

# 中譯童妮·摩理森《寵兒》的職責

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## 摘 要

本論文在探索中譯童妮·摩理森《寵兒》的艱辛過程之際，將援引班雅民在〈譯者的職責〉中所表達的翻譯概念及德希達在〈巴別塔〉中的相關闡釋為架構。明知翻譯這本難懂的小說本身極具挑戰性，為什麼我當初會答應呢？論文首先省思個人所經歷的心理掙扎和接受挑戰的全部理由。第二部分的子標題為「做為負責任的摩理森譯者」，旨在檢視擔任摩理森小說，尤其是《寵兒》的好譯者，須具備哪些先決條件？第三部分為本論文的重點所在，主要析論個人在中譯這本摩理森名著時所遭遇的種種困難及解決之道：從小說的中文書名（《寵兒》）開始討論，接著分析小說的敘述風格和語調、聖經典故、口述和聽覺特性、詩意的散文和歌詞、對話、口語和文字遊戲（雙關語）。不過，在語言上最讓我傷腦筋的是翻譯小說第二部分的幾章內心獨白，特別是透過寵兒的「中間航程」意識流所呈現的那一章。論文第三部分最後反思翻譯中所遭遇的種種文化差異和障礙，第四部分（結論）提出有關翻譯的技巧和藝術的一些觀察，同時將翻譯用作隱喻，藉以提出我的「救贖的」翻譯行為和摩理森書寫《寵兒》之間的關聯。

**關鍵詞：**職責、翻譯、童妮·摩里森、《寵兒》、班雅民、德希達

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## The Task of Translating Toni Morrison's *Beloved* into Chinese

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### Abstract

In exploring the tough process of translating Toni Morrison's *Beloved* into Chinese, the paper will be framed by Walter Benjamin's notion of translation as expressed in his famous 1923 essay "The Task of the Translator" and Jacques Derrida's related exposition in "Des Tours de Babel." Since I am fully aware that translating this difficult novel is highly challenging, why, then, did I agree to undertake the task? The paper begins by examining the psychic struggles I underwent and the rationale involved before I finally accepted the challenge. Subtitled "To Be a Responsible Morrison Translator," the second section investigates what I believe to be the prerequisites of a good translator of Morrison's novels in general and of *Beloved* in particular. In the third section, which constitutes the principal focus of my paper, I will explore the problems I encountered while rendering Morrison's most well-known novel into Chinese and how I came to solve them. Starting with the choice of a Chinese title, I proceed to analyze the novel's narrative style and tone, its biblical allusions, its oral and aural quality, its poetic prose and songs, its dialogues, colloquialisms and word-play. But the hardest linguistic nut for me to crack was translating the various interior monologues in Part Two, especially the chapter narrated through Beloved's "Middle Passage" stream of consciousness. While I conclude the main section with a reflection of the cultural differences and barriers, in the final section I will put forth a number of observations

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concerning the craft and art of translation while using translation metaphorically to propound the correlation of my “redemptive” act of translation with Morrison’s writing of *Beloved*.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Task, Translation, Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest version of the paper was presented at the “Conference on Toni Morrison,” held on December 17-18, 2004 at the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica. A revised shorter version, entitled “The Challenges of Literary Translation: Taking my Translation of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* as an Example,” was presented as a keynote speech at the international conference on Foreign Language Education at Yuda University of Technology on June 12, 2012. The author wishes to thank the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica, and the Department of Applied English, Yuda University of Technology, for allowing me to expand and revise the shorter version and have it published elsewhere. The author also wishes to thank Mr. Judd Kinzley, the former English editor of the Institute of European and American Studies, for polishing the early draft of the paper, Mr. Ming-chieh Chen, Ms. Wei-ling Chen for providing all the technical assistance, and especially Mr. Jeffery Cuvilier for polishing the revised version, and helping me solve most, if not all, of the problems I had with understanding and translating Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.

## I. Prologue

In the spring of the year 2000, when the editor-in-chief of the Taiwan Commercial Press, Mr. Hao-chuan Tang (湯浩全), first approached me with an offer to translate Toni Morrison's *Beloved* into Chinese, I suggested to him a couple of scholars known to have done research on Toni Morrison. My initial wish to decline the project had to do with the fact that I was wrapped up with my own research projects. Had I taken on the project, I would have had to sacrifice most, if not all, of my weekends and holidays. Furthermore, I know only too well that the art of translation has long been relegated to a marginal status. Indeed, as the famous Portuguese translator Giovanni Pontiero has written, "As an intermediate language form and a parasitic art form, translation is vulnerable to attack. Often accused of being treasonous and even treacherous, it is not a pursuit for those easily put off by awkward linguistic problems or pragmatic issues" (26).<sup>2</sup> For Gregory Rabassa, the renowned translator of Romance literature, translation is "a disturbing craft because there is precious little certainty about what we are doing, which makes it so difficult in this age of fervent belief and ideology, the age of greed and screed" (12). In his famous 1923 essay, "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin also points out the marginal position of translation: "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest, but on the

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<sup>2</sup> Pontiero expresses a similar viewpoint in "The Task of the Literary Translator": "We must never forget that translation and translators are vulnerable to attack from all quarters. For some critics translation is a parasitical art. For others, treasonable and treacherous. For most people, including translators, always less than satisfying and rarely perfect" (62).

outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one” (76).

