



Another World in this One: Gerald Murnane's Fiction

Thursday December 7, 2017
Golf Club, Goroke, Victoria

Program

9.00-9.30am Arrival, welcome

9.30-11.00am Session one

- Samantha Trayhurn, 'Beyond the Shimmer'
- Anthony Uhlmann: 'Report on the Mind in *Border Districts*'
- Emmett Stinson: 'Intention and Retrospective Revision in Gerald Murnane's *Border Districts*'

11.00-11.30am Morning Tea

11.30-1.00pm Session two

- Shannon Burns: 'Truth, Fiction and "True Fiction": Approaching a Biography of Gerald Murnane'
- Suzie Gibson: 'What Lies Between'
- Luke Carman: 'To the Eye Untrained: An Apprentice's Encounter with Murnane'





1.00-2.00pm Lunch

2.00-3.00pm Session three

- Ivor Indyk ‘What Kind of Literary History is *A History of Books?*’
- Brigid Rooney: ‘Stream System, Salient Image and Feeling: Gerald Murnane’s *Barley Patch*’

3.00-3.30pm Afternoon Tea

3.30-5.00pm Session four

- Gerald Murnane: ‘The Still-breathing Author’

Abstracts

Shannon Burns

'Truth, Fiction and "True Fiction": Approaching a Biography of Gerald Murnane'

Abstract: Some critics have been reluctant to overemphasise the autobiographical elements of Murnane's work, preferring, on the whole, to mark strong distinctions between the flesh-and-blood Murnane (or the 'breathing author', as Murnane prefers), his various narrators and protagonists, and the implied author of his works. In this, they take their cues from Murnane's own highly developed semanticism, which appears to privilege literal denotation over connotative or associative constructions of meaning or modes of interpretation. Other critics – mostly non-academic – have baldly claimed that Murnane's fiction is fundamentally and essentially autobiographical, and treated it as such. This paper will discuss both approaches in connection with Murnane's conception of 'true fiction', and outline the preliminary schema that has directed my (still developing) approach to a critical biography of Gerald Murnane, with reference to archive material.

Dr. Shannon Burns is a freelance writer and member of the JM Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice, at the University of Adelaide.

Luke Carman

'To the Eye Untrained: An Apprentice's Encounter with Murnane'

Abstract: It is one of the often purported privileges of fiction that it permits the reader an encounter with that uncanny 'unknown known' of the reader's self, eerily nestled in the mind of the other. No writer gives greater credibility to this claim for fiction than Murnane, whose perpetual rediscovering of one's own, apparently forgotten, experience of reading is one of the many perverse joys of journeying through the strange 'chiseled' sentences that tie *Tamarisk Row* to *A Million Windows*. In Murnane's latest, and rumored final novel, *Border Districts*, the author begins with a pledge to explain a resolution: 'Two months ago, when I first arrived in this township just short of the border, I resolved to guard my eyes, and I could not think of going on with this piece of writing unless I were to explain how I came by that odd expression.' Here Murnane rediscovers for us the first principles of writing fiction – what the wannabe writer has long forgotten they began with – the heralding intensity of 'self-being' borne in our most faithful seeing.

Dr Luke Carman is writer of short fiction who hails from the Sydney suburb of Liverpool. His first book, An Elegant Young Man, was awarded a NSW Premier's Literary Award in 2015 and shortlisted for the ALS Gold Medal. In 2014 he was named a Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Novelist. His writing has appeared in Heat, Meanjin, Seizure, The Lifted Brow, The Australian, Sonofabook, Cultural Studies Review, Southerly, SBS Online, and on ABC TV's Big Ideas.





Suzie Gibson
'What Lies Between'

Abstract: In *The Plains* Murnane's strong pictographic imagination takes us to a nether world of ideas and sensations that are generated through undulating word patterns and speculations. Every word matters like a topographical mark in contributing to the novel's overall design. There is an egalitarianism to his vision of flat plains whose horizons are every-expanding. A spirit of exploration is also evoked through a narrator-character whose journey to the interior of Australia is a personal voyage toward the self. But unlike the physical world of plains and grasslands, the interior realm of the self is difficult to navigate. The true plains cannot be captured in photographs or maps: the conceits of representation are just too limiting. However, the gap between the map and the territory, the physical world and its representation, is perhaps resolved by the idea that our skins are territories unto themselves that record our ageing and memories. The question is: would we recognize the canvas of our own skin if it was somehow detached from our bodies and rolled out like a map? This is perhaps a question of perspective. Being too close means we cannot see. The true plains are invisible landscapes of the mind: worlds in this one.

