

Towards a Translator Criticism: (Mis)translating connections in Alice Munro's "Too Much Happiness"

Anna Antonova¹

¹ Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: aantonov@ualberta.ca

Abstract

In *Towards a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, Antoine Berman centres translation analysis on the translator's personality itself, suggesting the concepts of individual "position," "project," and "horizon" as the cornerstones of translation critique. This article will apply Berman's model to Alice Munro's short story "Too Much Happiness" and its Russian translation "Слишком много счастья" by Andrey Stepanov. The resulting comparative analysis framework will highlight how a translation project enforcing its inherent biases on the target text may produce a textual product misrepresenting the original and serving imperialist, rather than purely cultural, goals. Although Munro's story, based on the life of the Russian mathematician Sophia Kovalevsky, does invite connections between the source and target cultures, the translator's consistent self-positioning towards the heroine's gender and nationality leads to profound shifts in meaning. Stepanov's translation project focuses on asserting his country's cultural and literary superiority, while revealing his condescending attitude to the female protagonist. As a result, the Russian translation of "Too Much Happiness" plays up non-essential cultural connections and undermines the author's critical perspective on the Russian reality. At the same time, the translator's approach discredits the story's complex main character and effectively erases the feminist undertones of Munro's narrative. A careful examination of this case study building on Berman's critical model problematizes the widely-discussed concept of translator's agency and emphasizes the importance of comprehensive translator-centred analysis which combines textual and extratextual aspects.

Keywords: Alice Munro, translation, Russian, translators' agency, translating position

Introduction

Translators' agency, as a progressive and empowering concept, has long become the central aspect in most discussions of translation in general and literary translation in particular. Theorized by the feminist scholars of translation as a way to reject the normative requirement of fidelity and to reframe the role of translation from reproduction to production of meaning (see Simon, Flotow, Lotbinière-Harwood, and Tymoczko), agency of the translators is largely understood in relation to "various sites through which the translating subject defines itself" in the act of translation (Simon 29). From this standpoint, the translator is seen as the author's active and conscious collaborator who may be approaching the source text either in the mode of engagement or resistance, but whose interventionist practices

always imply "extending and developing the intention of the original text, not deforming it" (Simon 16). As a theoretical construct, translator's agency has played an extremely positive role in asserting the creative authority of translators and reconceptualising translation as an activity grounded in difference, interdependence, and hybridization rather than imitation and equivalence. However, it is rarely mentioned that in certain institutional environments translators' agency itself may become the tool of misrepresentation. If a translator approaches their task from a position of bias supported by the dominant discourse, such biases are then enforced on the text producing a translation product that may significantly distort the original message. I will consider Andrey Stepanov's Russian translation of Alice Munro's short story "Too Much Happiness" (published in 2014 as "Слишком много счастья") from the translator's agency perspective to show how the target text reflects and

reinforces the translator's cultural biases, eventually serving imperialistic purposes rather than attempting a cultural transfer.

Antoine Berman's Translation Analysis Model

As the basis of my analysis, I will use Antoine Berman's translation criticism methodology first suggested in his book *Towards a Translation Criticism: John Donne*. This model is conceptualized as a form of positive criticism, which is meant to go beyond the simplistic judgment of errors and to overcome common perception of translation as inherently defective and secondary (29). Berman's goal is to consider the target text's purpose of attaining autonomy as a legitimate work of art in its own right and its potential of becoming a "new original" (30). Accordingly, his methodology is broken down into a series of non-conventional steps that are meant to present the process and product of literary translation from a new angle: 1) the study of the translation as an autonomous text, 2) the study of the original, 3) comparative analysis of both texts with a heavy emphasis on the translator's decision-making, and 4) overview of the translation's critical reception to evaluate the success of the relevant literary transfer.

Within the framework of this model, the analytical process starts with studying the translation itself, outside of its relationship with the original, with the goal of determining whether the translated text can "stand" on its own and whether it possesses integrity that Berman terms "immanent consistency" (50). This initial phase is to be followed by a careful study of the original as a form of "textual pre-analysis" (51) leading to the eventual confrontation between the two versions. Berman suggests that this pre-analytical stage should focus on selecting "those passages of the original that are, so to speak, the places where the work condenses, represents, signifies, or symbolizes itself. These passages are signifying zones where a literary work reaches its own purpose (not necessarily that of the author) and its own center of gravity" (54).

The third—and central—part of the translation analysis model focuses on the translators themselves as the key actors and empowered agents of the transfer process. Berman names the following key criteria used for determining the nature (and degree) of the translator's agency: 1) "the translating position" (58), 2) "the translation project" (60), and 3) "the horizon of the translator" (63). The translating position relates to the translator's theoretical approach and is understood as "the compromise between the way in which the translator ... perceives that task of translation, and the way in which he has internalized the surrounding discourse on translation (the norms) ... the self-positioning of the translator vis-à-vis translation, a self-

positioning that, once chosen (for it is, in fact, a choice) binds the translator" (58). The concept of the translation project focuses more on the practical realization of this theoretical understanding and is broadly construed as the purpose of translation (whether consciously articulated or not). It "defines the way in which the translator is going to realize the literary transfer and to take charge of the translation itself, to choose a 'mode' of translation, a translation 'style'" (60). Finally, the translator's horizon considers multiple outside factors and is seen as "the set of linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical parameters that 'determine' the ways of feeling, acting, and thinking of the translator" (63).

The next stage, focusing on the translation analysis itself, signals a return to the comparative textual study and provides the space where the actual confrontation between the available textual iterations of the same literary work takes place. However, in Berman's view, the confrontation occurs not only between the textual versions and their particular "signifying zones," but also between the projects themselves, including possible tensions between various translations and retranslations (69). These tensions will further be reflected in the critical reception of the translated text after it is transplanted into the new linguistic and cultural context. Berman's integrated methodology considering these multiple factors provides an in-depth view of the translation process and its results while remaining essentially translator-centred.

