setting of the manor house, "in the middle of an extensive and delightful park, with its tennis-court, artificial lake, orchard and majestic avenue of trees".³⁹ This cultivated zone is further separated from the surrounding Alföld by virtue of a high wrought-iron fence and a remnant moat or ditch. What attracts Illyés' attention is the construction of the farm quarters occupied by the peasants: "According to the ethnographers, these outhouses are still constructed on the architectural principles once common in the original Central Asian homeland, out of a few bits of wood plastered with mud and straw".⁴⁰ The obscure ethnic origins of the *puszta* people are matched by their marginal status, living "in utter isolation, more hidden away and cut off than any villagers",⁴¹ and showing a pronounced suspicion of outsiders. Illyés admits to a longstanding prejudice against this minority – much like that endured by the Roma throughout Europe or the *an lucht siúil* or Travellers in Ireland. This is set against the more esteemed origins of the Magyars:

Of the various theories concerning the origin of the Hungarians, none has struck me with greater force and certainty of revelation than the latest one, which states that the Hungarians came here not with Árpád, but as the mute baggage-carriers of Attila, if not even before him. At all events it was due to their unwarlike nature that they were neither driven out nor slain with the Huns or the Avars ... They yielded all they had to their noble conquerors, even their exquisite Ugric language – a normal historical process in the relationship between conqueror and conquered.⁴²

39 Gyula Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, trans. G.F. Cushing (1936; Budapest: Corvina, 1967), 7.

40 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 8–9.

41 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 9.

42 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 12. Notably, the proper name Árpád derives from *árpa*, the Hungarian word for barley, itself of Turkic origin – providing a neat link with Murnane's novel *Barley Patch* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2009).

Illyés alters his view of the peasant population in a series of homecomings to the *puszta*, overcome by the bleakness and emptiness of the sunsets: "Only then, freed from a fanatical enthusiasm for peasants and from that passion for home found in great reformers, could I survey the landscape and take a dispassionate view of its all".⁴³

This dilatory excursus helps situate the *puszta*'s inhabitants in relation to the Eurasian steppe, but it is the account of a female farmhand's suicide in Chapter 12 that arrests Murnane's attention and forms the basis for the understated sequences of observations in and beyond the manor house in *Inland*. Having been forced into sex with a farm official in the manor house, the young woman's body is found in the well – a common method of female suicide. The official chases off the labourers there to offer help: "The official – and I cannot help it if all this sounds rather like a medieval horror-story filtered through the imagination of [József] Eötvös – circled round and round the dead body, white as a sheet and utterly unable to do anything".⁴⁴ The peasants are without the power to defy authority, thus the act of suicide is the most radical transgression of the social order:

Yet the girl by dying suddenly developed a personality and stood apart from the community ... Later in my imagination this girl became the angel of defiance and revolt for me, with her pale, dead face and the raw flesh showing through it. I envisaged her character, the powerful spirit in the "simple peasant girl"; the spirit which revealed itself in the fire of suffering to me was like that of Joan of Arc.⁴⁵

Illyés meditates on the unfortunate culture of exploitation, where according to a village proverb, "Only bread is not shared", and notes that any tut-tutting extended only to the actions of the "old swine" and not so far as the welfare of the young girls being sexually harassed or abused. Illyés resents the girl for having had access – compelled as it was and subject to violence – to the inner sanctum of the manor house, a privilege he was only to enjoy much later on his return to the *puszta*: "However well I knew its inhabitants, the manor-house was still a feudal castle and a witches' den, and in its unpretentious way it did indeed swallow up young maidens".⁴⁶ This is the context of the window scene at the outset of *Inland*, where the narrator occupies the manor house, and peering periodically from one of the windows, views the overseer who views the labourers. Illyés discovers that, navigating between the choices of "submission or death", some girls attempt to evade the advances to which they are subject, and when successful they then stage

43 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 19.

44 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 189.

45 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 189–90.

