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Three Faces of the Monster: Interpreting Disability and Creating Meaning in Translations of Alice Munro's "Child's Play"

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Contemporary debates in translation studies draw attention to textual instability as an essential factor of translation that needs to be recognized to ensure deeper understanding of the translators' powers and responsibilities. In *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*, Karen Emmerich, referring to the textual variability of most literary "sources", points out that "[t]he textual condition is one of variance, not stability. The process of translation both grapples with and extends that variance, defining the content and form of an 'original' in the very act of creating yet another textual manifestation of a literary work in a new language" (2). If any text is theorized as a fluid and non-definitive version of a literary work that has no "single, stable lexical entity whose existence predates the process of translation" (Emmerich 13) and at the same time, as Rita Felski argues in *Literature after Feminism,* constitutes "a zone of unstable, oscillating, and often clashing interpretations" (63), then what translators do is indeed create their own originals, consolidating particular aspects and characteristics of the text in their reimagined performances. Alice Munro's short stories, which apply uncertainty as a deliberate strategy to represent multiplicity and complexity of human experience[1], offer ample potential for such creative "original-making," pushing the translator to not "convey but creat[e] meaning and messages, if always in relation to a specific prior text" (Emmerich 162). As the example of Munro's story, "Child's Play," demonstrates, this choice, while being fraught with the risks of simplification or textual appropriation, may open the path towards artistic interpretative extension of a literary work where the translator's agenda takes precedence over the deeply ingrained requirement of fidelity and shapes the target text in new and unexpected ways.

"Child's Play", first published in Harper's magazine in 2008 and later included in the 2009 collection *Too Much Happiness*, stands out among Munro's oeuvre as a particularly bleak and bitter narrative that addresses a sensitive issue of the culturally reinforced opposition between "normal" and "monstrous" with regard to physical and intellectual disability. As the story suggests, stigma and hate resulting from normative thinking about human body and its abilities marginalize the "special" bodies marked by disability with a disastrous effect. A new, unusual type of narrator introduced here by the

[1] Claims to this effect have been made by many critics over the years; in particular, Katherine Sutherland points out that "Munro's work contrives a precise but unstable realism through a writerly technique that enacts supreme control while simultaneously sabotaging it: her stories defy control, closure, culminating insights, or even plot certainty" (156).

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writer can be understood as both the product and the perpetrator of this destructive force. According to Isla Duncan, "In the narrator of 'Child's Play', Munro unveils another addition to her cast of troubled and troubling characters that have transgressed: this narrator outdoes the others, however, in the violence of her actions, and the disjunction of her tale" (160). Exploring the story of a child murder, the author shows how normative societal beliefs, internalized by the child protagonist, effectively transform so-called "normalcy" into monstrosity, thus reversing their socially constructed opposition. Translation, in its turn, further problematizes the boundary between the two by manipulating the narrator's figure to reveal multiple dimensions of the monster, and to frame the translators' visions in a way that best fits their personal goals in addressing their target audiences.

Munro's Style and Story

"Child's Play" uses the author's characteristic fragmentary time-jumping structure and an intradiegetic "dual narrator" who brings about "a commingling of the remembered event, vividly described so as to lend immediacy to it, and […] detached understanding of it" (Thacker, "Clear Jelly" 45), thus creating a destabilizing effect of split consciousness and double vision. Yet this time Munro reimagines these strategies taking a new angle on the "links between a self-reflexive and ambiguous narrative perspective, trauma, affective force, and situational and uncertain ethical acts" (Sutherland 156). The plot of the story revolves around the narrator's memory of Verna, a mentally disabled girl and one of the "Specials" abhorred and despised by the so-called "normal" children. Verna's "otherness" and her instinctive attempts to reach out to Marlene (the narrator) provoke the latter's hostility and physical revulsion—feelings that are instantaneously shared by her friend Charlene and culminate in a violent act when the two girls kill unsuspecting Verna on the last day of the summer camp. The act of murder itself, although unpremeditated, is perceived by them as a natural and even liberating impulse because both girls see it as elimination of an object of disgust. They intuitively stigmatize and reject the difference of a "special" body, feeling, as Heidi Darroch puts it, that "minds that are affected by disability […] disturb, provoking a desire to repudiate and expel" (110). In Marlene's and Charlene's eyes, Verna's otherness makes her revolting. Munro, through her protagonist, makes it clear that the girls' aversion to Verna and, respectively, their attempt to distance themselves from the "Specials" with their distinctive bodies and unpredictable behaviours is only a logical consequence of their society's deep-seated prejudice against disability. However, it also stems from their own feeling of gendered vulnerability that forces them to self-identify as "normal" to attain safety, and thus precludes any possibility of positive affect towards the vulnerable other. This instinctive rejection of weakness defines Munro's depiction of the "gendered politics of empathy and affect" (Darroch 110): her protagonist refuses to extend empathy to someone she sees as different, because she wishes "to avoid being associated with a disabled other's dejected state, to avoid a traumatic identification" (Darroch 118).

The act of killing Verna, therefore, reveals that "able-bodied privilege and absolute subjectivity can only survive or thrive through the destruction of disability and thereby the

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reproduction of social norms around appropriate bodies" (Narduzzi 86). The opposition of two relationships in the story, the powerful and almost mystical connection between Verna and the narrator, and the intimate closeness between Marlene and Charlene that borders on twinship (and is amplified by their almost identical names and similar appearances), demonstrates that "negative affective responses to disabled bodies or queer expressions both reinforce and are reinforced by 'normal' able-bodied and heterosexual bodies. The effects of negative affect toward 'othered' bodies silence difference and curtail disabled reproductions, sometimes through actual murder" (Narduzzi 72). Destruction of the other becomes the triumph of the "normal" self.

