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Whispers and Dances: (De)Construction of Heterochronism in Alice Munro's "Walker Brothers Cowboy"

ABSTRACT

Alice Munro stitches a patchwork of short stories in her 1968 short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*. The collection is constructed as a rhizomatic multiplicity wherein stories relate to each other in a rhizomatic pattern, as off-shoots of the same organic body. Each story in *Dance of the Happy Shades* is also internally constructed in the same way as a multiplicity, where micro-narratives are assembled as pieces of a patchwork to form a whole. This paper, however, explores only the opening story "Walker Brothers Cowboy" through a geocritical and geophilosophical lens and shows how Munro builds it through the same pattern. The story comprises multiple micro-narratives of different lengths and forms, each of which functions as part of this organic growth. The essay also shows how the juxtaposition of such micro-narratives, and of smoothing and striating images, creates a heterochronian heterotopia at the climax of the story.

Keywords: Alice Munro, "Walker Brothers Cowboy", heterotopia, heterochronia, geocriticism, geophilosophy, rhizomes, smoothing

Šepetanja in plesi: (de)konstrukcija heterokronizma v zgodbi »Walker Brothers Cowboy« Alice Munro

IZVLEČEK

Zbirka Alice Munro z naslovom *Dance of the Happy Shades* iz leta 1968 predstavlja krpanko kratkih zgodb. Zbirka je izgrajena kot rizomatska množičnost, kjer se zgodbe navezujejo druga na drugo v rizomatskem vzorcu kot poganjki iz istega telesa. Vsaka izmed zgodb v zbirki je notranje izgrajena na enak način, saj so mikropripovedi združene v celoto kot delčki krpanke. Pričujoči prispevek skozi geokritiko in geofilozofijo analizira zgolj prvo zgodbo, »Walker Brothers Cowboy«, in pokaže, da jo je Munro izgradila po istem vzorcu množičnosti. Zgodba vsebuje več mikropripovedi različnih dolžin in oblik, med katerimi vsaka deluje kot del organizma. Prispevek tudi prikaže, da na vrhuncu zgodbe jukstapozicija mikropripovedi ter gladkih in gubastih podob tvori heterokronično heterotopijo.

Gljučne besede: Alice Munro, »Walker Brothers Cowboy«, heterotopija, heterokronija, geokritika, geofilozofija, rizom, glajenje

“If the art of speaking is itself an art of operating and an art of thinking, practice and theory can be present in it.”

Michel de Certeau
The Practice of Everyday Life

1 Introduction

Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades* (2000), first published in 1968, is a collection of short stories anchored in a small-town Ontario environment and peopled by “young, female protagonists confronting expectations as firmly rooted as the rural landscape in which they live” (Liebson 2019). The stories are marked by a retrospective narrative mode where, as Robert Thacker remarks, “past and present comingle,” and narrators are “allowed their articulate moments” (2016, 23). Liebson, however, recognizes an important convention in the structure of the stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades*: “an essential co-dependency” (Liebson 2019), which is indicative of what this essay claims: a rhizomatic structure. The stories in the collection are also assembled in a patchwork model, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (2005), and mutually connected through a rhizomatic system. Moreover, each story comprises a rhizomatically structured patchwork model, internally, too. The essay will primarily focus on “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” the opening story in *Dance of the Happy Shades* and explore the story through a geocritical and geophilosophical lens, which could initiate further spatial studies on Munro's writing. “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” as a rhizomatic multiplicity, comprises multiple micro-narratives of different lengths and forms, which appear as heterogeneous off-shoots of this rhizomatic multiplicity. The juxtaposition of these micro-narratives, and of smoothing and striating images, constructs a heterochronian heterotopia, a Foucauldian spatial concept, at the climax of the story in the presence of Ben, Nora, and the young girl. The heterochronian heterotopia creates an illusory space where these characters temporarily experience an alternative dimension and return to reality after this climactic event. Yet, the experience for the young girl, the unnamed narrator of the story, was enduring and maturing. To better understand her experience, the essay will first delve into the concepts of heterotopia and heterochronia.

2 Realized Utopias of Alternative Dimensions

The metaphor of heterotopia was proposed by Michel Foucault in his renowned 1967 lecture “Of Other Spaces” where he initially states that we humans do not dwell in a void but in heterogeneous spaces – streets, trains, cafés, cinemas, beaches, or houses, bedrooms, and beds – which we define through “a set of relations that delineate emplacements that cannot be equated or in any way superimposed” (2008, 16). Foucault later expresses his main interest, not in these emplacements, but in other sites where we “suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by [these spaces, and these] nevertheless contradict all the other emplacements” (2008, 17). Foucault identifies these other emplacements as utopias, “emplacements with no real place,” and heterotopias (2008, 17). Foucault categorizes heterotopias as “a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be

found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable” (2008, 17).