Pre-Analysis: The Author's Project

Although the first stage of Berman's model is essential for determining if the translation can function as an autonomous literary work, the tensions between the source text and target text projects—which will be the main focus of this study—can only be discovered at the second, source text-oriented stage of the process. Therefore, my discussion of Stepanov's "Слишком много счастья" will be preceded by a brief pre-analysis of the author's project in "Too Much Happiness." In this respect, Munro's text does not pose a significant interpretation problem: most critics agree that its narrative centres on the typically feminist theme of female ambition that is denied its proper realization and eventually leads to the protagonist's isolation and disappointment (see Duffy, Zsizsmann, and Nillson). It can further be argued that, in this short story, Munro is attempting to (de)construct the myth of a feminist heroine by negotiating the fiction/history divide inhabited by her character. In "Too Much Happiness," the writer ventures into the territory of fictionalized biography recounting the last few days in the life of Sophia Kovalevsky, the nineteenth-century Russian mathematician and novelist who subsequently came to be known as the first female university professor in Northern Europe. The story, fluctuating between accurate historical facts and Sophia's

fictionalized personal experiences, simultaneously offers a “fully sourced and yet elliptical historical fiction” (Zsizsmann 201) and “an ambitiously imagined, intricately structured novella-length work, a tale of ambition and isolation, a narrative of displacement” (Zsizsmann 202).

Structurally, the text is both linear and fluid, moving continuously between the present time where Sophia is making her long and exhausting train journey from Paris to Stockholm, and the past in the form of multiple flashbacks. The main character’s memories bring her back to her childhood spent with her sister Aniuta at the family estate of Palibino, her marriage to the geology scholar Vladimir Kovalevsky, her studies in Germany under the supervision of professor Karl Weierstrass, her time in Paris during the Commune, her life in St. Petersburg and the birth of her daughter, the dissolution of her family life and financial ruin followed by Vladimir’s suicide, her move to Stockholm for a university teaching job, her prestigious Bordin Prize in mathematics, and her unhappy courtship with Russian professor of law Maxsim Kovalevsky. This last relationship comes to an abrupt end when Sophia suddenly dies of pneumonia soon after reaching Stockholm. The story’s title “Too Much Happiness,” which quotes Sophia’s last words, becomes symbolic of the protagonist’s inability to reconcile her professional ambition with the societal expectations imposed on a woman.

Based on these true facts from Sophia’s biography, Munro’s narrative offers a fictional, subjective interpretation of her heroine’s perceptions and responses, bringing together real historical events, memories, dreams, character-authored letters, and author’s speculations in an attempt to blur the boundary between history and fiction—or rather to reveal how the two grow into each other, essentially becoming the same thing. Sophia does not directly narrate her own story in “Too Much Happiness”, although her fictionalized inner monologue pervades the text through the author’s preferred structure of free indirect discourse that effectively blends the protagonist’s thoughts with other textual presences, playing both on her need to be heard and her instinct of self-silencing. This intentional polyphony and the author’s use of the real story behind Sophia’s character arc serve as a convenient backdrop for exploring the central crux of the story—the conflict between creative work as the heroine’s vocation and domesticity as the basic requirement in women’s lives of her time.

Lizbeth Goodman describes this internal crisis as “the opposition between marriage as a fate or ‘job’ for women, and the need for women to improve themselves through education” (74) and classifies it as a typical feature of 20th century women-centred fiction. Sophia’s life story can, therefore, be interpreted as a version of the female

Bildung plot that embodies the clash between romance and personal quest. According to Rachel Blau Duplessis’s narrative theory, such plots could traditionally end either in the female hero’s marriage or death, the latter being seen as a punishment for her transgressions but also as a form of protest against restrictive normativity. From the very beginning, Sophia behaves as a female hero who manages to subvert both “the marriage plot, with its high status . . . , and the quest plot of punishment for female aspiration” (Duplessis 21). Although at her time women in Russia were not allowed to study at universities or to leave the country without their father’s or husband’s permission, Sophia, driven by her determination to study mathematics in Germany, finds a way to overcome this outrageous obstacle by entering into a fictitious “white marriage” with Vladimir Kovalevsky, a like-minded progressive student. By making this radical choice, Sophia gains freedom both from her family and her home country and avoids the requirement of female domesticity, at the same time maintaining proper appearances. This decision takes her beyond the conventional ending of the “marriage plot,” in line with Duplessis’s discussion of “writing beyond the ending, taking ending as a metaphor for conventional narrative, for a regimen of resolutions, and for the social, sexual, and ideological affirmations these make” (21). The heroine finds herself on the “quest plot” of studying mathematics, which leads her into the academic world where she is not only mentored and supported but can excel and shine, even surpassing the men around her. However, the “marriage plot” catches up with Sophia when her fictitious marriage with Vladimir becomes real, ultimately leading to a break between them as he starts to demand submission and domesticity of his wife and finally alienates her with his dismissive behaviour.

Having failed at this attempt to reconcile her need for love and family with her scientific aspirations, Sophia returns to her studies and eventually reaches professional success, becoming a professor of mathematics at Stockholm University and receiving an award for her outstanding research. Still, even then she is not accepted by the European scientific community, but rather seen as a dangerous, although curious, transgression. As she herself bitterly remarks, “[T]hey had closed their doors when it came to giving her a job. They would no more think of that than of employing a learned chimpanzee” (“Too Much Happiness” 266). Sophia’s struggles with inequality and her commitment to her ambitious goals in the profoundly sexist society make her an important feminist heroine (both fictional and historical), as she becomes a trailblazer among the European female academics. As Dennis Duffy suggests, “Munro obviously has a particular story to tell about women savants and the obstacles they encounter, a pointed, even didactic, tale of the trials endured by women . . . the pointed exposition of an exemplary life whose ultimate meaning lies beyond

that of the particular moment in material history caught in the story” (203). Yet Sophia eventually turns out to be more complex and flawed than an exemplary feminist role model because in many respects she is constrained and stalled by her own weaknesses.

