

BOOK REVIEW

Storm, Marjolijn. 2016. *Agatha Christie's The Mysterious Affair at Styles in German and Dutch Translation: The Remarkable Case of the Six Poirots. Approaches to Translation Studies, vol. 43.* Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi.

Reviewed by Edin Badić

Marjolijn Storm's comprehensive study of Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in German and Dutch translation is part of *Approaches to Translation Studies*, an international series promoting the scholarly study of translation. The series provides extensive overviews of pivotal issues in Translation Studies, allowing for a recognition of the plurality of approaches scholars may take in their research. James S. Holmes, today widely considered one of the founding fathers of Translation Studies as an academic discipline, established the series as early as in 1970.

The latest, forty-third volume in the series focuses on "the six Poirots" – five in translation and the "original" one, offering an in-depth macro- and microstructural analysis of Christie's first novel and examining not only the potential similarities and differences in translation, but also the reasons behind them. Inasmuch as there is a widespread opinion that detective stories should be categorized as "lowbrow" fiction, translations of "lowbrow" genres are often treated differently than translations of "highbrow" literature: these translations are produced quickly and cheaply, which is commonly reflected in the translation decisions made. In effect, translations of "lowbrow" fiction reveal more about the translation process itself, as they are deemed representative of the translation market and of the average consumer. Therefore, it is essential to scrutinize everyday translations through different ages in a comparative manner, so as to create a more complete picture of translation practices in different countries at different times.

This volume consists of three parts. Part A comprises an overview of relevant translation theory concepts, as well as of the history of detective fiction in Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands, genre theory and the translation history of Agatha Christie's works. In Part B, the author presents the analysis of the five translations in accordance with the previously established criteria. In Part C, the author collates the findings presented in the two previous parts and attempts to draw conclusions and put her findings into a wider perspective.

Part A is organized into four chapters. In the first chapter, Marjolijn Storm touches upon the history of Translation Studies, giving a broad outline of theoretical frameworks relevant for this study. The target-text and culture-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies and the polysystem theory, in which translations are seen as one of the (sub)systems, the concept of equivalence as redefined by Toury, as well as the notions of translation norms, laws and universals, all provide a theoretical basis for the analysis of the texts.

Additionally, the gate-opening position that corpus linguistics occupies in the progress of Translation Studies as a discipline is elaborated upon, since corpus-linguistics tools were used in the study in order for the author to obtain more complete and structured results. Chapter 2 looks at the bodies of detective fiction, the cultural systems into which the translations under consideration were integrated and for which they were written. The author introduces the discourse on detective fiction in Britain, Germany and the Netherlands, placing special emphasis on the Golden Age of the detective story. At the same time, she also aims to determine the status and the role of "lowbrow" detective fiction and translated detective fiction as genres in the latter two countries in different historical periods. Storm also collected a substantial amount of data on the history of translations of Agatha Christie's works in Germany and the Netherlands and their reception, bringing the role of publishing companies, the general attitudes towards English-language literature and its translation, as well as Christie's rising popularity, to the fore in the third chapter. In Chapter 4, the author applies elements and models of translation theory and genre theory to detective fiction. Moreover, she presents an overview of detective story structures in general and, more specifically, in Agatha Christie's detective fiction, highlighting the game character of Christie's works and briefly outlining not only

the most prominent structural features under examination (the setting, the characters, the plot), but also the “Englishness” that permeates the novel.

Part B is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 5, Storm contrasts various approaches to analyzing and describing translations, as she opts for Lambert and van Gorp’s (1985) flexible, dynamic and explicitly descriptive model, which embraces both the historical and sociological contexts without rejecting the lexical side. In other words, Storm adopts the model with minor modifications in order to enable the already addressed detective story structures to fit into the larger picture. Furthermore, this chapter looks into some preliminary data, such as the publication information, title page, metatexts and, last but not the least, general translation strategies and techniques employed, which, according to the model, lead to the hypotheses to be tested in the analysis of the macrostructures. In the sixth chapter, the texts are studied on the macro-level, that is, with respect to the novel’s internal narrative form. This includes the geographical (the social and class connotations of place names, the treatment of honorifics, proper names and realia) and historical setting (the story takes place during the First World War), the characters (the upper class, the culprits, the outcasts and the detectives), inserts (maps) and the development of the plot, which is by many considered the key part of a Golden Age detective novel. Findings on the macro-level in turn lead to the hypotheses about the microstructures, which are further developed and discussed in Chapter 7. Hence, this chapter deals with the texts on the micro-level. Firstly, the author explores the translations of proverbs, proverbial expressions, predominantly similes, and allusions, drawing all examples, apart from the allusions, from George B. Bryan’s (1993) study *Black Sheep, Red Herrings and Blue Murder: The Proverbial Agatha Christie*. Secondly, various language levels, such as register, dialect and sociolect, and their treatment in the five translations are examined minutely, as Christie delineates characters by their language variation, thus manifesting their position in the society portrayed. Thirdly, apart from the use of register, dialect and sociolect, the chapter looks at further examples of language levels, which, according to Storm, play a central role in the novel, i.e. the dichotomous use of English as a native versus foreign language and Poirot’s marked language – the

foreigner's "most foreign" idiosyncrasies entailing distinctive lexical, grammatical, syntactical and rhetorical features.

Lastly, Part C contains only one, final chapter. In Chapter 8, the author compares detective story structures to the structures of the translations. She points out that the translator's decision on whether to adopt these thought-to-be clear, exclusively and quintessentially English, detective story structures or not highly depends on the contemporary discourse of the genre in the country. Storm suggests that the radical changes found in the analysis of the Dutch and German translations do not stem from the translators' insufficient knowledge of the English language or culture. Rather, the reasons for this lie elsewhere – in the position of these translations in the polysystem or the relations within a certain cultural field. In this chapter, three relevant factors determining the position of the translations in Dutch and German cultures are established: the status of the genre, the status of the author and the status of translations from English. Several other agents, e.g. publishing companies, critics, editors, political bodies, external circumstances or translators themselves, also influence these factors. Accordingly, the Dutch and German traditions of translating detective fiction differ greatly, which the author explores in detail, mapping out a trajectory for detective fiction and Agatha Christie for the time period and the two countries in question, Germany and the Netherlands, and linking the polysystem theory, Bourdieu's (1990) notion of "habitus" and her own findings regarding translation norms.

To conclude, Marjolijn Storm approaches the novel and its five translations in an extensive fashion, which makes her study a sound contribution to the field of Translation Studies, as there are relatively few works of the kind in the discipline. Generally, translations of popular fiction, and such is the case of Agatha Christie's works, should be more thoroughly analyzed because they make the vast majority of translation production. In this study, the author investigates the novel's socio-historical background and considers translated detective fiction a system that can be analyzed within the polysystem theory and then contrasted to other systems in different target cultures. Owing to this approach, this scholarly study has undoubtedly produced fruitful results and offers interesting and helpful insights that could be used in further research of this phenomenon in

other target cultures. As for the varying treatment of detective fiction in Germany and the Netherlands, we should remember the very title of the book, in which “the six Poirots” are mentioned. Storm indeed showed that there are as many different Poirots as there are translations of Agatha Christie’s novels featuring him, which serves as a clear reminder of how important it is to conduct continuous research on translation practices. Or to use the author’s own words: “...there are hundreds and hundreds of Poirots crowding the literary planet, which is – indeed – remarkable” (2016: 247).

References

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