Foucault classifies heterotopias into two major categories: heterotopias of crisis, and heterotopias of deviation. Heterotopias of crisis, Foucault suggests, “are privileged, or sacred, or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (2008, 18). Foucault offers boarding schools and hotels as examples of such heterotopias (2008, 18). For the second category, heterotopias of deviation, he points to rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and retirement homes, where individuals manifest deviant behaviour in relation to the general norms (2008, 18).

Foucault postulates that heterotopias can juxtapose several spaces within a simple space. For such incompatible juxtapositions, he propounds theatre stages and cinemas. He suggests that “the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage a whole series of places that are alien to one another,” and that “the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space” (2008, 19).

Foucault also introduces the term “heterochronia,” as a subcategory and suggests that heterotopias may be connected to “slices of time” (2008, 20). Heterochronia is manifest in the temporal accumulation within a heterotopia, the best examples of such heterotopias being museums and libraries. In such heterotopias, time continuously accumulates to create a heterochronia (Foucault 2008, 20). Foucault considers this idea one of the paradoxes of modern times:

By contrast, the idea of accumulating everything, the idea of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time, and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move – well, all this belongs to our modernity (Foucault 2008, 20).

Foucault then identifies two more heterotopias: heterotopias of festivity, for instance, “fairgrounds,” where time is treated “in its most futile, most transitory, most precarious aspect, and this in the festive mode,” and heterotopias of vacation where one is paradoxically offered temporary abolishment of time to regain time in return in “three short weeks of primitive and eternal nudity” (2008, 20). Foucault also suggests that heterotopias have a function, for instance, “to create a space of illusion that exposes all real space, all the emplacements in the interior of which human life is enclosed and partitioned, as even more illusory” (2008, 21). Foucault finishes his lecture with the most interesting heterotopian example: the ship. “The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure, and the police the pirates,” suggests Foucault (2008, 22). The concept of the ship, in the context of this essay, corresponds to Ben’s car in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” which leads him to adventures of ‘a vagabond cowboy,’ an ironic name for Ben as he hardly leaves his home, does not dance, and buys liquorice instead of ice cream in the end.

3 A Journey in Narrativity

“Walker Brothers Cowboy” begins with an invitation: “Want to go down and see if the Lake’s still there?” (Munro 2000, 1). The first invitation takes the narrator and the reader to the shore of Lake Huron where one of the first micro-narratives in the story is told by Ben Jordan, the narrator’s father, a vagabond cowboy – at least in spirit. The second invitation is to the whole family for “a drive in the country” (Munro 2000, 6). These invitations, while captivating the narrator’s sense of adventure and curiosity, initiate a journey in narrativity for the reader. Sturgess defines narrativity as “the enabling force of narrative, a force that is present at every point in the narrative, and thus [it] always operates syntagmatically” (1989, 763). Sturgess further states that “juxtaposed events” create “one powerful sense” and the text will always carry “a sense of the mediating or juxtaposing power of narrativity” (1989, 765). “Walker Brothers Cowboy” also has metafictional qualities, as the story is told through a specific story construction technique.¹ Metafiction creates fiction while making a statement about the way it is created (Waugh 2001, 6). Regarding the self-exploratory quality of metafictional writing, Waugh also says that metafiction “draw[s] on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in the terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory” (2001, 3), and adds that metafiction offers “extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems” (2001, 9). In the light of the narrativity logic, as observed by Sturgess, and the metafictional writing mode, as suggested by Waugh, this essay claims that Munro presents a rhizomatic² pattern comprising a collection of spatiotemporally divergent micro-narratives in “Walker Brothers Cowboy”; the juxtaposition of these micro-narratives, which function as off-shoots of the rhizomatic growth in the frame narrative, and the juxtaposed images within the micro-narratives, help in the construction of heterochronian heterotopia in the story.

4 The Narrativizing Voice

“Walker Brothers Cowboy” is narrated in the confiding voice³ of an adult woman who reminisces about a memorable episode from her childhood, like an intimate diary entry. “My father does not say anything to me about not mentioning things at home, but I know, just from the thoughtfulness, the pause when he passes the liquorice, that there are things not to be mentioned,” says the perceptive narrator in the end (Munro 2000, 18). The story revisits and, more importantly, retells the events leading up to a spatiotemporal experience, in the historical present tense, except for a few places in the story where Munro uses past simple tense. One of these occurs in the story as an off-shoot of the episode with her father during their walk by Lake Huron.⁴ Another one comes in a similar fashion, as a micro-

¹ Munro’s short story “The Office” in the same collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, comments on the issues of story writing as an art form.

