

## BOOK REVIEW: AGATHA CHRISTIE'S POIROTS IN WORD AND PICTURE: STRATEGIES IN SCREEN ADAPTATIONS OF POIROT HISTORIES FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF TRANSLATION STUDIES

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Though almost five decades have elapsed since her passing in 1976, the British novelist Agatha Christie is still regularly mentioned as one of the world's most popular authors. Her prolific output has been translated into many languages, and the enduring appeal of characters such as Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot has transcended the realm of detective fiction to leave an indelible imprint on modern-day popular culture. Indeed, in *Agatha Christie's Poirots in Word and Picture: Strategies in Screen Adaptations of Poirot Histories from the Viewpoint of Translation Studies*, it is the television and cinematic versions of Christie's works involving the famous Belgian detective that form the core of Polish literary and translation studies scholar Lucyna Harmon's detailed study.

Harmon's 208-page book is based on the analysis of over 70 of Agatha Christie's short stories and novels which feature Poirot, together with their relevant screen versions. As the work's subtitle suggests, it adopts theoretical approaches from translation studies to examine the varying strategies and techniques used in the filmed Poirot adaptations as interpreted through a comprehensive taxonomy of Harmon's own devising. This material is outlined in the first chapter, which opens by defining the rationale for undertaking research on Christie's oeuvre, as well as providing succinct character portraits of the key figures who recur regularly in the literary originals as well as on screen. In addition to Hercule Poirot himself, these include his friend Captain Hastings, his secretary Miss Lemon, and Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard.

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This presentation is complemented by an incisive evaluation of the scholarly literature which conceptualises screen adaptations as translations, outlining the common features that underline why “film adaptation is often perceived as a relative of translation” (p. 25), and alluding *inter alia* to Roman Jakobson and intersemiotic translation. Harmon locates her research study as primarily being a content-based analysis, and discusses the question of fidelity to the original text, observing the widespread conceptualisation of an adaptation as either faithful, somewhat faithful, or unfaithful. Citing key theorists, Harmon then goes on to differentiate the strategies and techniques with regard to translation and adaptation, before presenting the twenty-three adaptation strategies which have resulted from her evaluation of the Poirot literary and screen works (pp. 32-36). To give just a few examples, these include strategies such as “co-option”, where “a character is introduced that is absent from the pages” (p. 33); “entertainmentisation”, where an element of the plot “has been introduced in order to generate humour” (p. 33); and “glorification”, where “a character’s individual splendor is emphasised or increased” (p. 33). In addition, other strategic elements such as ‘melodramatisation’ (p. 34), “political correctness” or “political redirection” (p. 35), as well as “thrill intensification” (p. 36) are also included. This taxonomy features heavily in the subsequent chapters, each of which is dedicated to a specific focal point in the Poirot context. With this in mind, Harmon’s book is a valuable addition to the literature on screen adaptations of Christie’s work (see e.g., Aldridge, 2016, 2023; Rolls, 2016, etc.).

In Chapter 2, the outlined strategies are applied to Christie’s short stories featuring Poirot, which are contrasted with the associated episodes from the acclaimed long-running (1989-2013) television series featuring Sir David Suchet in the role of the detective (indeed, it is the adaptations featuring Suchet’s interpretation of Poirot which form the main point of reference throughout the volume). In terms of presentation, the necessary data for each original story (year, length) and episode is given (director, screenwriter). This is followed by a short summary of the plot; any changes between the filmed version and the original are analysed through the prism of Harmon’s aforementioned taxonomy. In this chapter, the thirty-six stories and adaptations are divided into four sets corresponding to the year the television version was first screened, thus allowing different trends to be discerned and analysed (for example, in the third set from 1991, the strategy of glorification is “significantly strengthened” (p. 86) compared to the two previous iterations.

Chapter 3 adopts a similar approach, but this time the focus is on the adaptation strategies utilised in television version of Christie’s Poirot novels, again with reference to the David Suchet television series. Unlike in the previous chapter, the thirty-two works are presented in chronological order according to the original year of composition, starting with *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Aside from being the first Poirot novel, it was also Christie’s first published

book and would ultimately pave the way for her global success as an author. As with the preceding chapter, a potted plot summary of the original novel is provided, before the filmed episode is scrutinised for relevant modifications as per Harmon's analytical schema. Additionally, each case study is concluded by a final 'Comment', which evaluates and interprets the deviations from the original novel. For example, in what Harmon terms "marital reduction" (p. 109), the television adaptation of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* omits Captain Hastings' marriage, thus ensuring that he remains a bachelor in future episodes.

The fourth chapter of the book focuses on those seminal Poirot novels which have attracted the attention of multiple directors and screenwriters. These include adaptations of well-known works such as *Murder on the Orient Express* and *Death on the Nile*, and in addition to Sir David Suchet, other incarnations of Poirot have been interpreted by actors such as Sir Peter Ustinov and Sir Kenneth Branagh. Harmon opens this chapter by arguing that multiple film adaptations could be considered as retranslations, as well as noting that it could be interesting to examine French scholar Antoine Berman's famous 1990 hypothesis (Berman, 1990) in the context of screen adaptations (p. 160). For each of the eight novels featured in this chapter, a short overview is given, and then the various filmed adaptations (always starting with the Suchet version) are outlined and evaluated in line with Harmon's twenty-three strategies, after which brief general comments concerning all of the films are provided.

The closing chapter draws together the various avenues presented by Harmon in her analysis – namely, by comparing and contrasting the various screen adaptations as a coherent whole through the prism of the strategies utilised and with reference to the theoretical approach delineated in Chapter 1. In noting the effectiveness of these strategies, Harmon posits that these could be applied more widely, not only "as a research-based and descriptive tool for screen adaptations of detective prose, but they may additionally prove applicable to film adaptations in general" (p. 200). To reiterate, the development and implementation of this detailed framework in the context of a large-scale analysis of a given author's works certainly makes this book distinctive, and certainly enriches the literature on adaptation studies significantly. Accordingly, with its clarity of approach and succinct analyses, this volume is important not only for scholars in literary studies and translation studies, but also for fans of the Poirot books, television series, and films – indeed, for all who are looking for new scholarly perspectives on these much-loved works.

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