Vilnius University
Faculty of Philology
Department of English Philology

Kasparas Varžinskas

Surfaces and Depths: The Geography of the Artistic Consciousness in Gerald Murnane's Novel "The Plains"

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of BA in English Philology

Supervisor: Dr Rūta Šlapkauskaitė

Vilnius 2016

Contents

Abstract 3
1. Introduction 4
2. Conceptual Landscapes: Vistas of Theory 9
3. Aesthetic and Hermeneutic Crossovers 14
    3.1. Mapping the Artist 14
    3.2. Mapping the Reader 22
4. Conclusions 27
Summary in Lithuanian 29
References 30

Abstract

This BA paper is an attempt to examine the artistic process as it is conveyed in Gerald Murnane's novel *The Plains* through the topographical imagination suggestive of the artist-narrator's metaphorical interiorizing of his surroundings. The analysis focuses on how unfamiliar environment can be capable of evoking a speculative form of perception of the world, thus making an individual question the limits of representation and the notion of reality itself. Seeing as landscape is the mise-en-scène of the novel, it will be approached as a central metaphor that welcomes the theoretical premises of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and anthropology. By foregrounding the narrator's visual thinking and explorative movement as a metaphor for a rigorous survey of internal states, this BA paper argues that the narrative becomes a site of clashing ontological and epistemological assumptions to the extent that it questions whether the personal and artistic truth is dependent on its exterior existence or on one's ability to perceive it. As a result, this analysis will show how cognitive and perceptual planes structure the reader's hermeneutic experience and how the reading experience of the novel parallels the narrator's artistic quest, characterised as it is by the paradox of simultaneous successes and failures of language and representation, in general.

1. Introduction

Gerald Murnane (b. 1939) is an Australian writer, currently living in Goroke, Australia. Since his birth Murnane has never left Australia and remained a reclusive author, which is notable in his fiction that often deals with topographical interiority and its limits. Murnane's first book, *Tamarisk Row,* was published in 1974, but it was the publication of his third novel, *The Plains* (1982), which drew attention from the foreign readership and established him as an important Australian writer with a unique and mature literary style. Since then Murnane has become one of the principal modern Australian authors (such as Patrick White, Miles Franklin, Peter Carey or Richard Flanagan) who is more interested in depicting what is "Australian" from an insider's point of view. His fiction foregrounds a form of internalized Australian landscape, full of dreamy and surrealist-like scenery, usually approached from the first-person perspective. Murnane dares to question the concept of the Australian "national character" and situates the reader in a landscape of inner Australia with no clear relation to the *real* Australia, (or even the *real* world). His prose is constructed in intellectually charged narratives, episodes of philosophical introspections with often solipsistic characters whose conscious 'being' reminds us of Jorge Luis Borges' or Italo Calvino's worlds. However, Murnane's elliptical prose may not seem designed for popular acclaim as its speculative nature is densely introspective and opaque. An avid reader could notice that his fiction reads in the tradition of European modernist and American postmodernist literature, including Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, John Ashbery, and Mark Strand, as his novels share a central concern with the relationship of an individual mind to its surrounding reality.

To grasp Murnane's unique rendition of Australia better, it would be advisable to overview the continent's not-that-old literary history and its place in the context of world literature. Due to its island/continent status, Australia has been defined as not part of any region of the world and until the 19th century it had no real literary tradition (Birns 2000: 112). Standard Anglophone literary history was no longer monolithic and the unique Australian tension between myth and reality, between settlement and uncharted territory, is emblematic of how the *settler* literature of Australia could *unsettle* the 'English' ideas about literature, at that time defined by Victorian proprieties (ibid., p. 114). In point of fact, the Australian literary tradition begins with poets who felt responsible for showing that Australia *could* produce literature, that its landscape was beautiful and honorable. Such conception of the land is still alive today as many recent Australian novels are 'returning' to the 19th century for material and inspiration. There is a long

tradition of Australian poetry about the natural world from Charles Harpur and Henry Kendall in the nineteenth century to poets as diverse as John Shaw Neilson, David Campbell, Judith Wright, and Oodgeroo Noonuccal in the twentieth and Les Murray and John Kinsella in the twenty-first (Cranston & Zeller 2007: 115). It is evident in how the local writers still write in a tradition of taking Australian sensory experience and European poetic form and threading them through each other with incredible nimbleness, making their works not just an imitation or an unwieldy adaptation of European models, but their systematic reinterpretation of them in an Australian light that threatens to upend their initial preconditions (Birns 2000: 114). The departure point for such literary tradition can be traced back to the 1890s, a period which is often named as a phase when Australian literature changed from being a colonial to a truly national one (Webby 2000: 25), e.g. the era of Balladists of the 1890s who rejected European norms of balladry and took their lead from the local oral tradition. Writers like Henry Lawson and Miles Franklin now were more interested in depicting what was "Australian" from an insider's point of view and the Australian landscape and ideas about the Australian "national character" moved to the foreground (ibid., p. 105).

The question of identity of this New World, postulated in the late 19th century, is still being approached in Australia's contemporary fiction. For example, in his novel *Riders in the Chariot*, Patrick White chooses a Jewish refugee, an Aboriginal artist and two women as his 'riders', highlighting the issues of multiculturalism, Aboriginal and women's movements as the catalysts of young, yet colorful, Australian culture (Webby 2000: 35). As the 20th-century Australian authors started abandoning their old colonial dependency on Britain, writers now were influenced by the Paris and New York literary scene. A rising interest in French symbolism and modernist American poetry produced such movements as the 'generation of '68', rejecting old romanticist ideas about diction and subject matter (ibid., p. 161). The Australian literature of the second half of the 20th century is significantly marked by the historical novel as an experimental form of alternative history writing, of expiation for colonial guilts, or of comment on more recent times (ibid., p. 108), e.g. works of Brian Penton, or Eleanor Dark, which revisit the periods of the convicts' exile, the Gold Rush, etc. Such reconstruction of history was in parallel to the 1960s' politics of women's liberation, literary experimentation and, a few decades later, the Aboriginal Rights' movement.

As for contemporary Australian literature, the aspect of landscape and its significance in the search of national and individual identity seems to be coming back. Literary critic Elizabeth Webby calls such literature "speculative fiction" (2000: 192) that foregrounds the landscape

setting for both introspective and social narratives which are inevitably concerned with individual subjectivity, as are Murnane's plains (*Inland, The Plains)* or Weller's post-apocalyptic terrain (*Land of the Golden Clouds*).

