
‘Fluctuating Meanings and Alternative Readings’ – The Translator-Detective in the Works of Barbara Wilson

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Abstract

Translators and interpreters often play an important role in criminal and detective stories, especially in modern and postmodern literature, which addresses central concerns such as conventional concepts of authorship and authority. Translation theory has associated translation with "moral and factual truth", [1] a concern in classical criminal and detective stories, too. The detective's search for clues and evidence and his attempt to reconstruct the true turn of events resembles the translator's search for equivalences and his intention to reconstruct a text and its meaning – albeit in a different language. However, both detective and translator can conceal and manipulate truth as much as reveal it, and meanings can be deliberately constructed to confuse or deceive, undermining the idea of the translator as neutral and unbiased mediator, and any clear boundary between original and translation, truth and lies. Barbara Wilson's crime fiction uses the figure of a lesbian translator and amateur detective who contributes to an entertaining play with ideas of translation and authorship, fiction and reality, constantly overstepping, crossing and blurring boundaries. The absence of simple truth and the questioning of conventional ideas of authority usually associated both with (male) detective figures and with literary originals, are a central theme in Wilson's works and in feminist criminal literature in general. [2] This paper will show how the detective Cassandra Reilly, whose work "translating fiction has accustomed her to fluctuating meanings and alternative readings", [3] questions the very possibility of an unambiguous order.

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