

The Italian titles of Agatha Christie's novels

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to an analysis of the titles of the 66 novels written by Agatha Christie, with a special focus on their Italian translations. It is divided into twelve parts, each of which takes a specific title as a starting point to illustrate the main findings of the analysis in relation to aspects such as multiple titling, title form and structure, title functions and translation.

KEYWORDS

Multiple titling, title form, title functions, title translation.

In a literary career spanning almost six decades, from the 1920s to the 1970s, Agatha Christie wrote 66 novels and over 150 short stories. This article is about her novels and in particular about the titles of her novels, with a special, but not exclusive, focus on the titles of the Italian editions. For reasons explained below, the title corpus under consideration does not consist of 132 items (66 + 66), as might be expected, but of almost 180 items. The titles will be analysed along four main dimensions: as *autonomous texts*, i.e. with regard to their form and structure, as

outward-looking texts, i.e. with regard to what they say to the (potential) reader, as inward-looking texts, i.e. with regard to what they say about their novels, and as target texts, i.e. as outcomes of a translation process. The findings will be discussed in the light of research work carried out in the field of *titrologie* or *titology*.¹

1. THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES

The first novel by Agatha Christie,² *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, has been published in Italy under no fewer than ten different titles, probably an all-time record: (1) *Un delitto a Stylen* [sic] *Court* [A crime at Stylen [sic] Court],³ (2) *Un delitto a Styles Court* [A crime at Styles Court], (3) *Il misterioso "Affare Styles"* [The mysterious "Styles case"], (4) *Morte misteriosa a Styles Court* [Mysterious death at Styles Court], (5) *Il misterioso affare di Styles* [The mysterious case at Styles], (6) *L'affare misterioso di Styles* [The mysterious case at Styles],⁴ (7) *Il mistero di Styles Court* [The mystery of Styles Court], (8) *L'affare Styles* [The Styles case], (9) *Omicidio premeditato* [Premeditated murder], (10) *Poirot a Styles Court* [Poirot at Styles Court].

Several other instances of multiple titling can be found in the Christie corpus. Two novels have been published in Italian under three different titles each: (1) *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* → *Dalle nove alle dieci* [From nine to ten] / *Chi è l'assassino?* [Who is the murderer?] / *L'assassinio di Roger Ackroyd* [The murder of Roger Ackroyd], (2) *Ten Little Niggers* → *E poi non rimase nessuno* [And then there was no one left] / *Dieci piccoli negretti* [Ten little black boys] / *Dieci piccoli indiani* [Ten little Indians]; and two titles were used for each of eight other novels: (1) *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* → *Ritratto d'ignota* [Portrait of an unknown woman] / *Perché non l'hanno chiesto a Evans?* [Why didn't they ask Evans?], (2) *Murder on the Orient Express* → *Orient Express* [Orient Express] / *Assassinio sull'Orient Express* [Murder on the Orient Express], (3) *The Moving Finger* → *Lettere anonime* [Anonymous letters] / *Il terrore viene per posta* [Terror comes by mail], (4) *The Hollow* → *La morte in piscina* [Death in the swimming pool] / *Poirot e la salma* [Poirot and the corpse], (5) *They Do It With Mirrors* → *Giochi di prestigio* [Conjuring tricks] / *Miss Marple: giochi di prestigio* [Miss Marple: conjuring tricks], (6) *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* → *Silenzio si uccide* [Silence, killing in progress] / *Assassinio allo specchio* [Murder in the mirror], (7) *Endless Night* → *Nella mia fine è il mio principio* [In my end is my beginning] / *Nella fine è il mio principio* [In the end is my beginning], (8) *By the Pricking of My Thumbs* →

1 Both the French and the English terms used to designate the critical study of titles date back to the 1970s. *Titrologie* was coined by Duchet (1973), *titology* by Levin (1977).

2 Information about Agatha Christie's novels in English and in Italian has been collected mainly from the specialised site *I colori del giallo* (<http://www.genovalibri.it/christie/>).

3 Throughout the article each Italian title is followed by a translation into English reproducing as closely as possible its semantic content.

4 (5) and (6) have the same semantic content, but the word order is different.