Dr Suzie Gibson is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst New South Wales. She is also Adjunct Lecturer at the University of New England. She has published in distinguished international journals and volumes on important literary figures including Henry James, Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee. Her research is interested in examining the relationship between literature and philosophy.

Ivor Indyk
'What Kind of Literary History is A History of Books?'

Abstract: This paper will examine what Gerald Murnane's 2012 work of fiction *A History of Books* says about reading, memory...and the book.

Professor Ivor Indyk is an academic, editor and publisher. He is the founding editor and publisher of HEAT magazine and the award-winning Giramondo Publishing which has published Gerald Murnane in recent years. He is the Whitlam Professor in the Writing and Society Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney.

Brigid Rooney

'Stream System, Salient Image and Feeling: Gerald Murnane's *Barley Patch*'

Abstract: Attending most closely to *Barley Patch*, my paper formulates what is at best a provisional answer to the following two questions. What does it mean to 'write fiction by following the stream system'? And second, if I attempt to break this 'stream system' into its component parts, can I explain with any degree of accuracy the sorts of feelings engendered in me, as a reader, by the fiction of Gerald Murnane?

Brigid Rooney teaches Australian literature at the University of Sydney. She is the author of Literary Activists: Writer-Intellectuals and Australian Public Life (UQP 2009) and has published widely on twentieth century and contemporary Australian literature. Her current book project investigates the significance of suburbs and suburbia in Australian fiction.

Emmett Stinson

'Intention and Retrospective Revision in Gerald Murnane's *Border Districts*'

Abstract: Gerald Murnane's publishing career includes an infamous lacuna of fourteen years (from 1995 to 2009) during which he published no new works of fiction. Murnane has addressed this lacuna in his post-break fiction, which often refers back to his earlier work; given this, it may be tempting to view Murnane's post-break fiction as an example of 'late style', which is to say a final re-iteration and revision of earlier techniques that feels intentionally unfinished. Such a view seems particularly pertinent to *Border Districts*, a work that has been billed as being '[c]onceived as Gerald Murnane's last work of fiction'. The only problem with such a claim is that, in many respects, there appears to be a great deal of stylistic continuity between the post-break works and his later pre-break works, including *Landscape with Landscape* (1985), *Inland* (1988), *Velvet Waters* (1990), and *Emerald Blue* (1995). In this sense, it may be that Murnane's 'late style' comprises the overwhelming majority of his career. At the same time, the post-break works do seem markedly different in their frequent return (both explicitly and implicitly) to Murnane's earlier work. Through a close reading of such correspondences in *Border Districts*, I will argue that Murnane's post-break works represent an attempt to revise his earlier works by placing them within a new and different artistic trajectory—a practice that retrospectively turns the contingency of the material process of publishing into a necessity. This form of revision also constitutes a retrospective reconfiguring of artistic intention, which suggests—among other things—that intention, for Murnane, rather than being a discrete act, is an inexhaustible one that can always be creatively repurposed after the fact. This unusual approach, as I will argue, helps to clarify the role and thematization of intention within *Border Districts* itself.

Dr Emmett Stinson is an author, literary critic and lecturer whose years of experience in the publishing industry in Australia and the United States inform his research into literary production. He is Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Newcastle. His books include Satirizing Modernism Aesthetic Autonomy, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde (Bloomsbury, 2017), and The Return of Print? Contemporary Australian Publishing (Monash University Publishing, 2016).





Samantha Trayhurn
'Beyond the Shimmer'

Abstract: This is a short story written in response to the work of Gerald Murnane.

Samantha Trayhurn is a writer and editor. She is currently completing a DCA as part of the Other Worlds: Forms of World Literature ARC Project. She is the editor of the zine 'Pink zine'.

Anthony Uhlmann
'Report on the Mind in *Border Districts*'

Abstract: In Gerald Murnane's most recent novel *Border Districts* the narrator makes a fine distinction between fiction and a report. The novel, we are told, is not a work of fiction, but a report on the mind. This paper will examine some of the implications of this idea, and how it relates to concerns Murnane sets out elsewhere.

Anthony Uhlmann is Director of the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University. He is the author of two books on Samuel Beckett. His most recent monograph is Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov. He is currently finishing a monograph on J. M. Coetzee's fiction. He is one of several CIs on the ARC Project, Other Worlds: Forms of World Literature, of which this conference forms a part.

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ANOTHER WORLD IN THIS ONE GERALD MURNANE'S FICTION

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