

Foreign Women Authors under Fascism and Francoism

Foreign Women Authors under Fascism and Francoism:

*Gender, Translation
and Censorship*

Edited by

Pilar Godayol and Annarita Taronna

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CHAPTER TWO

WHODUNIT?

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S DETECTIVE FICTION
AND THE "OBLIQUE" TRANSLATION
OF *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*
UNDER FASCISM

ELEONORA FEDERICI

Introduction

Detective fiction became very popular in Italy in the 1930s thanks to the series "*I Libri Gialli*" offered by one of the major Italian publishers, Mondadori, which presented to the Italian reader a new literary genre and new authors mainly from the Anglophone world, the cradle of crime fiction. My analysis will focus on a well-known work, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), written by one of the major authors of the time, Agatha Christie. This choice is due to the author's position as a touchstone writer of the genre, to the thematic and linguistic properties of the text which open many questions on the practice of translation under Fascism, to Christie's depiction of her famous detective, Hercule Poirot, and to her representation of strong female characters in the story. Christie's novel was translated just one year after its publication in the USA, and quite surprisingly, Alfredo Pitta's translation was published, for half a century, until the mid-1980s. Pitta's version of the original text was published with very few corrections in the 1970 and 1974 editions with a preface and a postface by Oreste del Buono which offered an analysis of the author and of the book together with the history of the "Orient Express" at the time, only alluding to a "Fascist translation" and making the reader believe that what he was reading was not that work. In these editions some changes were made (for example, characters got their names and nationality back), and some of the French expressions so peculiar of Poirot were re-

introduced into the text, but, overall, for decades the Italian detective fiction lover read and appreciated the novel in a shorter (because of cuts and omissions), ideologically adapted and re-elaborated Fascist version. The paratextual elements of the 1974 edition make clear that Del Buono did not attribute any importance to the translation of the work for the reader's interpretation, not even to a "modernisation" of the language used.

A second translation by Lidia Zazo was published only in 1987 and then republished in the series *Biblioteca Repubblica*, an edition sold with the major Italian newspaper, in 2009. Christie's fate, that is to say, a manipulated version of her work, was common to detective fiction writers, whose works were perceived as too "foreign" and imbued with dangerous Anglo-Saxon values and ideas. Therefore, these detective novels of the 1930s, more than simply translations, offered examples of revisions to the original text and of thematic and linguistic adaptations according to the regime's desires and the reader's taste. As a matter of fact, under Fascism, cuts, omissions, and semantic changes were tools hiding various aims: texts were censored, cut, and some parts summarised 1. because of ethnic and racial representations, 2. because of themes considered morally offensive for the Italian reader like sex, adultery, abortion, or suicide, 3. because of words considered as unacceptable for the morals of the time, but also 4. because of the idea of uncertainty that the genre proposed in a society where order, security, and certainty were the main keywords of social control. As a matter of fact, detective fiction posed too many questions to the reader, thus undermining Fascist authority, and this was not acceptable, since texts needed to support Fascist ideology and values and perpetuate a definite idea of "Italianness" and national identity. Translation was meant to change and adapt the foreign work to the target culture and its ideology, since faithfulness was due to the Fascist regime more than to the original text and its author. From this perspective, anything could be changed, scenes or conversations among characters—even if illuminating for the plot's development—could be omitted, foreign words could be deleted, and characters could be presented in a totally different way from the original characterization, in their name, nationality, way of speaking, and thus narrative function. It was paramount that anything clashing with the Fascist representation of the nation, of Italian identity and culture, of virility and femininity, should be omitted. At a first reading, the contemporary reader immediately realises that there was another aspect which was deemed unacceptable: the author's sense of irony.

Agatha Christie, the Queen of the Detective Novel

Author of detective novels, short stories, theatrical and radio pieces, Agatha Christie dominated the genre of detective story for more than half a century and is still considered as the “Queen of the mystery” (Ramsey 1967; Ercoli 1976; Fitzgibbon 1980; Rowland 2001). Starting from her first publication in 1920, she published regularly every year, almost a book for each year of her life and millions of copies of her books have been sold all over the world, being, according to the *Index Translationum*, one of the most translated authors of her time. Her publisher, Harper Collins, proclaims: “she is the most widely published author of all time, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. Her books have sold more than a billion copies in English and another billion in a hundred foreign languages”¹ and her website defines her as the “best best-selling novelist in history”² and well outlines the richness of her work, including the many movie adaptations that have been made from her stories, and offers an informed overview of her life. It has been said that her success was amplified by the famous personal event, her disappearance for 11 days in December 1926, after her mother’s death and the elopement of her husband when she was found in Harrogate. Doctors claimed she had suffered from an episode of amnesia. Dame Agatha Christie (she received the honour of Dame of the British Empire) undoubtedly played, and still plays, an eminent role in English literature. It is quite startling that the heroine of the British detective novel was a middle-class woman born in a small city in Devonshire like Torquay, which has dedicated a tourist trail to her in the “English Riviera” and where the “International Agatha Christie Festival” is organized every year. Above and beyond that, a whole literary tourist package on her life and works has been promoted in the area which demonstrates her appeal also for the tourist industry.³ After the end of her marriage, Christie began to travel and was very fond of the Middle East, where she met her second husband, the archaeologist Max Edgar Mallowan, whom she accompanied from that moment on many of his excavations, all experiences which became useful sources for her stories.

Agatha Christie is the symbol of the so-called “Golden Age” of detective fiction, in the 1920s and 30s her stories, like other works by crime fiction writers, were originally published serially in newspapers and literary magazines. Detective novels were considered as popular literature,

¹ www.Harpercollins.com (accessed March 1, 2017).