Such being the case, why then did I change my mind and agree to undertake the difficult task? Well, there are a number of reasons. From a purely commercial perspective, as an Oprah Book Club best-seller, Princeton chair professor and Nobel laureate for literature in 1993, Toni Morrison has now become “a veritable industry” (McKay and Earle ix). The Swedish Academy, in a press release issued on October 7, 1993, hailed Toni Morrison as “a literary artist of the first rank,”

[w]ho, in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality. . . .

Her oeuvre is unusually finely wrought and cohesive, yet at the same time rich in variation. One can delight in her unique narrative technique, varying from book to book and developed independently, even though its roots stem from Faulkner and American writers from further south. The lasting impression is nevertheless sympathy, humanity, of the kind which is always based on profound humour. . . .

. . . she delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race. And she addresses us with the lustre of poetry.

Having come to be recognized as “a writer of international stature” (Sumana 7), “the best fiction writer in the world” (David 3), and “one of the most significant contemporary American novelists and literary/cultural critics”

(McKay 1997:4), I considered it a great pity that seven years after having won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Morrison's novels remained inaccessible to the general Chinese reading public on the island of Taiwan.

But why *Beloved*, of all her novels? I chose to translate this work because it is not only Morrison's most powerful book, but is also a great work of art in its own right. As Elsie Washington explains, *Beloved* is "a kind of epic prose poem, exquisitely rendered" (234). In her "Introduction" to *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*, Nellie McKay writes:

. . . readers almost unanimously acknowledge the book as a major literary achievement of great purpose. The momentum it generated on its appearance has not abated a decade later. In the attention that they give to it, scholars, general readers, students, and critics alike continue to assess *Beloved* as one of the great books of this [twentieth] century. (1998: 4).

Indeed, since its appearance in 1987, *Beloved* has drawn a tremendous amount of public and critical attention. As McKay indicates, Morrison's fifth novel<sup>3</sup> "made its way onto the *New York Times* Bestseller List in the week of its official publication date, and within a month, after an initial run of 100,000 copies, it was in its third printing. There is little question at this time that of all her novels, this is the one most often taught and the one most written about

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<sup>3</sup> The four preceding novels are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *Tar Baby* (1981). While *Song of Solomon* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, the publication of *Tar Baby* made its author a celebrity, for Morrison "was interviewed and articulated by every major newspaper and magazine in the [United States] and in March 1981 she became "the first black woman ever to appear on the cover of *Newsweek* (David 21, 22).

across the world” (1998:4).<sup>4</sup> In addition to being an immediate best seller, *Beloved* received spectacular reviews, and garnered many accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988.<sup>5</sup> For Homi K. Bhabha, *Beloved* serves as an example representing “a radical revision in the concept of human community itself,” for the novel “revives the past of slavery and its murderous rituals of possession and self-possession in order to project a contemporary fable of a woman’s history that is at the same time the narrative of an affective, historic memory of an emergent public sphere of men and women alike” (6, 5).

In spite of its overwhelming popularity, however, for over a decade after its publication, *Beloved* remained largely inaccessible to Chinese readers not versed in the technique of multiple narration. Since its publication, I have heard fellow professors and literary colleagues complain that they had difficulty reading or just getting through the novel, which is presumably “Morrison’s masterpiece” (Sumana 112). Part of the novel’s difficulty lies in its innovative manipulation of narrative time and voice, which, together with the fact that Morrison deliberately holds back key information, may serve to confuse or intimidate the reader. Of Morrison’s novels, *Beloved* is, according to Ron David, the one “that was abandoned most often” in the midst of reading (111). “Arguably Morrison’s most complex novel” (McKay 1997:4), *Beloved*

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<sup>4</sup> Up to October 2007, MLA Bibliography records as many as 576 entries of critical works published on *Beloved*.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed enumeration of the accolades and Morrison’s soaring reputation, see McKay 1998:11. Four years after the publication of my Chinese translation, Morrison’s *Beloved* receives yet another recognition. On May 21, 2006, *New York Times* Book Review published the results of a survey, in which “a couple of hundred prominent writers, critics, editors, and other literary sages” were asked to identify “the single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years” (Scott 17). *Beloved* topped the list, being “solidly ahead of the rest” (Scott 18).

does demand meticulous scrutiny and seems to run counter to the current trend of “fast food” consumption. Morrison herself does not deny this; in an interview with Richard Duckett on October 16, 1998, the day her film version of *Beloved* was released, Oprah Winfrey recalled a conversation she had conducted with Morrison; at the time, she asked if:

people had ever complained about having to continually go over passages of the novel so that they could grasp the full meaning.