These weaknesses are epitomized by the protagonist’s pervading feelings of displacement and loneliness. As she believes that Russia, with its legal discrimination of female academics, can never again be a safe home for her, Sophia comes to associate home and safety with the prospect of marriage—something that, as she thinks, can give her a respectable social status, protection, and financial independence. But when she falls in love with Maxsim Kovalevsky, the deep conflict between the two sides of her life becomes painfully clear: Sophia’s longing for love and companionship—but above all, safety—is so strong that she readily submits to his male authority, temporarily trading her own goals for the comfort and reassurance of his company. Her perception of marriage as “a kind of ancient noble pact that they have made, a bond that has been signed, necessarily even if not enthusiastically, for your protection” (“Too Much Happiness” 294) reveals her deep-seated insecurity and her hope to find the solution in a clear and honest arrangement with a man who could both protect her and treat her as an equal.

However, after Sophia wins the Bordin prize, Maxsim’s unsupportive response to her achievement shatters this hope. When he abandons her in the wake of her professional triumph, Sophia realizes that her needs for blissful domesticity and academic success cannot be successfully reconciled and that a truly equal partnership she has envisioned is impossible. So, in fear of losing her fiancé, she tries to accommodate his wounded ego by downplaying the importance of her work in comparison to his own: “He would be glad she had something to absorb her, though she suspected that he found mathematics not trivial, but somehow beside the point. How could a professor of law and sociology think otherwise?” (“Too Much Happiness” 253). This sudden willingness to restrain her ambition and to reduce her mathematical gift almost to a frivolous pastime indicates a downward shift in Sophia’s perception of herself and her relationship with Maxsim. Now she feels the need to control her behaviour at all times to avoid his displeasure, even going as far as to repress her emotions in his presence: “She can barely answer, she feels such gratitude. Also a disastrous pressure of tears. Weeping in public is something he finds despicable ... She manages to reabsorb her tears” (“Too Much Happiness” 253). Despite her progressive views and rebellious nature, Sophia starts to see this submissive behaviour and forced self-control as a reasonable compromise for the comfort and security of marriage—because she knows too well that, as a woman, she cannot

earn acceptance and make a comfortable living on her own. But, to attain this desirable status, she must reconsider her notions of femininity and, to some extent, abandon her modern ideals of women’s emancipation to diminish herself to a more conventional and acceptable role. According to Emma Nilsson, “[t]his self-reducing process may be seen as an attempt to live up to the ideal of the Angel in the House ... Munro’s short story could be interpreted as a critique of the ideal of the Angel in the House, suggesting that [it] still affects society’s norms even in the 21st century” (2). From this perspective, “Too Much Happiness” may be read as a profoundly feminist message.

Nevertheless, Munro complicates things further by refusing to see feminism as the answer to all questions. Eventually, the feminist ideals of equality and justice that Sophia so passionately believes in turn out to be useless for herself and the women around her, as these elitist and idealistic notions have no bearing on their real everyday struggles. By the end of the story, Sophia feels that her rebellion has failed, partially because the men in her life, although initially supportive, prove unable to live by the progressive convictions they claim to share—but also because, to some extent, she herself remains in thrall to the promise of safety and home that she sees in a conventional marriage. Dennis Duffy points out this contradictory duality in his reading of “Too Much Happiness” as a story that “epitomizes the heroic image of a woman who was in some ways done to death by her culture’s restrictions, and in other ways strengthened the chains of her bondage through her own recklessness” (204). Still, he insists that Munro’s discovery of Sophia’s story indicates “the major role that a writer like Munro has played in the cause of feminism” (Duffy 204), which fits in the author’s overall project of dealing with “the exploitation and resistance of women through a generic continuum of narrative devices and hybridization ranging from the quotidian realistic to the historical to the exemplary” (Duffy 205). Sophia’s (and Munro’s) feminism in “Too Much Happiness” may be subtle and limited—up to the point of being critical of its own limitations—but it is ground-breaking in its sincerity, never shying away from the “uncomfortably honest treatment of the role played by victims in the cruelties visited upon them” (Duffy 205). Whether Sophia Kovalevsky is seen as a hero or a victim, the act of telling a story like hers becomes a signal of change in itself.

The Translator’s Position

This essentially feminist reading of Munro’s narrative is, however, not reflected in the Russian version of the text. In terms of the translation project, Andrey Stepanov, the Russian translator of “Too Much Happiness”, approaches his task from a position that largely undermines both the

feminist potential of Sophia Kovalevsky's life story and the author's intention to present her protagonist as a complex and tragically lonely figure isolated by her own non-conformance. Stepanov, a professor of Russian Literary History at the Saint Petersburg State University who is known primarily as an Anton Chekhov scholar, mostly focuses on the Russian (and particularly Chekhov's) literary influences on Munro while showing very little interest in the female/feminist themes of her stories or her place in the tradition of Canadian women's writing. This limited perspective on the writer's work, which prioritizes non-essential cultural parallels over in-depth contextual study of her oeuvre, is by no means characteristic of Stepanov's personal approach alone. Rather, it reflects the entire history of Munro's literary transfer into the Russian-speaking linguistic and cultural context. The author's short stories and collections were conspicuously absent in Russian translation, and her name was virtually unknown to the Russian-speaking readers up until the 2013 Nobel Prize announcement. When *Too Much Happiness*, the first Munro collection that was translated into Russian (and the one containing the eponymous short story), was finally published in 2014, both the choice of the translator and the material suggested that the publisher intended to exploit Munro's "Russian connections" in presenting her to the Russian-language reading audiences.