² www.agathachristie.com (accessed March 1, 2017).

³ www.englishriviera.co.uk (accessed March 1, 2017).

an evasive entertainment, that is “low brow” if compared to truly literary works. Christie became known for the “crossword puzzle type” detective story, a term coined to describe the perfect typology of the genre (Cawelti 1976: 80). However, Christie's novels cannot be dismissed as such, since she often breaks the rules of the genre, as, for example, in *Murder on the Orient Express*, where the victim is transposed into the villain and all of the characters turn out to be murderers, or, in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), where in an against-the-grain reading of detective fiction, the narrator, Dr Sheppard turns out to be the murderer, destroying the notion of reliability connected to its fictive nature. It is not by chance that millions of readers appreciate her work satisfied by her capability of surprising them and discovering what is hidden beneath the surface with the help of her detectives. Many scholars have outlined the elements and structures of the detective novels, whose principal themes are mystery and detection, and a rational investigation of facts carried out by a detective who is always able to unravel the mystery (Haycraft 1941; Del Monte 1962; Symons 1972; Porter 1981). The plot of the archetypal detective novel, in fact, includes three main elements: the murder, the detection, and the solution. The crime is usually perpetuated at the beginning of the story and the development of the plot is based on the characters' answers to the many questions the detective poses. Many scholars have investigated the depiction of the setting, the representation of the characters, and the highly connotative language (Bargainnier 1980; Delamater and Prigozy 1997; Scaggs 2005; Faktorovic 2014).

A Re-envisioned Version of *Murder on the Orient Express*

Italian readers know well the story of *Murder on the Orient Express* because it has been adapted for the cinema on various occasions, in 1974 by Sidney Lumet,⁴ later in 2001 by Carl Schenkel, and in 2010 for a TV series by Philip Martin. Kenneth Branagh, who always chooses touchstone texts for his adaptations, is now shooting a brand-new version of the story which will be released in November 2017. The enduring success of Agatha Christie in the 20th century is probably due also to the many film adaptations of her novels, from the very first, *The Passing of Mr Quin* directed by Leslie S. Hiscott and Julius Hagen in 1928, to this most recent

⁴ For an analysis of Lumet's adaptation of Christie's novel as a movie, see Hark 1987. For a filmography on Agatha Christie's works, see Atkins 1975. For an analysis of Philip Martin's adaptation as a TV drama, see Makinen and Phillips 2010.

one. In the 1950s and 60s, George Pollock's "Miss Marple series" with Margaret Rutherford was highly influential and made the lady detective more famous than before. Similarly, the detective Hercule Poirot has been the protagonist of many movies, starting with *Alibi* directed by Leslie S. Hiscott in 1931 and widely remembered for the 1974 adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express* starring Albert Finney or later for the CBS series with Alfred Molina in 2001.⁵

Murder on the Orient Express was first published in 1933 in the weekly *Saturday Evening* and in the following year in a single volume by Collins Crime Club. It is an extraordinary example of a detective story, first of all for the setting, a train, the memorable "Orient Express." If the train is a master trope in 20th-century literature which introduces the themes of modernity and mobility, a journey on the "Orient Express" was the most luxurious long-distance one at the time. Aristocrats and the rich and famous travelled on the "Orient Express" in its heyday in the 30s when it ran daily from Paris to Istanbul (Wilkinson 2013). Christie was extremely fascinated by this train, as we know from her *Autobiography*, where she states: "all my life I had wanted to go on the Orient Express. When I had travelled to France or Spain or Italy, the Orient Express had often been standing in Calais, and I had longed to climb up into it" (Christie 1977: 372). The Orient Express is exemplary of one of the two main settings of Christie's novels, England or a microcosm like a little rural village, a train, or a ship travelling in an alien territory, an element which added an element of exoticism to the story. In this novel, the author offers the reader three suspense filled days aboard Europe's most glamorous train. The murder occurs when the train stops because of the snow, an episode probably referring to an actual event that happened in 1929 when the Orient Express was trapped in a drift for six days near Istanbul. The multimillionaire Samuel Eduard Ratchett is found dead, and there is evidently more than one murderer, as the many and different stabs demonstrate. The plot develops through clues, deductions, and a long sequence of questions and answers between the detective and the passengers. It is a quintessential detective novel where each character has his or her place in the puzzle and the climax is reached when from a partially burnt letter the detective is able to connect the victim with a famous crime; that is, the disappearance and death of the little Armstrong girl and the suicide of her nanny, wrongly accused of the crime. The victim is not a mysterious and unknown millionaire, but the guilty

⁵ For a comprehensive exploration of 90 years of film and television adaptations of Christie's novels, see Aldridge 2016.

architect of an infamous murder. The story was sadly inspired by the disappearance and murder of Charles Lindbergh's little son that occurred in 1932. It is a typical example of the detective novel victim, who is highly unsympathetic to the reader and, as in this case, seldom innocent, and is usually punished for a crime that he has previously committed, but for which American law had not brought him to justice.