² I borrowed the term from Deleuze and Guattari (2005).

³ Duncan highlights the confiding voice in Munro’s short stories “The Peace of Utrecht” from *Dance of the Happy Shades* and “Material” in *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You* (2011, 19–30). Munro also uses the expression “confiding voice” in her story “Thanks for the Ride” from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (2000, 51), which naturally creates a rhizomatic connection with “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” “The Peace of Utrecht,” and “Material.”

⁴ “That is the part of the town we used to know when we lived at Dungannon and came here three or four times a

narrative within a micro-narrative, during the ‘Do you remember’ episode.⁵ Another finds voice in the ‘Nora’ micro-narrative as a rhizomatic off-shoot,⁶ which I entitle the ‘wrong foot’ micro-narrative in the context of this essay.⁷ These instances all appear as off-shoots of micro-narrative episodes to express anchorage to a stagnant experience in the past.

In the traditional sense, however, the use of the historical present suggests that the author or the narrator experiences an event anew while narrating it and that the event is vividly rooted in the narrator’s mind (Park et al., 2011, 1171–76). It should also be taken into consideration that the construction of heterochronism, as this essay claims, requires “[a] narrativizing of practices [as] a textual ‘way of operating’ having its own procedures and tactics,” drawing upon de Certeau’s ideas about storytelling (1988, 78). The use of the historical present tense gives a unifying voice to the rhizomatic multiplicity in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” and a smoothing quality to the polychrony and polytypy of the story. In short, the use of multiple micro-narratives narrated in the historical present tense in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” exemplifies what de Certeau calls “a discourse composed of stories” (1988, 78).

5 Patchwork Model: A Discourse Composed of Stories

Insofar as “Walker Brothers Cowboy” is about metafictional storytelling, it also focusses on the storyteller (presumably a version of Munro herself)⁸ who experiences a transgressive journey of awakening, epiphany, smoothing and, more importantly, ‘becoming.’ The narrator follows her father’s footsteps in the ‘barding’ tradition and gains originality as Munro gives her the role of storyteller. She becomes a “rhapsode” who stitches micro-narratives together into a whole like a patchwork, which is a rhizomatic strategy. Robert Tally states that *rhapsode* is “a term used in its technical or etymological sense of a ‘weaver,’ as one who thus weaves disparate parts into a whole” (2013, 48). A rhapsode becomes “a surveyor of spaces” and “sews these spaces into a new unity,” adds Tally (2013, 48). In support of this, Nunes demonstrates a ‘patchwork piecing’ pattern in Munro’s writing strategy and suggests that “[Munro’s] writing calls attention to itself not to underscore disruption or narrative excess, but to note the narrative strategies – the conditions and contingencies – that allow the pieces to come together” (1997).

As a patchwork unity, “Walker Brothers Cowboy” also corresponds to the smooth space concept proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. They state that a patchwork model created by the continuous addition of fabric of varied sizes and types exhibits smooth space characteristics (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 476–77). This explains the story’s expansive quality as well. In clarifying how patchwork spaces are created, Deleuze and Guattari evoke “an amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways”

summer, to the Lake” (Munro 2000, 2).

⁵ “[...] before my brother was born, when she would give me a little tea and a lot of milk in a cup like hers and we would sit out on the step facing the pump, the lilac tree, the fox pens beyond” (Munro 2000, 5).

⁶ “I think of what my grandmother and my Aunt Tena, over in Dungannon, used to always say to indicate that somebody was a Catholic. *So-and-so digs with the wrong foot*, they would say. *She digs with the wrong foot*. That was what they would say about Nora” (Munro 2000, 14; italics in the original).

⁷ “Dig with the left foot” is used as a derogatory term indicative of one’s Catholic origins (Dalzell and Victor 2015, 237).

⁸ The story draws on some elements of Munro’s upbringing (Tausky 1986).

(2005, 476). Munro creates an expanding, smoothing and rhizomatic movement in the story, in both form and content. This practice results in polychrony, “the combination of different temporalities,” and polytopy, “the composition of different spatialities” (Westphal 2011, 43), which then leads to the construction of heterochronian heterotopia through juxtaposition.