This aggressive act of annihilation requires dehumanization of the enemy, which is consistently reflected in the language Munro's narrator uses with regard to Verna and other "Specials". Passive voice is used consistently when referring to them to accentuate their random behaviour, lack of purpose, and the need to be controlled and steered: "the Specials […] were being herded by" ("Child's Play" 202); "Some […] had to be yelled at and fetched back" (201); "At the supper table they were marched in […] Then they were deliberately separated, and distributed amongst the rest of us" (202). The motif of passivity further evolves into the metaphorical vision of Verna as an inanimate object: "The skin of her face seemed as dull to me as the flap of our old canvas tent, and her cheeks puffed out the way the flap of that tent puffed in a wind" (195). Often this objectivization reduces Verna in Marlene's eyes to a single repulsive attribute, a feeling of disgust: even her name sounds "like a trail of obstinate peppermint, green slime" (196). But the most important recurrent motif that helps to understand motivation behind Verna's murder is the narrator's perception of a "special" child as an animal. At one point, Marlene admits: "I suppose I hated her as some people hate snakes or caterpillars or mice or slugs. For no decent reason" (200). Her consistent equation of Verna with a revolting creature leads to the ultimate denial of the girl's humanity, highlighting "how similes and metaphors that attribute animal-like characteristics to Verna function as a prelude to the act of violence carried out against her" (Darroch 115).

Insisting on Verna's animalistic nature, Marlene assumes her inability to speak and thus undermines any possibility of communication: "Her voice was hoarse and unmodulated, her words oddly separated, as if they were chunks of language caught in her throat" ("Child's Play" 195). This understanding of "special" body as not quite human, incapable of what is seen as "normal" human behaviour or interaction, creates an unbridgeable divide between the two girls—or rather, the narrator puts up the wall herself for fear of associating with Verna and discovering their similarity. Refusing to see the person behind the "special" body, Marlene obsessively fixates on Verna's animal-like qualities and individual body parts. She metaphorically takes the "special" body apart to completely dehumanize it; but by doing so, she ascribes a strange, almost mythological power to Verna, making her a threat. In the narrator's eyes, fear and aversion transform a clueless, mentally disturbed child into a dangerous monster, setting the scene for an unmistakable—however vaguely described—act of inhuman cruelty.

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Translations

The fluidity and uncertainty that epitomize Munro's narrative give rise to the diverging interpretations offered by translators. I will be looking at the three target language versions: "Kinderspiel" by Heidi Zerning in German, "Детская игра" ["Children's Play"] by Andrey Stepanov in Russian, and "Дитячі розваги" ["Children's Amusements"] by Yevheniya Kononenko in Ukrainian. As each translator approaches the same text from a different background and with different objectives, Munro's complex and deliberately ambiguous narrative becomes more defined, crystallizing into three related, but distinctly non-identical renditions. Each version performs the same script, offering a new reading of the story's central conflict and character, and each of them attains consistency and relatability for its target audience by inscribing its preferred meaning to the exclusion of all others. The translators' individual projects in dealing with the text become key to this transformation.

Out of all three translators, Heidi Zerning has the most personal connection to Munro's work: as the *Tagesspiegel* article celebrating her translation career points out, Zerning, a self-taught literary translator, is known as the "German voice" of Alice Munro since she has translated all the writer's published short story collections over the years (Kippenberger). Having spent decades rewriting Munro into German language and consciousness, she has an intimate knowledge of the author's unique style and focuses on the stylistic nuances of her texts, their rhythm and musicality. Zerning describes Munro's style as "unpretentious" and claims that the writer "does not use any special stylistic devices, but rather unfolds nuanced narratives with utmost finesse" (Kippenberger, translation mine). Despite the translator's choice to remain faithful and invisible (both in the text itself and for the public eye), her translations do not stop at conveying the original—her subtle approach, with its emphasis on the poetic, enriches Munro's writing phonetically and stylistically, at the same time introducing a certain degree of domestication to bring it closer to its German-language readers. Interestingly, Zerning's reticence and determination to avoid the spotlight mirror Munro's own private and reclusive nature.

Andrey Stepanov, the Russian translator of *Too Much Happiness*, is a historian of Russian literature and a professor at the Russian Literary History Department of Saint Petersburg State University, specializing in the study of Anton Chekhov. His interest in Munro originates primarily from her relationship with the classical Russian literature and often-cited genre and stylistic parallels with Chekhov that have long become a cliché in any critical discussion of the Canadian writer's work and her "most ubiquitous publisher's blurb" (Thacker, *Writing Her Lives* 443). In his article "Chekhov's Themes in Alice Munro's Stories", Stepanov defines Munro as an author heavily influenced by the Russian literary tradition in her genre, style and thematic motifs, and presents her as a new (although peripheral and distinctly secondary) "Chekhov" for the Russian readership (2014). While discussing Munro's humanism and focus on the depths of inner psychological life, he, nevertheless, substantially downplays the significance of gender and social conflict in her world (particularly as compared to Chekhov), explaining this view with a rather idealistic outlook on Canadian reality:

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> Canada is one of the most advanced countries in the modern world, a de facto socialist state without any distinct stratification of income, education levels or cultural preferences; a country with a reliable social welfare system, known for its tolerance and stability. All racial, class, and gender biases have been successfully eliminated here, and typical Chekhovian plotlines based on such inequalities […] are apparently impossible. In most of her present-day stories, Alice Munro writes about personal conflicts—psychological and family-related—rather than social ones. (Степанов 87, translation mine)

Although Stepanov further acknowledges that some social themes are present in Munro's stories set in the 1940s-1950s ("Child's Play" being one of them), his overly positive and somewhat simplistic perception of the Canadian cultural context seems problematic for the successful reconstruction of Munro's world through translation.