In Italy, the novel was published by Mondadori in 1935 in the series *I Libri Gialli* with the shortened title *Orient Express*. The series was conceived by Lorenzo Montano, founder of the journal *La Ronda*, who wanted to introduce the detective novel to the Italian public. Importantly, Montano, as the founder of the series, not only chose the texts to be translated, but also chose the translators and sometimes edited their versions, as the letters between him and Mondadori demonstrate (D'Alessio 2012). Alfredo Pitta's translation is characterized by cuts, omissions, and changes both in the descriptive and in the narrative parts, as is to be expected in a political and social context where the reading of books was heavily influenced by ideology. Since the 20s, censorship had been in the hands of the "Prime Minister's Press Office," who mainly monitored foreign press, but also controlled the publication of volumes. In the 30s, the same office took in its hands all the Fascist propaganda, until 1935 when the "Ministry for Popular Culture" was created. Censorship meant that books considered as offensive to the regime were banned, the copies confiscated and destroyed. A circular dated 3 April 1934 made it clear that publishers should send three copies of any book to the local Prefecture before introducing it into the market: one copy was checked by the "General Directorate for Public Security" and the second one by the Press Office. That meant that censorship was applied after the book was printed, and censorship was not defined as strictly as that but, as Rundle asserts, as "a more democratic revision" (Rundle 2011: 25). In the Italian context of the 30s, literature needed to exalt the family and Christian values, to emphasise the role of virile and hard-working Italian people driven by the Duce, to outline a domestic role for women and to enforce Fascist ideas and beliefs in people's minds. From this presupposition, it is evident that foreign works of literature should be adapted to this mission, especially detective novels, which seemed almost charged with symbolic power because of their central themes and the characters' representation.

There are many causes for the changes from the original text to the translated one in this first Italian version: first of all, the economical reason; that is to say, the necessity of reducing publishing costs and making this type of novel affordable for any reader. Textual re-elaboration was a practice which aimed at selling more copies at a lower price,

because a genre like the detective novel permitted a wide earnings margin for publishers that could sell economical books in great quantities in order to make a lot of money. In Italy, the detective novel was published by Mondadori, and we still define it as a “giallo” from the yellow cover of this publisher’s series. They realized there was a whole sector of readers to be satisfied, and they usually chose texts which were successful abroad and whose authors were already well known. A skilful use of self-promotion and good advertising campaigns helped Mondadori to promote bestsellers (Dunnett 2010); for example, the first slogans on the covers, “Questo libro non vi farà dormire” (You will not sleep when reading this book) or “Ogni pagina un’emozione” (An emotion on every page) well clarified the aim of the book by inviting a very specific buyer/reader. Secondly, the idea of textual manipulation was commonly accepted in detective fiction, considered as a genre whose structures and style would not be compromised by cuts and omissions. Thirdly, the very notion of translation in this particular historical period and cultural context and of the translator’s role in this process were very different from our contemporary idea. Translation was meant to follow a specific idea of stylistic elegance and was a means to widen the process of standardization of the Italian language. In the 20s and 30s, translators were obliged to adapt the text to an elegant, clear, and fluent standard Italian. This variant of the Italian language was used by the intellectual élite, but it was not a common and ordinary-day spoken language, and so it needed to be supported also through literature. Foreign languages in texts were not admitted since they could deteriorate Italian language which was the core of national identity. As a matter of fact, Fascist Italy was a young State, since the unification of Italy had happened only a few decades before, and so the Fascist State was still looking for a cultural identity which could embrace the Italian people. Added to this, new media and arts like cinema, photography, radio, and popular culture were emerging which were changing the European cultural panorama and consequently influencing Italian culture, as well. Fourthly, the Fascist regime did not encourage the translation of texts by foreign authors, especially of British and American books seen as a means of expressing Anglo-Saxon morals and values which could corrupt the Italian reader. American and British cultures were considered as an evil to fight, and literature as a means of ideological and intellectual influence, even more so the detective novel because of its themes and characters.

However, notwithstanding the political choices against translations, British and especially American authors were widely translated under Fascism (Rundle 2011; Billiani 2007; Bonsaver 2007). These translations

were adaptations, texts drastically changed according to the regime's rules, which obliged publishers to reduce, cut, and rewrite entire parts. Maria Elena Cembali (2006) has outlined how we can talk about a form of self-censorship practiced by translators and publishers in order to publish foreign books. Through her study she has demonstrated how translators chose to totally omit certain themes or historical-social references in order to overcome censorship before control. Translators manipulated the text when the image of Italy and Italians was not positive or when the notion of Catholic morality was challenged by Anglo-Saxon ideas and ways of life. It was a sort of preemptive translators' censorship in order to avoid the external one or risk having the book banned. Readers and editors evaluated the book before its translation and publication and wrote the so-called notes of suggestions indicating how to tone down some aspects not particularly appreciated by the regime or suggesting how to completely avoid others (Albonetti 1994). At the time, Italian intellectuals complained about the translation and selling of popular literature which was seen as a cause of a diminishing number of readers for quality books. If this fact it is not proved, it is extremely interesting that the number of translated foreign books was high and, as Chris Rundle outlines, the years between 1929 and 1934 were marked by a "translation invasion" (Rundle 2011: 67). A strong debate was carried on in newspapers and literary journals like *Il torchio*, *Settimanale fascista di battaglia e critica*, and *Il Marzocco*, where Fascist intellectuals deprecated the flood of foreign literature into the Italian market. The campaign against translations carried on by newspapers such as *La Sera*, *Il Lavoro Fascista*, *Il Giornale della Libreria*, and *Il Giornale di politica e letteratura*, has been widely documented by Rundle in its many aspects: aesthetic questions, moral issues, high print runs, and low prices, all of which caused a lowering of the intellectual quality of published works. The detective novel, with its stories of people and places so far away from the everyday life of the Italian reader, was an evasion from the known and repetitive existence of many readers, and it was very popular. Furthermore, anti-Fascist literary critics and intellectuals felt a deep unease about this literary genre and their popularity, and, as Jane Dunnet has emphasized, "the question of respectability of the detective novel, and in particular, its acceptability as a literary genre has exercised Italian intellectuals ever since it started to circulate more widely in book form in the late 1920s ... the vogue for crime fiction had caused a stir giving rise to an intense debate on the merits and demerits of the genre" (Dunnett 2011: 746). Interestingly, the critical discourse emerging with the popularity of the detective novel used specific semantic fields, like disease, to talk about a phenomenon which "spread uncontrollably

