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Translating “Filth and Trash” — German translations of Agatha Christie’s detective novels between 1927 and 1939

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ABSTRACT

Translating Agatha Christie’s first detective novels was a challenge for the German-language translators and publishers involved. Christie was first translated into German in 1927 by Irene Kafka. However, the three Christie novels she translated were all re-translated within a span of ten years. This article explores the background of the translations of Christie’s novels, which can be found, on the one hand, in the tensions caused by the peripheral position of detective fiction in the polysystem (considered “filth and trash” by conservative forces), and, on the other, in the enormous success of the genre. Such tensions have left traces in the translations. This article highlights how translation decisions are determined by multiple factors, including: the status and perception of detective fiction, the status of translations from English, the reasons publishing houses published detective fiction, the function of the publication, the choice of the translator, and external (for example political or financial) constraints.

KEYWORDS

Agatha Christie, detective fiction, entertainment fiction, German translations, polysystem theory, Weimar Republic, National Socialism, censorship

1. Introduction

Agatha Christie published her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1920. Six years later and with her sixth detective story, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, she had her literary breakthrough and became the dominating author of detective fiction for decades to come. Detective fiction using Christie’s typical plot-structure, which fellow-writer Dorothy L. Sayers (1937: 76) called the “crossword puzzle” type (a murder happens, the detective investigates, everyone is a suspect and behaves suspiciously before the murderer is revealed by the detective in a meeting where everyone is present), has become a synonym for the archetypal detective story (Buchloh and Becker 1973: 11).

With relatively few exceptions, Christie’s stories are not set in a particular time but rather in the stereotypical, idyllic setting of the country house or village with stereotypical characters (Egloff 1974: 33ff). At the end of the story, following the removal of the culprits, the initial “Garden of Eden” is restored (Auden 1948: 158). Therefore, the universe of her stories is a safe and remote one. For this reason, it may come as somewhat of a surprise that when these escapist stories are introduced to Germany via their translations, they become highly politicised, especially in the period between 1927 and 1939.

2. The translations

A comprehensive list of German translations of Agatha Christie novels, compiled using the *Index Translationum* and the catalogue of the German National Library, can be presented as in Table 1.

Date	Title	Translator	Publishing house
1927	<i>Der Mord auf dem Golfplatz</i> (<i>Murder on the Links</i> , 1923)	Irene Kafka	Georg Müller, Munich
"	<i>Die Memoiren des Ministers</i> (<i>The Secret of Chimneys</i> , 1925)	Elisabeth von Kraatz	Aufwärts, Berlin
1928	<i>Roger Ackroyd und sein Mörder</i> (<i>The Murder of Roger Ackroyd</i> , 1926)	Irene Kafka	Drei Masken, Munich
1929	<i>Geheimnisvolle Verbrechen in Styles</i> (<i>The Mysterious Affair at Styles</i> , 1920)	Anna Drawe	Georg Müller
1930	<i>Der blaue Expresß</i> (<i>The Mystery of the Blue Train</i> , 1928)	Ernst Simon	Amonesta, Vienna
1932	<i>Die Abenteurer-G.m.b.H.</i> (<i>The Secret Adversary</i> , 1922)	Irene Kafka	Goldmann, Leipzig
1933	<i>Das Haus an der Düne</i> (<i>Peril at End House</i> , 1932)	Elisabeth/ Otto Albrecht van Bebber	Goldmann
"	<i>Das Geheimnis von Sittaford</i> (<i>The Sittaford Mystery</i> , 1931)	Otto Albrecht van Bebber	Goldmann
1934	<i>Dreizehn bei Tisch</i> (<i>Lord Edgware Dies</i> , 1933)	Otto Albrecht van Bebber	Goldmann
"	<i>Die Frau im Kimono</i> (<i>Murder on the Orient Express</i> , 1934)	Elisabeth van Bebber	Goldmann
"	<i>Sieben Uhren</i> (<i>The Seven Dials Mystery</i> , 1929)	?	Expresßbücher, Vienna, Leipzig
1935	<i>Nikotin</i> (<i>Three Act Tragedy</i> , 1935)	Otto Albrecht van Bebber	Goldmann
"	<i>Ein Schritt ins Leere</i> (<i>Why Didn't They Ask Evans?</i> 1934)	Otto Albrecht/ Elisabeth van Bebber	Goldmann
1937	<i>Der ABC-Fahrplan</i> (<i>The ABC Murders</i> , 1936)	Kurt Ziegler	Tal, Vienna, Leipzig (Die rotblauen Bücher)
"	<i>Tod in den Wolken</i>	Otto Albrecht	Goldmann