Significantly, the image of the landscape is the dominant element in Murnane's fiction. Playing with geographic notions and forms has already become his version of a conceptual template, as the author uses various countries as fictional analogues of Australia, such as the 'Australianised' Hungary in *Inland* (1988), to give just one example. In an attempt to creatively render the remoteness of Australia, Murnane creates his own world with isolated characters exercising imaginative voyaging and even explores the relationship of his work to mainstream Anglophone conceptions of 'the literary'. For example, his story *In Far Fields* (1997) portrays a young Australian writer who feels isolated from the world of English and European literature and travels to London in order to immerse "himself in the rarefied air of Anglo-European literary discourse" (Birns 2000: 124). Because of his reclusiveness Murnane is a unique author amongst his globetrotting contemporary Australian writers (e.g. Peter Carey), for though seemingly sedentary, he manages to talk powerfully about Australia in relation to the remaining world. What might seem an isolated, solipsistic Australian vision, ends up being an Anglophone alternative, as if "Australia were a new world" (ibid., p. 127), capable of opening even more 'worlds' and their possible combinations.

Despite the small amount of critical reception and scholarly attention Murnane's fiction has received, academics have highlighted Murnane's ability to construct his own narrative systems and sources of metaphors while trying to convey an individual's subjective relationship with the world. In the very first full-length study of Gerald Murnane published in 1993 Australian scholar Imre Salusinszky (1993: 15) observes that Murnane's true subject is "the nature of consciousness and imagination, their role in the world." Salusinszky argues that the author succeeds in exploring these themes, while at the same time remaining deeply individual. In addition, Elizabeth Webby (2000: 193) suggests that Murnane constructs "imagistic coherence" among his narratives which share the alienated subjective mind, "through which each fiction is focused" and the question of what is interior and what is exterior to the mind is recounted "through the musings of those consciousnesses in a deliberately monotonous way." Murnane's creative and idiosyncratic style has been also acknowledged by several awards Murnane has received, including the Patrick White Award (1999) and the Melbourne Prize for Literature (2009).

The Plains, the object of analysis in this BA paper, is a short novel about a young filmmaker who travels to a fictive country far within Australia where he tries to make a film about a mythical community who are in constant search for what it means to be a plainsman. The plainsmen have their own branches of philosophy, system of "symbols and heritage that transcend spiritual, political or cultural purposes" (Adelaide 2000: 251), only to reaffirm the boundlessness of the landscape. The documentary exploration and his shattered expectations lead the narrator into an introspective state of mind, making him rethink his identity as an artist. In the plains he spends over twenty years, never finishing the movie (and instead becoming a writer), which perhaps may be his most profound achievement and revelation.

The novel revolves around the problem of literal and imaginative limits and horizons of geographical and artistic latitudes, balancing the internal and external perceptions of the world. The book is both a metaphysical parable about appearance and reality, and a parodic examination of cultural horizons and anthropological attitudes. J. M. Coetzee (2012: 3) has called Murnane's fiction a "dual-world system" where the "real" and the "ideal" worlds are suspended in reciprocal tension, each holding the other in existence. The dual (even ambivalent) perception of the world is masterfully rendered in *The Plains* as the novel deals with an entire scope of dualities – temporal and spatial, surface and interior, success and failure, the finished and the unfinished. It is a novel about ideas which questions both the reality and its fictional representation, thereby unfolding itself as a clash of ontological and epistemological perceptions of the human condition and creativity. All this is filtered through the mind of the filmmaker who frames every episode and every scene as a series of shots in a film camera reel, only to prove that this whole journey made him a writer.

The main focus of this BA paper is also dual. For one, it will examine the narrator's artistic endeavors in relation to his surroundings: this first part of the analysis pinpoints the artist's literal and metaphorical movement(s) in the unfamiliar landscape, defined by its refractive and speculative nature. Consequently, it will look into how in this environment the narrator evolves from an ambitious filmmaker into a perceptive storyteller and whether his artistic quest is accomplished or failed. The second part follows the idea of the problematic notion of artistic representation and concentrates on how this process influences the reading experience and how it affects the reader. This section focuses on the metafictional characteristics of the book by examining how the speculative creativity of the artist merges with its speculative reception of the reader. The whole analysis should lead to conclusions about how Murnane makes use of the medium of art to tackle the root problem of the nature of reality and one's relation to it. Both

chapters of the analysis ('Mapping the Artist' and 'Mapping the Reader') will be approached by focusing on the dynamics of movement in the tempo-spatial landscape (analyzed in the light of British anthropologist Tim Ingold's ideas) and phenomenological perception (above all, vision) by referring to the philosophy of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The question of the work of art, its inexhaustability and its relation to truth and interpretation will be approached with the help of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic reasoning, specifically his magnum opus *Truth and Method* (1960).

2. Conceptual Landscapes: Vistas of Theory

In this BA paper I will employ theoretical insights from the phenomenological works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, anthropological-philosophical surveys of Tim Ingold and hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. As the novel deals with the first-person experience of the surrounding phenomena and accentuates the role of imagination in the creative process, the ideas from each theoretical approach will benefit the analysis and will support the interrelated arguments throughout both sections of the analysis.

To tackle the issue of perception, I will refer to the reasoning of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), one of the leading figures in the continental philosophy of the 20th century, who worked mainly in the tradition of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Challenging the Cartesian split of the body and mind, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy accentuates the entire bodily experience in relation to its environment. The philosopher follows the idea of Heidegger's *dasein* and argues that the embodied consciousness is a way of "being-in-the-world" through which an individual subject inhabits the environment by perceiving it (Carman 2008: 1). Establishing perception as the most basic mode of being in the world (ibid., p. 3), Merleau-Ponty builds an analytical fieldwork, tackling the issues of metaphysics, epistemology, language, art, etc. Although his *magnum opus, Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), is often regarded as his best and most thorough work, I will mainly focus on his last unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (published after his death in 1968), in which Merleau-Ponty poses a question of how we experience the outside reality through our internal consciousness while focusing on the sense of vision. He suggests that vision can be understood as a reflexive palpation, just like touching, but with the look (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 134), thus the objects we visually observe in our consciousness are treated as being experienced without the spatial distance. He goes on to say that vision, as one of our primary senses, functions not only as a perception of the outside world – we also see ourselves in the world (ibid., p. 9). In other words, for Merleau-Ponty, the body that is capable of seeing, is always seeing itself.

Another significant idea of his philosophy, is the concept of the visible object and its surface (ibid., p. 136). According to Merleau-Ponty, what we usually observe is not a thing itself, but a quality, the surface of inexhaustible depth. This invisible depth is only hinted at in our perceptive experience and art becomes a means of its exploration. In his essay *Eye and Mind* (published in 1964) he elaborates on the artistic experience, specifically painting, and states

that in relation to a visible object (e.g. a painting) our observing vision is never constant and is always in dynamic motion. Since we perceive with the whole body, our moving around makes a difference in the visible world, being part of it. By moving around, our bodies govern our gaze, steering the consciousness through the visible, thus our vision is always attached to our positioning and movement in space (Johnson et al. 1993: 124). While Merleau-Ponty focuses on visual representation, his ideas in *Eye and Mind* regarding the inexhaustibility and infinity of the work of art could also be used to describe other artistic mediums. He states that for an artist nothing is ever finally acquired and possessed for good. Every step of improving the work of art results in another opening where "everything he said before must be said again in a different way" (ibid., p. 147). Thus, what he seeks always remains to be sought out and any discovery itself calls forth still further quests. Merleau-Ponty concludes that the world will always be yet to be represented and the artistic endeavor is endless in its quest for perfection.