throughout society contaminating and corrupting readers from every class and background” (Dunnnett 2011: 750). However, detective novels continued to be translated and distributed. Mondadori was a publisher in a dialectical relationship with the Fascist regime, firstly because it turned publishing into a large-scale industry, and, secondly, because Arnoldo Mondadori possessed political contacts which helped him to go around the restrictive measures of the Fascist regime, at least until 1936 when censorship became stronger. Obviously, the negotiation with the authorities was fundamental in order to publish, as the documents preserved in the Mondadori archive demonstrate. The first case of a ban was for the popular novel by Joe Lederer, *Storia di una notte*, included in the series “I romanzi della Palma” and translated from the German by Barabara Allason in 1933 (Barrale 2011). The letters between Arnoldo Mondadori and Galeazzo Ciano, at the time Head of the Prime Minister’s Office, were written to limit the financial damages while reasserting the publisher’s loyalty to the regime and to the Fascist ideology. If, on the one hand, Mondadori’s rhetoric aimed at convincing the regime that they were a Publishing House following Fascist politics, and outlining how their mission was also to purge foreign texts from contents and form not adequate for the Italian morality, then, on the other hand, they made it clear that they understood their mistakes, which would certainly not be repeated in the future. Mondadori’s line of action was thus not only to translate foreign books which could be read in the original language without the adequate adaptation for the Italian reader, but also to promote Italian literature abroad, which was a central mission for the Fascist regime.

Publishers’ strategies to face censorship worked until 1938 when Racial Laws were promulgated to enforce racial discrimination and a stronger compliance with Nazi Germany was carried out. After 1938, as previous studies on Fascist censorship have widely demonstrated, control and the censorship of translations of foreign books grew more and more common, hand in hand with purges of school textbooks, children’s literature, and Jewish works through the work of the *Commissione per la bonifica libraria*. Anti-semitism was also expressed through translation; for example, the “Jewish” theme was introduced in Agatha Christie’s novel *Lord Edgware Dies* (1933), translated into Italian with the title *Se morisse mio marito* by Tito N. Sarego in 1935. Negative connotations were added to the figure of the actress Carlotta Adams, who in the novel acts as the alter-ego of the murderer, depicted as a cunning money-seeker, as can be seen in the following example, where Jewish people are referred as social climbers and possessing “a certain disposition”: “Si sarà accorto

che è ebrea? ... quando ci si mettono, questi ebrei, sanno arrivare molto in alto ... e costei non manca certo di certe attitudini” (Haven't you noticed she is Jewish? ... When they really want, these Jews can climb the social ladder ... And this one does not lack a certain disposition).⁶ Jewishness is visible through behavior but also appearance, and the detective defines the physical characteristics as “stigmata,” a term which immediately convey the idea of ineluctable destiny: “A dire il vero non ci avevo fatto caso, ma l'osservazione del mio amico mi aprì gli occhi e notai anch'io sul bel volto bruno le inconfondibili stigmata della sua razza” (Christie 1935: 7) (Actually I did not notice, but my friend's observation made me open my eyes and I saw on her beautiful face the unmistakable stigmata of her race).⁷ Later, in July 1941, a Circular prohibited any further publication of serialized detective novels in magazine or periodicals, and, in 1943, crime fiction was definitively banned in the Italian market. However, notwithstanding this ban, this literary genre would be, as Loris Rambelli has outlined (1979), very influential for contemporary Italian literature of the second half of the 19th century: the “disease” was spreading.

No Murder in Italy: Orient Express and the Italian Translation

A translated text should be read in relationship with the context in which it has been published, being not only a linguistic and cultural interpretation of the translator, but also an act of mediation influenced by the social values and cultural ideas of that time. A constellation of meanings is always attached to the translated text, especially under authoritarian regimes. As Umberto Eco outlined in his major work *Opera Aperta* (1962), in popular culture every word has not a single meaning but acquires different connotations through time, since language is continuously changing and creating new meanings. Translations are made in an historical period and in a specific linguistic community. In the 30s, Agatha Christie's translated works were a perfect example of assimilation to the target culture and adoption of target culture cultural items. As André Lefevere (1992) has highlighted, there are many ideological implications in the production and publication of a translation, as what is read and presented to the reader is mainly decided by the publisher and its editors even in times of peace and democracy. If we are looking at texts translated and published in the Fascist era, clearly this aspect is even more

⁶ My translation.

⁷ My translation. See also Spurio 2011.

complicated because original texts were censored or “purified” of their negative messages. Institutional control was exerted both over the themes included in the book and over the language used. Detective novels were considered as immoral, and the same cutting and simplification of the title from *Murder in the Orient Express* to *Orient Express*, which took out any allusion to assassination, happened time and again. As Maurizio Viezzi (2014) has underlined, Agatha Christie’s titles were changed from the original text to the Italian translation in many cases, and sometimes changed more than once. So, if as Umberto Eco asserted (1983), the title is the key to interpretation and acquires great importance in translations, the change from the original text makes a difference in the reading of the text. Even if it is probable that the translation of titles of detective novels aimed at a wider marketability of the product, because titles were also means of promoting a book, nonetheless, titles always raise readers’ expectations and have a suggestive function. The elimination of the allusion to murder was in line with other censorial restrictions on the book, like, for example, at the very beginning, the transformation of an officer’s suicide into a disappearance: “a very distinguished officer had committed suicide” (Christie 1934: 11) is transformed into: “un distintissimo ufficiale si era perso in un’escursione nel deserto” (Christie 1935: 5). In the Italian versions, the officer does not commit suicide, a gesture that could clash with Catholic morals, but disappears in an excursion among the dunes. This was in line with the overall censor politics of the newspapers which would eliminate stories of crime, incest, rape, and sexual deviance.⁸ All these topics were severely controlled, being signs of unhealthy foreign cultures, and stories dealing with these themes were seen as damaging the morality of the Italian people. Any theme thought to be “foreign” to Italian culture was “familiarized” and adapted to the target context.