	<i>(Death in the Clouds, 1935)</i>	van Bebber	
1937	<i>Alibi</i> <i>(The Murder of Roger Ackroyd)</i>	Fritz Pütsch	"
1937	<i>Mord auf dem Golfplatz</i> <i>(Murder on the Links)</i>	Fritz Pütsch	"
1938	<i>Die Abenteuer (sic) G.m.b.H.</i> <i>(The Secret Adversary)</i>	Fritz Pütsch	"
1938	<i>Der ballspielende Hund</i> <i>(Dumb Witness, 1937)</i>	Anna Schober	Tal
"	<i>Karten auf den Tisch</i> <i>(Cards on the Table, 1936)</i>	Marie Rieger	Tal
1939	<i>Eine Frau in Gefahr</i> <i>(Murder in Mesopotamia, 1936)</i>	Auguste Flesch-Brunningen	Tal
1943	<i>Das Sterben in Wychwood</i> <i>(Murder is Easy, 1939)</i>	Auguste Flesch von Bringen	Scherz, Bern
"	<i>Die Tote in der Bibliothek</i> <i>(The Body in the Library, 1942)</i>	Anna Katharina Rehmann	"
"	<i>Morphium</i> <i>(Sad Cypress, 1940)</i>	Auguste Flesch von Bringen	"
1944	<i>Der Tod wartet</i> <i>(Appointment with Death, 1938)</i>	Auguste Flesch von Bringen	"
"	<i>Die Schattenhand</i> <i>(The Moving Finger, 1943)</i>	Anna Katharina Rehmann-Salten	"
"	<i>Zehn kleine Negerlein</i> <i>(Ten Little Niggers, 1939)</i>	Anna Katharina Rehmann-Salten	"
1945	<i>Rätsel um Arlena</i> <i>(Evil under the Sun, 1941)</i>	Ursula von Wiese	"

Table 1. Translations into German between 1927 and 1945.

From this list, several observations can be made. First of all, there are two indications of Agatha Christie's rise to fame in Germany: her move from smaller publishing houses to a large one (Goldmann) in 1932, and the period between the publication of the original and the translation, which becomes very short from 1933 onwards. It is purely incidental but nevertheless significant for the publication history that her rise to fame coincides with Hitler's ascent to power in Germany. However, the publication of her books in Germany does not stop with the beginning of the National Socialist rule in 1933, as one might suspect considering the predominant view of detective fiction by many representatives of the

regime, but it continued until 1939. There is also the curious fact that the books translated by Irene Kafka were already re-translated within ten years of their original publication, by a certain Fritz Pütsch for the Goldmann publishing house.

In order to investigate the reasons for these unusually quick re-translations, one has to take into account the many factors impacting on literature and literature in translation. Even-Zohar's polysystem theory provides a framework for investigating the complex interactions shaping the publication of these translations. This article will focus on three key issues: (1) the perception of detective fiction in Germany in the Weimar Republic (1918-1933); (2) the influence of the National Socialist regime (1933-1945) on the publication of detective fiction and of translations from English in Germany during that time; and (3) what role the institution and the market played in this polysystem. By the institution I mean, in this case, the critics, the media, and political and educational institutions, while the market consists of writers, critics, booksellers, as well as readers, and, contrary to Even-Zohar's classification, publishing houses (Even-Zohar 1990: 38f).

3. The discourse on entertainment fiction

According to the polysystem theory, translated texts enter the system of the target language. This heterogeneous system, or polysystem, influences the ultimate shape the translations take. The different systems constituting the literary polysystem (meaning all entities and activities that constitute it) are in a "permanent struggle" with each other (Even-Zohar 1990: 14, 28ff). This struggle for domination means that texts are in constant movement between the centres (as canonised literature) and peripheries (as non-canonised literature) of this polysystem (Even-Zohar 1990: 14f). In this and the following chapters we will see how this theory helps us understand in which complex and heterogeneous system(s) Christie's texts were translated into German.