In the 2017 Ukrainian publication of *Too Much Happiness* (the first and so far only available collection of Munro's stories in Ukrainian), Yevheniya Kononenko offers a compelling perspective on the Canadian writer's work that relies on the translator's own cultural capital to introduce Munro to the Ukrainian-language reading audience. Kononenko is a prominent Ukrainian postmodernist writer and a prolific literary translator from English and French, who is also a self-identified feminist (see "Євгенія Кононенко: 'Я – за злам стереотипів'" ["Yevheniya Kononenko: 'I Am All for Breaking Stereotypes'"]). Ukrainian literary critics often discuss her writing primarily from the standpoint of politicized feminist discourse. Nila Zborovska, while analyzing Kononenko's novel *Ностальгія* [*Nostalgia*] and essay "Без мужика" ["Without a Hubby"] claims that both works are "based on the opposition of the two worlds: the static male world as a totalitarian and colonial space closely linked to the societal pressures and 'etatism' of personal life, and the dynamic female world as a private and rebellious space, i. e. […] the central and marginal elements in the societal structure" (Зборовська, translation mine). Kononenko's feminist outlook also becomes evident in her translation philosophy: well aware of the contemporary feminist translation theories, and particularly Canadian feminist writing on translation[2], she consistently rejects the conventional notion of fidelity along with the gendered metaphorics of translation that implies its inherent inferiority and the need for faithfulness. She asserts importance of creativity in translation and justifies transtextualization as the approach aiming at "enhancement and development of the original ideas without their distortion" ("Про

[2] In particular, in her article "Про інтимні стосунки оригіналу та перекладу" Kononenko quotes Linda Gaboriau's translation of Nicole Brossard's line "Ce soir j'entre dans l'histoire sans relever ma jupe" from the play *La Nef des sorcières* (*Clash of Symbols*), rendered as "tonight I shall step into history without opening my legs", as a successful example of transtextualization. This translation was analyzed by Luise von Flotow in *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'* (19).

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інтимні стосунки оригіналу та перекладу" ["On the Intimate Relationship between Original and Translation"], translation mine).

Importantly, Kononenko takes a clearly political stance on literary translation in the Ukrainian context, qualifying it as a "nation-building activity" ("Про інтимні стосунки оригіналу та перекладу"). She posits that in the environment of Russian linguistic domination in the Ukrainian publishing market[3], translation of fiction into Ukrainian is truly a political decolonizing mission: "In the Ukrainian national reality, where even bilingual readers who are willing to read contemporary Ukrainian literature traditionally access world literature through the Russian language, it is of utmost importance to make sure that Ukrainian translation is of *better quality* than Russian" ("Алхімія перекладу" ["Alchemy of Translation"]). For Kononenko, this element of competition in translation is more than an attempt to win over readers—the choice to translate world literature into Ukrainian becomes a prerequisite for the development of national self-identity and cultural survival.

Thus, in translating Munro into Ukrainian Kononenko consciously pursues political goals, as well as cultural, and positions herself as an activist translator. As such, she often chooses to radicalize the translated texts in terms of content and style, increasing their shock value and accentuating their social critique or political message. In case of Munro's "Child's Play", the Ukrainian translator offers the darkest reading and makes bold choices in her particularly harsh portrayal of the main character. As a result, Kononenko's take on the Canadian writer's work veers into the territory of adaptation, offering not so much "Munro in Ukrainian" as "Munro for Ukrainians" and making her stories not only relatable, but relevant in the contemporary cultural and political climate. If this ambitious project does not fall flat, instead legitimizing the translator's unusual choices, it is because of the three main factors involved in its conception and production: the fact that Kononenko's version is effectively a retranslation of Stepanov's earlier Russian-language effort that previously became available to Ukrainian readers; the translator's utmost openness about her goals and methods; and her unwavering respect for the original material and its cultural context, which precludes overt domestication or offhanded value judgments.

The difference between the translators' approaches becomes expressly obvious in the episode describing the first physical contact between Marlene and Verna, which is seen through the narrator's eyes as an otherworldly encounter with a terrifying wild creature: "I was not wearing a cap, so the hairs of my head came in contact with the woolly coat or jacket she had on, and it seemed to me that I had actually touched bristling hairs on the skin of a gross hard belly" ("Child's Play" 198). The German version clearly chooses the path of faithfulness (which, in this case, is also aided by

[3] Which came as a result of centuries-long suppression of the Ukrainian language by Russian political forces, from multiple bans to publish Ukrainian-language literature in the Russian Empire (Peter I's royal decree in 1720, Valuev Circular in 1863, prohibition to translate books into Ukrainian in 1892, etc.), to the consistent Russification policy implemented by the Soviet Union authorities from the 1930s to the 1990s, and ongoing efforts to ban the use of Ukrainian and persecute its speakers in the occupied Crimea, Luhansk People's Republic, and Donetsk People's Republic since 2014.

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linguistic similarities between the source and target languages) and stays as close to the original as possible, carefully preserving the ambiguity implied by the original that avoids naming the animal or even directly referring to it: *"als hätte ich Borsten auf der Haut eines dicken, harten Bauches berührt"* ["as if I touched bristles on the skin of a fat, hard belly"] ("Kinderspiel" 323). At the same time, the Ukrainian text resorts to the specification making the monstrous imagery more explicit through its use of the phrase *"волохатого черева якоїсь потвори"* ["a hairy underbelly of an unknown monster"] ("Дитячі розваги" 230). This deliberate juxtaposition of the two images, a child and a monster, while downplaying the elements of mystery and uncertainty, immediately challenges the narrator's version of events revealing how far from reality her perception of Verna is. The Russian translator, conversely, makes sure to outline the connection between the two: the creature is not named, but the repetition of the "wool/hair" element in the phrases *"шерстяным пальто"* ["woolen coat"] and *"колючей шерсти, растущей на огромном и твердом животе"* ["bristling wool/hair growing on the huge, hard belly"] ("Детская игра") ties in the images of a girl and a wild hairy beast, making Verna's association with an animal more transparent—and unchallenged.