A reading of the Italian version of Christie’s famous novel immediately reveals a shift in the author’s ironic register, which is here filtered through Fascist ideology. The author’s use of irony partially remains in the representation of characters, and above all stock characters such as outcasts, culprits, and detectives. However, in Christie’s novels, the psychological analysis of the characters is central to the plot, and their dialogues are meant to delineate values and a sort of final moral of the story. A novel like *Murder on the Orient Express* acquires an ethical aspect which aims at punishing anyone who violates another person’s freedom and collective peacefulness; that is, social harmony and order. This novel is “very English,” in that the descriptions of peoples and places

⁸ For the censorship of suicide in Mondadori’s novels of the 30s, see Barrale 2015.

reflect English conservative ideas; however, the author always introduces an ironical edge and even some hilarious moments of self-irony when she inserts common stereotypes about English people and culture. This satirical bite is unfortunately seldom retained in the Italian translation, as the following examples demonstrate:

“Poirot, reading the English mind correctly, knew that he had said to himself, ‘Only some damned foreigner’” (Christie 1934: 5).

In the Italian translation, the whole passage is totally eliminated. Probably the term “damned” or the negative idea associated with what was “foreign” made the translator decide just to skip this sentence, and many other similar ones in the rest of the book with similar descriptions.

“True to their nationality, the two English people were not chatty” (Christie 1934:9).

“I due inglesi non erano molto loquaci” (Christie 1935: 9).

Here the translator opted for an adaptation omitting the first part of the sentence referring to English nationality.

Poirot, “The Little Grey Cells of the Mind” and the Art of Detection

Hercule Poirot is born at the very beginning of Christie's narrative world, and he appears, in fact, in the very first novel by the author, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), where he is presented as a Belgian detective with a big moustache and an extreme faith in his capabilities. Poirot is described as short and sometimes depicted as effeminate, both aspects in opposition with the Fascist idea of virility. Sally R. Munt even described him as a “parody of the male myth” (Munt 1994: 8). Various studies investigating the figure of Poirot have underlined how Christie depicted her detectives as fully rational and “self-consciously female,” to the point of affirming that we can always talk in Christie's novel about a “gendered methodology of detection” (Knight 1980: 5). So, we can immediately understand that he was not the kind of male character who could attract the Fascist reader, nor represent the idea of Fascist masculinity.

At the beginning of *Murder on the Orient Express*, he is portrayed as a famous and capable detective who has just left Syria, where he had been drafted by the French Government for a difficult case, and is now

travelling in order to reach London, where he has been summoned to solve another. Reading the original text, it is evident that Poirot is an English construction of a foreigner, the emblem of the “Other” set in opposition to the self-image of the English at the time and personified English ideas about foreign people (especially the French), both immediately familiar to and accepted by contemporary readers. Christie depicted Poirot through the stereotypes associated with French culture by adding another level of prejudice (that is, the stereotypes French people feel towards Belgian people), so that the fact that Poirot is not even “French” makes him even more alien and strange. Poirot’s otherness is expressed by his appearance—his waxed moustache and egg-shaped head make him different—and by his behavior and opinions. The reader is also given an idea of Poirot by the other characters’ perceptions about and reactions to him. Reactions to his behavior and attitude differ among the travellers on the “Orient Express”; for example, the upper class supports his ways because being his status as a private detective ensures that the cases can be solved in privacy without too much clamor, as happens in the end. However, he is seen as an eccentric and an outsider by the world of the European aristocracy and upper class who travel with him. The lower class even demonstrates contempt towards him.

The Italian translation changed the reader’s perception of the character because the detailed representation of his personality and abilities were omitted, summarized, or presented ironically, as in the following example:

“A ridiculous looking little man. The sort of little man one could never take seriously” (Christie 1934: 7).

“Buffo davvero quel tipo!” (Christie 1935: 9)

This sentence, uttered by Mary Debenham, the first passenger the reader meets in the novel, at the very beginning of the story when Poirot is on the platform, anticipates in the original text Poirot’s great intellectual ability in opposition with his eccentric appearance through the author’s ironic register. In the Italian translation, the last part of the sentence, “The sort of little man one could never take seriously” is totally omitted, and, instead of translating “ridiculous” literally with “ridicolo,” the translator opted for the adjective “buffo,” which in Italian makes the reader underestimate the great capability of the detective that will be proved by the end of the novel.

Not only characters’ perceptions but also dialogues are summarized, and parts of conversations are omitted, as in the many examples of dialogues between Mr. Bouc and Poirot. Mr. Bouc, an old acquaintance of

Poirot, is the Director of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagon-Lits and has a clear and central narrative function in the novel. Therefore, the compression and even the omission of their dialogues causes a simplification of both characters, of the plot's structure, which is clearly based on these dialogues, and of the author's ironical register, discernible in the conversations between the two men in the source text. Here are two examples:

"But you—you are at the top of the three nowadays, mon vieux! 'Some little success I have had, perhaps'. Hercule Poirot tried to look modest but failed signally" (Christie 1934: 16).

This sentence, totally omitted in the Italian translation, is uttered by Mr. Bouc in chapter 2 when he meets Poirot at the Tokatlian Hotel and introduces the detective's abilities and fame.