In due si indaga meglio [Two people investigate better] / *Sento i pollici che prudono* [I feel my thumbs itching]. As a result of all this, the 66 novels have led to 87 Italian titles. As can be seen, titles used for a single book are sometimes similar – little more than variations on a theme, as is the case for most translations of the first novel, for example; sometimes they are very different.

The practice of publishing an old book with a new title is not confined to the Christie corpus. In fact, it is by no means unusual in Italy. The most significant example in recent years is Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, available in Italy since 1932 under the title *La montagna incantata* [The Enchanted Mountain] and then published in 2010 as *La montagna magica*, echoing the choices made for the translations into English (*The Magic Mountain*), French (*La Montagne magique*), Spanish (*La montaña mágica*) etc. Another famous example of a 20th-century classic published under two different titles is Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, which came out first as *Vita da uomo* [Man's life] and then as *Il giovane Holden* [Young Holden]. The same practice may be found in the English-speaking world, as shown, for example, by Italo Svevo's *Senilità* [Old Age] and *La coscienza di Zeno* [Zeno's Conscience]: the former was published first as *As a Man Grows Older* and then as *Emilio's Carnival*; the latter came out first as *The Confessions of Zeno*, then as *Zeno's Conscience*. Similarly, Dostoyevsky's *Бесы* has been variously translated into English as *The Possessed*, *The Devils* or *Demons*. As is obvious, a new title for an old book may reflect a different understanding or interpretation of the text (as is probably the case for Mann's or Dostoyevsky's novels), but it is difficult to resist the temptation to regard it, more often than not, as the outcome of a marketing choice. Just one example: Don DeLillo's *Running Dog* was published in Italian as *Cane che corre* [Running dog] in the 1990s and as *Running Dog* in the 2000s. Novels are, after all, cultural products and products are placed on the market to be sold. Changing a title may be a way to increase a book's marketability, a new way to promote an old product. The reason for the multiple titles used for several Christie books probably lies there. Be that as it may, the fact remains that multiple titling is not just a curiosity. A title is a key to interpretation (see Eco 1983), it also performs a *suggestive* function (see Viezzi 2004),⁵ and different titles generally suggest different ways to approach a text, raise different expectations, (potentially) offer different indications as to how to interpret the text etc. The questions asked by Genette – “comment lirions-nous l'*Ulysse* de Joyce s'il ne s'intitulait pas *Ulysse*?” (Genette 1987: 8) – and by Maiorino – “how should we read *Ulysses* exactly because it is entitled *Ulysses*?” (Maiorino 2008: 67) – say it all. It should be added, though, that in terms of suggested interpretation, i.e. in terms of suggestive function, very little can be expected of crime titles which can even be deliberately ambiguous. An example in this respect is *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (*L'assassinio di Roger Ackroyd* in one of the three Italian translations): is Roger Ackroyd the murderer's perpetrator or the murderer's victim? Linguistically both options are possible.

5 The suggestive function is called *instructive* by Nord (1995).

2. TEN LITTLE NIGGERS

The 26th novel by Agatha Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, was also published in the UK as *And Then There Were None*. It is one of two cases of novels published in the UK with two different titles, the other being *After the Funeral* whose second title is *Murder at the Gallop*. The first case may be explained with a desire to avoid a title that might be regarded as racially offensive; for the second, marketing considerations played an obvious role as the new title was used for an edition published after a film based on *After the Funeral* had been released with the title *Murder at the Gallop*. A similar case happened in Italy with Dennis Lehane's *Mystic River*, published first as *La morte non dimentica* [Death does not forget] and then as *Mystic River*, after the great success of *Mystic River*, Clint Eastwood's Oscar-winning film based on Lehane's book.