The same connections consistently come to the centre stage in virtually all (not very numerous) Russian-language literary studies engaging with Munro's work (See Potanina and Butenina). In his own article "Chekhov's Themes in Alice Munro's Stories", Stepanov defines Munro as an author following Chekhov's literary tradition and talks extensively about the genre, style, and thematic parallels between both writers, such as their preference of the short story genre, masterful use of psychological details, thematic focus on the entrapments of everyday life, failures of human communication, invisible social hierarchies, and recurrent motifs of symbolic death and resurrection (86). Stepanov's attention, nevertheless, invariably concentrates on the "original" rather than the "copy": he uses this comparative analysis framework (as well as his own translations of Munro's stories) as a lens to refocus the readers' attention on Chekhov and to re-evaluate his literary legacy as an author who, unlike his Canadian counterpart, "always wrote about social injustice" (Stepanov 87, translation mine). What is important is that in the process Stepanov largely ignores the role of gender and social conflict in Munro's work, referring to the "absence of social barriers" for marriage and the "lack of impermeable barriers between the capital city and the country" (Stepanov 87, translation mine) in her stories. As a result, his claim that "typical Chekhovian plotlines based on such inequalities ... are apparently impossible" in Munro's fictional representation of Canada (Stepanov 87, translation

mine) reveals his limited understanding of the Canadian cultural and literary scene, as well as his selective blindness to some of the key themes in Munro's work. On the part of a literary translator, this lack of sensitivity to the source text and its original context can only be seen as problematic for the successful translation. At the same time, in Stepanov's case, it is symptomatic of the historical and cultural horizon the translator operates in.

The resulting translating position significantly determines the nature of Stepanov's translation project, particularly with regard to his self-positioning towards the story's protagonist, her gender, and her nationality. Situating Sophia Kovalevsky in the context of her "Russianness" and her femininity—metaphorically speaking, putting her back in her place—becomes a defining motif of Stepanov's translation, up to the point of ignoring the character's complexity and trivializing her struggles.

Confrontation: Diverging Images

From the opening paragraph where Sophia is first introduced to the readers, Munro's narrative subtly foregrounds her inner tensions, conflating her astounding intelligence with persistent self-doubt and picturing her simultaneously as an aging woman and a child:

The woman has a childishly large head, with a thicket of dark curls, and her expression is eager, faintly pleading. Her face has begun to look worn. ("Too Much Happiness" 246)

Stepanov, however, misreads Sophia's tenseness as a sign of enthusiasm and explains her pleading expression by reorienting it towards her male companion (Maxsim):

Выражение лица энергичное, но в то же время в разговоре с ним словно бы просящее. ("Слишком много счастья")

[Her facial expression is energetic, but at the same time, while talking to him, almost pleading].

This change of focus reveals the Russian translator's tendency to remain oblivious to his protagonist's inner conflicts and to align himself—whether intentionally or not—with the male characters of the story or, more generally, with the male perspective. Throughout the text, Stepanov demonstrates a condescending attitude towards Sophia as the main character, or an attempt to distance himself from her point of view, instead of fully embracing her own voice. When Sophia contemplates Maxsim's unexpected departure from Paris, attributing it to her sudden fame after winning the prestigious Bordin prize (which upstaged his own academic reputation), it is clear that she

has no illusions about his vanity or the transient nature of her own success. Thinking back to how the Parisian high society met her achievement with a mix of admiration and rejection, she refers to herself in ironic terms combining praising and disparaging language and conflating stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities to construct a contradictory self-perspective that reveals her inner conflict and familiar bitterness:

A man of solid worth and negotiable reputation, with a certain bulk of frame and intellect, together with a lightness of wit, an adroit masculine charm. While she was an utter novelty, a delightful freak, the woman of mathematical gifts and female timidity, quite charming, yet with a mind most unconventionally furnished, under her curls. (“Too Much Happiness” 250)

In the Russian text, the tension is no longer obvious because Sophia’s description consistently becomes more patronizing and less sympathetic towards the protagonist:

Человек видный, с солидным состоянием, с серьезной репутацией, умный, светский, веселый, с несомненным мужским обаянием. А она была всего лишь любопытной чудачкой, новинкой сезона, дамой с математическими способностями, по-женски робкой, очаровательной, но с весьма странным устройством головного мозга — там, под кудряшками. (“Слишком много счастья”)

[A distinguished man, with a solid fortune, a serious reputation, intelligent, worldly, jovial, with an undeniable masculine charm. While she was only a curious freak, a seasonal novelty, a fine lady with mathematical aptitudes, timid in a feminine way, charming, but with a very strange setup of her brain—there, under the curls].

In this passage, Stepanov not only downplays Sophia’s positive characteristics by smoothing over the meaningful dissonance implied by “a delightful freak”—he adopts a decisively mocking tone with his use of sarcastically-sounding, and clearly gendered, descriptions “чудачка” [freak/odd woman] and “дама” [fine lady], while reducing Sophia’s “gifts” to “aptitudes” [способности] and her fame to “a seasonal novelty” [новинка сезона]. But, most importantly, he distances himself from the protagonist, shifting the narrative point of view away from her own perspective. Although this episode focuses on Sophia trying to construct an unbiased picture of how Maxim and she must be perceived by the people around them—and she does that with a certain detached irony—the translator’s sarcastic

tone and his use of deixis (“there” [там]) place the heroine away from the centre of narrative and reveal his unwillingness to side with her point of view.