Entertainment fiction (meaning adventure stories, detective and wild west stories) entered the German cultural system in the late nineteenth century in the form of translations and was therefore considered 'alien' and 'un-German' by the institution (Strothmann 1960: 187). In middle class circles, this 'invasion' of a new kind of fiction mainly aimed at the working and lower middle classes was seen by many as an attack on the ideal of the *Kulturnation* ('cultural nation') and *Bildungsbürgertum* ('educated bourgeoisie'), which constituted the core of German national identity and compensated for the long lack of national unity and a democratic history (Dann 1995: 70). In addition, not only were aesthetics and nationalism linked in this reaction, but public discourses around entertainment fiction also acquired a pronounced moral dimension. Certain parts of society – mainly aspiring members of the lower middle class – saw themselves as 'custodians of art': Teachers, librarians and members of the churches

organised public outcries against these new genres. Entertainment fiction was called *Schundliteratur* ('trash'), meaning of worthless literary quality and morally dangerous because it undermined the authorities, violated moral norms, brutalised its readers and therefore fostered crime and other immoral behaviour. In addition, its only reason for existence was commercial gain, which already sufficed for it to be deemed immoral (Maase 2012: 36ff).

The conservative-bourgeois movement was so powerful that in 1926, the so-called *Schmutz- und Schundgesetz* ('Law against Filth and Trash') was ratified, which put an age restriction on certain publications, mainly erotic fiction and penny dreadfuls, but also certain types of serialised detective fiction (Mai 2009: 81). In 1935, this law was abolished and replaced by the censorship system introduced by the National Socialist regime. In fact, the regime in many ways upheld the opinions of the conservative middle class in the Weimar Republic. The notion of 'filth and trash' was maintained and further expanded to refer to most publications of entertainment fiction, including high-quality detective stories. Also, in contrast to the law of 1926, the aim was to protect everyone from this type of literature, not only the young. Fiction was supposed to be educational or at least 'Volksliteratur', entertaining literature sanctioned by and conforming to National Socialist values (Strothmann 1960: 187, 192). Campaigns against other entertainment fiction continued (Sturge 2004: 23ff) and detective stories, due to their topic of crime and their Anglo-American origin, were the main target.

However, this summary would be incomplete without mentioning that there were different opinions on entertainment fiction. Whereas the group around Alfred Rosenberg, the chief NSDAP cultural propagandist, wanted to ban entertainment fiction outright, Joseph Goebbels, head of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, intended to use and promote entertainment fiction to relax and divert the public. By 1942, Goebbels had won this dispute and soldiers at the front, for example, were sent entertainment fiction. Goebbels also initiated a competition for German writers of entertainment fiction to write stories for the soldiers (Strothmann 1960: 188ff).

According to Even-Zohar (17), "... it is the group which governs the polysystem that ultimately determines the canonicity of a certain repertoire," which explains why the regime was not successful in changing readers' tastes. Firstly, because it was not a homogeneous group, and secondly, because the market acted as a 'challenging' system to the "institution": As detective fiction was the most popular genre in the Weimar Republic, which Hitler's ascent to power did not alter (Wölcken 1953: 9), publishers and booksellers only changed their policies when they were explicitly forced to do so. Between twenty-five and fifty per cent of translations from English until 1940 were detective stories (Sturge 2004: 67). They were in the centre of the polysystem of entertainment

fiction because there was a, using Even-Zohar's term, (perceived) "literary vacuum" (1990: 47) in the source culture. Thus, the genre of detective fiction makes a considerable contribution to the predominance of English translations during that time due to an alleged lack of German entertainment fiction (Strothmann 1960: 416).