3. THE SITTAFFORD MYSTERY

The 11th novel by Agatha Christie, *The Sittaford Mystery*, was published in the United States as *The Murder at Hazelmoor*. It was the first of over 20 cases in which American publishing houses chose for the American market titles that were different from the titles used in the UK. Furthermore, in three cases, two different American titles were used for a single novel. Here is the complete list: (1) *The Sittaford Mystery* (UK title) / *The Murder at Hazelmoor* (US title), (2) *Lord Edgware Dies / Thirteen at Dinner*, (3) *Why Didn't They Ask Evans? / The Boomerang Clue*, (4) *Murder on the Orient Express / Murder in the Calais Coach*, (5) *Three Act Tragedy / Murder in Three Acts*, (6) *Death in the Clouds / Death in the Air*, (7) *Dumb Witness / Poirot Loses a Client*, (8) *Hercule Poirot's Christmas / Murder for Christmas and A Holiday for Murder*, (9) *Murder is Easy / Easy to Kill*, (10) *Ten Little Niggers / And Then There Were None and Ten Little Indians*, (11) *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe / The Patriotic Murders and An Overdose of Death*, (12) *Five Little Pigs / Murder in Retrospect*, (13) *Sparkling Cyanide / Remembered Death*, (14) *The Hollow / Murder After Hours*, (15) *Taken at the Flood / There Is a Tide ...*, (16) *They Do It With Mirrors / Murder with Mirrors*, (17) *Mrs McGinty's Dead / Blood Will Tell*, (18) *After the Funeral / Funerals Are Fatal*, (19) *Destination Unknown / So Many Steps to Death*, (20) *Hickory Dickory Dock / Hickory Dickory Death*, (21) *4.50 From Paddington / What Mrs Gillicuddy Saw*, (22) *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side / The Mirror Crack'd*. As a result, and also taking into account the multiple UK titles mentioned in the previous section, the corpus of English-language titles is made up of 92 items. As can be seen, the American titles are sometimes similar to and often very different from the corresponding UK titles. A few reasons may be identified or suggested for the choice of having a different title for the American edition: political correctness (*Ten Little Indians*, see above), the wish to distinguish a book from others with the same or a similar title (e.g. *Murder in the Calais Coach*, see below), the attempt to find a more appealing title (*The Patriotic Mur-*

ders vs. *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*) etc. Whatever the reason, however, it should be noted that the practice of devising a different title for the same book in the same (original) language is by no means uncommon or limited to any specific genre. Examples concerning contemporary authors include works by David Lodge (*How Far Can You Go?* in the UK and *Souls and Bodies* in the United States), Alice Munro (*Who Do You Think You Are?* in Canada and *The Beggar Maid* elsewhere), J.K. Rowling (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in the UK and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the United States), Tess Gerritsen (*Ice Cold* in the United States and *The Killing Place* in the UK), etc. Particularly relevant here is a case dating back to the 1930s: Graham Greene's *Stamboul Train* (1932) was published in the United States with the title *Orient Express*, which is probably the reason why, across the Atlantic, Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) became *Murder in the Calais Coach* – the charm was gone, but confusion was avoided: a perfect example of a title chosen with a view to fulfilling a *distinctive* function (see Fisher 1984, Nord 1990, Viezzi 2004). As is obvious, what was said above with regard to the practice of changing a translated title also applies to the practice of changing an original title. Saying that a change in the title implies a change in the product would perhaps be an exaggeration,⁶ but there is no doubt that two titles such as, for example, *Five Little Pigs* and *Murder in Retrospect* (the UK and US titles of Agatha Christie's 33rd novel) have a completely different impact on the (potential) readers, their expectations, etc.

4. LA MORTE NEL VILLAGGIO

La morte nel villaggio [Death in the village] is the Italian title of the 10th novel by Agatha Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*. A title may be regarded as an autonomous, though not independent, text or microtext (see Hoek 1981: 149). A title is not independent because it is necessarily associated with a cultural product, even when that cultural product does not exist any longer (e.g. Pliny the Elder's *Bella Germaniae* and all the works that have not survived from antiquity) or has never existed (e.g. *The Clue of the Candle Wax* by Agatha Christie's fictional detective writer Ariadne Oliver and all the imaginary books found in the history of literature); and a cultural product is necessarily associated with a title, even when it has no title and ends up being referred to as *Untitled* (e.g. the 1941 painting by Kandinsky) or with a sort of catalogue entry (e.g. Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 35), in which case “the practice of titling is more mathematical than literary, sharing a degree of kinship with the procedures of taxonomy” (Symes 1992: 18). The title is an “onomatexte: il forme le nom du texte” (Ricardou 1978: 143), it is a “designative individual name for a work” (Fisher 1984: 289), it

6 Fisher, though, convincingly explains how the title chosen to refer to a Matisse painting (either *Madame Matisse* or *The Green Line*) “alters the meaning of the work in a significant way” (Fisher 1984: 292).

fulfils an *appellative* function (Grivel 1973, Hoek 1981)⁷ – as such it is an essential element of a cultural product and necessarily related to it.