When Sophia is weighing the prospects of her marriage to Maxim, she implicitly acknowledges her deep dissatisfaction with their relationship, at the same time choosing to see her own expression of feelings as the problem:

To be comfortable with his wealth was of course a joke. To be comfortable with a tepid, courteous offering of feeling, ruling out the disappointments and scenes which had mostly originated with her—that was another matter altogether. (“Too Much Happiness” 252)

The Russian version of the same passage differs from the original in some significant respects pertaining to how the characters’ relationship is presented to the readers:

[В]опрос, устроит ли ее его богатство, был, конечно, шуткой. Но был и другой вопрос: устроит ли ее холодноватое, учтивое выражение чувств, совершенно исключающее скандалы и сцены, которые она, случилось, устраивала? (“Слишком много счастья”)

[The question whether she would be satisfied with his wealth was, of course, a joke. But there was another question: would she be satisfied with a coldish, courteous expression of feelings, completely ruling out scandals and scenes that she, as it sometimes happened, started?]

First of all, Stepanov’s use of the active verb “устроивала” [started]—instead of the vague “originated with her”—clearly lays the blame on Sophia and her indiscretions, at the same time erasing any indication of Maxim’s fault, as if he had no part in the couple’s disagreements. Moreover, the Russian translator replaces “disappointments” with “скандалы” [scandals], once again overlooking any signs of the protagonist’s inner tension and instead portraying her as simply melodramatic and unreasonable.

Stepanov continues to insist on this unfavourable characterization even after Sophia suddenly opens up about Maxim’s selfishness and vanity—qualities that she has long been aware of but kept silent about, not daring to admit his imperfections:

Spoiled and envious, actually. A while ago he wrote to her that certain writings of his own had begun to be attributed to her, because of the accident of the names. He had received a letter from a literary agent

in Paris, starting off by addressing him as Dear Madam. Alas he had forgotten, he said, that she was a novelist as well as a mathematician. What a disappointment for the Parisian that he was neither. Merely a scholar, and a man. Indeed a great joke. (“Too Much Happiness” 254)

Here, Sophia’s initially idealistic perception of Maxsim turns to negative, as she realizes that his revolt against his fiancée’s fame, which he sees as taking away from his own privilege, borders on a personal accusation against her and is thinly disguised as a joke. She can easily see through his pretenses and responds with habitual quiet bitterness, acknowledging his attempt at witticism at the end of the passage. However, Stepanov, while starting the paragraph from Sophia’s perspective, quickly reorients it towards the male character:

Испорченный и завистливый. Некоторое время назад он написал ей, что какие-то его сочинения стали приписывать ей из-за совпадения фамилий в латинской транскрипции. Кроме того, он получил письмо от ее литературного агента в Париже, начинающееся с обращения «мадам». Ах да, — писал он, — я же совсем забыл, что Вы не только математик, но и нувеллистка. Как, наверное, был разочарован этот парижанин, узнав, что мсье Ковалевский не писатель. Всего лишь ученый, да к тому же мужчина. Очень смешно. (“Слишком много счастья”)

[Spoiled and envious. Some time ago, he wrote to her that some of his writings started to be attributed to her because of the name coincidence in the Latin transcription. Besides, he received a letter from her literary agent in Paris that started with addressing him as “Madam.” Ah yes,—he wrote,—I have completely forgotten that you are not only a mathematician, but also a novel authoress. How disappointed that Parisian must have been to find out that monsieur Kovalevsky is not a writer. Just a scholar, and a man on top of that. Very funny].

As the translator switches from free indirect discourse to direct speech (and from “he” [он] to “I” [я]), the narrative perspective shifts from Sophia to Maxsim, giving him the voice to speak and silencing her in the process. Moreover, Stepanov reintroduces the contested name as Maxsim’s own by referring to him as “monsieur Kovalevsky” [мсье Ковалевский]. At the same time, his deliberate use of the word “нувеллистка”—which is not only an unusual, outdated spelling of “novel author” but also a feminine form (that translates more accurately to “authoress”)—implies derision, both towards Sophia herself

and her literary aspirations as an inferior form of activity. Taken together, these seemingly minor changes indicate the translator’s (possibly unconscious) bias against the female protagonist and his tendency to merge his narrative voice with the male perspective in the story.

The translator’s tendency to diminish and misrepresent his heroine finds its climax in the central episode on the train, when Sophia is contemplating the lives of women around her and thinking how (and whether) they could be changed by the burgeoning female liberation movement and the new opportunities she herself has been a part of:

How terrible it is, Sophia thinks. How terrible is the lot of women. And what might this woman say if Sophia told her about the new struggles, women’s battle for votes and places at the universities? She might say, But that is not as God wills. (“Too Much Happiness” 294)

Here, Stepanov transforms the heroine’s resentment about the limitations of female fate into her contempt of women themselves, contradicting Munro’s original text:

Как все это ужасно, думает Софья. Как ужасно большинство женщин. Интересно, что ответила бы эта крестьянка, если бы Софья начала рассказывать ей про новые веяния, про борьбу женщин за право голоса, за работу в университетах? Наверное, сказала бы что-нибудь вроде “на все воля Божья, а это Ему не угодно.” (“Слишком много счастья”)

[How terrible all this is, Sophia thinks. How terrible are most women. She wonders what this peasant would say if Sophia started telling her about the new developments, about the women’s fight for the right to vote, to work at universities? Probably, she would say something like ‘Everything is God’s will, and this is not what He wills’].

The translator’s decision to change the character’s statement from the compassionate “How terrible is the lot of women” to the harsh and judgmental “How terrible are most women” distorts Sophia’s perception of women, misrepresenting Munro’s most feminist heroine as unsympathetic, backward-thinking, and snobbish; instead of sharing the unknown woman’s pain, she shows only disgust. Stepanov’s use of the word “крестьянка” [peasant] instead of “woman” also puts an unnecessary emphasis on the social class, which makes the story’s protagonist sound condescending and completely unaware of her own privilege. These transformations, while revealing the translator’s project and position, undermine both the author’s

characterization of Sophia and the character's entire journey and thus can only be seen as problematic.