“And she said, ‘That, my dear, is called reading.’ And I said, you know, you can’t skip a word. And she said, ‘Why would I reconstruct a sentence seven, sometimes 12 times, just so you could skip it?’”  
(Duckett C1)

My own reading and teaching of the extraordinary narrative of slavery has also helped underscore the novel’s richness and profundity for me. As Sharon Holland and Michael Awkward point out:

When we set out to identify some of the most difficult aspects of teaching Morrison’s fifth novel, it occurred to us that the difficulty lay not so much in the text itself as in our perception of its events and characters. Teaching *Beloved* involves an overwhelming contradiction: teachers promise students that what at first appears incomprehensible will eventually become familiar and ascertainable while as teachers they realize that vast sections of the text elude the critic’s touch and give way to revelation only gradually, if not stubbornly. (48)



In view of Toni Morrison's international acclaim and prestige, *Beloved's* high literary worth, and the original text's inaccessibility to the general public in Taiwan, a good Chinese version was in order. These considerations basically correspond to the three priorities mapped out by Giovanni Pontiero:

My priorities would be firstly that the translation must offer a serious challenge, secondly that the author must be significant in his or her time, and thirdly, that the topic of the book should have a certain universality and durability so that it will attract readers in other cultures for more than a fashionable season. (21)

Hence, when Mr. Tang got me on the phone for the third time, I accepted the task, one which I knew would be arduous, to say the least.

## II. To Be a Responsible Morrison Translator

But what does it mean for a Taiwanese student of American literature and culture to translate Toni Morrison's *Beloved* into Chinese? What is involved in rendering a literary masterpiece into a language "so rich, so different from English and with such a splendid literary and intellectual tradition as Chinese" (Miller 13)? More broadly, is *Beloved*, with all its complexity and multilayered meanings, translatable at all? To quote Walter Benjamin, who regards translation as a mode of its own, "Does its nature lend itself to translation and, therefore, in view of the significance of the mode, call for it?" (70). Although I had over the past three decades accumulated some experience and knowledge about translation, I still felt uneasy about translating a Nobel Prize winner's

most celebrated book. I kept asking myself, “Am I qualified to be a translator of Morrison’s supposedly most difficult work?” But my uneasiness was somewhat assuaged when it dawned upon me that, as an academic versed in the culture of Antebellum slavery and the American South, I possessed some advantages over non-academic translators. Pontiero conveyed a similar idea when he noted, “The academic who is also a translator and the translator who is also an academic find themselves in a privileged position” (21).

As I have come to understand since then, translation is not simply a matter of finding equivalence between source language and target language, but is instead “a cross-cultural transfer,” because language should not be seen “as an isolated phenomenon suspended in a vacuum, but as an integral part of culture” (Snell-Hornby 46, 39). In the view of Hans J. Vermeer, one of the leading figures in German translation theory, the translator should be bicultural, if not pluricultural, and this naturally assumes a command of various languages (qtd. Snell-Hornby 46). In the case of translating Morrison’s *Beloved*, an important prerequisite would be proficiency in American history and culture in general and African American history and culture in particular. These fields happened to be part of my training and specialization, though I was still far from proficient in any of them. Similarities between my own educational background and Toni Morrison’s helped alleviate some of the difficulties of translating such a rich and profound text. As English majors, both Morrison and myself have shown a keen interest in modernist writers like Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. Just as her thesis probed into the theme

of death in the writings of the two writers mentioned above,<sup>6</sup> Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* was one of my favorite texts, and both my thesis and dissertation focus on the works of William Faulkner. Actually, *To the Lighthouse* happened to be the text I originally planned to investigate in my own thesis. After broaching the idea with Father Pierre Demers, my thesis advisor, however, he suggested that I work on Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* instead, for by the mid-1970s, he thought, *To the Lighthouse* had already been explored in depth. Since then, my interest in Faulkner has not abated. Like Morrison's *Beloved*, a significant portion of Faulkner's works like "Evangeline," "Wash," *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down Moses* also deal—among other issues—with the inhumanity of American slavery. If Faulkner ranks as a powerful literary influence on Morrison, then my familiarity with the former would certainly facilitate my appreciation and comprehension of the latter. In response to a question about the impressions Faulkner and Virginia Woolf had left on her, Morrison answered,

They fascinated me for different reasons: Faulkner was one of the few writers in the USA who understood the relation between the past and the present, including the Afro-American reality. Regarding Woolf, I was impassioned by her refined language and modern feminine outlook. (Garzon 4)

In an article called "Faulkner and Women," Morrison also acknowledges Faulkner's influence on her treatment of the past (Morrison 1986:296).

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<sup>6</sup> Morrison earned her M. A. degree from Cornell University in 1955, with a thesis entitled "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated."