4. The discourse on detective fiction and translations

The discourse on detective fiction and on translations was, as all discourses are, heterogeneous. However, the predominant view of nationalist and conservative wings of society was that detective fiction, as part of 'entertainment' fiction, was an 'alien' genre. Due to the fact that most detective novels were translations from English, the genre as such was seen as 'quintessentially English', as national characteristics and culture were understood to be interlinked. Detective fiction was thus described as decadent, artificial, unnatural, a symbol of empiricism, capitalism and a class-ridden society (Rix 1978: 124ff). An example of this view of the genre is Peter von Werder's thesis on detective fiction from 1943. For him, "English" detective fiction expresses everything that is wrong with "English" society: capitalism and colonialism. Plot-wise, evil is only used to create suspense, crime is degraded to a sport and presented in a sensationalist and unrealistic way, which is unacceptable for Germans because crime is a serious matter which should be treated with a certain earnestness (von Werder 1943: 119f). Würmann mentions other scholars who offer similar opinions (2004: 157f). So, certain members of the institution - critics, scholars and politicians - saw the detective novel as a reflection of the English national character - which supposedly stood in contrast to German identity (Egloff 1974: 86, Rix 1978: 125).

As a result, translated texts were suspected of contaminating German society with 'un-German' ideas (e.g. Sturge 2004: 10) and the National Socialist regime took measures to 'cleanse' the book market (Sturge 2004: 31). In 1935, pre-publication censorship was introduced: in order to translate a book, publishers had to submit a copy of the work in the source language, a statement confirming the author's 'suitability' (non-Jewish, non-communist), information on the translator, along with a quotation of potentially 'unsuitable' parts in the book, plus a statement detailing the publisher's intentions and the reasons for introducing the text on the German market (Strothmann 1960: 197). However, despite the strict rules, non-conformist translations were still published, which was partly due to defiance against these restrictions on the publishers' side (Sturge 2004: 35). Interpretation and implementation of the censorship rules became stricter in 1939, when between sixty and seventy per cent of all applications for translations were refused (Strothmann 1960: 198). Furthermore, the outbreak of the war changed the policies regarding translations of books from countries which were now enemies: in December 1939, a blanket ban on literature from Britain and France was introduced (Sturge 2004: 37).

One can summarise the interplay between the different systems as follows: there was a conflict between the regime (even if Goebbels used detective fiction to appease the public it does not mean that he approved of the genre) and conservative intellectuals on the one hand, and publishers, booksellers and readers on the other – in Even-Zohar's terms, a conflict between the institution and the market. A clash occurred between ideology and commerce: the market depended on entertainment fiction because it was so popular. However, despite the restrictions, publishers and booksellers took advantage of various loopholes in the system. The seventeen different institutions responsible for censorship made the task of controlling the book market impossible due to lack of coordination. This is how entertainment fiction could reach peak sales figures during the National Socialist regime (Strothmann 1960: 416f).

5. The publishing houses

The Georg Müller Verlag in Munich published Christie's first novel, *Mord auf dem Golfplatz* (*Murder on the Links*), in 1927. Two years later it also published *Das geheimnisvolle Verbrechen in Styles* (*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*). This publishing house traditionally specialised in books on art and highbrow literature, but in 1919, it started publishing popular fiction to save the house from bankruptcy. In 1928, the Georg Müller Verlag was sold to a right-wing association and in 1932, it merged with the Albert Langen Verlag, a right-wing publishing house, from 1936 directly linked to the National Socialist party (Herbig). The history of the publishing house offers an explanation as to why only two of Christie's novels were published here. With its proximity to the National Socialist movement from 1928 onwards, it shifted its focus towards 'more acceptable' literature. According to the German National Library, it published its last detective story in 1930 – *Die schreiende Grube* (*The Shrieking Pit*) by Arthur J. Rees, translated by Irene Kafka. Presumably, the translation rights for the few detective novels still published in 1929 and 1930 had already been bought before 1928. After that, the 'entertainment' repertoire of the Langen-Müller Verlag shifted towards 'Volksliteratur' in the form of plays and romantic fiction, both mainly by German, but also by Flemish and Scandinavian authors. Irene Kafka had translated the first German Christie novel for Georg Müller in 1927. It is not clear, why Anna Drawe translated the second one published by this publisher in 1929, *Das geheimnisvolle Verbrechen in Styles*.

If one compares Drawe's translation to the source text, it becomes apparent that it was changed considerably. The following is an extract from *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and its translation. Poirot's friend Captain Hastings has just arrived at Poirot's house to tell him that a murder happened during the night. He is very excited and Poirot calms him down.