In other cases, translators specify or even completely alter Munro's imagery to make it more expressive and emotionally loaded, particularly when referring to the parts of Verna's body: "The worst was that her fingers had pressed my back. Through my coat, through my other clothing, her fingers like so many cold snouts" ("Child's Play" 197). Here Verna's touch once again is interpreted by the narrator as a disgusting and pervasive attack of an animal-like creature. The German translator picks up on the animalistic image implied in the original: *"Das Schlimmste war, dass ihre Finger sich in meinen Rücken bohrten. Durch meinen Mantel, durch meine übrigen Sachen, diese Finger wie viele kalte Rüssel"* ["The worst thing was that her fingers drilled into my back. Through my coat, through my other things, these fingers like many cold snouts"] ("Kinderspiel" 321). This passage preserves the simile, which despite its vagueness clearly marks the connection the narrator makes between Verna's "abnormal" body and the animal world. Zerning also makes sure to strengthen the association: her use of *"bohren"* ["drill"/ "gnaw"] emphasizes intensity of the narrator's feeling and hints at annoying stinging insects. However, the Russian text has to clarify this image to make the simile understandable, and explains it as *"хоботки насекомых"* ["snouts of insects"] ("Детская игра"), thus more directly conveying the narrator's disgust. The Ukrainian version goes even further to replace the insects with "slimy reptiles" by using the phrase *"слизькі плазуни"* ("Дитячі розваги" 229). This transformation highlights and intensifies the narrator's repulsion and fear—which, again, gives away the ridiculousness of her claims about Verna. In all three cases, specification (in varying degrees) is the main strategy the translators resort to to make the narrator's fixation on Verna's body parts and her perception of Verna's body as monstrous more obvious.

Still, it is essential to stress that for Munro the central conflict of the story is not limited to the narrator's abhorrence of non-conforming bodies—for her, the crux lies in the socially sanctioned rejection of disability. As Sutherland claims, "beyond the failures of a single child, 'Child's Play' exposes the failed social attachment of the 'able' to the 'disabled' […] This is an ethical failure of care

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that is broad and external to Marlene and Charlene, a social failure without which they might not have acted as they did" (158). The author consistently underlines that Marlene's perspective on disability is an expression of the commonly accepted mindset that children internalize and reproduce in their own relationships with the "Specials". They consciously justify these beliefs as a norm and, accordingly, ascribe these views even to the people who refuse to openly support them (like the narrator's mother):

> But I certainly did blame her [Verna]. I did not question that it was somehow her fault. And in this, whatever my mother might say, I was in tune to some degree with an unspoken verdict of the time and place I lived in. Even grown-ups smiled in a certain way, there was some irrepressible gratification and taken-for-granted superiority that I could see in the way they mentioned people who were simple or a few bricks short of a load. And I believed my mother must be really like this, underneath. ("Child's Play" 196)

Here the adult narrator is explaining and rationalizing the way she felt about Verna, at the same time trying to appear distant and objective. As a professional anthropologist and a seasoned academic that she has become, she makes sure to leave space for some doubt about past events, which is expressed through her frequent use of uncertainty markers ("somehow", "might say", "to some degree", "even", "must be"). In a paradoxical way, this seeming non-insistence on a particular version of the story emphasizes the main character's honesty and makes the unreliable narrator more reliable in the readers' eyes—while still allowing her to construct a convincing narrative. The German translator obviously realizes the significance of this strategy and carefully keeps these elements in her text. However, almost all of them are omitted in the Russian and Ukrainian versions. As a result, the narrator's speech becomes more direct (although, it can be argued, less sincere) and her emotions and intentions seem not quite as complex. Use of more straightforward phrases indicating inferiority of the "Specials", such as *"абсолютно природна зверхність"* ["absolutely natural condescension"] ("Дитячі розваги" 228) and *"безусловное чувство превосходства"* ["unconditional feeling of superiority"] ("Детская игра") serves to "normalize" and even vindicate the narrator's feelings and the socially perpetuated prejudice against the "special" children. But the translators do it in different ways: the Ukrainian text remains bluntly clear about the narrator's emotions, using concise brusque statements and portraying her as hateful and unrepentant: *"Але, звісно ж, я її дорікала. Я не вважала, що то її провина. Але в моїй поведінці стосовно неї втілювався не сформульований настрій тієї епохи […] І я переконана, моя мати була така сама"* ["But of course I blamed her. I did not think it was her fault. But my behaviour towards her embodied the not-openly-formulated attitude of that era […] And I am convinced that my mother was the same"] ("Дитячі розваги" 228). The Russian translation, nevertheless, softens Marlene's image and makes her sound almost compassionate, carefully glossing over the evident inconsistencies in her story as she simultaneously acknowledges Verna's innocence, admits blaming her for her difference, and offhandedly reinforces this difference, labelling her as being "that way", or "one of them": *"Но я ее винила, хотя и понимала: да, она такой родилась. И в этом отношении, что бы там ни говорила мама о моей злобе, я была дитя своего времени […] И мне казалось, что и моя мама в душе точно такая же"* ["But I did blame her, although I understood: yes, she was

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born that way. And in this respect, whatever my mother might have said about my malice, I was the child of my time […] And it seemed to me that deep in her soul my mother was exactly the same"] ("Детская игра"). While a certain degree of simplification can be detected in both cases (and can partially be explained by the conventions of good literary style in both Slavic languages), the translators' diverging approaches to Munro's complex, self-contradictory tale become clear: Stepanov empathizes with the narrator and is almost willing to acquit her, while Kononenko remains unconvinced and masterfully uses the narrator's own words to point to the holes in her story and to turn the reader against her.

The narrator's musings about social acceptability of the terms describing intellectual disabilities betray complexity of her feelings where her profound insensitivity and lack of empathy contrast with her conscious attempt to seem understanding and sympathetic:

> The words "deficient," "handicapped," "retarded" being of course also consigned to the dustbin and probably for good reason—not simply because such words may indicate a superior attitude and habitual unkindness but because they are not truly descriptive. Those words push aside a good deal that is remarkable, even awesome—or at any rate peculiarly powerful, in such people. And what was interesting was to discover a certain amount of veneration as well as persecution, and the ascribing—not entirely inaccurately—of quite a range of abilities, seen as sacred, magical, dangerous, or valuable. ("Child's Play" 210)