46 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 192.

these events in comedies that would last for weeks.⁴⁷ Similarly, the narrator turns the potential drama outside to literary ends by constructing the narrative we read, and by reflecting on the act of writing as he does so. The serial gazes in the scene – the narrator watching the foreman who watches the “sullen young man” whose attentions fall upon the female labourer – conjures an atmosphere of conspiracy out of writing and grasses:

Now, having written this, I see that the husband of Anne Kristaly Gunnarsen has always wanted me dead. I see him crouched above the wolfberry on the dream-prairie of Anne Kristaly and hating me because I see him and he cannot see me. (12)

The function of grassland is to camouflage, just as the surface of writing can hide specific meanings, motivations and plotlines beneath its unvaried surface. This is what ultimately unites the novel’s two narrative scenarios: the economy of desire for the female farmhand in Illyés’ book, and her defiant suicide, is given a second iteration in the consciousness of the first narrator. Yet it is also translated into the lost love of the second narrator in his youth, and the lifetime attempting to reconcile the melancholia that comes of unrequited loss. These narrative exclaves all belong to the larger geomorphological structure of the novel, as Murnane has gone to some effort to elucidate:

I’ve never been able to explain how the different narrators of *Inland* take over from one another – give way to one another. Now, I’ll try again. Imagine that a certain man fell in love with a young woman who was both dead and written about in a book. Now, if that man wanted to meet that young woman, he could either die, or become part of a book. He probably can’t become part of the book that was already written, but perhaps he and the young woman can meet in some other book. So there you have the key to *Inland*. And I should add that the young woman lived and died in a country where the man who read about her had never been. He only knew the country from books. This man tries first to be a narrator of a book. At one time, he tries to be a character. And he tries to write the young woman into the book. But I can’t go on. The book is too complicated to sum up like this.⁴⁸

Gerald Murnane – or better, perhaps, his author function – falls in love with the defiant farmhand who suicides in Illyés’ text. He can never meet her, or become part of the book in which she is discovered, but he has the ability to create a new

47 Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 202–3.

48 Quoted in Susanne Braun-Bau, “A Conversation with Gerald Murnane”, *Antipodes* 10, no. 1 (1996), 47.

terrain in which they meet: not the Hungarian Alföld of the first section of *Inland*, as the narrator never steps away from his book-lined room, but translated into his meeting with the girl from Bendigo Street in the second section of the novel. The girl from Bendigo Street does not die, but her young brother's grave marks out the topography of the narrator's loss. These slippages, deferrals and separations are precise expressions of an exclave poetics.

Conclusion

The exclave permits a shared identity with a larger formation, but a qualified identity all the same. While the Alföld or Pannonian Plain is geomorphologically a part of the larger Eurasian steppe it is separated from it by the Carpathian Mountains. Similarly, the rich material of the narrator's memory obeys distinct boundaries, dwelling on the geographic and hydrological location of the narrator's youth as he orbits the central moment of his emotional life – his interactions with the girl from Bendigo Street that quickly suffer incidental but final separation. This imposition of distance in the course of potential, and potentially profound, emotional intimacy, has the novel's geographic, emotional, narratological and intertextual concerns converge in a poetics of the exclave. The final scene in the graveyard captures this sense of deeply grounded displacement. As the narrator ponders the words whispered between the two girls decades before, the narrative hinges on the proximity of the key to his emotional life and the insuperable border or ring-fence that time and memory places in the intermedial zone:

There is no final resolution here; but neither is there a literalizing end-point, a restrictive telos, a goal that can serve to dominate and subordinate everything that leads up to it. The untranslatability of the whispered words aspires toward a liberation as exhilarating as the endless horizons of any imagined prairies. Both in landscape and in love, Murnane celebrates the indefinite beauty of unconsummated desire.⁴⁹

Endlessness – whether geographically, emotionally, or in the workings of the imagination – may be understood but not directly experienced. Yet the reader and narrator may occupy a position that affords a view of the endless plains, grounded sympathetically in relation to that promised unreachable zone. The poetics of the exclave require precisely this kind of strange intimacy, engineering a surface division that belies a subterranean commonality. Here is the real mystery of the girl

49 Birns, "Infinite Desires", 62.

from Bendigo Street: she is unattainable, lost, a figment of memory, but in working through his meditation on his loose sheets, the narrator's marginal experience of deferred intimacy taps into a common ground, absorbing each of his narrative subjects as well as the reader open to the hidden complexities of the steppe.

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