Similar choices can be traced in the episode where Sophia is thinking about her own acceptance by other women in her social circle and their response to her unusual status as a female professor:

She must stop this litany of resentment. The wives of Stockholm invited her into their houses, to the most important parties and intimate dinners. They praised her and showed her off. They welcomed her child. She might have been an oddity there, but she was an oddity that they approved of. Something like a multilingual parrot ... No, that was not fair. They had respect for what she did, and many of them believed that more women should do such things and someday they would. ("Too Much Happiness" 267)

In approaching this passage, Stepanov follows the same pattern of diminishing Sophia's struggles and trivializing her feelings:

Впрочем, пора прекратить эту литанию обид. Жены ученых в Стокгольме приглашали ее к себе: и на лучшие званые вечера, и на ужины в узком кругу. Они хвалили ее и даже выставляли напоказ. Тепло приняли ее дочку. Может, Софья и для них была курьезом, но таким, который они приняли и одобрили? Что-то вроде попугая-полиглота ... Нет, это несправедливо. Они с уважением относились к тому, чем занималась Софья, и многие из них считали, что женщинам надо последовать ее примеру и когда-нибудь так и будет. ("Слишком много счастья")

[Still, she must stop this litany of grievances. The wives of scientists in Stockholm invited her to their houses: both to the best soirees and private dinners. They praised her and even showed her off. They gave her daughter a warm welcome. Maybe Sophia was a curiosity for them, but the kind that they accepted and endorsed? Something like a polyglot parrot ... No, this is unfair. They treated what Sophia did with respect and many of them thought that women should follow her example and that someday it would happen].

Here, Sophia's rightful indignation about the opportunities unavailable to her as a woman is reduced to an unsounded emotional complaint—Stepanov's use of the word "обиды" [grievances] is less strong and does not seem justified in comparison with "resentment," which could be more accurately translated as "возмущение" or "негодование".

The translator's choice of "курьез" [curiosity/amusement/absurdity] to describe the character's unusual social standing implies a stronger degree of contempt and "othering" than the original "oddity," adding to the Russian text's rather negative and limited portrayal of the great mathematician. Finally, the grammatical transformation introduced in the translated version casts doubt on the very fact of the heroine's acceptance in her new home country, as Stepanov changes Sophia's statement into a question. Overall, his approach plays up the protagonist's uncertainties and self-negativity, at the same time undervaluing her achievements and her inner complexity and significantly weakening the feminist message of her story.

Confrontation: Cultural Biases

Another interesting aspect of the translation project is the translator's personal response to the representation of the heroine's cultural affiliations in the text. For Stepanov, any reference to the Russian language or culture becomes a matter of contention, and he goes to great lengths to state (and overstate) Sophia's Russianness, always framing it in the best possible light. In his version, the story's cultural connection to Russia is presented as an essential (and invariably positive) dimension of Munro's original text.

In this respect, Sophia's contradictory feelings about her country and mother tongue become an important point of departure in translation. Munro is consistently making it clear that her heroine, while resenting Russia's politics, is still nostalgic about her childhood memories and finds a safe shelter in her language. This becomes particularly obvious when she rediscovers a piece of her lost homeland in her relationship with Maxsim, a fellow exiled Russian intellectual:

A torrent of jokes and questions followed, an immediate understanding, a rich gabble of Russian, as if the languages of Western Europe had been flimsy formal cages in which they had been too long confined, or paltry substitutes for true human speech. ("Too Much Happiness" 248)

Stepanov does not stop at conveying Munro's metaphor of a foreign language as a constricting cage but elaborates on it, equating the Russian language with freedom and happiness:

Бесконечный поток шуток и вопросов, понимание с полуслова, а главное — свобода и счастье болтать по-русски. Им показалось, что все остальные европейские языки были клетками, в которых они просидели целую вечность, жалкой заменой подлинной человеческой речи. ("Слишком много счастья")

[The *endless* torrent of jokes and questions, finishing each other's sentences, *but most importantly—the freedom and joy of chatting in Russian*. It seemed to them that *the rest* of European languages were cages where they had been kept *for eternity*, a pitiful substitute for real human speech].

The additions introduced by the translator in this paragraph (italicized in the above quote and back translation) do not only stress the special meaning of the Russian language for the story's characters, but also reflect Stepanov's personal perception of his language and culture as superior. However, unlike the translation, the original text makes a point of highlighting critical intonations in Sophia's inner monologue about her long-lost home. Thus, in the scene where the heroine thinks back to the memoir and the novel she had written, she does acknowledge her mixed feelings about the past, referring to her despair and frustration along with happy memories:

She had written the recollections of her life at Palibino in a glow of love for everything lost, things once despaired of as well as things once treasured. She had written it far from home when that home and her sister were gone. And *Nihilist Girl* came out of pain for her country, a burst of patriotism and perhaps a feeling that she had not been paying enough attention, with her mathematics and the tumults of her life. ("Too Much Happiness" 281)

Here the protagonist reveals a painful mix of love, resentment, and nostalgia that comes from not being able to reconcile her powerful sense of belonging and her profound disappointment with her country's flaws. It is significant then that Stepanov chooses to ignore this negative side of Sophia's memories—in his version, there is no mention of her despair, and her pain is only attributed to being away from home:

Она написала воспоминания о жизни в Палибино, подавшись порыву ностальгии по всему бесконечно дорогому и безнадежно утраченному. Написала вдали от дома, когда и дом, и сестра навеки остались в прошлом. А «Нигилистка» родилась от боли за свою страну, от вспышки патриотизма и, наверное, еще от чувства вины за все, на что она не обращала внимания, вечно занятая математикой и перипетиями своей личной жизни. ("Слишком много счастья")

[She wrote her memories about life in Palibino, succumbing to an outburst of nostalgia for everything endlessly precious and hopelessly lost.