Frequent use of dashes in this passage reveals the narrator's disjointed thinking, her attempt to reconcile two conflicting worldviews. The narrative intonation is somewhat changed in the Russian and Ukrainian versions that leave out several pauses, making the narrator's speech less fragmented and more coherent. Omission of some of the narrator's meaningful comments ("and probably for good reason" in Ukrainian, "or at any rate" in Russian, "not entirely inaccurately" in both versions) also takes away from the original's complexity. At the same time, all three translations increase intensity of the narrator's emotions to a certain extent, either through the use of stylistically charged words when speaking about prejudiced perception of disabilities (*"зверхність"* ["condescension"], *"презирство"* ["contempt"], *"цькували"* ["harass"] in Ukrainian) or through additions that focus on fear: *"bemerkenswert und sogar beängstigend"* ["remarkable and even frightening"] ("Kinderspiel" 342) in German, *"примечательного, пугающего или просто впечатляющего"* ["remarkable, frightening or simply impressive"] ("Детская игра") in Russian. Here, again, Kononenko's concise, expressive phrasing accentuates rejection and persecution of the "Specials" and the narrator's lack of sympathy towards them, while Stepanov tones down and rationalizes this attitude in the narrator's deliberately impassive monologue. As for the German translation, it closely follows Munro's narrative intonation and simultaneously elevates poetic qualities of the text by relying on alliteration and phonetic parallelism: *"gewohnheitsmäßige Voreingenommenheit"* ["habitual prejudice"] ("Kinderspiel" 342); *"ein gewisses Maß an Verehrung ebenso wie an Verfolgung"* ["a certain amount of veneration as well as persecution"] (342). Zerning uses similar techniques throughout the text to draw attention to Verna's body or behaviour

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and to the narrator's view of the "special" children: *"wegen meines Mangels an Mitgefühl"* ["because of my lack of compassion"] ("Kinderspiel" 342); *"wegen ihrer Unsicherheit oder Ungeschicklichkeit"* ["because of their insecurity or unskillfulness"] (322); *"verdrossen oder verwirrt zu sein"* ["to be irritated or confused"] (331). In all these examples, phonetic effects are used to intensify Marlene's aversion—or to point out typical socially acceptable reactions to intellectual disability. In doing this, the translator builds up emotional tension around Verna and the "Specials" to amplify depth and complexity of the protagonist's affective responses.

In the original text, Marlene's feelings, well-hidden in the adult narrator's purposefully distant account, break to the surface when she remembers her childhood experience through "an enfolded perspective, as the child and adult perspectives fold into and over one another" (Sutherland 161). Talking about her prejudice against people with disabilities, she is trying to justify it as the society's fault, to "normalize" the hate people with disabilities are subjected to; but by doing this, she inadvertently exposes "normal" children as real monsters in these interactions: "Children of course are monstrously conventional, repelled at once by whatever is off-centre, out of whack, unmanageable" ("Child's Play" 195). Here the narrator's genuine emotions become even more obvious through the translators' interpretations. Zerning focuses on the idea of monstrosity and disgust, once again alluding to the wild animalistic nature of the "Specials" (implied by the impossibility to "tame" them): *"Kinder sind natürlich ungeheuer konventionell, sie werden sofort von allem abgestoßen, dass von der Norm abweicht, nicht ganz im Lot, nicht zu bändigen ist"* ["Children are, of course, monstrously/immensely conventional, they are instantly repelled by everything that deviates from the norm, is not completely balanced, is not to be tamed"] ("Kinderspiel" 318). However, both Russian and Ukrainian texts move on to the justification of hostile actions rather than feelings: the use of verbal forms *"відганяючи"* ["chasing away"] ("Дитячі розваги" 227) and *"отвергают"* ["reject"] ("Детская игра") indicates that the children do not simply detest, but actively push away the "Specials". Nevertheless, the translators highlight different reasons for this malevolent behaviour. Kononenko cites inferiority and uncontrollability of the "Specials": *"некерованих, неповносправних, які роблять усе не так"* ["unmanageable, incompetent, the ones who do everything wrong"] ("Дитячі розваги" 227), whereas Stepanov suppresses the implied meaning of inequality and focuses entirely on unpredictability and difference: *"выпадает из общих правил или совершает непредсказуемые поступки"* ["falls outside of general rules or performs unpredictable acts"] ("Детская игра").

In the young narrator's eyes, the qualities she ascribes to Verna are translated into power—the "special" body's power to defy the society's normative expectations and be different. Marlene, who identifies as "normal", perceives this freedom as a personal threat:

> But only adults would be so stupid as to believe she had no power. A power, moreover, that was specifically directed at me. I was the one she had her eye on. Or so I believed. As if we had an understanding between us that could not be described and was not to be disposed

of. Something that clings, in the way of love, though on my side it felt absolutely like hate. ("Child's Play" 200)

The power Verna holds over the narrator is mysterious and almost mystical, while remaining deliberately ambiguous. The translators once again minimize this ambiguity by using specification. Both Russian and Ukrainian versions leave no doubt about Marlene's hostility as they stress her hate for Verna: *"Якесь притягання, що з'являється між тими, хто любить одне одного, хоча з мого боку була чиста ненависть"* ["A kind of gravitational pull, like between those who love each other, although on my side it was pure hatred"] ("Дитячі розваги" 232); *"Некое сцепление, как между возлюбленными, хотя с моей стороны это была чистейшая ненависть"* ["A kind of bond, like between lovers, although on my side it was the purest hatred"] ("Детская игра"). At the same time, in both cases the connection between the two girls becomes burdening and unavoidable, as "something that clings" is transformed into an obvious force of attraction or attachment. The German version prefers a heavier, technical metaphor implying danger in its choice of the verb *"verklammern"*: *"Etwas, das sich verklammert, wie Liebe, obwohl es sich für mich wie Hass anfühlte"* ["Something that clamps/staples things together, like love, although for me it felt like hate"] ("Kinderspiel" 326).

As can be seen from these examples, all three translators make an effort to clarify things that have only been vaguely outlined by the original, while building up for the central scene of the story—the narrator's memory of Verna's murder, which, "[c]ircling between and around the language of self and other, accident and intention, unconscious action and conscious decision, demand and injunction, goodness and wickedness, choice and necessity […] is compelling in its evocation of the ethical struggle at the heart of our encounter with the Other" (Warwick 144). Here, again, Marlene demonstrates the fragmented and animalistic vision of Verna's body, which up to a certain point helps her conceal the full significance of what is happening: "Verna's head did not break the surface, though now she was not inert, but turning in a leisurely way, light as a jellyfish in the water. Charlene and I had our hands on her, on her rubber cap" ("Child's Play" 221).