The second thinker on whose ideas I will rely in my analysis of Murnane's novel is British anthropologist Tim Ingold (b. 1948). Ingold has written over ten books in which he is examining archaeology, art, perception of landscape and movement in it. I will concentrate primarily on his work *Lines: A Brief History* (2007). In the preface of his study, Ingold elaborates the idea that every living organism inhabits its surroundings by moving in it and leaving a trail behind. In a sense, we, humans, are constantly drawing lines with our movement, not just in space, but also in our cultural domain, each in a different way, e.g. the linear movement of journey is essentially parallel to the linear nature of our storytelling. By giving various anthropological examples, Ingold develops a system of various modes of movements and lines, categorizing the ways we mark our existence in the world. For Ingold, any human experience is inevitably a movement and a journey as he draws parallels between such experiences as writing and travelling:

> *The work of memory inscribes the surface of the mind much as the writer inscribes the surface of the paper with his pen and the traveller inscribes the surface of the earth with his feet, they thought of these surfaces not as spaces to be surveyed but as regions to be inhabited, and which one can get to know not through one single, totalizing gaze, but through the laborious process of moving around.* (Ingold 2007: 16)

This parallel is developed throughout his survey as he focuses on the linear nature of writing:

> *The lines inscribed on the page, whether in the form of letters, neumes, punctuation marks or figures, were the*

> *visible traces of dexterous movements of the hand. And the eye of the reader, roaming over the page like a hunter on the trail, would follow these traces as it would have followed the trajectories of the hand that made them.* (ibid., p. 26)

Ingold also explores *how* these lines are created by examining the movement of a travelling subject. Firstly, he introduces the idea of *wayfaring* which he defines as "the most fundamental mode by which living beings <..> inhabit the earth" (ibid., p. 81). *Wayfaring* is a natural way of exploring one's surroundings and moving continually while literally crossing and traversing the surface of the world without concern for time or speed. Ultimately, it is a method of inhabiting the world where the knowledge is integrated along the path of movement. Ingold opposes *wayfaring* to another kind of movement, calling it *transport*. According to the anthropologist, the modern way of living propagates a mindset where the landscape and surroundings are used rather than inhabited. As a result, the act of travelling in our era is no more a full experience of all the components we encounter in the process of moving, rather we experience the distance as an empty gap between points A to B. This modality of movement suggests a pragmatic attitude towards the environment and this agenda fragments the line of *wayfaring* into a "succession of points or dots" (ibid., p. 75). Rather than being an experience *along* the way, this modality of movement carries us *across* it from location to location. This way we live only in these points while we are "temporarily exiled whilst in transit" (ibid., p. 77). Ultimately, Ingold suggests that the awareness of how we move could provide a hermeneutic-like approach to life, proving that our existence is a constant act of creation and interpretation of lines and trails that constitute the world.

The last thinker, whose philosophy I will be referring to, is German philosopher of the continental tradition, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), who mainly worked in the field of hermeneutics. Gadamer's prolific *oeuvre* involving metaphysics, epistemology, and aesthetics established him as one of the most prominent thinkers of the 20th century. Similarly to Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer's thought was greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, as well as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy (Davey 2007: 2). I will employ the ideas from Gadamer's most important work, *Truth and Method* (1960). Gadamer's hermeneutics is primarily concerned with the notion of human understanding and interpretation, especially in the area of cultural text. For Gadamer, 'text', as an interpretive object, is not necessarily a biblical text or a linguistic narrative, for him it is any cultural artefact that requires an act of understanding, e.g. drawings, historical relics, etc. (Gadamer 1975: 380). According to him, the artwork, whatever its medium, opens up through its symbolic character, a space in which both the world and our own being in the world are brought to light as a single, but inexhaustibly rich

totality. In the interpretive experience of art, we are not merely given a 'moment' of vision, but are able to 'dwell' along with the work in a way that takes us out of ordinary time (ibid., p. 567). Therefore, Gadamer sees the work of art as a space of understanding, encouraging a dialogue between the author and the observer. He elaborates that both parties in the dialogue (be it in the form of art or in a literal discussion) always bring their own backgrounds of prejudices, preconceptions and beliefs, formed by the person's environment. Gadamer calls such a worldview a horizon, which can be defined like this:

> *Understanding and interpretation always occurs from within a particular 'horizon' that is determined by our historically-determined situatedness. Understanding is not, however, imprisoned within the horizon of its situation—indeed, the horizon of understanding is neither static nor unchanging. Just as our prejudices are themselves brought into question in the process of understanding, so, in the encounter with another, is the horizon of our own understanding susceptible to change*. (Davey 2007: 8)

As Gadamer notes, one's horizon inevitably has its own limits of understanding, but at the same time it is subject to change. This horizon in contact with other horizons expands as the individual's initial presuppositions and prejudices are challenged and broadened (Gadamer 1975: 302-304). Gadamer aptly names this contact a "fusion of horizons" which happens when each party has his own particular horizon and through dialogue a mutual understanding is obtained (Pan 2009: 426). The philosopher argues that this form of dialogue is at the center of the textual interpretation as there is no objective meaning, fixed independently in the text. A substantial work of art for Gadamer is a site of possibilities and it kindles the stimulus for further interpretation (Davey 2007: 10). Thus, the experience of meaning is a process that arises in understanding rather than exists objectively in a form of the author's original intention.

The notion of one's horizon and its fusion with other forizons are closely related to another significant concept of Gadamer's thought – the hermeneutical circle. Gadamer picks up on Heidegger's idea that every interpretation presupposes understanding because every interpretation is guided by anticipations (Dostal 2002 : 46). Heidegger states that the constant movement between understanding and its unfolding in the interpretive process establishes a circular relationship (ibid., 47). Gadamer focuses on the dynamics of circular understanding and elaborates on it while discussing the hermeneutical experience of a text – according to him, the movement of understanding unfolds constantly through the relation of the whole to the part and back to the whole (Gadamer 1975: 259). In other words, Gadamer's hermeneutical circle refers to to the "problem of interpreting any text where it seems we can only interpret the

"whole" text in light of the meaning of its "parts", but the meaning of its parts can't be determined apart from the meaning of the whole text" (Dostal 2002: 77-78). Therefore, an interpreter is caught in a circular movement between the context and its features, features and the context by seeing how the object's elements are shaped by the whole work of art and how this totality is shaped by the elements.