A title, though, also is an autonomous text or microtext and as such it can be considered and analysed autonomously, independently of its cultural product. In particular it can be analysed in terms of its formal or structural features. In this respect, *La morte nel villaggio* may be regarded as a *typical* title. It is typical in terms of length: with its four words it is very close to the average length of Christie's Italian titles (3.7 words) and perfectly in line with modern practice in Italy.⁸ Titles are determined "par la Bibliothèque générale d'une époque, par le discours social de cette époque" (Hoek 1981: 184) and modern titles tend indeed to be rather short, *brevitas* often being their favoured feature (Cappello 1992: 14).⁹ *La morte nel villaggio* is also typical in relation to another feature. Grutman notes that "le titre prend de nos jours souvent la forme d'une phrase sans verbe, voire d'un syntagme nominal" (2002: 599) and Hoek even goes as far as to say that "le titre est la structure a-verbale par excellence!" (1973: 21). Verbs are indeed relatively rare as they are only found in 23 Italian titles (26.4%).¹⁰ The percentage is low, although perhaps not as low as might be expected, probably on account of the limited size of the corpus.¹¹ Indeed, if a title is to be a caption rather than a narrative, if it is to be static rather than dynamic, synthetic rather than analytic (as it generally is), the role played by verbs is inevitably marginal. And the *syntagme nominale*, i.e. the noun phrase, often followed by a prepositional phrase is the most common structure, accounting for some 60% of the total. Examples in this respect are: *I sette quadranti*, *La domatrice*, *Carte in tavola*, *Il giorno dei morti*, *Il mistero del treno azzurro*, *Il segreto di Chimneys*, *Il misterioso affare di Styles* etc. The English-language corpus exhibits the same prevailing features.

- 7 While for Grivel and Hoek the *appellative* function consists in *being the name* of a cultural product, for Nord (1995: 264) the *appellative* function consists in *evoking the attention and the interest* of the reader.
- 8 A similar analysis recently carried out on a corpus of 111 titles found an average length of 3.9 words. The corpus consisted of 41 titles of films shown in Italy on 9 January 2015 and the titles of the 70 best-selling fiction books (35 Italian, 35 translated) in Italy in the week from 29 December 2014 to 4 January 2015 (Viezzi forthcoming).
- 9 With an average length of 3.5 words, the English-language titles in the corpus are slightly shorter than the Italian titles.
- 10 In the English-language corpus verbs are found in 18 titles (19.5%).
- 11 The percentage of verbs was considerably lower (ca. 13%) in a study carried out on a much larger corpus consisting of several thousand book and film titles and their translations (Viezzi 2006).

5. SONO UN'ASSASSINA?

Sono un'assassina? [Am I a killer?] is the Italian title of the 57th novel by Agatha Christie, *The Third Girl*. It is just one of three titles containing a question mark, the two others being *Chi è l'assassino?* and *Perché non l'hanno chiesto a Evans?*. Those found in the latter's source title, *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?*, and in *N or M?* are the only two questions in the English-language corpus. As a matter of fact, questions are relatively rare in titles. For example just one question mark can be found among the titles of Italy's 70 best-selling novels (35 original Italian books, 35 translations) in the week 9-15 February 2015 (www.ibuk.it) and no more than three question marks can be found in the list of the 465 films (including short films) produced in Italy in 2014 (<http://www.cinemaitaliano.info/>). It is not easy to put forward convincing hypotheses about the reason why question marks are so uncommon and why so few titles are phrased as questions (at least if one ignores Hollywood's superstition whereby question marks in films are bad luck, but questions are rare in books as well). After all, it would seem perfectly legitimate to use the title to ask a question to be answered by the book. However, if one regards titles not as something referring to books to be read or films to be seen, but as something referring to books that have been read or films that have been seen, i.e. if one regards titles as information provided *before* (*ante-textum*) that only takes on its full meaning *after* (*post-textum*), then a plausible explanation is found. While questions may be legitimate *before* (e.g. Am I a murderer?), they have no sense whatsoever *after*, when answers have been given by the book or film. This is also the reason why in titles definite articles are much more common than indefinite articles: they are not used to raise expectations of information to be given, but refer to information that has already been given (see Weinrich 2001: 61); they do not refer to something or someone to be identified, but to someone or something that has been identified.

6. BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS

The title of the 59th novel by Agatha Christie, *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*, refers to a line in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Act 4, Scene 1). Intertextuality is a rather common feature of titles, although it may often go unnoticed unless explicitly announced. A simple look at one's bookcase will enable the discovery of several examples of intertextuality: from Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (referring to a verse in John Donne's *Meditation XVII*) to Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* (from a verse in Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*), from Edna O'Brien's *Country Girl* (referring to the same author's *The Country Girls*) to Saroyan's *The Human Comedy* (a reference to Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* which, in turn, is a reference to *La divina commedia*).

Several titles in the English-language Christie corpus contain intertextual references: *Taken at the Flood* is a reference to a line in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act

4) as is *There is a Tide ...*, the American title of the same novel; *Sad Cypress* comes from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*; *Postern of Fate* is a phrase taken from *Gates of Damascus*, a poem by James Elroy Flecker (and the novel's Italian title, *Porte di Damasco*, coincides with the poem's Italian title); *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* and the American title *The Mirror Crack'd* are quotations from Tennyson's *The Lady of Shallott*; *Ten Little Niggers / Ten Little Indians* refer to different versions of a song; *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe, Five Little Pigs, A Pocket Full of Rye, Hickory Dickory Dock* and *Crooked House* all refer to nursery rhymes. Unsurprisingly, intertextual references are generally lost in the Italian translations.

7. MURDER IN MESOPOTAMIA

The title of the 19th novel by Agatha Christie, *Murder in Mesopotamia*, is an example of a title containing a *genre tag*, i.e. a word clearly identifying the novel as belonging to the crime fiction genre. Genre tags are found in roughly 50% of the titles and include (inflected forms of) words such as *murder*, *die*, *death*, *mystery*, *mysterious*, and *delitto*, *omicidio*, *assassinio*, *assassino*, *morire*, *cadavere*, *salma*, *mistero*, *misterioso* etc. Names such as *Poirot* and *Miss Marple* may also be regarded as genre tags as, at least for the experienced Christie reader, they are clear, though indirect, references to the novels' genre. The same is true, of course, for the author's very name, but that has nothing to do with titles. By referring to the novels's genre, titles containing genre tags tend to be *seductive* and may also, to some extent, be *descriptive* (see below).

8. ASSASSINIO SULL'ORIENT EXPRESS

The 15th novel by Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, was published in Italy first under the title *Orient Express* and later under the title *Assassinio sull'Orient Express*. The difference between the two titles of the Italian editions is clear – the latter is more attractive, more appealing; it is not difficult to imagine a potential reader being more inclined to buy the latter than the former. In other words, *Assassinio sull'Orient Express* may be said successfully to fulfil a *seductive* function.¹² The seductive function is obviously crucial for fiction titles to the extent to which they “look outward, to the marketplace, where artifacts compete for critical acclaim and appeal” (Symes 1992: 19). It is pursued, with varying degrees of success, by most titles in the Christie corpus, mainly through “crime” words (see above) and the names of the two characters, *Poirot* and *Miss Marple*. In this respect, it is interesting to note that in the English-language corpus *Miss Marple*'s name never

12 It was Pascua Febles (1994) who introduced the term *función seductora* to refer to what Nord had called *appellative function* (see above). The same function is called *persuasive* by Hoek (1981) and *publicitaria* by Peñalver Vicea (2002).

appears whereas *Poirot's* name can only be found three times: in *Poirot Loses a Client* (the American title of *Dumb Witness*); in *Hercule Poirot's Christmas* (but not in the two titles of the novel's American editions), and in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*. In the Italian corpus, on the other hand, *Miss Marple* appears 5 times and *Poirot* 11 times – there is little doubt that the two names are used for seductive purposes.