This scene is presented like a slowly unfolding, almost static picture where Charlene and the narrator seem to be as inactive as Verna herself. However, the translations shift the focus, revealing the girls' action and intent, albeit to various degrees. Zerning allows only a hint of their true intentions: *"Charlene und ich hielten die Hände auf ihr, auf ihre Gummibadekappe"* ["Charlene and I held the hands on her, on her rubber bathing cap"] ("Kinderspiel" 361). The verb *"hielten"* ["held"] used in German is hesitant, focusing on the fact but not the action itself, and, just like in the original, the narrator stumbles on the word "her", immediately switching her attention from Verna herself to the part of her body as an inanimate object. In the Ukrainian version, the verb *"намацували"* ["were groping for"] implies acting, although in an undecided and perplexed way, and the narrator stresses that this action is directed at the object, not the person: *"Ми з Шарлен намацували руками її голову в гумовій купальній шапочці"* ["Charlene and I were groping for her head in the rubber bathing cap"] ("Дитячі розваги" 254). This mirrors the change of focus introduced by the Russian translator, although Stepanov

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removes any signs of hesitation and describes an instantaneous conscious action: *"Мы с Шарлин протянули руки и схватили ее за резиновую купальную шапочку"* ["Charlene and I held out our hands and grabbed her rubber bathing cap"] ("Детская игра").

The narrator is trying to deny intentionality of her and Charlene's actions, to question the truth of what happened, and to appear less guilty. But she continues to see Verna as nothing more than an object, and her apologetic monologue eventually turns from self-justification to mockery indicating that she is completely aware of her own insincerity: "This could have been an accident. As if we, in trying to get our balance, grabbed on to this nearby large rubbery object, hardly realizing what it was or what we were doing. I have thought it all out. I think we would have been forgiven. Young children. Terrified. Yes, yes. Hardly knew what they were doing" ("Child's Play" 222).

Both Russian and Ukrainian translations completely ignore this change of tone and the transition from "we" to "they" that mocks the adults' possible response to the tragedy. In the German translation, as in the original text, this shift undermines the narrator's honesty and reveals her callousness showing that she does not believe in her own innocence or any possibility of redemption: *"Das kann ein Unfall gewesen sein. Als hätten wir uns, um unser Gleichgewicht zu finden, an diesem großen Gummiding ganz in unserer Nähe festgehalten, ohne dass uns klarwurde, was es war oder was wir taten. Ich habe alles genau bedacht. Ich glaube, man hätte uns vergeben. Kleine Kinder. In Panik. Ja, ja. Wussten nicht, was sie taten"* ["This could have been an accident. As if we, to find our balance, held on to this big rubber thing next to us, without it becoming clear to us, what it was or what we were doing. I have thought it all through thoroughly. I believe one would have forgiven us. Little children. In panic. Yes, yes. They did not know what they were doing"] ("Kinderspiel" 361). But in the other two translations Marlene remains determined to vindicate herself, even suggesting an actual possibility of forgiveness in Ukrainian: *"Я все те обмірковувала. Гадаю, нас цілком може бути прощено. Ми були дітьми. Були нажахані. Так, так. Ми не відали, що творимо"* ["I have thought it all through. I think we can easily be forgiven. We were children. Were terrified. Yes, yes. We did not realize what we were doing"] ("Дитячі розваги" 255). In the Russian text, this suggestion turns into insistence, almost a demand: *"Я обдумала всю ситуацию в деталях и считаю, что нас следует простить. Мы были совсем дети. К тому же перепуганные. Да-да. Вряд ли осознавая свои действия"* ["I have thought the whole situation out in detail and believe that we should be forgiven. We were very young children. Plus, quite terrified. Yes, yes. Hardly aware of our actions"] ("Детская игра"). Both versions minimize the doubt pervading the original by omitting most markers of uncertainty ("could have been", "as if", "hardly"). As a result, the narrator's carefully constructed assumptions are transformed into straightforward statements, which makes her account more coherent but less believable. In the Ukrainian text, conflation of her self-apologetic defensiveness with her emotionally charged, tense speech and brief elliptical sentences reveals the narrator as a shockingly callous villain. The Russian translation, on the other hand, uses careful phrasing combined with a confiding, persuasive, and emphatically sincere tone. As a result, Marlene is presented as a deeply flawed personality seeking forgiveness.

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Interestingly, when the narrator stops to question her own story and admits that the girls' actions were conscious, the Russian translation omits and even partially negates this comment: "Is this in any way true? It is true in the sense that we did not decide anything, in the beginning. We did not look at each other and decide to do what we subsequently and consciously did. Consciously, because our eyes did meet as the head of Verna tried to rise up to the surface of the water" ("Child's Play" 222). Stepanov chooses to leave out the last sentence completely, along with its meaningful repetition of "consciously": *"Правда ли это? Ну да, правда—в том смысле, что ничего не было решено изначально. Мы не взглянули друг на друга: мол, надо сделать то-то и то-то, а потом сознательно это сделали"* ["Is this true? Well yes, it is—in the sense that nothing was decided in the beginning. We did not look at each other: see, this and that needs to be done, and then consciously did it"] ("Детская игра"). This significant intrusion into Munro's text marks the spot where the translator's project finds itself at odds with the author's intention. As a result, the translator prioritizes his own interpretation by changing the text accordingly.