Another prerequisite for undertaking this task would be genuine interest in and familiarity with Morrison's works. If Faulkner is my major field of specialization, then Toni Morrison is my minor. As early as 1987, I published a cross-cultural paper comparing the female identity quest in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*.<sup>7</sup> Besides *The Bluest Eye*, I have over the past fifteen years or so, assigned *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *Playing in the Dark* as required reading in my graduate seminars.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, as I was fully aware that the attitude a translator assumes toward the work of translation would, in the long run, come to determine the overall quality of a *translatum* (the resulting translated text), I decided to approach my task with both fervent enthusiasm and high seriousness. Here (and elsewhere) I use the word "task" deliberately, not merely to underscore the stern challenges, but also to highlight the "task" as laid out by Walter Benjamin. As Jacques Derrida has contended, "There is nothing more serious than translation" (184). In his deconstructive reading of the title of Benjamin's much-discussed essay, Derrida wrote of his perception of the word "task":

The title also says, from its first word, the task (*Aufgabe*), the mission to which one is destined (always by the other), the commitment, the duty, the debt, the responsibility. Already at stake is a law, an injunction for which the translator has to be responsible. He *must* also acquit himself,

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<sup>7</sup> Entitled "In Search of a Female Self: Toni Morrison *The Bluest Eye* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," the paper appeared in *American Studies* 17.3 (1987): 1-44.

<sup>8</sup> Since my Chinese version was first published in early 2003, I have also taught Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, *Paradise*, *Love*, and *A Mercy*.

and of something that implies perhaps a fault, a fall, an error and perhaps a crime. . . . The translator is indebted, he appears to himself as translator in a situation of debt; and his task is to *render*, to render that which must have been given. (175-76)

It took me many a month of Sundays—about two years and a half—to complete my own task, and in the process of translation was confronted with quite a few thorny problems.<sup>9</sup>

### III. The Task of Translating *Beloved*

The first problem I had to grapple with was the title, which, as is noted in the novel's epigraph, is a biblical allusion to Romans 9:25. In the authorized Chinese version of the Bible, the word "beloved" is rendered into an adjective form ("meng-ai-de" [蒙愛的]). But Morrison's title refers, as Sethe's first "rememory" makes clear, to the name engraved on the tombstone of Sethe's "crawling-already?" baby, who died at the hands of her own mother eighteen years before. Thus, for the name of a character, this adjectival rendition simply would not do here. Neither would two other commonly-used Chinese translations—"Zhi-ai" (摯愛 / 至愛). The translation of *Beloved* into (摯愛 / 至愛) would encounter another problem when we come across the phrase "Dearly Beloved" (5). Later on, I came up with "Hsin-gan" (心肝), "Ai-er" (愛

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<sup>9</sup> My Chinese version of *Beloved* (《寵兒》) garnered two prizes for 2003: *United Daily News's* Readers Best Books Award (《聯合報》讀書人最佳書獎) and *China Times's* Kai-juan 2003 Ten Best Books in the Category of Translation (《中國時報》2003 開卷好書獎：翻譯類十大好書).

兒), “Bao-er” (寶兒), and “Chong-er” (寵兒) as possible translations. In the end I opted for “Chong-er,” which seemed more pertinent to the theme of a mother’s overriding love for the daughter—“I love my daughter so much that under certain circumstances I would kill her” (David 179).

In addition to the title, biblical allusions also abound in the text proper. The phrase “Fire and brimstone” (6), referring to hell, comes from Revelation 20:10 and 21:8.<sup>10</sup> The mention of “Lot’s wife” on page 17 is taken from Genesis 19:17-26 and Luke 17:32. In the wake of Stamp Paid’s failed attempts to knock at the door of 124, the narrator remarks tersely, “Spirit willing; flesh weak” (173). This remark alludes to Matthew 26:41: “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” A Chinese idiom (「心有餘而力不足」) seems to coincide with the terse remark. Stamp Paid employs another biblical allusion when he tries to dissuade Baby Suggs from quitting the Word after Sethe’s infanticide. He says, “We have to be steady. ‘These things too will pass,’ . . .” (179). Here, the sentence “We have to be steady” is adopted from Corinthians I 15:58 while “These things too will pass” may be related to Matthew 24:34-35.<sup>11</sup> The sentence “Honor thy mother and father that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (「當孝敬父

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<sup>10</sup> “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” to be “tormented day and night for ever and ever.” There “the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” See also Genesis 19:24 and Luke 17:29. The lake of fire and brimstone is also known as the bottomless pit or the pit of the dragon (Rev. 20:1-3).

<sup>11</sup> Corinthian I 15:58 and Matthew 24:34-35 read respectively: “So my dear brothers, since further victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord’s work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted as it would be if there were no resurrection.” “Then at last this age will come to its close.” “Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words remain forever.”