For all its importance, the seductive function does not always appear to be pursued. It is hard to find much of a seductive intent behind Christie titles such as *The Pale Horse*, *The Clocks*, *Due mesi dopo* [Two months later] or *È un problema* [It is a problem]. In fact, bland titles are not at all unusual: in early March 2015, WHSmith's Fiction Book Chart included titles such as *The Farm*, *A Place Called Home* and *Welcome Home* (<http://www.whsmith.co.uk/chart/books/fiction-02x08974>), a clear indication that readers, or buyers, are not attracted solely by titles and titles are not the only way to promote a book – other factors such as the author's name, advertising or simple word-of-mouth communication may be just as good or even better.

9. THE BODY IN THE LIBRARY

The Body in the Library is the 31st novel by Agatha Christie. Besides unmistakably hinting at the novel's genre, the title may be said to fulfil, at least to some extent, a *descriptive* function in that the story moves from and actually is about a body found in a library. Several titles in the Christie corpus are similarly descriptive – by referring to a character (*The Man in the Brown Suit*), to a location (*Miss Marple nei Caraibi* [Miss Marple in the Caribbean]), to some event or thing or situation playing a role in the story (*Lettere anonime* [Anonymous letters], *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, *Hallowe'en Party*), they provide information about the novels. They are not particularly explicit, but of course explicitness cannot be expected in a crime title, and may be regarded as *neutral*, i.e. “titles whose selection seems almost automatic [...]. Often such titles are merely the names of characters, objects, or places that figure prominently in the body of the work” (Levinson 1985: 34) or *transparent* as they “identify the referent clearly” (Baicchi 2004: 29) or, more often than not, *partially transparent* in that “the referent is only partly described, i.e. it is characterised by a degree of indeterminacy and is waiting for a more complete description at a later stage” (Baicchi 2004: 29). The *descriptive* function, though, is a function that may or may not be pursued. It is generally pursued in academic papers, of course, but the world of literary fiction is different from the world of academia: “le titre littéraire n'a généralement pas, contrairement aux autres titres, comme fonction principale de fournir des informations sur le texte” (Malingret 1998: 397). The Christie corpus has many examples of that kind: titles such as *Destination Unknown*, *Nella fine è il mio principio* [In the end is my beginning], *Addio, miss Marple* [Farewell, Miss Marple] etc., not to mention the *nursery rhymes* titles, provide very little information, if any, about their novels, and often can only be fully understood *post-textum*, i.e. after reading the book.

10. DESTINAZIONE IGNOTA

The 46th novel by Agatha Christie, *Destination Unknown*, was published in Italy under the title *Destinazione ignota*. It is an example of literal translation. Literal translation and quasi-literal translation (by which what is meant here is the transfer of the semantic content of the source title with only minor modifications) are relatively common in the Christie corpus. Further examples are: *The Secret Adversary* → *Avversario segreto* [Secret adversary], *The Secret of Chimneys* → *Il segreto di Chimneys* [The secret of Chimneys], *Death in the Clouds / Death in the air* → *Delitto in cielo* [Crime in the sky], *The Body in the Library* → *C'è un cadavere in biblioteca* [There is a body in the library], *Elephants Can Remember* → *Gli elefanti hanno buona memoria* [Elephants have a good memory] etc. Some 30 Italian titles may be said to be literal or quasi-literal translations of their source titles, although there may occasionally be doubts about whether some titles are correctly ascribed to this category, e.g. does *Un delitto avrà luogo* [A crime will take place] count as a quasi-literal translation of *A Murder Is Announced*? The fact that literal or quasi-literal translations account for just over one third of the Italian titles comes as no surprise. In fiction in general and in crime fiction in particular, literal or quasi-literal translation of titles tends to be the exception rather than the rule (see Viezzi 2004: 133). This is true for Italy and for other countries as well.