At the same time, both Ukrainian and German translations put emphasis on "consciously" as an important confession of guilt that adds to the narrator's characterization and represents complexity and ambiguity implied by the original: *"Чи таки моя правда? Це правда в тому сенсі, що ми нічого не обдумували наперед. Ми не обмінялися поглядами, не планували того, що зробили свідомо. Свідомо, бо наші очі таки зустрілися, коли Вернина голова спробувала виборсатися з-під води"* ["Is what I am saying true? It is true in the sense that we have not thought it through in advance. We have not exchanged glances, have not planned what we consciously did. Consciously, because our eyes did meet when Verna's head tried to fight its way out of the water"] ("Дитячі розваги" 255). Zerning makes the same choice in stressing Marlene's admission: *"Ist das auch wirklich wahr? Es ist wahr in dem Sinn, dass wir anfangs keinen Entschluss fassten. Uns nicht in den Augen sahen und beschlossen, das zu tun, was wir im Folgenden absichtlich taten. Absichtlich, denn unsere Blicke trafen sich, als Vernas Kopf versuchte, aus dem Wasser aufzutauchen"* ["Is this also really true? It is true in the sense that we initially made no decision. Did not look each other in the eyes and decide to do what we then consciously did. Consciously, because our glances met when Verna's head tried to emerge from the water"] ("Kinderspiel" 361). Preserving deliberate uncertainty is the main focus of the German version here, whereas Kononenko concentrates on the narrator's hatefulness and Stepanov on her need to vindicate herself. Accordingly, the translators reimagine the story's climactic moment and Marlene's feelings in different ways:

> Charlene and I kept our eyes on each other, rather than looking down at what our hands were doing. Her eyes were wide and gleeful, as I suppose mine were too. I don't think we felt wicked, triumphing in our wickedness. More as if we were doing just what was—amazingly—demanded of us, as if this was the absolute high point, the culmination, in our lives, of our being ourselves. We had gone too far to turn back, you might say. We had no choice. But I swear that choice had not occurred, did not occur, to us. ("Child's Play" 222)

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At this moment of highest affective intensity, the killers paradoxically reveal their similarity to their victim, as Marlene describes Charlene and herself in the same terms she previously only used to talk about Verna—as a combination of disparate, instinctively acting out body parts. Through this disembodiment, both girls "detach themselves from any ethical sense of what it means to *feel* embodied, vulnerable, empathetic, and human […] There is an almost synesthetic confusion there […] which creates an affective disconnect—or rather, a purely affective reaction, unmediated by ethical thinking" (Sutherland 159). Even more importantly, the narrator is trying to use this mental state to justify their actions, to manipulate the reader into questioning their guilt at the same time as she admits it. Zerning's translation captures this duality and uncertainty, where murderous intentions are simultaneously described and negated, and where every part of the narrator's account remains not a fact but only an assumption, a possibility: *"Ich glaube nicht, dass wir das Gefühl hatten, etwas Böses zu tun, und darin triumphierten. Eher, als täten wir genau das, was—zu unserer eigenen Verblüffung—von uns verlangt wurde, als sei das der Gipfel, der absolute Höhepunkt unseres Lebens, unseres Ichbewusstseins"* ["I do not believe that we had the feeling of doing something evil, and triumphed in it. It was rather as if we were doing exactly what—to our own puzzlement—was demanded of us, as if it was the peak, the absolute highest point of our life, our self-awareness"] ("Kinderspiel" 362). The Ukrainian version, however, chooses the opposite strategy, unambiguously stating that both girls were aware of their wrongdoing and indulged in it, perceiving murder at that moment as the utmost expression of their will: *"Ми почувалися не просто грішницями, які захоплені власним гріхом. Ми робили саме те—хоч як це дивно—в чому виявлялась наша воля, ніби то була наша найвища точка, кульмінація наших життів, нашого єства"* ["We were feeling not just as sinners revelling in our own sin. We were doing exactly what—however strange—expressed our will, as if that was our highest point, the culmination of our lives, our being"] ("Дитячі розваги" 255). The Russian text, on the other hand, continues to minimize the killers' responsibility underlining that the girls did not see themselves as villains, but rather as the tools of inevitable fate; the focus is thereby shifted from intention and free will to destiny: *"Вряд ли мы чувствовали себя злодейками, получающими радость от своего злодейства. Скорее, было такое чувство, что мы странным образом выполняем предначертанное, и этот момент—высшая точка, кульминация нашей жизни. Мы были собой"* ["We were hardly feeling as villains enjoying our villainy. Rather, it was the feeling that we were strangely carrying out what was meant to be, and that moment was the highest point, the culmination of our life. We were ourselves"] ("Детская игра").

As Sutherland comments on this pivotal scene, "[t]he state of affective ecstasy is simultaneously brief […] and eternal for both Marlene and Charlene, always informing their negotiation of adult subjectivity. Nevertheless, the final surrender to a sense of guilt and reparation with which the story ends is ethically uncertain" (160). Munro does not provide a neat resolution in redemption for the narrator and offers her "nothing beyond the desolate and fully aware acceptance of the failure her murderous act signifies. While her friend Charlene seeks atonement through her religious faith, Marlene finds no redemptive possibility there, or elsewhere" (Warwick 146). At the end of the story, pondering her friend's final impulse to redeem herself in confession, the narrator drops