"'Ah? Mon cher' Mr Bouc's voice became positively caressing. 'I know your reputation. I know something of your methods. This is the ideal case for you. To look up the antecedents of all these people, to discover their *bona fides*—all that takes time and endless inconvenience. But have I not heard you say often that to solve a case a man has only to lie back in his chair and think? Do that. Interview the passengers on the train, view the body, examine what clues there are and then—well, I have faith in you! I am assured that it is no idle boast of yours. Lie back and think. Use (as I have heard you say so often) the little grey cells of the mind—and you will know!'" (Christie 1934: 48).

In the target text, this is summarized as follows:

"'Via, amico mio! Come se non conoscessi lei e la sua reputazione' disse Bouc, con voce divenuta addirittura carezzevole" (Christie 1935: 38).

An entire paragraph on the detective's qualities has been taken out, even if for the plot this is an important moment when the detective's help is sought. While explaining Poirot's method, Mr. Bouc emphasizes in the source text his capabilities. The paragraph also contains one of Poirot's "slogans": "the little grey cells of the mind," which disappears in the Italian version. Short summaries when dealing with details about Poirot's abilities are repeated all through the translation, diminishing in this way Christie's representation of the character, but also Mr. Bouc's role in the plot. By comparing the two texts, we can see that Mr. Bouc's characterization differs in the Italian translation: indeed, if in the source text he is always deferential towards Poirot, whom he respects and totally

admires, in the Italian translation the change of linguistic register creates a different impression of the friendship between the two men, implying an underestimation of the major character's abilities:

"Speak, then, let us hear the wisdom of Hercule Poirot" (Christie 1934: 164).

"Ma parli allora, benedetto uomo! Parli, ci faccia sentire cosa dice la sapienza di Hercule Poirot" (Christie 1935: 130).

The insertion of the epithet "benedetto uomo!" makes the Italian reader perceive both characters differently in the target text. Mr. Bouc's lack of patience towards Poirot clearly changes the reader's perception about the detective's "wisdom" (*sapienza*).

Throughout the novel, Poirot is described with very precise qualities such as strictness, neatness, and self-restraint; he is said to possess an analytical mind and is depicted as being able to plumb the depths of human psychology. Poirot is emblematic of the detective figure who thinks logically and has an intuitive mind; his working methods are based on observation, interrogation, and deduction, not on footprints or traces. Clues are discussed in the long conversations with the twelve passengers of the train and with his friend Mr. Bouc, who acts as the Watson-figure. Christie's detective follows a step-by-step path of logico-temporal reconstruction, what Dennis Porter defines as the "necessary chain" (Porter 1981: 334) in the novel's development. As the reader can expect, Poirot undertakes a forensic examination of both the crime scene and the dead body, and, with method and linearity as the main weapons in his hands, he is able to reassemble the fragments of the clues and join them together, presenting two possible solutions to the case in front of all of the passengers. The discussion about the crime from different points of view creates suspense, delineates the traces to follow, and eventually reveals the guilty party. In Agatha Christie, we find what Robert Rushing has defined as "structural playfulness" (Rowland 2005: 100). In the end, he fulfills the reader's expectations—readers, in fact, have been guided to the broken Armstrong's family and the subsequent death caused by the tragedy, leaving all twelve murderers free. Readers have been driven by the failure of American justice, which let Ratchett go free because he was able to bribe his way out of imprisonment; therefore, murderers are allowed to escape following a moral execution of the crime (Makinen and Phillips 2016).

The Italian translation omits many references to Poirot's thoughts and ideas throughout the whole text, thereby diminishing the reader's

perception of his step-by-step solving of the case. There are many examples of the omission of ideas about the passengers and their actions, as in the following sentence, when Poirot observes Colonel Arbuthnot talking to Miss Debenham: "'Rather an odd little comedy that I watch here,' said Poirot to himself thoughtfully. He was to remember that thought of his later" (11). By omitting Poirot's impressions on what is happening at the crime scene, the Italian translation simplifies not only the characterization of the main character, but also the structure of the novel.

Another aspect which is quite lost in Pitta's translation is Poirot's colloquial use of language, which in the original text not only renders the reading more fluent and communicative, but also reflects his "linguistic otherness." Censorship cut the many French expressions so typical for its representation, and when not omitted they are translated into Italian. This clearly modifies the detective's characterization, because losing his idiolect means losing his characterization. However, any term in another language was not considered as acceptable in this historical period, nor could any negative reference to police or any controlling patrol could be received positively, and so they were simply omitted, like, for example, the omission of an "unpleasant police case" (Christie 1934: 229). Similarly, references to British colonies like India, here referred to through the character of the Colonel, were taken away, consequently also changing Colonel Arbuthnot's characterization, based on his military career in the colonies, to the point that from the definition "pukka sahib" (Christie 1934: 239) in the original text, in the Italian translation he is transformed into a perfect English gentleman, "un perfetto gentiluomo britannico" (Christie 1935: 186). However, cuts and omissions are not always connected to Fascist censorship, but more probably to editorial choices aimed at reducing the length of the volume and maintaining a low price.