Waugh suggests that authors who engage in metafiction respond to “the pluralistic, hyperactive multiplicity of styles that constitute the surfaces of present-day culture” with the use of aleatory writing. What authors offer in metafictional writing, Waugh adds, is “an anarchic individualism, a randomness designed to represent an avoidance of social control by stressing the impossibility of easily categorizing it or assimilating the reader to familiar structures of communication” (2001, 12–13). For present purposes, I prefer to call such aleatory writing ‘rhizomatic.’ Rhizomatic growths seem random, decentralized, and heterogeneous, while avoiding a fixed order, like trees. Deleuze and Guattari call rhizomatic growths “adventitious” because of their natural randomness (2005, 15). Thacker recognizes “an organic feel” in Munro’s stories with their “stops and starts, bends and turns” (2011, 501). Munro indeed creates *Dance of the Happy Shades* as a rhizomatic organism where the stories are all interconnected through a rhizomatic logic.⁹ Therefore, the geocritical analysis of “Walker Brothers Cowboy” could encourage further studies on *Dance of the Happy Shades* as well as Munro’s other works. The rhizomatic expansion in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” is much like the movement of the ice Ben describes in the ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative. Ben imitates the creeping ice from the north with his hands, and says: “Well, the old ice cap had a lot more power behind it” (Munro 2000, 2), which may indicate his powerlessness in the face of hardship and struggle, alongside the ineffectiveness of his smoothing desire. “And the ice went back, shrank back towards the North Pole where it came from, and left its fingers of ice in the deep places it had gouged, and ice turned to lakes and there they were today,” concludes Ben (Munro 2000, 2). The force of the ice caps is inevitable, forceful, and transgressive, but then creates the smoothest space.¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari classify “ice deserts” and “sand deserts” as smooth spaces where “the polyvocality of directions” becomes an indispensable quality (2005, 382).

“Walker Brothers Cowboy” is indeed a smooth story in geophilosophical terms, with its polychronic and polytopic micro-narratives creating narrative polyvocality. The narrator devises various micro-narratives of different lengths and forms. For instance, ‘The nineteenth-thirties’ is the shortest micro-narrative in the story; another short one is the ‘on my way to see you’ micro-narrative,¹¹ and some are impromptu, or “adventitious” as termed by Deleuze and Guattari (2005, 15). ‘Spying kids’ exemplifies such an adventitious micro-narrative: “The children are far away, following dry creek beds or looking for blackberries, *or else they are hidden in the house, spying at us through cracks in the blinds*” (Munro 2000, 9; emphasis

⁹ Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* can be taken as an example of rhizomatic writing, since each story in *Winesburg, Ohio* is presented as having the potential to bloom into another one – and does so. Caryl Phillips also uses this technique in his writing. For more about Phillips’s use of this *modus operandi*, see Öner (2016).

¹⁰ The words ‘smooth’ and ‘smoothing’ in the article are borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (2005).

¹¹ This story reveals that Ben and Nora were in an intimate relationship in the past. The narrator’s awareness is also noteworthy here. “My father shakes his head. ‘I can’t think of her any way but when she was going to school, so shy I used to pick her up on the road – I’d be on my way to see you – and she would not say one word, not even to agree it was a nice day’” (Munro, 2000, 13).

added). The ‘spying kids’ micro-narrative is also a rhizomatic reference to neighbours drawing curtains so as not to see the eyesore of a house owned by Mrs. Fullerton in “The Shining Houses” in the *Dance of the Happy Shades* collection.¹²

6 Juxtaposition of Micro-Narratives

Howells states that “Walker Brothers Cowboy” touches upon “microhistories” within “national history” (2004, 6). Bonta and Protevi write, “Smooth space does not have a long-term memory with all that entails, so only microhistories are possible, and microsociologies” (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 145). In this essay, I prefer to use the term ‘micro-narratives’ instead of microhistories, as each microhistory already comes with its own narrative.