<p>Presently, when we are calmer, we will arrange the facts, neatly, each in his proper place. We will examine--and reject. Those of importance we will put on one side; those of no importance, pouf!-- he screwed up his cherub-like face, and puffed comically enough--"blow them away!" "That's all very well," I objected, "but how are you going to decide what is important, and what isn't? That always seems the difficulty to me." Poirot shook his head energetically. He was now arranging his moustache with exquisite care. "Not so. Voyons! One fact leads to another--so we continue. Does the next fit in with that? A merveille! Good! We can proceed. This next little fact--no! Ah, that is curious! There is something missing--a link in the chain that is not there. We examine. We search. (34)</p>	<p>Bis Sie ruhiger sind, werden wir die Tatsachen ordnen und überprüfen und dem Wichtigen unsere besondere Aufmerksamkeit zuwenden." „Das ist alles sehr schön," warf ich ein, „aber wie wollen Sie entscheiden, was wichtig ist und was nicht? Das ist doch das Schwierige!" Poirot schüttelte den Kopf. „Nein. Sehen Sie. Eine Tatsache führt zu einer andern – so fahren wir fort. Paßt die nächste dazu? Wunderbar! Gut. Dann können wir weitergehen. Wir suchen. Wir prüfen. (34)</p>
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Table 2. Extract from *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*.

This extract was chosen because it is typical of the target text, which is roughly one third shorter than the source text. Furthermore, almost all characteristic changes Drawe introduces throughout the novel can be found here. For example, Poirot's explanation of his methodology is omitted and he is not the comical character of the source text. Almost all the features that distinguish him from other detectives are omitted, for example his effeminacy, his neatness and his other 'foreign' habits. This applies to the characteristics of his language, too – his frequent use of hypotaxis and anaphora, his not quite perfect command of English and use of French words are not translated. Descriptions of characters and landscapes, long conversations and situations of comical effect are omitted throughout the novel. Only the plot remains untouched, the rest is cut rigorously. This translation stands in complete contrast to Irene Kafka's translation of *Murder on the Links*, the first Christie novel in German, where none of these changes can be found (see below).

Drawe's changes in *Styles* can again be explained by the publication date, during a time when the publisher wanted to turn away from detective fiction. This assumption is confirmed by another translation by Drawe for Georg Müller, E.P. Oppenheim's *Das goldene Netz* (*The Golden Web*), also

from 1929. Here we find similar cuts, again, mainly of information superfluous for the plot. In terms of polysystem theory and Toury's theory of translation norms, this does not mean that Drawe's texts are not valid translations of the source texts. They are translations of their time, with characteristics of their time, conforming to conditions in the receptor culture.

The other small publishing houses on the list, Drei Masken and Amonesta, like Georg Müller also primarily published detective fiction to earn money for their 'real' projects: 'highbrow' books (Dreimaskenverlag; Hall). Financial gain was the main reason for such small publishing houses to publish detective stories. That way, they inadvertently confirmed the criticism of detective fiction being 'trivial', cheap and mainly a commercial enterprise.

6. The mystery of the re-translations

As mentioned above, it is strange that the three Christie novels translated by Irene Kafka - *Der Mord auf dem Golfplatz* (1927), *Roger Ackroyd und sein Mörder* (1928) and *Die Abenteurer-G.m.b.H.* (1932) - were published again by Goldmann as *Mord auf dem Golfplatz*, *Alibi* and *Die Abenteuer-G.m.b.H.* in 1937 and 1938, listing Fritz Pütsch as translator. What strikes one immediately is the minuscule change of titles of two of the books. The question is why they were re-translated after only ten, nine and six years respectively.

Goldmann was one of the largest publishing houses of popular fiction, which had specialised in translations from English. And so it was a sign of Christie's growing success when Goldmann published at least ten of her novels between 1932 and 1938. However, the National Socialist regime wanted to get rid of the Goldmann publishing house, which, due to its focus on entertainment fiction, subverted their ideas. For example, in 1935, Goldmann was prohibited from buying the translation rights to English-language detective novels, which was a great blow to the publishing house. In 1937, probably after publication of the last translations for which the rights had already been bought, Goldmann announced a change of programme away from entertainment fiction to save the company from ruin. Ironically, when attitudes changed during the war and Goebbels wanted Goldmann to publish entertainment literature for the troops, he declined (Barbian 1995: 568ff).