Poirot's colloquialism is also reiterated in his use of proverbs and allusions in his question/answer dialogue with the two characters who assist him in his search for the murderer, Mr. Bouc and Dr. Costantine. One of the many examples occurs when he says, "You are in error. You are inclined to put the cart before the horse" (Christie 1934: 168), simplified in "Si sbaglia, amico mio" (Christie 1935: 133), where the second part of the sentence is totally omitted, even if an equivalent in the target's language ("mettere il carro davanti ai buoi") could be used. If in Christie's novel characterization is developed through the representation of conversations and dialogues among characters together with a use of colloquial language, these choices in translation clearly change the text's structure and tone. We know that fictional reality reflects the speech of characters and reveals its relation to spoken language, so that the

translation of dialogues becomes central in the transmission of the original text to the target audience. As Jenny Brumme and Anna Espunya (2012) have outlined, it is common to find a standardization of the spoken language in translated texts. The language spoken by characters reflects the speakers' attitudes and emotions: partly it is a written language that aims at giving the illusion of authenticity; partly it is a language that creates the idea of the portrayed character in the reader's mind. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, the use of language is very important for the definition of the many characters the author portrays. Idiolect, temporal and geographical dialects or social dialects are central to the characters' representation. Dialogues are the backbone of this story, and it is through the detective's conversations with the suspects that the story unfolds. It is through these dialogues that Christie portrays the various characters, giving a detailed representation of their appearance and adding the other characters' points of view. Ideas and perceptions about the different characters are also influenced by their nationality, which seems to affect their personality and behavior. By doing this, the author draws widely on national prejudices and stereotypes, like, for example, in the representation of American characters. Even if Christie was half-American, her representation of Americans is not neutral:

“By the time I get to Paris’ he said, ‘what’s left over of this little lot will go into a bottle labeled hairwash’. ‘You’re not a believer in Prohibition, Monsieur Hardman’, said Mr Bouc with a smile. ‘Well’ said Hardman, ‘I can’t say Prohibition has ever worried me any’. ‘Ah!’ said Mr Bouc. ‘The speakeasy’. He pronounced the word with care, savouring it. ‘Your American terms are so quaint, so expressive’ he said. ‘Me, I would much like to go to America’, said Poirot. ‘You’d learn a few go-ahead methods over there’ said Hardman, ‘Europe wants waking up. She’s half asleep’. ‘It is true that America is the country of progress’, agreed Poirot. ‘There is much that I admire about Americans. ...’ (Christie 1934: 182).

“‘Quando giungerò a Parigi, il poco che sarà rimasto di questi liquori, sarà versato in una bottiglia con l’etichetta “lozione per capelli”. Ne conosciamo parecchi, noi americani di questi trucchi’. ‘E’ vero che l’America è il Paese del progresso’ convenne Poirot, ‘e vi sono molte cose che ammiro negli americani’” (Christie 1935: 143).

It is a conversation among the private detective Mr. Hardman, Mr. Bouc, and Poirot. Instead of following social rules, the American acts illegally and is proud of not caring too much about Prohibition. In the target text, the reference to Prohibition is completely omitted, the allusions to the United States of America and Americans have been changed to the point

of referring to them as people living with tricks, and the reference to the European context totally omitted. Another American is Samuel Edward Ratchett, whose real name is Cassetti, which reveals his Italian background. Ratchett/Cassetti is a mobster, a kidnapper of children, and a murderer. He values money more than people and makes a failed attempt to bribe Poirot. If names, behavior, and way of speaking are important for the characterization of the villain, in the Italian translation Cassetti changes nationality and becomes the Irish O'Hara. Instead of connecting him to the American Mafia, the reader immediately links him to Irish crime:

“‘Eh bien’ said Poirot. ‘What do you think of those two?’. ‘They are Americans? Said Mr Bouc. ‘Assuredly they are Americans. I meant what did you think of their personalities?’ ‘The young man seems quite agreeable’. ‘And the other?’ ‘To tell you the truth, my friend, I did not care for him. He produced on me an unpleasant impression. And you?’ Hercule Poirot was a moment before replying. ‘When he passed me in the restaurant’ he said at last, ‘I had a curious impression. It was as though a wild animal—an animal savage, but savage! You understand—had passed me by’. ‘And yet he looked altogether of the most respectable’. ‘Précisément! The body—the cage—is everything most respectable—but through the bars, the wild animal looks out’. ‘You are fanciful mon vieux’ said Mr Bouc. It may be so. But I could not rid myself of the impression that evil had passed me by very close” (Christie 1934: 17-18).

“‘Che ne pensa di quei due signori?’ domandò Poirot. ‘Sono americani’ rispose pronto Bouc. ‘Il giovane mi sembra un bravo ragazzo’. ‘E l’altro?’ ‘L’altro? Ecco, se devo essere sincero non mi va a genio: mi ha fatto una spiacevole impressione. Anche a lei?’ Poirot rifletté un attimo prima di rispondere. ‘Quando mi è passato accanto, nel ristorante, ho avuto anch’io una strana impressione: come se passasse un animale selvatico, anzi una belva, e delle più feroci’. Parlava pacato. ‘Eppure dall’aspetto si direbbe una persona assolutamente rispettabile’. ‘Può darsi ma non riesco a liberarmi dell’impressione che mi sia passato vicino lo spirito del Male’. ‘Il Male, quel rispettabile americano?’ ‘Quel rispettabile americano, appunto” (Christie 1935: 15).

Ratchett is depicted as “a wild animal,” “an animal savage,” “an evil,” and Poirot himself is strongly predisposed against him even before the journey on the train. The Italian translation omits some elements of the dialogue between Poirot and Mr. Bouc when they first see Ratchett. As the reader can notice, the length of the original version is longer, and Christie’s use of metaphors in the description for the character is partially lost. Poirot’s study of human nature and people’s attitudes is summarized in the

translation, even if the main idea about the character is maintained: appearance can bring us to wrong perceptions but people's physical characteristics and attitudes tell a lot about their personality. In a novel like *Murder on the Orient Express*, where the author plays with the international diversity of the passengers because they are from different countries and various cultural backgrounds, their characterization is important for the development of the plot. If, at the beginning of the story, the passengers seem total strangers, the reader will discover they actually are a group of organized murderers.