11. CROOKED HOUSE

Agatha Christie's 39th novel, *Crooked House*, was published in Italy under the title *È un problema* [It is a problem]. It is an example of non-literal or non-quasi-literal translation. As has been seen in the previous section, roughly two thirds of the titles belong to this category. Some examples: *Hallowe'en Party* → *La strage degli innocenti* [The massacre of the innocents], *The Clocks* → *Sfida a Poirot* [A challenge to Poirot], *Ordeal by Innocence* → *Le due verità* [The two truths] etc. As has also been said in the previous section, this is a common feature for translated literature in Italy and elsewhere. A few examples concerning novels by contemporary best-selling authors will illustrate this point: Peter Robinson's *Aftermath* was published in Italy as *Il camaleonte* [The Chameleon], in France as *Beau Monstre* and in Germany as *Wenn die Dunkelheit fällt*; Elisabeth George's *Great Deliverance* was published in Italy as *E liberaci dal padre* [And deliver us from the father], in France as *Enquête dans le brouillard* and in Germany as *Gott schütze dieses Haus*; David Baldacci's *Stone Cold* was published in Italy as *Cani da guardia* [Watchdogs], in France as *Des cadavres trop bavards*, in Germany as *Die Spieler*.

In many or even most cases, therefore, the semantic content of the source title is not reproduced in the target title. Is that translation? Is the use of the word "translation" legitimate when there is no semantic correspondence between source text (source title) and target text (target title)? In 2003 Umberto Eco

published a book on translation entitled *Dire quasi la stessa cosa* [Saying almost the same thing] (Eco 2003), a title alluding to the (inevitably?) failed attempts to achieve perfect equivalence. Indeed, without entering here into the vexed question of equivalence, it is fair to say that even the staunchest supporters of the equivalence principle will probably admit that, for all the translator's efforts, a target text saying *almost* the same thing as the source text (as opposed to saying *exactly* the same thing) is the most likely outcome of the translation process. But what about a target text (target title) *deliberately* saying a *completely different* thing? Is that translation? Or is it *adaptation* (see, for example, Nord 1994 and Jiménez Serrano 1997) or *transposition* (Bucaria 2010) or *substitution* (Malingret 1998)? It is perhaps just a matter of definitions:

in an extreme case it may then be preferable not to translate the source-text at all, but to “design” a new text, partly or as a whole, under target-culture conventions. *But then it will not be a translation!* – So what? Of course it will not, if you define “translation” otherwise. (Vermeer 1996: 34, emphasis in the original)

Translation has authoritatively been defined as “a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, text-producing activity” (Neubert & Shreve 1992: 43) and as “source-text induced target-text production for a third party” (Neubert 2000: 10). It is enough to replace the word *text* with the word *title* – titles are texts or micro-texts, are they not? – to have two excellent descriptions of what happens with titles. There is nothing inherently wrong, therefore, in calling *translation* the process moving from a source title to a target title *irrespective* of the semantic relationship between the two, the target title being just a possible source of inspiration in the choice of a title for a cultural product destined for another linguaculture and another market:

la traduction d'un titre, à l'image de la traduction d'un texte littéraire, est une opération de création, de réécriture dans toute son ampleur, dont les effets ne sont que partiellement prévisibles. Le choix d'un titre traduit est ainsi la résultante des mêmes tensions et dilemmes que le choix d'un titre original avec cette particularité qu'il existe un modèle supplémentaire et influent: le titre original. Le titre traduit est autre car les conditions et les intentions de sa création et de sa réception sont autres, à l'image de toute la littérature traduite qui appartient dès lors autant au système littéraire de départ qu'au système de réception. (Malingret 1998: 406)

The process moving from a source title to a range of target titles in a range of languages creates a corpus of titles in which each item is inextricably linked to all other items in a relationship of *mutual intertranslation* (cfr. Wilson 1978). That relationship may be expressed with the equals sign (=), not the approximately equal symbol (\approx), let alone the not equal sign (\neq). Whatever the differences in semantic content, the following equations are true: *A Maiden's Grave* = *Il silenzio dei rapiti* [The silence of the kidnapped] = *Dix-huit heures pour mourir*; *To Fear a*

Painted Devil = *Vespe e veleni* [Wasps and poisons] = *La Danse de Salomé* etc.¹³ And the equations are true because the titles are the names of the same thing in different languages.