For Gadamer, at the center of the hermeneutic experience lies the problem of language. Throughout his works Gadamer is constantly drawing attention to the aspect of language and calls it "the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized" (Gadamer 1975: 350). For him, all understanding is interpretation and all interpretation inevitably "takes place in the medium of language" (ibid., p. 350). Concerning the literary tradition, Gadamer goes on to say that by using language, a writer in a sense alienates the meaning which requires the input of the reader:

> *Writing's signs need to be transformed back into speech and meaning. Because the meaning has undergone a kind of self-alienation through being written down, this transformation back is the real hermeneutical task. The meaning of what has been said is to be stated anew, simply on the basis of the words passed on by means of the written signs.* (ibid., p. 354-355)

In such a way, Gadamer acknowledges that language is not only a means for the author to convey his artistic vision, but is also a subject for the reader to be interpreted. As a result of this hermeneutic process, the meaning of the work of art is constructed in the reader's consciousness rather than within the boundaries of the text.

Merleau-Ponty's, Gadamer's, and Ingold's ideas overlap in that they all offer a certain access to a reality mediated in various ways: phenomenological perception draws attention to the interrelation between our consciousness and the world and that is on a par with Ingold's hypothesis that we consciously map the world by leaving our marks of existential movement, which, for Gadamer, is realized and experienced in an artistic endeavour. Murnane's fiction could be examined from these perspectives as it constantly displays seeing and moving as ways of individual knowing, which is then transformed into visionary narratives, puzzling and foregrounding the act of interpretation.

3. Aesthetic and Hermeneutic Crossovers

The main purpose of the analysis is to examine how the aesthetic experience of the landscape overlaps with the hermeneutic experience of understanding the narrative. In the first part I will focus on the environment in which the artist's consciousness wanders in order to disclose truth about the plains. I will examine the narrator's transition from the visual medium to language as a metafictional dimension in which the novel unfolds as a hermeneutic experience between two consciousnesses.

3.1. Mapping the Artist

> *In my own landscapes, all of them unreal, I've always been attracted to what's in the distance, and the hazy aqueducts – almost out of sight in my dreamed landscapes – had a dreamy sweetness in relation to the rest of the landscape, a sweetness that enabled me to love them.*
>
> Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*

In order to explain the narrator's journey, it is inevitable and practical to start with the setting, which is the source and the driving force for the filmmaker's searchings. Attempting to define the landscape of the plains and highlighting its boundless nature will help understand how the terrain shapes and transforms the narrator's consciousness. By entering the plains (presumably located in the inner Australia beyond the Great Dividing Range), the narrator encounters a space which is contrasted and juxtaposed to the real, coastal Australia from which the narrator originates. From the very start Murnane is establishing a tension between what is real and what is fictitious as the narrator is in a sense caught between the civilized shoreline of Australia and an invented community with an elaborate philosophy of the surroundings plains. The filmmaker's journey starts with a series of paradoxes which define the unfamiliar land. The plains are situated in central Australia and yet they are perceived as a territory without a center itself (at best this center is 'supposed' or 'putative' (Murnane 2003: 22). The plainsmen refuse to agree upon the limits of their land, rendering it unbound. As the plainsmen's main activity involves speculating and exploring the plains (alongside the significance of the landscape),

every revelation about their surroundings leads to oxymoronic conclusions that the land cannot be explored and defined:

> *The plains were so immense that no plainsman was ever surprised to hear of their encompassing some region he had never seen. Many places far inland were subject to dispute – were they part of the plains or not? The true extent of the plains had never been agreed on*. (ibid., p. 17)

After arriving to the plains, the filmmaker observes the rich culture of the plains, which, as he discovers, is primarily influenced by a cultural dispute between two clashing ideologies upheld by two factions, aptly named Blue-greens and Old Golds. Both parties stem from distinctive philosophical approaches to the land, the first one claiming that the defining characteristic of the plains is the "scant layer of haze where land and sky merged in the farthest distance" (ibid., p. 27). The Blue-greens were soon challenged by another group of artists, who "utterly rejected the supposed appeal of misty distances" (ibid., p. 29) and focused on the soil and flora which, for them, signified the foundation of the grand plains. The quarrel evolved into philosophical (Horizonites vs. Haremen), industrial ('Progressive Mercantile Party' vs. 'Plains First League'), and political ('Outer Plains' vs. 'Central Plains') debates which all equally tried to "promote whatever distinguished the plains from the rest of Australia" (ibid., p. 33). Behind this dissension, lies another significant paradox of the plains – both conflicting philosophies agree to disagree and co-exist with the help of one another. In fact, the everlasting debate is the principal mode of living and experiencing the landscape. The playful dynamics of such a cultural dialogue is demonstrated in a polo match (a fundamental communal event in the plains) between the two factions:

> *My informants were sure that as boys they had seen nothing ominous in the hectic clash of colours. A blue-green might break loose and dash alone towards the far goal. A knot of golds might pursue him, gaining steadily, the very tilt of their bodies – low over the flapping manes – suggesting menace*. (ibid., p. 32)

It is soon evident how both blue-green and gold colors are intertwined in the plainsmen's culture as the people are expected to exhibit them both and their combination is expressed in poetry, heraldry, music, and other arts. It is a culture obsessed with visual modes of thinking and theorizing.

The vague and abstract nature of the plains forces the inhabitants to understand it via deciphering. In the plains, it is foregrounded that the primary access to the world around an individual is the act of interpretation and the medium between a plainsman and the plains is a

work of art. It is hard to tell what kind of person the nameless filmmaker was before arriving to the plains, but it is evident that he quickly accepts the plainsmen's approach to the landscape: "I wanted to prove that I was already attuned to their ways; that I was prepared to put aside all else and devote and hour or a day to speculative thinking" (ibid., p. 45). We have now observed how the plains are a boundless locale governed by a set of paradoxes and how both interpretive efforts to understand it are simultaneously futile and creative. The plainsmen's philosophy renders the plains as essentially a *speculative* space in the word's multiple meanings: *to speculate*[1] usually means to "form a theory or conjecture about a subject without firm evidence", which is proved true throughout the whole novel, for example, the 4th landowner says: "we're all plainsmen, always claiming that everything in sight is a landmark of something beyond it" (Murnane 2003: 46). The number of questions posed by the plainsmen surpasses the number of answers or definitive ideas about the reality of the plains. The manner in which the plains unfold in the novel calls for the original sense of the Latin word 'speculum' which literally means 'mirror' (hence the plainsmen's obsession with lenses and reflections). In the perception of the plainsmen the landscape of endless foliage and hazy horizons proves to be a prime type of a surface constantly suggesting its reflecting and refracting nature and effect. Politics, industrial ideologies, sports and art, religion and philosophy - every cultural project of the plains is inevitably related to the infinite land and to how an individual *sees* oneself reflected in it. There is no single mental image of the plains that can be agreed upon and when the narrator firstly presents his idea of the film which will expose what the plains truly are, he is treated with great suspicion and doubt:

> *For these men were confident that the more I strove to depict even one distinctive landscape – one arrangement of light and surfaces to suggest a moment on some plain I was sure of – the more I would lose myself in the manifold ways of words with no known plains behind them*. (My emphasis; ibid., p. 110)

The interrelation of the speculation of reflection in the surface of the plains is both the starting point and the blocking end, perpetually kindling the imagination of the plainsmen.