“The tiny share we have of time appalls me,” comments the narrator regarding the creation of the Great Lakes (Munro 2000, 3). Ben’s ‘scientific’ story takes her back to a time when dinosaurs roamed the Earth. Although it looks aleatory, the ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative gives the frame story an immense backward expansion in space and time. “All where Lake Huron is now,” the narrator quotes her father, Ben, “used to be flat land, a wide flat plain. Then came the ice, creeping down from the North, pushing deep into the low places” (Munro 2000, 3). This backward expansion is reflected in the forward trajectory of the story: a smoothing transgression toward the construction of the heterochronism at the climax of the story.¹³ This movement also resembles Ben’s aleatory choice to go “out of [his] territory” to visit Nora (Munro 2000, 10). Ben is compelled into this choice after he experiences a humiliating affair as a salesman. “Just don’t tell your mother that [...]. She isn’t liable to see the joke,” says Ben before he naturally follows “a line of flight”¹⁴ and changes his regular course. Ben is “plugged by machines of enslavement and order” and “unplugged by forces of desire and smoothing” (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 106). Speaking of such (in)voluntary transgressive movements, Bertrand Westphal comments: “In the absence of a common rhythm, transgression is inevitable” (2011, 43), and further comments: “Transgression is somehow the result of an oscillation, little attributable to a singular, individual responsibility but more like continental drift, the shock of geological plates” (2011, 46). Being unable to achieve a common rhythm with his wife, Ben holds his desire for smoothing and follows a line of flight. By this movement, more importantly, Ben leaves the imprints of his smoothing desire on his daughter just as Nora leaves “an unintelligible mark in the dust” on Ben’s car (Munro 2000, 17). The undeniable presence of this experience can be traced, as we see in “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” in the life of the storytelling rhapsode she later ‘becomes,’ and in the story (or stories) she (Munro) ‘whispers.’ With its assemblage of rhizomatic stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* indicates that Munro is indeed a rhapsode who not only tells stories but also comments on the way she composes stories like a bard.

¹² Ben’s foxes are also rhizomatically matched with Mr. Fullerton’s plans of “putting chinchillas in the backyard” in “The Shining Houses” (Munro 2000, 20).

¹³ Dutoit classifies Munro’s stories into groups: “the geologically-based” ones (outside and childhood stories), and “the nongeologically-based” ones (inside stories and adulthood stories). Dutoit also believes that Munro connects “Canadian place in the Anthropocene (the era of the human in geological time) with literary space-time in imagination (the epoch of the trace)” (2014, 77–78).

¹⁴ Another geophilosophical term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Bonta and Protevi see lines of flight as “vectors of freedom” (2006, 107).

At the end of “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” the narrator gains a new experience, and this creates what de Certeau calls a “curved’ movement” “like the knight in chess” for the narrator to cross “the immense chessboard of literature” (1988, 81). This enables the narrator to go beyond the fixity of stagnancy and find fluidity of smoothing in the end. It is not a coincidence that Munro opens *Dance of the Happy Shades* with “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” an organic story of fluidity, and weaves similar rhizomatic stories with a postmodern playfulness into the collection.

With reference to contradictive and paradoxical postmodern spaces in literature, McHale writes: “Space here is less constructed than *deconstructed* by the text, or constructed and deconstructed at the same time. Postmodernist fiction¹⁵ draws upon a number of strategies for constructing/deconstructing space, among them *juxtaposition*, *interpolation*, *superimposition*, and *misattribution*” (2004, 45; italics in the original). Unlike the “noncontiguous and unrelated” spaces projected by real-world atlases or encyclopaedias, McHale observes, postmodern spaces in literature create zones when juxtaposed, for instance, Foucauldian heterotopias¹⁶ (2004, 45–46).

The juxtaposition of micro-narratives brings to the surface an alternative zone in “Walker Brothers Cowboy.” For instance, the ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative can be juxtaposed with all other micro-narratives in the story. This micro-narrative holds the key to unlocking the other stories, since it proves that any transgressive movement has the potential to construct a smooth space, e.g., Lake Huron. The ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative also foreshadows the unavoidable change the narrator will be experiencing, and it reveals how insignificantly microscopic our lifespan is compared to cosmic history, which initially frightens the narrator (Munro 2000, 3), and how important it is for one to realize this and embrace the destined change. After the narrator’s epiphanic experience in the heterochronism of the heterotopia, as narrated in the ‘Nora’ micro-narrative, she realizes that some things in life are almost magical: “[...] like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine” (Munro 2000, 18). Here, her emotions conflict with her father’s moody, embittered feelings. Similarly, the ‘wrong foot’ micro-narrative is in sharp contrast with, for instance, the image of “the picture of Mary” in the ‘Nora’ micro-narrative (Munro 2000, 18). The narrator comments on this contrast with what she witnesses: “She digs with the wrong foot, I think, and the words seem sad to me as never before, dark, perverse” (Munro 2000, 17). The narrator’s awareness of this stark contrast is reflected in her words: “dark” and “perverse” (Munro 2000, 17). The narrator sees Nora as a woman filled with a positive vibe and life energy, unlike her own mother back home.

Juxtaposing the smooth ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative and the micro-narratives dealing with the mother’s fixity also reveals the main conflict in the story. As we read, we become witnesses

¹⁵ I am referring to postmodernity here with caution and not suggesting that Alice Munro is a postmodernist author and her work postmodernist. However, Munro, recognized by critics as a quintessential realist, is also known to use postmodern modes and methods in the construction of her stories. For instance, Nunes recognizes ‘patchwork piecing’ as a narrative technique in Munro’s stories (1997). This essay also demonstrates the playfulness of her techniques.