Wrote away from home, when both her home and sister were already gone for good. And *Nihilist Girl* was born out of her pain for her country, the spark of patriotism and, probably, the feeling of guilt for everything she had not paid attention to, always busy with mathematics and the entanglements of her personal life].

In the Russian translation, the attention is redirected instead towards the heroine's feeling of guilt for losing connection with her homeland. Moreover, the distractions that prevented her from staying in touch are described in a way that downplays the difficulties Sophia had to overcome: the use of a slightly ironic and deliberately theatrical word "перипетии" [entanglements/adventures] combined with the addition of "personal life" [личной жизни], erases the negative connotations of "tumults" and reduces her political, academic, and financial troubles to romantic affairs. As a result, it seems that the translator does not only underestimate the depth of the protagonist's feeling of displacement in his attempt to embellish Sophia's (and the reader's) perception of Russianness—he also sounds almost accusing of his character's insufficient patriotism.

At one point, Sophia herself acknowledges that her own view of what it means to be Russian may not be reliable: she understands that her privileged class status makes her ignorant of how the other half lives. Still, the qualities she identifies as "typically Russian" mostly come across as negative in her account. As she watches Swedish peasant families on the train, she fails to recognize the same manners and behaviours she used to see in Russia as a child—and then she has to admit that both Swedish reserve and Russian excessiveness would be equally strange to her now:

But these are not Russian peasants. None of them are drunk, or garrulous, or laughing. They are stiff as boards ... She knows nothing about them. But what does she really know about Russian peasants, the peasants at Palibino, when it comes to that? They were always putting on a show for their betters. ("Too Much Happiness" 291)

This passage reveals Sophia's own class prejudice, as well as her ability to recognize her privilege. It also questions the reality of her nostalgic memories and shows the extent of her alienation from her homeland and its people. The Russian translator softens the picture by making Sophia's description less critical and generally portraying the Russians in a more positive light:

Правда, эти люди совсем не походили на русских крестьян. Не пьют, не болтают, не

смеются. Не люди, а какие-то деревянные ... Впрочем, что она о них знает? Хотя если так рассуждать, то что она знает о русских крестьянах, тех же палибинских, например? Перед господами они всегда разыгрывали спектакли. (“Слишком много счастья”)

[To be honest, these people were not like Russian peasants at all. They don't drink, don't chat, don't laugh. Not people, but wooden planks ... Yet, what does she know about them? Though if you think about it, what does she know about the Russian peasants, the ones from Palibino, for instance? For the masters, they always put on shows].

Here, Stepanov's shift towards more neutral expressions (“chat” [болтают] instead of being “garrulous” and “drink” [пьют] instead of being “drunk”) serves to normalize behaviours that Sophia finds off-putting, making the reasons for her detachment less visible and less understandable. Hence, the translator's intention to minimize any criticisms of his culture in the translated text results in taking away from the characterization of the protagonist and her emotional state at this point in the narrative.

The translator's cultural bias becomes particularly pronounced in his treatment of Russia's discrimination of women, as described by Sophia when she tries to explain to professor Weierstrass and his sisters that the only way she could leave her country to study in Germany was through a fictitious marriage:

Young people—young women—who wanted to study abroad were compelled to go through with this deception because no Russian woman who was unmarried could leave the country without their parents' consent ... What a barbarous law. Yes. Russian. (“Too Much Happiness” 275)

Although this passage utilizes free indirect discourse to relay the conversation between the characters, it clearly combines two voices—Sophia's careful and somewhat hesitant explanation and her audience's incredulous response. When the listener calls the idea “barbarous,” the protagonist unequivocally agrees, and her emphasis on the repeated word “Russian” sounds as a quiet accusation and a meaningful comment on the social injustice she herself has been subjected to. However, Stepanov, in his translation, complicates things by refusing to convey Sophia's quiet but decisive judgement:

В России молодым людям, точнее, молодым женщинам, желающим учиться за границей, приходится прибегать к подобному обману, потому что незамужняя девица не имеет права

покидать страну без согласия родителей ... Какой варварский закон! Да-да. Русский закон. (“Слишком много счастья”)

[In Russia, young people, or to be more precise, young women, who wish to study abroad have to resort to this deception, because an unmarried maiden has no right to leave the country without her parents' consent ... What a barbarous law! Yes, yes. A Russian law].

Elimination of the pauses marked by the dashes here undermines the impression that Sophia is speaking emotionally, obviously torn between her national loyalty and her profound convictions but eager to explain her position. The use of the condescendingly-sounding word “девица” [maiden] finds itself in stark contrast to the original's consistent repetition of “woman”/“women” and somewhat distorts the character's individual manner of speech, making her sound less respectful of women and more accepting of the societal norms she is rebelling against. The double repetition “yes, yes” [да-да] introduced by the translator sounds hasty and less confident than Sophia's unambiguous agreement in the original, and the addition of “закон” [law] redirects attention from “Russian” to “law,” to some extent normalizing the injustice faced by the protagonist. Overall, the translator's interventions in rendering this dialogue—as well as other culturally-marked signifying zones of the text—serve to shift the narrative tone towards weakening Sophia's resentment and minimizing her non-conformance.

Conclusion: Implications of the Translator's Agency

As can be seen from the above, Stepanov's treatment of the story's heroine, the feminist significance of her narrative, and her complex negotiation of her Russianness are profoundly determined by his own cultural self-identification and his personal views on the nature and function of literary translation. Instead of accentuating the feminist potential of Munro's text, the Russian translator consistently downplays the main character's complexity and shifts away from her female perspective, occasionally veering into male-oriented narration up to the point of demonstrating open condescension towards women. From the cultural perspective, he is actively trying to construct a nostalgic image of Russia through Sophia's memories, thus enforcing an idealistically positive cultural connection on Munro's story and obscuring any sociopolitical criticism expressed or implied by the narrator/protagonist.