Within such a context, the riddle of the re-translations of the novels translated by Irene Kafka is more easily explained. If one compares Kafka's translation of *Murder on the Links*, *Der Mord auf dem Golfplatz* (1927), to Fritz Pütsch's *Mord auf dem Golfplatz* (1937), one discovers the following:

Kafka	Pütsch
Es gibt eine weitverbreitete Anekdote. Sie gipfelt darin, daß ein junger Schriftsteller, der darauf bedacht ist, den Anfang seiner Erzählung so wirksam und originell zu gestalten, daß er die Aufmerksamkeit der blasierten Verleger erregt und fesselt, folgendermaßen beginnt: „‘Verdammt!’ sagte die Herzogin.“ Sonderbarerweise beginnt auch meine Erzählung so. Nur ist die Dame, die dies ausrief, keine Herzogin. (5)	- Ein junger Schriftsteller, der darauf bedacht war , den Anfang seiner Erzählung so wirksam und originell zu gestalten, daß er die Aufmerksamkeit der blasierten Verleger erregte, begann folgendermaßen: „‘Verdammt!’ sagte die Herzogin.“ Sonderbarerweise beginnt auch meine Erzählung so. Nur ist die Dame, die dies ausrief, keine Herzogin. (11)
„Sagt nicht einer eurer englischen Dichter, daß die Zeit nicht nach Stunden, sondern nach Herzschrägen bemessen werden sollte?“ „Ich bilde mir ein, daß Browning da aber etwas Romantischeres vorschwebte, als Seekrankheit.“ „Weil er ein Engländer, ein Inselbewohner war, dem der Ärmelkanal nichts bedeutete. Oh, ihr Engländer! Mit <i>nous autres</i> ist es ganz anders.“ (13)	„Sagt nicht einer eurer englischen Dichter, daß die Zeit nicht nach Stunden, sondern nach Herzschrägen bemessen werden sollte?“ „Ich bilde mir ein, daß Browning da aber etwas Romantischeres vorschwebte, als Seekrankheit.“ „Weil er ein Engländer, ein Inselbewohner war, dem der Ärmelkanal nichts bedeutete. Oh, ihr Engländer! Aber wir anderen! “ (16)

Table 3. Extract from *Murder on the Links*.

In contrast to Drawe’s translation, Kafka’s translation is very close to the source text. The comparison of Kafka’s and Pütsch’s translation of two passages at the beginning of the novel makes clear, with the differences between the two texts highlighted in bold, that Pütsch’s re-translation is in fact an adaptation, and that the changes are so minimal that it is unlikely that Pütsch looked at the source text at all. The changes consist of omission of a few sentences, replacing words with synonyms and the translation of French phrases into German.

One can assume that Pütsch’s three edited versions of the translations originally by Irene Kafka were Goldmann’s last resort to be able to publish successful English-language detective novels after the publishing house was banned from buying new translation rights abroad. But Goldmann could of course buy the publishing rights from German publishing houses. He would not have been allowed to publish the original translations by Irene Kafka, at least not under her name, due to the aforementioned pre-publication censorship introduced in 1935, which also demanded proof of the ‘Aryan’ and non-communist background of the translator. According to the handbook of Jewish authors in Austria published by the Austrian National Library, Kafka was Jewish and in 1942 was murdered in the Ravensbrück concentration camp (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 2011: 4758v). So, after Goldmann had acquired the copyright for the two novels originally published by other publishing houses, Fritz Pütsch, one of the main editors at Goldmann, edited the translations and inserted his name as the translator. In order to do so, the texts had to be different,

hence the small changes. The translation of Poirot's French phrases into German might well have been a reaction to the increasing hostility towards France (although, of course, Poirot was Belgian) before the outbreak of the war and can be seen as an attempt of 'de-alienating' the main character.

7. After Goldmann's demise

When it became impossible for Goldmann to translate new novels by Agatha Christie because the publishing house was prohibited from buying new translation rights, the Viennese Tal Verlag stepped in between 1937 and 1939. Its series of detective fiction, "die rotblauen Bücher" ('the red blue books'), was also one of the most popular on the German market. However, because of its Jewish founder, Ernst Peter Rosenthal, it also ran into considerable difficulties. In 1939, it was 'aryanised' and closed down in 1941 (Hall 1984). So by 1939, the publication of translations by Christie in Germany¹ became impossible due to closures of publishing houses, censorship, difficulty of obtaining translation rights, and a blanket ban of translations from enemy countries.