母，使你的日子在耶和華上帝所賜你的地上得以長久」) (242) quotes from Exodus 20:12.<sup>12</sup> “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (「一天的難處一天當就夠了」) (256-57) is an allusion to Matthew 6:34.<sup>13</sup>

Morrison’s use of biblical allusions is textually significant and helps add an additional layer of meaning to an already complex story. The various benevolent roles Stamp Paid plays convey much more significance when the reader discovers what his original name is and what prompts him to change his biblical name—Joshua. Besides the titular character Beloved and Joshua-turned-Stamp Paid, the names of the three Pauls, of Ella’s husband John and the female protagonist (Sethe) are also biblically significant.<sup>14</sup> Even the number 124, which opens each of the three parts, invokes Psalm 124, which is a psalm of King David to his God and refuge.<sup>15</sup> My final example is

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<sup>12</sup> This is the Fifth Commandment.

<sup>13</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

<sup>14</sup> According to Genesis 4:25, Seth was born after the slaying of Abel by Cain, and Eve believed God had appointed him as a “replacement” for Abel “because Cain killed him.” In the Hebrew Bible, Seth is the ancestor of Noah and hence the father of all mankind.

<sup>15</sup> Psalm 124 reads:

- 1 If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side,  
now may Israel say;
- 2 If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side,  
when men rose up against us:
- 3 then they had swallowed us up quick,  
when their wrath was kindled against us:
- 4 then the waters had overwhelmed us,  
the stream had gone over our soul:
- 5 then the proud waters had gone over our soul.
- 6 Blessed *be* the LORD,  
who hath not given us *as* a prey to their teeth.
- 7 Our soul is escaped as a bird

culled from page 259: “In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like.” Morrison must have had John 1:1 in mind when she depicted the manner by which a group of thirty black women, led by Ella and intent on rescuing Sethe from the tormenting apparition, resort to their cultural roots to exorcise the ghost.<sup>16</sup> In order to avoid interfering with the pace of reading by conducting extensive biblical explanations, I simply footnoted the source of the biblical allusions. All these examples indicate that without some background knowledge of the Western Judeo-Christian tradition, a translator would be liable to commit key textual blunders here.

Another problem I had to cope with is the narrative style and oral qualities of the work, which, in many ways, is unique to the novels of Toni Morrison; therefore, in translating *Beloved*, I tried to retain as much as possible the narrative style and oral qualities of my Chinese. First of all, to engage the reader in the story, Morrison tends to induce a participatory relationship between the text and the reader. In her conversation with Charles Ruas, Morrison remarks that she tries to make her reader “naked and quite vulnerable, nevertheless trusting . . . in order to engage [the reader] in the novel” and to experience “a strong intimacy [with characters] that’s so complete, it humanizes [the reader]” (109). Take as an example the opening sentence of

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out of the snare of the fowlers:  
the snare is broken, and we are escaped.  
8 Our help *is* in the name of the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.

<sup>16</sup> John 1:1 reads: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” See also Genesis 1:1, where the Bible unfolds with the Hymn of Creation: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”



*Beloved*: “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom. The woman in the house knew it and so did the children” (3). The novel opens with a simple, declarative sentence describing the state of 124. But what is 124? It is not immediately clear until the reader reaches the third sentence. As Bhabha has perceptively observed, “it is the cryptic circulation of number as the very first word, as the displacement of the ‘personalized’ prediction of language, that speaks the presence of the slave world” (199). Why is 124 spiteful and full of a baby’s venom? The reason remains obscure until much later. To find out the answer to many plot questions, the reader is thus obliged to actively take part in the story, rather than passively watch the action unfold. As Morrison pointed out in “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature”:

. . . the *in medias res* opening that I am so committed to is here excessively demanding. It is abrupt, and should appear so. No native informant here. The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel’s population. (Bloom: 228)

Here is my rendering of the first three sentences: 「一二四號帶有怨氣，瀟灑著一名嬰孩的怨恨。屋裡的女人和小孩都見識過。」(2003:5)

An example of a different narrative style and tone appears at the textual center of the novel. In the chapter that begins with “When the four horsemen came. . .” (148), the events at the crux of the novel are narrated from the white man’s point of view, which appears cold, aloof, detached and clinical. What is

brought into relief here is blatant racism and the white man's lack of compassion for the plight of blacks. As a matter of fact, the white man regards Sethe's infanticide as "testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (1987:151). Here is my translation for the quoted passage: 「證明了一點所謂的自由加諸在這幫人身上的後果，這幫人在在需要照料和指引，以免回復他們所偏好的骨肉相殘的生活。」(2003:181). So, besides presenting the viewpoints of ex-slaves, Morrison also offers white perspectives.

Another characteristic of Morrison's fiction is its aural quality. As if to echo the words of the third-person omniscient narrator on page 259, "In the beginning was the sound," Morrison pays special attention to the acoustic effect of her writing. Let us see what happens when we change the opening sentence and the adjective phrase to "124 was spiteful, full of a baby's venom," or "124 was spiteful and full of a baby's venom." Though semantically identical or similar, both forms sound less powerful than the original, for their accent on *full* is much reduced. In an interview Morrison stresses her efforts "to make aural literature—A-U-R-A-L—work because I hear it . . . the way I hear it is the way I write it" (Davis 230). With regard to the sound of *Beloved*, Morrison says:

And the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious, must be an inner ear sound or a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can. ("Unspeakable," 228)

I must admit that preserving the aural quality in the Chinese version constitutes one of the hardest tasks I have ever undertaken. For one thing, as a monosyllabic language, Chinese differs from English in terms of its acoustic constitution. For another, I am not very good at recognizing the acoustic quality of language.