As the narrator perceives, the plainsmen is a society obsessed with vision to the point where it becomes a mode of thinking and being. Anything that can be perceived visually can be questioned in terms of the object's truth or hidden meaning behind the appearances. The main appearing object in the plains are the plains themselves which unfold as a surface. In Merleau-Ponty's words, the plain landscape, as a 'visible object', has its own Visible and Invisible

[1] "Speculate", Oxford Dictionary of English. Second Edition 2003. Print.

features which cannot be defined independently and they are separated by the surface (or appearance) of an entity. With such foregrounded duality, the plains and the novel itself can be interpreted as a site of clashing ontological and epistemological assumptions: the reality of the plains is defined by the way one perceives it while trying to see beyond the surface. Both Old Golds and Blue-greens can agree on the very existence of the plains in which they live, but the conflict arises when the ways they see it starts to differ. Following Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological logic, what the plainsmen observe in the hazy distance or before their very eyes is not the plains themselves, but only qualities and surfaces of inexhaustible depth. The plainsmen are perfectly aware that every artistic attempt in the plains is, at best, a guess: "I'll go in search of the places that lay just beyond the painted horizons; the places that artists knew they were only able to hint at." (ibid., p. 50) Yet they are still determined to pierce through the visible surface in order to artistically convey the essence of their surroundings.

The main reference point for attempting to deconstruct these 'places' and the novel itself is without a doubt the figure of the narrator, who is telling his story while retrospectively looking back to twenty years prior to his arrival at the plains. The narrator becomes a vessel in the landscape, whose expectations to create a film about an utterly unfamiliar space starts to crumble because of the reflective nature of the plains. As a peculiar recollection, the narrative essentially becomes a manifestation of an artist who grows with the help of the revelations caused by the landscape. The narrator first approaches the plains with an almost conquering idea regarding his artistic project: "I declared that of all forms of art, only film could show the remote horizons of dreams. […] I would go even further […] and claim that film was the one art form that could satisfy the contradictory impulses of the plainsman." (ibid., p. 54) The filmmaker soon discovers, that not only the plains, but the very form and method of expressing the invisible depth of this Visible object can also be misleading and indefinite. In this case, with the help of the first-person narrative, Murnane offers a nameless consciousness to experience the artistic journey involving stages of naïveté, doubt, and revelation. This phenomenological opportunity becomes an access to a private eye, (a significant motif which reoccurs throughout the novel and will be expanded on in the second part of the analysis), which renders the new and unfamiliar setting through a foregrounded perception.

The way the narrator starts to become aware of his perception of the land is by moving and observing how his vision is affected by it. If vision is the primary thinking mode in the plains, then the manner in which an individual traverses the landscape has a vast impact on how one will perceive and interpret his surroundings. Towards the end of the second chapter of the novel,

the narrator describes a scene where he stands in a room observing the approaching girl whom he wants to have for the role in the last scenes of his film. The filmmaker has just realized that it would not be true for him to employ the girl to portray his vision of the plains and he struggles with the idea of how to represent her own unique perception of the landscape. He watches her through the window and then decides to situate himself in her position as he has been observing her:

> *I checked that the young woman had gone into her own wing of the building. Then I walked downstairs and along the paths to the spot where she had stood looking up. I stood there myself and stared at the library window.*
> *I was surprised at the seeming darkness inside the library. I had always kept the blinds drawn in every window but that one. Yet at my desk I still felt in contact with the intense light of the plains. Now the window, enclosing only a sort of twilight, showed nothing of the room behind it – only an image of the sky above me*. (ibid., p. 66)

By physically moving his body, the filmmaker, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, is making a difference in the visible world by being part of it. He tries to adjust his vision to a position he seeks to attain in order to show the subjective grasp of the plains and he is surprised when he does not see what he hoped the girl was seeing – the glass, another surface of the plains, is reflecting the sky rather than showing a space where he had just been. As it dawns on the narrator, his vision is never constant and is perpetually revealing new points of view. Just as his optical vision shifts, his artistic vision also starts to alter, taking him to places he did not expect to find.

Another significant change in the narrator's exploration is the shift in his movement on the land, which is closely related to how he treats the uncharted territory. Imre Salusinszky (1993: 41) has argued that *The Plains* can be viewed as a "parody of anthropological fieldwork" and such an attitude can be seen in the narrator's initial film idea of the plains. Claiming that "[he] had been ready <…> to spend months of silent study in the libraries and art galleries of their town to prove [he] was no mere tourist or sightseer" (Murnane 2003: 17), the narrator expects to academically dissect the plainsmen's culture and represent it in a visual form. The filmmaker tries to copy the customs of the plainsmen by wearing blue-green and gold colors and trying to appear 'plainsmanesque' in the eyes of the patrons in order to get their blessing. Such attempts reinforce the initially pragmatic attitude towards the plainsmen's way of life and, in line with Ingold's ideas, could be interpreted as a mode of transport. In the beginning, the narrator, as a traveller, perceives the plains as a mere point, a goal for his film. He is oblivious to the type of inhabiting the land that dominates the plainsmen philosophy. The lack of geographical accuracy

or limits and boundaries on the plains suggests that the plainsmen are not concerned with localizing and dividing their surroundings: "The road to the estate was an offshoot from a deserted side-road whose signposts were sometimes vague and contradictory" (ibid., p. 62). They do not seem to worry about the time or speed at which they are traversing and experiencing the land and this starts to slowly affect the filmmaker:

> *During my first months in the great house I suited my methods of work to the leisury rhythms of the plains. Each morning I strolled a mile or so from the house and lay on my back and felt the wind or stared at the clouds creeping past me. Then the time I had spent on the plains seemed unmarked by hours or days. It was a trancelike period* <...>. (ibid., p. 63)

To use Ingold's terms, by internalizing the landscape and exploring the surroundings without a pragmatic sense of direction, time or purpose, the filmmaker starts to adapt himself to the modality of wayfaring as the dominant way of inhabiting the world on the plains. In the end we see that the filmmaker never finishes his film, a thing which had to encapsulate his whole experience of the plains; instead, by changing the habits of his movement, the narrator learns to inhabit the space where knowledge is integrated along the path of movement rather than extracted from the surface of the land. As the plains are not defined by any geographical references, the territory of the plains is not really a territory – it is a surface of dynamic trajectories and unpredictable ways, which are formed by the movement of the inhabitants. After understanding this, the narrator proves himself to be a truly Murnanian character, whose travelling errancy is determined by the conscious abandonment of their former way of inhabiting the land and by the elusiveness and unreachableness of their destination (Bartolini 1999: 4).