In the Christie corpus, therefore, *Third Girl* = *Sono un'assassina?* (Am I a murderer?), in spite of the change in point of view; *Hickory Dickory Dock* = *Poirot si annoia* [Poirot is bored], although in the Italian title there is no attempt at intertextuality and Poirot's name is added; *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* = *Omicidio premeditato* [Premeditated murder], in spite of the difference in explicitness; *4.50 from Paddington* = *Istantanea di un delitto* [Snapshot of a crime], although what is an unmistakable reference to a train becomes what looks like (but is not) a reference to a photograph. At least a couple of reasons may be postulated for the choice not to have a literal or quasi-literal translation: the attempt to find a more seductive title or a wish to focus the readers' attention on a different aspect of the story. Some choices, though, e.g. *Death Comes as the End* → *C'era una volta* [Once upon a time] are not easily explained.

12. ORDEAL BY INNOCENCE

The final section is devoted to a brief consideration of some film titles. Over the years several novels by Agatha Christie have been adapted for the stage, television or the big screen. As regards film titles and their translations, there are a few interesting, sometimes even paradoxical, cases that will be briefly presented just to show the complex net of lines connecting book and film titles within and across languages.¹⁴

Ordeal by Innocence is the title of the 50th novel by Agatha Christie as well as the title of a film based on that novel. The novel was published in Italy under the title *Le due verità* [The two truths], whereas the film was distributed in Italy as *Prova d'innocenza* [Proof of innocence]. There are a few more cases in which the novel and the film have the same title in English and two different titles – or even three – in Italian: *Appointment with Death* → *La domatrice* [The female tamer] (novel) / *Appuntamento con la morte* [Appointment with death] (film); *Evil Under the Sun* → *Corpi al sole* [Bodies under the sun] (novel) / *Delitto sotto il sole* [Crime under the sun] (film); *Death on the Nile* → *Poirot sul Nilo* [Poirot on the Nile] (novel) / *Assassinio sul Nilo* [Murder on the Nile] (film); *Endless Night* → *Nella mia fine è il mio principio* [In my end is my beginning] / *Nella fine è il mio principio* [In the end is my beginning] (novel) / *Champagne per due dopo il funerale* [Champagne for two after the funeral] (film).

13 *A Maiden's Grave* is a 1995 novel by Jeffery Deaver; *To Fear a Painted Devil* is a 1965 novel by Ruth Rendell.

14 The main sources used for this section are the website <http://www.mymovies.it> and Morandini (2012).

In the 1960s George Pollock directed four films featuring Margaret Rutherford, three of which were based on Christie's novels and one (*Murder Ahoy!*) was based on an original screenplay. The first three films have titles that are different from those of the novels on which they are based: *Murder, She Said* (based on *4.50 from Paddington*), *Murder at the Gallop* (*After the Funeral*), *Murder Most Foul* (*Mrs Ginty's Dead*). The Italian titles are, respectively, *Assassinio sul treno* [Murder on the train], *Assassinio al galoppatoio* [Murder at the gallop] and *Assassinio sul palcoscenico* [Murder on stage]. The Italian title of the fourth film is *Assassinio a bordo* [Murder on board]. Three of the four Italian titles are not literal or quasi-literal translations of the English titles and the Italian titles of the novel-based films are different from the Italian novel titles. It is also worth noting that the four English titles begin with *Murder* and the four Italian titles begin with *Assassinio*. The series of Italian titles, though, appears to be more *symmetric* than its English counterpart. What happened with the Pollock films also happened with *The Alphabet Murders*, a film based on *The ABC Murders*: the Italian title of the novel is *La serie infernale* [The hellish series] whereas the Italian title of the film is *Poirot e il caso Amanda* [Poirot and the Amanda case].

There have been two films entitled *And Then There Were None* – the one directed by René Clair in 1945 was distributed in Italy under the title *Dieci piccoli indiani* [Ten little Indians] whereas the one directed by Peter Collinson in 1974 was released in Italy as *...e poi, non ne rimase nessuno* [... and then there was no one left]. *Dieci piccoli indiani* is also the Italian title of *Ten Little Indians*, a film directed in 1965 by George Pollock.

The final example is *Alibi e sospetti* [Alibis and suspicions] which is the Italian title of a French film, *Le Grand alibi*, which is based on a novel entitled *Le Vallon* which is the French title of a novel published as *The Hollow* in the UK and as *Murder after Hours* in the United States which was published in Italy as *La morte in piscina* [Death in the swimming pool] and as *Poirot e la salma* [Poirot and the corpse].

Confronted with such an intricate net, Poirot himself would be at a loss.

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