Indeed, I found myself hard put when I came across the poetic prose and songs that abound in Morrison's work. Songs are an important part of African and African American cultures. In translating the song sung by Amy Denver (pp. 80-81), the poor white girl who helped Sethe deliver the baby, I first counted the number of syllables in each line so as to know how many Chinese words to use; while putting the meaning across as close as possible, I tried hard to maintain most of the corresponding rhyme schemes in my Chinese version.

Here is my rendering of the long song sung by Amy Denver:

<i>"Through the muck and mist and gloam</i>	「穿過糞堆、迷霧和暮色
<i>To our quiet cozy home,</i>	回到我們安靜舒適的家
<i>Where to singing sweet and low</i>	一張搖籃搖啊搖著
<i>Rocks a cradle to and fro.</i>	伴隨悅耳的輕聲唱歌
<i>Where the clock's dull monotone</i>	時鐘滴答真單調
<i>Telleth of the day that's done,</i>	訴說一天過去了，
<i>Where the moonbeams hover o'er</i>	道道月光灑遍
<i>Playing sleeping on the floor,</i>	玩具躺臥在地面，
<i>Where my weary wee one lies</i>	睡著我疲倦的小寶寶
<i>Cometh Lady Button Eyes.</i>	扣子眼夫人就來到。」

*Layeth she her hands upon  
My dear weary little one,  
And those white hands overspread  
Like a veil the curly head,  
Seem to fondle and caress  
Every little silken tress.  
Then she smooths the eyelids down  
Over those two eyes of brown  
In such soothing tender wise  
Cometh Lady Button Eyes.”*

(1987:81)

「他把雙手置放  
我疲倦的小寶寶身上，  
那雙白手如紗帳  
往捲髮的頭上罩，  
似乎在撫弄輕觸  
每根絲般的小鬚毛。  
她讓寶寶的上眼瞼覆下  
在那兩顆褐眼珠上  
動作多麼撫慰輕柔  
扣子眼夫人出現了。」

(2003:97-98)

With the same care, I rendered the two songs Paul D sang on the day he was mending the things he had broken the previous day (1987: 40) and the song that opens the penultimate chapter, introducing the return of the transformed Paul D to 124 (263). Let me show you the Chinese versions of Paul D's songs:

*Little rice, little bean,  
No meat in between.  
Hard work ain't easy,  
Dry bread ain't greasy. (1987:40)*

*Lay my head on the railroad line,  
Train come along, pacify my mind.  
If I had my wright in lime,*

一點米，一點豆，  
裡頭沒有肉。  
幹粗活可不易，  
乾麵包不油膩。(2003:48)

我躺在鐵道線上，  
火車來了，安撫我心房，  
如果我有能力的話，

<i>I'd whip my captain</i>	我會鞭打隊長
<i>till he went stone blind.</i>	直到他全盲。
<i>Five-cent nickel,</i>	五分錢叫 <i>nickel</i> ，
<i>Ten-cent dime,</i>	十分錢叫 <i>dime</i> ，
<i>Busting rocks is busting time.</i>	砸石頭等於砸光陰。
(1987:40)	(2003:48-49)

<i>Bare feet and chamomile sap</i>	赤著腳和甘菊枝液。
<i>Took off my shoes; took off my hat.</i>	脫我的鞋；脫我的帽。
<i>Bare feet and chamomile sap</i>	赤著腳和甘菊汁液。
<i>Gimme back my shoes;</i>	還我的鞋；
<i>gimme back my hat.</i>	還我的帽。
<i>Lay my head on a potato sack,</i>	頭枕馬鈴薯袋睡，
<i>Devil sneak up behind my back.</i>	魔鬼暗中爬上背。
<i>Steam engine got a lonesome whine;</i>	蒸汽機孤獨地鳴叫；
<i>Love that woman till you go stone blind.</i>	愛那女人到全瞎了。
<i>Stone blind; stone blind.</i>	全瞎了；全瞎了。
<i>Sweet Home gal</i>	「甜蜜之家」姑娘
<i>make you lose your mind.</i>	讓你瘋掉。
(1987:263)	(2003:313)

In depicting Sethe's memory of her sexual and emotional intimacy with Halle in the cornfield, Morrison employs the trope of cornsilk hair and the husk to great artistic effect. Here I was stuck with the phrases "jailed down" and "jailed-up" in the exclamatory refrain:

How loose the silk. How **jailed down** the juice. . . . How loose the silk.  
How quick the **jailed-up** flavor ran free. (27)

I am little satisfied with my own choice of words (「飽滿」) and (「禁錮」) for the two phrases.