If Cassetti becomes O'Hara, another Italian, Antonio Foscarelli, also changes nationality:

"He departed. Poirot looked at his friend. 'He has been a long time in America', said Mr Bouc, 'and he is an Italian, and Italians use the knife! And they are great liars! I do not like Italians'" (Christie 1934: 148).

"Dopo di che Pereira se ne andò scrollando melanconicamente la testa. Poirot guardò il suo amico interrogativamente. 'E' stato a lungo negli Stati Uniti' – osservò in tono significativo Bouc" (Christie 1935: 148).

Instead of the Italian salesman Antonio Foscarelli, a "typical Italian face" always talkative and loud, in the Italian translation the reader finds the nice Brazilian Manuel Pereira smiling all the time. Any reference to gangsters ("Italians use the knife!"), emigration to America, or negative perceptions ("they are great liars," "I do not like Italians") is omitted. Similarly, in the following example, even the reference to "Latin temperament" disappears:

"'No' said Mr Bouc thoughtfully. 'That is the act of a man driven almost crazy with a frenzied hate—it suggests more the Latin temperament. Or else it suggests, as our friend the chef de train insisted, a woman'" (Christie 1934: 58).

The sentence has been omitted in the target text, thus also taking out the gendered reference to the murderer as a woman. Women could not be connected to murder, and, if chapter 6 is skilfully entitled "A woman?" in order to prepare the reader for the idea of a possible female assassin, Mr. Bouc's suggestion that the murderer can be a woman and not a man is totally omitted in Pitta's version.

The idea of a well thought-out, rational crime by an Anglo-Saxon mind in comparison with a passionate Latin temperament is reiterated later:

"It is not—how shall I express it? A Latin crime. It is a crime that shows traces of a cool, resourceful, deliberate brain—I think an Anglo-Saxon brain" (Christie 1934: 149).

"Ma ho idea, vede caro Bouc, che quest'assassinio sia stato accuratamente progettato in tutti i suoi particolari e non meno accuratamente eseguito. E' una mia piccola idea, s'intende." (Christie 1935: 118).

In the translation, the reference to the Latin crime has disappeared together with the allusion to the Anglo-Saxon brain.

As we can expect, foreign cultures are represented through stereotypes, including linguistic stereotypes, as in the following example, when the Italian character is depicted thus: "That whatta I say alla de time" (Christie 1934: 146). Obviously, this was completely omitted in the translation in order to avoid caricature.

Not only masculine figures but also the many feminine ones in the novel are represented differently in the Italian translation according to Fascist ideology, which celebrated a "domestic" woman, a perfect wife and mother and representative of the motherland, as the word itself well symbolizes. Mussolini was opposed to the entrance of women into the job market, considering this the antithesis of her family role, and was also opposed to a higher level of education for women (De Grazia 1992; Pickering Iazzi 1995). Christie was writing in a moment of renegotiation of gender roles, and in many of her stories we see women who are autonomous, have a job, ask for divorce, unsettle the traditional patriarchal family, and in many instances turn out to be the murderers. *Murder on the Orient Express* likewise presents strong women, including Princess Dragomiroff, Mrs. Hubbard, and Mary Debenham. The women on the Orient Express represent different nationalities and social classes, but their representation or words, when contrary to the feminine ideal perpetuated by Fascism, are always omitted. Mary Debenham's voice is often heard in the story and plays a pivotal role in the development of the novel. She also possesses some traits which were not seen as positive in the Italian context of the time. Consequently, references considered as unwomanly and inappropriate were omitted in the translation, as, for example, her assertion "I can assure you that it's the parents who are afraid of being bullied by me" (Christie 1934: 11) disappears in the Italian version. At the very end of the novel, there is another woman's voice to be heard talking about the plan and the execution (that is, the voice of the actress Linda Arden, here under the pseudonym of Mrs. Hubbard), who offers to be found guilty in order to leave all of the others free. The conclusion of the novel could not be changed in the translation, but the woman's voice is rendered more

docile and “feminine” according to the dominant ideology. Christie shows how men and women can be moral and intellectual equals, and, for a woman born at the end of the 19th century, she was not at all rigid about gender stereotypes. From this perspective, the first Italian translation of the novel does not do her justice and oversimplifies the female characters’ representation. They were too modern and independent for the Italian reader.

Conclusion

If a translation should be readable and easy to access for the Italian reader, it is nonetheless clear that the notions of equivalence, transparency, and the translator’s invisibility are not taken into account in this example. The translator’s presence is clear and visible; his work is retraceable in the text through omissions, cuts, changes, and adaptations both thematically and linguistically. *Orient Express* is a “purified” version of the original source which maintains the readability of Christie’s skilful writing, but loses many aspects which make the source text so entertaining and at the same time so refined and exemplary: the author’s ironical edge, her construction of characters, and partly also her well structured plot. This ideological choice certainly has consequences: Italian readers probably lacked empathy for the many characters who seem more dull and “empty” when compared with those of the original text, and they lost the author’s ironical edge, which was so central both for the structure of the work and for its language. Gender roles were also adapted to suit Fascist ideology, thereby losing the many references to the social and cultural changes taking place at the time.

We could define Pitta’s translation as an “oblique” translation; that is, as a translation where the translator’s hand is visible, his editing work immediately clear (even if we only compare the length of paragraphs), his rewriting highly ideological. Thus, it is an “oblique” translation not because it is not transparent or clear, but because it is a different—we could almost say, “mutilated”—text read through a very specific ideological lens. The most absurd fact of all is that this translation was read for decades.

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