The shift of the narrator's mindset is evident in the transformation of his artistic project. The filmmaker's naïve and grandiose plan to create a film depicting the essence of the plains starts to crumble and undergoes a gradual change. After some time on the plains the filmmaker tries to reassure himself that he only needs to "set [his] notes in order and write [the script]" (2003: 57), but from that moment on the idea of the ideal film starts leaving him. The initial *INTERIOR MASTER KEY TO CATALOGUE OF BACKGROUND NOTES AND INSPIRATIONAL MATERIAL* becomes *LAST THOUGHTS BEFORE BEGINNING THE SCRIPT PROPER*, then it turns into *REFLECTIONS FROM THE ULTIMATE (?) PLAIN* and ultimately it comes nowhere near an actual film. The filmmaker struggles and realizes that he is caught in an endless conundrum, spending over twenty years in the plains and still working on the film, which, as he accepts, "would probably never give rise to any image of any sort of plain" (ibid., p. 108).

This state of the filmmaker as a striving artist leads to the aporia of the simultaneous failure and success of the creative mind. Failing to make a film, he succeeds in breaking the initial artistic expectations and looking deeper beyond the very medium of his art, speculating that it may not offer a direct, complete and objective rendition of reality. Ironically, the work of art overcomes the filmmaker, leading him astray in his mental landscape. The plainsmen, observing the narrator, argue that "the further [his] researches took [him] away from [his] announced aim, and the less [his] notes seemed likely to result in any visible film, the more credit [he] deserved as the explorer of a distinctive landscape" (ibid., p. 109). Right after this, the filmmaker accepts that such arguments "classify him as a writer rather than a film-maker" (ibid., p. 109). This marks a crucial moment as the filmmaker takes up a new way of exploring a 'distinctive landscape' and opts for a linguistic medium, which gives the narrator a new perspective on the plains.

I have mentioned before that the plainsmen understand art as means of interpreting the infinite plains. If we accept that the filmmaker abandons his film project in favor of writing, we may interpret his use of language as a new way of seeing and, actually, moving. The object of this new artistic approach is no longer the plains themselves – with never ending piles of notes, the narrator struggles to examine his own experience of the plains. Inspiration for such a shift could be found in the words of the landowner towards the end of the novel:

> *Search to disprove the worst theories of these false plainsmen around us. You have always credited them with too much subtlety. You suppose that because they have spent lives on the plains they are privy to signs you are still searching for. And yet the most perceptive of them—those you might almost have taken for visionaries—have never asked precisely where their plains are.* (My emphasis; ibid., p. 101)

It seems that the narrator finally abandons the idea of 'searching for signs' and begins the construction of his own mental map – the narrative – governed by his own signs and symbols. Devoid of any signposts, the plains lack any geographical definitions or directions and the narrator chooses language as his primary mapping device to capture not the object (the plains) but the way he *moves* in it and towards it. The narrator realizes that his artistic journey is endless and by telling the story he puts his own experience at the center of his artistic project. In other words, the filmmaker (or, from now on, more accurately – the writer) realizes that his story is at best a way of signs, an account of a wayfaring zigzag on the surface of the plains.

As one critic noted, Murnane's 'journeys' always acquire the traits of a metafictional errancy

whose outcome is the investigation and exploration of place and, at the same time, fiction (Bartolini 1999: 7). Truly, if we interpret the filmmaker's narrative as a trail of signs left for the reader to follow, the novel opens up as a metafictional story which seeks to be interpreted by the eye of the reader.

3.2 Mapping the Reader

> *Some people have said that an eye is a window, but anyone who has looked carefully has seen that an eye is a mirror. If I look at an eye in this face that I am writing about, I see only the red roofs of my manor-house and the white walls and the windows reflecting fields and grassland. And if I look closely I see, on the other side of one of those windows, a man sitting at a table and writing.*
>
> Gerald Murnane, *Inland*

So far we have examined how the foregrounded perception in the speculative landscape shapes and transforms the artist in a way that he no longer seeks to represent the plains but rather present his own experience of being unable to reveal the plains in an adequate way. The filmmaker finally embraces the fact that art always includes a paradoxical risk of not being perfect and yet he goes on experimenting with the new artistic medium - language.

Although *The Plains* does not exhibit its metafictional nature so obviously and boldly as Murnane's other novels, e.g. *Inland* (1988)*, A Million Windows* (2014), its underlying self-reflexive nature offers a hermeneutical reading, a certain kind of dialogue between the nameless narrator and the reader. To some extent, this issue has been addressed in passing by literary critic Kate Foord (2003: 274), who noted that one of the main questions the novel poses is whether the reader, by undertaking the interpretive task and experience, is following the filmmaker's journey. After examining how the narrator's artistic consciousness moves *on* and *in* the plains, I find it productive to analyze how the narrative, as a result of the filmmaker's endeavors, unfolds in the reader's consciousness. Starting with Foord's observation, we can elaborate that the novel in a sense merges the writer and the reader by assuming the shared activity of inner and outer exploration. The narrator's searching for a perfect vision is parallel to the reader's interpretive reading process and experience which is interrelated with the metafictional implications of the novel. Before going into the hermeneutical analysis, let us draw attention to the landowner's cryptic remarks, which imply that all of the plainsmen's artistic ventures may be experienced by an exterior observer:

> […] *others may be looking at the plains too.* […] *Someone has been looking at us and our precious land. We're disappearing through the dark hole of an eye that we're not even aware of.* (Murnane 2003: 101)

Previously we have observed how the novel accentuates the visual perception and the image of

an eye, which in this case may present the figure of the reader by introducing the act of an external gaze. This particular soliloquy of the landowner marks the point where the reader, in Ingold's terms, starts to *inhabit* the surface of the page by taking the parallel journey of the wayfaring filmmaker. Consciously or not, the narrator reaches out to the reading "dark hole of an eye" in order to *present* his perceptual movement (in the linguistic form) rather than *represent* the plains (in the film medium). Both the story and the reading experience entail a movement of consciousness, during which knowledge is integrated rather than just reached, which was the initial objective of the filmmaker. This way Murnane establishes a certain kind of dialogue between the writer and the reader, which calls for the upcoming hermeneutic insights.