Morrison is able to use poetic prose for great effect in the open-ended coda that is characteristic of her fictional writing. Short as it is, the ending of *Beloved* contains a great deal of food for the imagination. Let me quote the first paragraph:

THERE is a loneliness that can be rocked. Arms crossed, knees drawn up; holding, holding on, this motion, unlike a ship's, smooths and contains the rocker. It's an inside kind—wrapped tight like skin. Then there is a loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive, on its own. A dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet going seem to come from a far-off place. (1987:274)

有一種孤獨可以讓人搖晃。手臂交叉，膝蓋抬起；握著、緊握著，這個動作並不像船艦的顛簸，使搖的人克制情緒，然後平靜下來。它是一種內心的孤獨——像皮膚一般緊緊裹著。還有一種孤獨四處流浪，怎麼搖晃也壓制不了。它孤單地活著，是一種乾燥而蔓延的東西，使你自己的腳步聲聽起來好像來自一個遙遠的地方。(2003:327)

In her conversation with Marsha Darling, Morrison says, “I don't want to write books that you can close and walk on off and read another one right away. . . It's not over just because it stops. It lingers and it's passed on” (253).

Does the term “passed on” here contain the same denotation as the phrase “pass on” in the refrain (“It was not a story to pass on.”) interposed within the passage of the lyrical ending? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Anyhow, in translating the phrase as 「流傳」, other possible meanings in the original phrase are irrevocably lost.

But the hardest linguistic nut for me to crack was translating the various interior monologues in Part Two, especially the chapter narrated through Beloved’s “Middle Passage” stream of consciousness. In translating these chapters, I attempted to retain the stylistic and syntactical properties of the source text. For instance, the two closely-related chapters that begin with “I AM BELOVED and she is mine” (210, 214) differ in style and syntax. The first one is composed of sentences without punctuation and transitional devices; to follow the typographical scheme of the chapter, I, in my Chinese version, made corresponding use of spacing between sentences and double gaps between paragraphs. The second one contains a punctuated prose narrative of Beloved’s interior monologue and a poetic dialogue between Sethe and Beloved, then Denver and Beloved, then all three, who, it seems, all want to possess one another. At first I had trouble figuring out what the recurrent word “clouds” means in the first chapter: “I would help her but the clouds are in the way” (210); “I could not help her because the clouds were in the way” (211). It was not until the following chapter where Beloved in her first-person monologue mentions “the clouds of gunsmoke” and “the noisy clouds of smoke” (214) that I realize its real meaning—gunsmoke during the hunt for slaves in Africa. The difficulty with these obsessive, possessive interplay of voices lay not so much in deciding their lexical or semantic meaning as in

matching the tone of the utterers with their emotional entanglements.

Dialogues, slangs, colloquialisms and word-play would all, on occasion, present problems for me. For instance, I had difficulty understanding an informal expression used by Baby Suggs: “Can you beat that?” (5). Not until I consulted a dictionary of American slangs did I figure out its true meaning. As this expression indicates Baby Sugg’s surprise and perhaps her annoyance about how little she remembers of her first-born, I thought the Chinese expression 「你說奇怪不奇怪？」 would fit in the context. In response to Sethe’s question —“Is that you?”— at their first meeting after eighteen years of separation, Paul D replies with “What’s left” (6). I had a tough time rendering this short reply, which may imply either that the Paul D sitting in front of Sethe is what is left of the Paul D eighteen years before or that he is the only survivor of the Sweet Home men. I am not satisfied with my own translation— 「就是剩下的那個」(9)—not only because of its wordiness but because of its failure to retain both implications. Perhaps 「劫後餘生」 would be better. Shortly afterwards, when they talk about Halle, Sethe’s husband who did not show up at their appointed time to escape to the North, Sethe says, “. . . It’s not being sure that keeps him alive” (8). It took me some time to comprehend what she means by this understatement: 「讓他在心中存活著，是基於無法確定」(10). One mistake I made has to do with the word “quiet” in the following sentence: “Although they had been polite to her during the quiet time and gave her the whole top of the bed. . .” (19). Initially, I thought “during the quiet time” refers to Denver’s two-year deafness; hence I rendered this phrase as 「在她失聰的時候」 (“zhai ta shi-cong de shi-hou” [24-25]). Now I realize that the phrase actually indicates the period of the ghost’s absence. Near



the end of Part Two, when Paul D, in response to Stamp Paid's ultimate revelation that he was there, in the yard, when Sethe committed the act of infanticide, tells Stamp Paid about how the oil-black girl showed up on the day of the carnival, with "silk dress and brand-new shoes." Stamp replies, "You don't say? . . ." (235). Not until I asked a native speaker of English did I realize the true meaning of this colloquial expression—"Really?" (「真的嗎？」)

My first example of word-play is taken from the opening chapter in Part Two when Stamp Paid was ruminating over the past, when there had been something interesting between his legs: ". . . when that drive drove the driven" (170). I finally came up with 「當時那股衝勁無往不利」(201). In the penultimate chapter, when Paul D asks the grown-up Denver whether Beloved is really her sister, Denver responds with a sarcastic pun: "But who would know that better than you, Paul D? I mean, you sure 'nough knew her" (267). For the word "know" or "knew," I could not think of a Chinese parlance able to preserve the dual meaning of "understand" and "have sexual intercourse with"; all I could do is clarify the pun in a footnote.