And yet, translation of Christie's novels into German did continue - in Switzerland. The Scherz Verlag published Christie from 1943 from their publishing house in Bern. During that time, Scherz must have bought the exclusive publication rights of Christie's works not yet translated, as after the war Goldmann only published the Christie novels for which it had acquired the rights before the war. It was thus the National Socialist policies, that is, the sanctions against the Goldmann Verlag and the ban on English translations later on, which provided Scherz with the opportunity to take over the monopoly over Christie's books, which it has retained to this day.

8. Conclusion

It seems to have been a legitimate practice for publishing houses to cut and alter the detective fiction they published under ideological and commercial pressure. By doing this, they contributed to the prejudices against the genre. In Even-Zohar's terms, translated detective fiction held a primary position (1990: 48ff) in the sense that it introduced and dominated the genre in Germany. But it also had a secondary and therefore peripheral position in the overall literary system as a genre that was – in general – not well respected. In this case, as Even-Zohar states, it happens very often that translations of peripheral position texts are altered heavily in order to integrate them into the target system (1990: 51).

What has become clear is that despite all the measures taken by the institution, the population did not change their reading habits. The majority of published books during the National Socialist period remained

entertainment fiction (Barbian 1995; 719f). This can be explained by quoting Even-Zohar:

As systems are governed by those who control them, the tools fought for will depend on their relative efficacy in controlling the system. Thus, when control can be achieved only by 'change', this becomes the leading popular principle. It will not be so, however, as long as perpetuation, rather than innovation, can satisfy those who might lose more by change (1990: 22).

The National Socialist regime reviewed their policy to change reading habits by force and decided, under Goebbels' command, in favour of a perpetuation of the genre, because Goebbels perceived the political usefulness of escapist reading. The role models — English, French and American detective novels — were banned in 1939, so the question is what kind of detective fiction filled the gap. In contrast to the discourse prevailing to this day, there had been many German(-language) writers of detective fiction whose books sold well (Würmann 2004: 144), but unfortunately not enough research has been conducted yet to present a conclusive overview.

The link between the genre and national characteristics determined the discourse of the time and does, to a certain extent, to this day. After characterizing the genre as 'un-German', a new way had to be found to render it compatible with German 'culture'. Erich Langenbucher, member of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, devised a list with features that the new German detective novel should have (Cf. Würmann 2004: 159f). It should basically avoid all the points criticised by von Werder above: mainly the idea of crime and detection as a mere sport and the unrealistic and sensationalist description of crime.

There have been a few studies to see whether there really is a difference between detective novels published during the National Socialist regime and after, and whether the books published during the regime adhered to the new rules of 'German' detective fiction, but they remain inconclusive. As Würmann explains, the vastness of the material prevents any accurate statements (2004: 177). His conclusion is that the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda did not create a new type of detective fiction, but that it simply favoured certain kinds of detective fiction — detective fiction with a clear moral guidance, where the murderer was unsympathetic; detective fiction using non-sensationalist language, often set abroad and/or in an urban environment, where the detectives are members of the police force rather than private investigators. Würmann discovers that this detective fiction is often not overtly propagandist and could easily have been written before or after the National Socialist period (2004: 178f). As Sturge (2004: 179) suggests, too, it is the novels without clearly National Socialist elements which simply entertain that fulfil their intended purpose best. In contrast, Rix comes to a different conclusion. He states that fascist ideology was indeed added to German detective fiction during the National Socialist period (1978: 133). Sturge

however points out that Rix only chose detective fiction published during the war, and not from before 1939. She analysed 20 randomly chosen German detective novels and finds some with ideological features, some without (2004: 150f).

The struggles in the German literary polysystem in the 1930s and 1940s caused changes in the publication history and the translation techniques of Agatha Christie's novels. It is only when one looks at the dynamics of the rivalry between the market and the institution that one understands why the National Socialist regime almost went full circle from condemning the genre to using it for their own means. And it is with the application of this model that a small and innocent list of translations of novels by a certain author reveals its secrets.

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Biography

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¹ From 1938 including Austria, but excluding Switzerland, which remained neutral and independent.