It is wise to start with the environment in which the reader and the narrator meet – the linguistic plain of the narrative. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer elaborates on language as the fundamental medium of hermeneutical experience by stating that any kind of communicational exchange is inevitably a linguistic process (Gadamer 1975: 350). He goes on to say that all understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language. It is possible that this aspect of language may have been already grasped by the filmmaker and the way he chooses language over cinema may be seen as a more direct and engaging gesture towards the reader: in a sense, the narrator presents the visual images of his consciousness as a possibility for the reader to mentally *imagine* the plains that the narrator was observing. Thus, the narrative, as the narrator's ultimate work of art, becomes an intersubjective space where the filmmaker's artistic vision meets the reader. Just as the narrator starts getting more and more aware of his own perception and movement *on* and *in* the plains because of the mirroring (*speculum*) landscape, so does the reader become aware of himself and the experience of understanding. By being the eye of 'someone looking', the reader is caught on a hermeneutic journey – interpreting the linguistically visible interpretation of the plains. The dual interpretive journey of the filmmaker and the reader can also be treated as a prime example of the hermeneutic circle: the narrator can only understand the plains by understanding himself in relation to them. Likewise, the reader can only understand the narrative by observing his response to the story. Both the filmmaker and the reader share what Gadamer calls "the anticipation of meaning", which governs the interpretive movement and suggests that the parts themselves also determine the whole (Gadamer 1975: 259). The narrator, in fact, changes the meaning of the plains as much as the plains transform his own expectations. Mirroring the process, the reader is encouraged to reinterpret the whole narrative while being aware of his own part in the story. In Gadamer's terms, understanding the plains means to move in this kind of circle in which return from the whole to the parts, and vice versa, is essential (ibid., p.167).

Furthermore, the filmmaker's narrative, just as his unfinished film, is by no means an end-product. The reader may initially approach the novel as a cover-to-cover completed story but the narrative, in relation to Gadamer's philosophy, inevitably opens up as a phase in the event of understanding. Rather than just being presented with the story which leads to an accomplished goal, the reader is called to retrace the movement of the narrator through the linguistic signs, marked right there in the surface of the plane page before his eyes. According to Gadamer's hermeneutics, text is an infinite *stage* during the process of the hermeneutic circle rather than an *object* that is given. Thus, the interpretation, while following the trail of the narrator, in a sense becomes a reconstruction of the shifting artistic consciousness in a form of the first-person narrative. The narrator has already realized the paradox and impossibility of a perfect representation of the plains, so his narrated story becomes a site for the reader to experience everything in his own way through the interpretation. Murnane in a way performs a welcoming gesture towards the reader, telling him that he will not be able to disclose the truth about the plains, but instead presents the consciousness, struggling to do it.

If we focus on the reader as one who is following the wayfaring line of the narrator's perception, we can observe how by reconstructing the artistic experience in his own consciousness, the reader is encouraged to construct his own mental landscape in relation to the textual plains of the narrator. This relation, as stated before, manifests as a hermeneutic dialogue of the writing and reading consciousnesses, both of which precipitate unique visions of the plains. These both visions or, in other words, mental landscapes can be interpreted as hermeneutic horizons, idiosyncratic worldviews the narrator and the reader bring, which, according to Gadamer, meet in the interpretation and experience of the text. The narrator's horizon of expectation, initially governed by the preconceived ideas and suppositions about the plains and his own artistic project, expands and shifts throughout the interpretive journey. Likewise, the reader's horizon is challenged and broadened by participating in the hermeneutical engagement. As Gadamer notes, every interpreter, in this case both the reader and the narrator, inevitably *moves* with their own horizons until they meet and overlap. The arrival of the reader and his own horizon is referred to in the further prophetic words of the landowner:

> *[…] on their [plains'] far side – too far away for you and me to visit – over there the weather is changing. The skies above us all are growing lighter. Another plain altogether is drifting towards our own. We're travelling somewhere in a world the shape of an eye.* (ibid., p. 102)

This '[]other plain' is the reader's horizon, amounting to his own authentic plains where he

moves by the method of interpretation. Also, as the reccurring image of an eye suggests, this interpretive movement is governed by vision, parallel to the visual thinking which the narrator adopted himself. Thus, vision, as a method of decoding the mythical landscape signs (visible to the narrator) and the linguistic signs (visible to the reader), proves to be a way of thinking and interpreting which, as Gadamer notes, is the realization of understanding (1975: 350).

The novel is constantly speaking of decentralized significations, revealing that the unique meaning of the text is born somewhere in-between of the writing and reading experiences, in the event of the fusion of horizons. This new authentic meaning of the work of art is the ultimate outcome of such a fusion and, essentially, the legacy of the co-interpretation, existing only in the symbiosis of the dialogue rather than just being an objective meaning of the text or the author's intention. Reminiscently, in the bar scene one of the landowners tells a story of a man who sought another perspective in order to reach new insights regarding his exploration:

> *He marked out a square of his property and spent years drawing the most detailed maps of it. […]. And he made notes and sketches of the plants and birds as though no one before him had seen them. Then in his last years he locked away all his notes and maps and invited anyone who cared to explore the same place after him and write a description of it. When the two descriptions were compared, the differences between them would reveal the distinctive qualities of each man: the only qualities that he could claim as his own.* (Murnane 2003: 49)

This prophetic story reflects the narrator's plan to reveal something that "no one before him had seen", inevitably failing and finally inviting the reader to "explore the same place". Both explorations, in Ingold's terms, cover the same ground, but each nevertheless is an authentic movement. As mentioned before, this fusion opens up a new dimension of existential surveying, concerned with new meanings, and Murnane's novel manifests itself as an exploration of the creative process, where the visual reading of the plains is mirrored in the interpretive reading of the text.

Concerned as he is with movement rather than arrival and completion, Murnane seeks to truthfully show the *ways* of the artistic consciousness, which are not exclusive to the artist, but also characterise the reader (in every sense of the word) of the work of art. As the narrator points out, landscape is "a convenient source of metaphors for those who know that men invent their own meanings" (ibid., p. 91); in other words, the plains for the artistic and the interpreting consciousness is a means rather than an end. In order to disclose the truth of the world, the narrator seeks to employ his own subjective experience as a dialectic gesture towards the other

human consciousness which is found in the “dark hole” of the reader’s eye. The novel’s driving force is exactly this rendition of the aesthetic and hermeneutic movements of the narrator and the reader which both simultaneously reciprocate and refer to one another in an infinite manner. The reader, accompanied by the narrator, resides in and shapes the plane surface of the represented experience into the present Heideggerian latitude of being as dwelling (Heidegger 2013: 143), in which one inhabits the space rather than occupies it.

4. Conclusions

The goal of this BA paper has been to demonstrate how Murnane's fiction employs visual perception and the metaphor of landscape in order to uncover the explorative nature of the artistic imagination. The analysis of the novel attempted to show how in *The Plains* Murnane plays with the notions of reality and fiction, by employing the metaphorical imagery of landscape in order to question problem of reality and representation. As the landscape in the novel is conceived as a surface which is sought to be explained via artistic attempts, the central medium of its experience becomes the narrator's consciousness. Murnane constantly foregrounds the relationship between an individual consciousness and the outer world. In assuming the main tenets of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, this BA paper has examined how paradoxical surroundings shape the visual perception of an individual consciousness. As the narrator undergoes a series of changes, his artistic endeavors may be interpreted in terms of simultaneous success and failure, which produce a new perspective on the world. Guided by Tim Ingold's observations about the ways we inhabit the landscape through movement, this reading of *The Plains* has revealed how the plains open up as a surface of intense mobility, ungoverned by geographical definitions. In consonance with this line of thought, the shift in the the movement narrator's consciousness has been interpreted as exposing his transition from a transport-like movement to a wayfaring mode of exploration. As the narrator's metaphorical movement mirrors the gradual revelation of the plains, I examined how the narrator opts for a new medium of representation – language.