¹⁶ For juxtaposing cinematic narrative space, see Zhao and Öner (2018).

to the mother's painfully uncomfortable stagnant attitude and the entrapment in which Ben finds himself. The narrator's mother keeps returning to the past by simply imitating "most leisurely days" (Munro 2000, 5). She does not compromise her suffering and even finds Ben's smoothing attempts pitiful: "A pedlar's song, and that is what he is, a pedlar knocking at backwoods kitchens" (Munro 2000, 4). All she can offer her children is to recycle clothes out of "an old suit and an old plaid wool dress of hers [which] she has to cut and match very cleverly" (Munro 2000, 1). She also (un)willingly wants to keep her children in this stagnancy: "Children are still playing. I don't know them either because my mother keeps my brother and me in our yard [...]" (Munro 2000, 1). The narrator knows that her mother's journeys do not offer vagabond adventures like her father's. In the 'Simon's Grocery' micro-narrative, she feels pinned and trapped, like a gazed-upon object of mockery: "Even the dirty words chalked on the sidewalk are laughing at us" (Munro 2000, 5). She becomes a character in her mother's narrative, not a rhapsode who creates her own stories. She confirms this in these words: "With me her creation, wretched curls and flaunting hair bow, scrubbed knees and white socks – all I do not want to be. I loathe even my name when she says it in public, in a voice so high, proud, and ringing, deliberately different from the voice of any other mother on the street" (Munro 2000, 5). Even in her smoothest moments, as she offers her children ice-cream, the mother attempts to co-opt her children into her own entrapment. In the 'Do you remember' micro-narrative, for instance, she tries to hold her daughter spatiotemporally entrapped in a place, Dungannon, and at the time of "[their] earliest, most leisurely days before [her] brother was born [...]," while the narrator, tired of her mother's such attempts, pretends she remembers little (Munro 2000, 5).

The narrator's father, Ben, also seems entrapped in her mother's wish for stagnancy. Although he tells stories, sings songs, and attempts to smooth the stasis, he "seem[s] to be fresh out of songs" on the way back home (Munro 2000, 17). After experiencing the smoothness of Nora's presence in her house, a heterochronian heterotopia, which is juxtaposed to his own house, he feels downcast as they approach Tuppertown, and the narrator senses the sharp shift in her father's mood: "I feel my father's life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange," and the sky turns "overcast" (Munro 2000, 18). This paragraph shows that the narrator has become more perceptive and understanding of her father's struggle. For Ben, his wife's attitude toward their life is a striating force to be tackled.

Deleuze and Guattari contrast smooth spaces, or the smooth products of smooth spaces, with striated spaces. Striated spaces¹⁷ are produced by the stratification of state apparatus and control mechanisms (2005, 385–86). Of striation, Bonta and Protevi write: "Striation imparts the 'truth' that 'place' is an immobile point and that immobility (dwelling) is always better than 'aimless' voyaging, wandering, itinerancy, and of course nomadism, which at best are temporary vacations, but, if insisted upon, pose grave threats to striated space" (2006, 154). Predictably, the narrator's mother appears as a striating force, a state apparatus, a person who finds Ben's smoothing struggles pathetic.

¹⁷ "[Striation], a geological phenomenon first detected by Louis Agassiz in 1840, was primordially the scratching of the earth's surface by continental glaciers" (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 151).

While “nature” is established by smoothing elements, “human systems” are recognized as striating forces (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 151). Smooth spaces are peopled by nomads, or more specifically, “war machines” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 351–423). “Smooth space operates in the landscape, in mathematics, in music, in thought, in politics, in religion, and so forth,” state Bonta and Protevi (2006, 144). Deleuze and Guattari recognize “becoming” in its smoothing attributes (2005, 488), while Bonta and Protevi state that “intensive becomings” take place only in smooth spaces (2006, 144). Additionally, Bonta and Protevi classify destructive forces like fire, natural spaces such as steppes, seas, deserts, polar ice, air and landscapes, and activities such as dance parties and children’s games, as smooth spaces, and elements of smooth space (2006, 144–45).