In Stepanov's case, these choices are supported (if not pre-conditioned) by the dominant discourse on the superiority of the Russian culture and the continuing prevalence of patriarchal values in the Russian society. The

fact that the translator's chosen position is aligned with the common discursive perspective on Munro's work and the function of literary translation can be evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive evaluation of Stepanov's translation in a review published by the literary scholar Olga Fedosyuk, where the reviewer herself focuses primarily on the Russian connections and influences in the author's short stories and disregards the importance of women-centred themes and motifs (see Fedosyuk). Accordingly, both the Russian translation of "Too Much Happiness" and its Russian-language critical reception unquestioningly reflect and reinforce the same (albeit one-sided) reading of the original, paring it down to what the translator and the critic consider acceptable rather than attempting to engage with the narrative's inherent difference.

As a result, it can be argued that the translated text does attain relative autonomy in Berman's understanding of the term and that the agency of the translator is exercised completely in line with the expectations of the respective cultural horizon—although both transformations occur at the expense of the character's truth and the story's integrity. Therefore, as this case study shows, even in the presence of a consistent translator's project and a clearly defined translating position, the true purpose of the translator's agency, as envisioned by contemporary translation theories, cannot be realized unless the translator is ready to work against the grain of one's own cultural conventions and personal biases.

References

- Berman, Antoine. *Towards a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, translated and edited by Francoise Massardier-Kenney, Kent State UP, 2009.
- Butenina, Evgenia. (Бутенина, Евгения). "Чеховское начало в прозе Элис Манро." ["The Chekhovian Heritage in Alice Munro's Fiction"]. *Новый филологический вестник*, № 1(40) [*Novyi Filologicheskii Vestnik (New Philological Journal)*], no. 1(40)], 2017, pp. 182-189, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/chehovskoe-nachalo-v-proze-elis-manro>.
- Duffy, Dennis. "Alice Munro's Narrative Historicism: 'Too Much Happiness.'" *American Review of Canadian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2015, pp. 196-207, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02722011.2015.1043565>.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Indiana UP, 1985.
- Fedosyuk, Olga. (Федосюк, Ольга). "Манро Элис. Слишком много счастья. Новеллы. Пер. А.Д. Степанов. СПб.: Азбука, Азбука Атткус, 2014. – 352 с.; Манро Элис. Беглянка. Пер. Е. Петровой. СПб.: Азбука, Азбука Атткус, 2014. – 352 с.; Манро Элис. Дороже самой жизни. Пер. Т. Боровиковой. СПб.: Азбука, Азбука Атткус, 2014. – 320 с. (обзор книг)." ["Munro Alice. *Too Much Happiness*. Translated into Russian by A.D. Stepanov. Spb: Azbuka, Azbuka Attikus, 2014. – 352 p. Munro Alice. *Dear Life*. Translated into Russian by T. Bоровикова. Spb: Azbuka, Azbuka Attikus, 2014. – 320 p. (book survey)"]. *Канадский ежегодник*, № 18 [*Kanadskiy Yezhegodnik (Canadian Annual Journal)*], no. 18], 2014, pp. 138-144, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/manro-elis-slishkom-mnogo-schastya-novelly-per-a-d-stepanov-spb-azbuka-azbuka-attikus-2014-352-s-manro-elis-beglyanka-per-e-petrovov-spb-azbuka/viewer>.
- Flotow, Luise von. *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'*. U of Ottawa P, 1997.
- Goodman, Lizbeth. *Literature and Gender (Approaching Literature)*. Routledge, 1996.
- Lotbinière-Harwood, Susanne de. "The Body Bilingual." *Re-belle et infidèle: la traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminin / The Body Bilingual: Translation as a Re-writing in the Feminine*. Éditions du Remue-ménage / Women's Press, 1991, pp. 89-168.
- Munro, Alice. "Too Much Happiness." *Too Much Happiness*. Penguin Canada, 2010, pp. 246-303.
- . "Слишком много счастья." *Слишком много счастья*. Переводчик: Андрей Степанов. Kindle ed., Азбука-Атткус, 2014. / "Too Much Happiness." *Too Much Happiness*. Translated by Andrey Stepanov, Kindle Ed., Azbuka-Attikus, 2014.
- Potanina, Natalia. (Потанина, Наталия). "Русская тема в художественной прозе Э. Манро." ["Russian Theme in Artistic Prose of A. Munro"]. *Вестник Тамбовского университета*, № 8(136) [*Vestnik Tambovskogo Universiteta (Tambov University Journal)*], no. 8(136)], 2014, pp. 122-127, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/russkaya-tema-v-hudozhestvennoy-proze-e-manro>.
- Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. Routledge, 1996.
- Stepanov, Andrey. (Степанов, Андрей). "Чеховские мотивы в рассказах Элис Манро." ["Chekhov's Themes in Alice Munro's Stories"]. *Мир русского слова*, № 2 [*Mir Russkogo Slova (World of Russian Word)*], no. 2], 2014, pp. 85-90, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/chehovskie-motivy-v-rasskazah-elis-manro/viewer>.
- Tymoczko, Maria. *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*. St. Jerome, 2007.
- Zsizsmann, Éva. "Escaping Flimsy Formal Cages: Alice Munro's *Too Much Happiness* as Fictionalised Biography." *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, pp. 201-210, https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/bitstream/handle/11222.digilib/118150/1_BrnoStudiesEnglish_37-2011-2_17.pdf?sequence=1.