Arguably, the true object of the narrator's exploration in *The Plains* is not the plains themselves, but his own creative experience. Thus, his choice to take up writing may be seen as a new way of creative movement realized in the form of the narrative itself. Treating the metafictional narrative as a hermeneutic intersubjective space invites our attention to the reading experience, which overlaps with the narrator's artistic project and which takes up the space of the second part of the analysis of the novel. Here we have focused on how the narrative unfolds as an intersubjective latitude where the narrator and the reader mirror each other's interpretative moves, recognizing the speculative nature of each other's dwelling. In conceptualizing the story as a dialogue between the reader and the writer, we are reminded of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, in whose light Murnane's novel reveals its interest in the act of understanding and interpretation. As a result, seeing the narrative as his true work of art, the narrator's phenomenological account of the landscape structures the reader's hermeneutic

experience. The reader, by reconstructing the mental landscape of the narrator, is encouraged to shape his own imaginative terrain with his own interpretive mapping and moving. Thus the narrative's anticipated meaning is infinitely constructed through the dialogue of two consciousnesses, engaged as they are in wayfaring along the lines of the hermeneutic circle.

As this BA paper suggests, in *The Plains* Murnane challenges the notion of objective 'correct' understanding and offers hermeneutic dialogue which suggests indefinite amount of different readings. Most critics agree that *The Plains* primarily opens up as a phenomenological account of an individual consciousness, but some of more recent studies have examined the book from ethical and poststructuralist approaches. However, some aspects of the novel have not been touched upon at all (for example, Murnane's idiosyncratic portrayal of time in the novel calls for further research) and the novel remains infinitely open for upcoming fusions of horizons.

Summary in Lithuanian
Meninės sąmonės geografija Gerald Murnane romane „The Plains“

Šiame baigiamajame bakalauro darbe nagrinėjamas australų rašytojo Gerald Murnane’o romanas *Lygumos* (angl. *The Plains*). Įvardijamas kaip vienas svarbiausių rašytojų šiuolaikinės Australijos literatūros kontekste, Murnane’as savo kūryboje pirmiausia nagrinėja ryšį tarp fikcijos ir realybės, tarp kurių yra įstrigusi individo sąmonė. Su kiekviena knyga rašytojas kuria autentiškus poetinius pasaulius, kurių pasakotoju visada tampa solipsizmo persmelkta sąmonė, sukelianti daugiau klausimų nei atsakymų. *Lygumų* pasakotojas yra rašytojas, keliaujantis į bevardę neegzistuojančią šalį, kurioje praleidžia virš dvidešimt metų, per kuriuos jis nesugeba užbaigti kuriamo filmo. Šiame bakalauro darbe aiškinamasi, kaip romano mizanscenų sudarantis kraštovaizdis užvaldo menininko sąmonę iki ribos, kuomet kūrinio pasakotojas pradeda abejoti savo kūriniu. Pasitelkiant Maurice Merleau-Ponty fenomenologines įžvalgas, Tim Ingoldo antropologinius tyrimus ir Hans-Georg Gadamerio hermeneutikos filosofiją, romano interpretacijoje išskleidžiamas meninės sąmonės vizualinis aplinkos suvokimas, judėjimas diskursyvinėje erdvėje ir jo pasekmės meninei vaizduotei bei meno kūriniui. Akcentuojant metafikcinį romano pobūdį, darbe siekiama atskleisti, kaip knygos pasakojimas suponuoja intersubjektyvių santykių erdvę, kurioje estetinės autoriaus paieškos yra lygiagrečiai išgyvenamos hermeneutiškoje skaitytojo patirtyje. Siekdamas perteikti kūrybinę patirtį, pasakotojas per meninę kalbą su skaitytoju užmezga pokalbį, kurio metu gimsta naujos kūrinio reikšmės. Tęsiant šią mintį, darbas siekia paliudyti ir išaiškinti, kaip su suvokimu ir interpretacija susijusi vizualinė kūrinio raiška atskleidžia, kokius kaitos procesus žmogaus sąmonė patiria kurdama ir ieškodama tiesos nepažinioje aplinkoje.

References

Primary Sources

Murnane, G. 2003. *The Plains*. Michigan: New Issues Poetry & Prose.

Murnane, G. 1997. *Emerald Blue*. Victoria: McPhee Gribble.

Murnane, G. 2012. *Inland*. London: Dalkey Archives Press.

Secondary Sources

Adelaide, D. 2000. Review of The Plains by Gerald Murnane. *Sydney Morning Herald*. October 7, 2000. Sydney: The Sydney Morning Herald.

Bartolini, P. 1999. Triptychal Fiction: re-interpreting Murnane's work from The Plains to Emerald Blue. *Southerly 59.1*. Vol. 40, No. 1: 1-6.

Birns, N. 2000. Australian Literature as Anglophone Alternative. *Contemporary Issues in Australian Literature.* Vol. 15, No. 2: 112-128.

Carman, T. 2008. *Merleau-Ponty*. New York: Routledge.

Coetzee, J.M. 2012. The Quest for the Girl from Bendigo Street. *The New York Review of Books.* Vol. 59, No. 20: 1-9.

Cranston, CA & R. Zeller. 2007. *The Littoral Zone: Australian Contexts and their Writers*. New York: Rodopi.

Davey, N. 2015. Gadamer's Aesthetics. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. [online] Available at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer-aesthetics [Accessed 15 Mar. 2016].

Dostal, R. J. 2002. *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Foord, K. 2003. The Figure of Woman and the Fantasy of the Modern Australian Nation: Travelling to the 'Empty Centre'. *Australian Feminist Studies.* Vol. 18, No. 42: 273-282.

Gadamer. H.G. 1975. *Truth and Method*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Heidegger, M. 2013. *Poetry, Language, Thought.* New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Ingold, T. 2007. *Lines: A Brief History.* London: Routledge.

Johnson, G.A., Merleau-Ponty, M., Smith M.B. 1993. *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Pan, D. 2009. Reader and text in the horizon of understanding methodology: Gadamer and

methodological hermeneutics. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*. Vol. 4, No. 3: 417-436.

Pessoa, F. 2003. *The Book of Disquiet*. New York: Penguin Books.

Salusinszky, I. 1993. *Gerald Murnane*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Webby, E. 2000. *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press.