There is a general sense of stagnancy in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” as history presents its share of striation. “The nineteen-thirties,” says the narrator pointing to the Great Depression as the major striating force and associating the decade with particular imagery: the “father’s hat,” “bright flared tie,” “an Essex, and long past its prime,” and desolation (Munro 2000, 8). “Nice boy, there’s a boy, nice old boy,” says her father to the only animals, dogs, in this desolation. Ben is portrayed as a man who attempts to smooth any striation he faces: He also needs to know how to calm the “desperate foxes with tongs around their necks,” and he uses “[o]ne gentling voice for the dogs and another, rousing, cheerful, for calling at doors” (Munro 2000, 8). Nevertheless, a prevalent cyclical pattern appears in the lives of the narrator’s parents. Ben seems to have the desire to go beyond the striations of his wife’s stagnant attitude for “some fresh air and a drive in the country” (Munro 2000, 5), and he is also willing to go “out of [his] territory” (Munro 2000, 10) to create an alternative smooth story. Yet, his invitations to singing, banter and wandering, to include his wife in his adventures, both physical and emotional, seem to fail. He only gets unwilling laughter or scorn: “Not a very funny song, in my mother’s opinion” (Munro 2000, 3). Yet, unlike his daughter, he is still trapped by striations of stagnancy. Ben does not get up to dance with Nora and will probably never visit her again. However, Ben and Nora (in)voluntarily pass the heterochronian experience on to the narrator, the rhapsode, who grows up to continue creating smooth stories of unbound, adventurous, moving vagabonds and nomads in search of smoothing, hence the title “Walker Brothers Cowboy.” After all, she has a soul “wary of being trapped into sympathy or any unwanted emotion” (Munro 2000, 6).

7 A ‘Whispering’ Illusion

The frame narrative in “Walkers Brothers Cowboy” climaxes at Nora’s house, where some of the micro-narratives find an alternative story, a climactic juxtaposition takes place, and micro-narratives, songs, contrasting images, smoothing, and striating forces converge to construct an enticingly heterochronian heterotopia. The spatial practice Munro adopts in the story leads to this construction. The narrator experiences an epiphanic transgression in a newly constructed heterotopia. At Nora’s house Ben fails to dance with her, which would be the ultimate act of smoothing in the story; the denouement then takes place in the car, a mobile heterotopia,¹⁸ where the narrator senses a “flowing” change in her father (Munro 2000, 18).

¹⁸ This mobile heterotopia can also be called ‘the heterotopia of vagrancy’ as Ben and his children find some comfort and temporary smoothing in their car, travelling and venturing.

The ‘Nora’ micro-narrative opens with an intriguingly polysensorial introduction. The narrator describes the paradoxically dilapidated state of this ‘illusory’ heterotopian setting using visual cues: “[...] pricks of sunlight penetrate and float on her face” (Munro 2000, 11) and “[...] every bit of her skin you can see is covered with little dark freckles¹⁹ like measles” (Munro 2000, 12); auditory cues: “[...] Momma. Hear his voice” (Munro 2000, 11) and “[...] cheerfully and aggressively” (Munro 2000, 11); olfactory cues: “[...] there is a faint sour smell” (Munro 2000, 11) and “[...] sending a smell of cologne far and wide [...]” (Munro 2000, 12); tactile cues: “It’s cool in the house” (Munro 2000, 11) and “She pulls us forward, makes each of us touch the old lady’s dry, cool hand [...]” (Munro 2000, 12); and finally gustatory cues: “You go and pump me some good cold water [...]” (Munro 2000, 12). Munro constructs this narrative heterotopia using a sensorially holistic approach, “polysensoriality” in geocritical terms (Westphal 2011). Westphal explains that “sensoriality allows the individual to conform to the world. It contributes to the structuring and definition of space” (2011, 133). By using this approach, Munro creates juxtaposed polysensorial images. Nora’s dress, for instance, is lined with “green poppies,” “flowered more lavishly than anything [the narrator’s] mother owns”, and Nora wears “Cuban heels”²⁰ (Munro 2000, 12), in contrast to the dress and shoes of the narrator’s mother: “She wears a good dress, navy blue with little flowers, sheer, worn over a navy-blue slip [and] a summer hat of white straw [and] white shoes [...]” (Munro 2000, 4). Ben’s songs, which are among the story’s most important auditory cues, are juxtaposed with a song from Ben and Nora’s mutual history in the insinuated ‘on my way to see you’ micro-narrative: “*Whispering while you cuddle near me, Whispering so no one can hear me*” (Munro 2000, 16; italics in the original). Nora also shows them “the snapshots” of her sisters, Isabel and Muriel (Munro 2000, 13). This can be contrasted with the mental image the narrator builds thinking of her Protestant grandmother and Aunt Tena, open anti-Catholics, with their ‘wrong foot’ micro-narrative.