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all pretenses and pronounces her own final judgement by denying any feelings of guilt and rejecting the possibility of atonement: "Was I not tempted, during all this palaver? Not once? You'd think that I might break open, be wise to break open, glimpsing that vast though tricky forgiveness. But no. It's not for me. What's done is done. Flocks of angels, tears of blood, notwithstanding" ("Child's Play" 220). In translating this passage, Zerning recreates Marlene's distrusting and sarcastic tone—but also her hesitation that is nevertheless resolved in an unambiguous and conscious refusal to repent: "*Geriet ich nicht in Versuchung, im Laufe dieses ganzen Palavers? Nicht ein einziges Mal? Man sollte meinen, ich hätte mich öffnen können, so klug sein können, mich zu öffnen, angesichts dieser ungeheuren, wenn auch trügerischen Vergebung. Doch nein. Sie ist mir nicht bestimmt. Was geschehen ist, ist geschehen. Trotz der Engelsscharen, der Tränen aus Blut"* ["Did I not become tempted, in the course of this whole palaver? Not one single time? One would think that I could have opened up, could have been clever enough to open up, in the face of this monstrous/immense, even though treacherous forgiveness. But no. It is not meant for me. What happened, happened. Despite flocks of angels, tears of blood"] ("Kinderspiel" 359). Kononenko, in her turn, downplays Marlene's bitter irony by omitting "palaver" and tones down the moment of hesitation expressed by the lexical repetition of "break open"—her narrator does not mock her own desire to be forgiven because deep down she has always known it to be impossible and irrelevant: *"Чи не виникло і в мене бажання покаятися під час цієї розмови? Чи ще колись? Думаєте, я могла відкритися, стати такою мудрою, щоб відкритися й побачити крадькома це безмежне, хоча і підступне прощення? Ні. Це не для мене. Що було, те було. Сонми янголів, незважаючи на криваві сльози"* ["Didn't I, too, feel the desire to repent during that conversation? Or at any other time? Do you think I could open up, become wise enough to open up and glimpse that boundless, although treacherous forgiveness? No. It is not for me. What happened, happened. Flocks of angels, in spite of bloody tears"] ("Дитячі розваги" 253). The change in the last phrase here—although it is not quite clear whether it resulted from the translator's conscious decision or simply from misunderstanding—provides symbolic closure asserting the narrator's readiness to accept her past without looking for forgiveness and to live with the consequences of her actions. The Russian text, nevertheless, paints a very different picture:

> *Вы спросите, было ли у меня искушение вдруг взять и все рассказать, прервав эту говорильню? И наверное, не единожды? Вы, должно быть, думаете, что я могла проявить мудрость и наконец открыться, понадеявшись на это великодушное, хоть и ненадежное прощение? Но нет, такое не для меня. Что сделано—то сделано. Сонмы ангелов, кровавые слезы—нет, это невыносимо.* ["You might ask if I had the temptation to suddenly blurt it all out, interrupting this palaver? And, probably, more than once? You must be thinking that I could show some wisdom and finally open up, placing my hopes in this generous, although unreliable forgiveness? But no, this thing is not for me. What is done is done. Flocks of angels, bloody tears—no, this is unbearable"]. ("Детская игра")

The confessional tone adopted here by the narrator, with her direct appeals to the reader, indicates regret and guilty conscience, as do some additions seen in the translation. The phrase *"наверное, не единожды"* ["probably, more than once"] implies that Marlene has considered admitting

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the truth on multiple occasions, and her final quiet outburst *"нет, это невыносимо"* ["no, this is unbearable"] (which was absent in the original) signifies intensity of her suppressed, but overpowering guilt. In the end, instead of briefly considering and calmly rejecting the prospect of forgiveness, she is overwhelmed by remorse. This change introduced by the Russian translator re-focuses the narrative on Marlene and her personal journey, taking away from the underlying social problematics of the story and its implications.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above, translational transformations lead to profound shifts in the intrinsic ethical and social meanings of the original text. Despite the author's downright refusal to offer the reader any generalized conclusions or provide a definitive plot resolution, Munro's portrayal of Verna's murder makes a strong point about the socially perpetuated perception of disability and the dangers of normative thinking that allows persistence of hatefulness in society. This narrative becomes particularly effective because the story is told through the perspective of the murderer and thus can disclose the mechanisms of hate and prejudice against mental disability. As Darroch points out, "Munro provides a careful elucidation of the nature and impact of stigma experienced by the characters with those disabilities, and in doing so she models the empathy and affect that vulnerable characters did not inspire in non-disabled protagonists in her fiction" (120). The empathy and affect are modelled by drawing attention to their conspicuous absence in the story, and the author's ethical message is implied rather than spelled out—however, its presence in the text is hard to ignore: "In referring to how people with cognitive disabilities experience ostracism, stigma, and dehumanization via animal analogies and repudiation of affiliation, Munro makes urgent ethical claims on her readers to reconsider their own complicity in upholding normative values about intelligence" (Darroch 121). The German translation attempts to recreate this by emphasizing complexity and ambiguity of the narrator's story, escalating her emotions, and conflating her seemingly forthcoming and reasonable account with hateful feelings boiling under the surface. The Ukrainian version somewhat simplifies the story by bringing Marlene's feelings and reactions to the extreme and portraying her as upfront but scornful, insensitive, and unforgiving. This rather exaggerated interpretation, nevertheless, draws attention to the victim of the murder making an important point about disability and empathy and elevating the story to a subtle social critique. The Russian text, on the contrary, focuses entirely on the narrator interpreting her self-justification as a sign of remorse and framing her confession, in the traditions of classical Russian literature[4], as a quest for redemption—thus failing to grasp the deeper social significance of the story's narrative. While Zerning chooses to centre her creative project on Munro's writing itself and its literary qualities, both Stepanov and Kononenko appropriate the text to use translation as an outlet for their personal views and to further their respective agendas—the former

[4] The motifs of sin, confession, and redemption, often with a religious subtext, are very common in the Russian literary tradition. Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* would be an obvious example, along with Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*.

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to assert the dominative influence of his own literary tradition, and the latter to challenge the social status quo.

Although it is obvious that the translator's performance of the original plays a key role in the recreation of its motifs and imagery, sometimes resulting in very different interpretations, this analysis shows how important it is to see how and why such transformative decisions are made. Munro's story, with its deliberate ambiguity, enables a number of translators' readings that represent the complex relationship of normalcy and monstrosity in unique ways, from obscuring the vulnerable other to sharply denouncing able-bodied prejudice. The comparison of the three translations that, while originating from the same source text, pursue quite different objectives, reveals in each case a consistent project of meaning construction. All three translators are engaged in the creation of message that fits their understanding of Munro as a writer and their ideological beliefs about their role in rewriting her work for their reading audiences. This process of original-making is evident even where the translators remain consciously committed to the ideal of fidelity. Their interpretations go beyond recreating Munro's original text—rather, they find themselves in a dialogue with it, building on its foundations to construct their own visions, while drawing from their respective cultural contexts. Ultimately, they renegotiate the writer's disillusioned view of normativity as the true source of monstrosity on their own terms—and destabilize it, bringing to life an endless multiplicity of narrative possibilities.

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