With a tactile, or more specifically kinaesthetic image, “Dance with me, Ben” (Munro 2000, 16), the story reaches its pivotal moment, which functions as a point of no return. The invitation would have led to a polysensorially physical build-up,²¹ yet it is unaccomplished. This rejection indicates that Ben is aware of the illusory, temporary, and liminal nature of this heterotopia. This spatiotemporal experience simply ‘whispers’ a past long lost and yet revisited momentarily and painfully. Ben simply enjoys the temporary loss of identity determinants.

¹⁹ With this visual image, we can again see Munro’s playful anchorage to her other stories in the collection “Images”: “Out in the daylight, and not dressed in white, she turned out to be freckled all over, everywhere you could see, as if she was sprinkled with oatmeal, and she had a crown of frizzy, glinting, naturally brass-coloured hair” (Munro 2000, 31), and “Thanks for the Ride:” “She had her long pale hair tied at the back of her neck; her skin was dustily freckled, but not tanned; even her eyes were light-coloured” (Munro 2000, 49). This shows the rhizomatic strategy in the creation of her stories.

²⁰ With this expression, Munro again connects “Walker Brothers Cowboy” to another story, “Sunday Afternoon” in *Dance of the Happy Shades*, in a rhizomatic pattern: “She had to wear stockings too, and white Cuban-heeled shoes that clomped on the stones of the patio – making, in contrast to the sandals and pumps, a heavy, purposeful, plebeian [sic] sound” (Munro 2000, 164).

²¹ The narrator’s polysensorial description of this intimate experience is as follows: “Round and round the linoleum, me proud, intent, Nora laughing and moving with great buoyancy, wrapping me in her strange gaiety, her smell of whisky, cologne, and sweat. Under the arms her dress is damp, and little drops form along her upper lip, hang in the soft black hairs at the corners of her mouth. She whirls me around in front of my father – causing me to stumble, for I am by no means so swift a pupil as she pretends – and lets me go, breathless” (Munro 2000, 16).

In recognition of the potential of the smoothing forces of such heterotopian spaces, Westphal writes: “Heterotopia is another name for the sphere of intimacy that resists codification and that each individual tries to expand at leisure” (2011, 64). In this heterochronian heterotopia of illusion,²² Ben could have expanded by grasping the chance to dance with Nora and smooth the striations his wife creates in real time. Foucault suggests that heterotopias tend to generate “a space of illusion” that reveals the roles of real emplacements where one’s life is controlled, or they create an alternative “perfect” or “meticulous” space contrasting the tough, chaotic, real space in which we live (2008, 21). Here, Westphal’s comments on Foucault’s heterotopias are noteworthy:

The Foucauldian heterotopia is the space imbued by literature in its capacity as a “laboratory of the possible,” the investigator of the integral space that sometimes occurs in the field of reality and sometimes outside of it. Heterotopia enables individuals to juxtapose in the same site several spaces that had previously been incompatible (Westphal 2011, 63).

In this alternative heterotopian space of heterochronia, we have a glimpse of ‘the possible’ universe. It is illusory, temporary, and liminal. Yet, it is revealing, enduring, and maturing for the narrator, the future storyteller, the rhapsode-to-be. It is not surprising that Munro initiates her writing journey with this very story, “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” the smooth story of transgression.

8 Conclusion

Thacker asserts that Alice Munro is “an organic writer” (2016, 11) and “an artist who, in her secret world has articulated in her stories the very feelings of being alive, and of being human” (2016, 268), which explains why her stories carry a unique smoothness. This essay addresses this naturalness and smoothness in the story “Walker Brothers Cowboy” through a geocritical and geophilosophical lens. The essay concludes that this organic feel and smoothness comes from Munro’s use of rhizomatic logic. Rhizomes do not function on a fixed order like tree structures but exhibit a natural randomness. I have established that the story contains multiple micro-narratives as off-shoots of this rhizomatic growth and that these are adventitious, random, and decentralized. These micro-narratives achieve an enticing spatiotemporal effect in the story. For instance, the smooth ‘Huron Lake’ micro-narrative brings an immense expansion to the story since this micro-narrative is also a metaphor for the emergence of a story-weaving rhapsode. This emergence is innately forceful, adventitious, inevitable, and transgressive, just as the ice caps, which naturally created the smoothest space, Lake Huron, were millions of years ago. When multiple micro-narratives in the story are juxtaposed, an alternative zone emerges in the story’s pivotal moment where reality is suspended and neutralized. The experience is climactic for Ben and Nora. For the narrator, however, it paved the path to becoming a story-weaving rhapsode and to telling the story of the vagabond cowboy, her father, Ben.

²² Foucault also suggests an alternative name: ‘heterotopia of compensation’ (2008, 21).

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