Sometimes, pronouns and proper nouns present difficulties, too. For example, I had a devil of a time deciphering the meaning of "it" in the passage where Paul D reflects upon the revolting scene he witnessed on the morning after his arrival at the prison camp in Alfred, Georgia. To illustrate why I would call the "it" here one of Paul D's "unspeakable things unspoken" (quoting Toni Morrison), I hereby quote the passage at length:

Chain-up completed, they knelt down. The dew, more likely than not, was mist by then. Heavy sometimes and if the dogs were quiet and just

breathing you could hear doves. Kneeling in the mist they waited for the whim of a guard, or two, or three. Or maybe all of them wanted *it*. Wanted *it* from one prisoner in particular or none—or all.

“Breakfast? Want some breakfast, nigger?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Hungry, nigger?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Here you go.” (107-08, italics mine)

Grammatically, the pronoun “it” seems to refer to the word “whim.” But what is the whim of the white guard(s)? At this point, it is not readily discernible, even to a native speaker of English. Indeed, not until the reader comes across the word “foreskin” in the next paragraph does the meaning of “it” become evident:

Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus. Paul D did not know that then. He was looking at his palsied hands, smelling the guard, listening to his soft grunts so like the doves’, as he stood before the man kneeling in the mist on his right. Convinced he was next, Paul D retched—vomiting up nothing at all. An observing guard smashed his shoulder with the rifle and the engaged one decided to skip the new man for the time being lest his pants and shoes got soiled by nigger puke. (108)

It now becomes clear that the italicized “it” refers to oral sex (「口交」) and that

the white guard's nasty command—"Here you go."—should be translated as 「吃吧」 or 「吸吧」 rather than 「去你的。」(131). Another mistake I should not have made concerns the pronoun "they" in the sentence: "Whatever they were or might have been, Paul D messed them up for good" (37). Here the word "they" actually refers to the recurrent word "plans" in the proceeding section, rather than "persons."

If the female protagonist's name Sethe is a derivative of the biblical Seth, then her husband's name Halle, as I come to understand now, may be short for "Hallelujah"; therefore, 「哈利」 would be a better rendition than 「黑利」, a phenomenon which calls to mind the problem of translating other ironic or humorous proper names like "Paul A," "Paul D," "Paul F," "Sixo," "Seven-O," "Baby Suggs," "Stamp Paid," "School Teacher," "Thirty-Mile Woman," "Here Boy" (a dog), "Brother" (a tree), "Mister" (a rooster), which were rendered as 「保羅一」, 「保羅四」, 「保羅六」, 「阿六」, 「阿七」, 「寶貝薩格斯」, 「史坦普·培德」, 「學校老師」, 「三十哩女子」, 「來, 乖乖」, 「兄弟」 and 「先生」, respectively. Among these proper names, I now feel that it would be better to translate "Stamp Paid" as 「郵資已付」. With regard to the question of my rendition of "Sethe" into 「柴特」, I would explain that according to *English Pronouncing Dictionary of Proper Names*, "Sethe" is pronounced as [zeitə] (Otsuka 791) and that Sethe's mother names her daughter after her black lover. As Nan discloses to small girl Sethe: "You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never" (62).

Finally, I would like to say a few words about cultural barriers. Several years ago, while talking about *Beloved* with an American-born Chinese from

Kentucky, she told me of a song by Stephen Foster called “My Old Kentucky Home,” first released in 1853. We have no idea whether Morrison had this in mind when she named Mr. Garner’s Kentucky plantation “Sweet Home,” but with this cultural understanding, our appreciation of the ironic import of “Sweet Home” would be much deeper. For the slaves, “Sweet Home” is never a “home,” let alone “sweet;” indeed, they are placed or displaced in what Homi Bhabha has called “the community of the unhomely” (16). As Gregory Rabassa has observed, “probably the most difficult aspect of translation is the necessary but often futile attempt to preserve or convey a cultural milieu and its concomitants through words” (10). After a stranger who calls herself “Beloved” first appears at 124, Paul D is reminded of the plight of the diasporic men of color, “chased by debt and filthy ‘talking sheets’” (52), which I mistakenly translated as 「犯罪檔案」(64). Here, the term “talking sheets” probably refers to the white cloaks worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan (「三K黨」). Likewise, when I first came across the word “Delaware” in “After Delaware and before that Alfred, Georgia. . .” (40) and “a weaver lady in Delaware” (66), I thought it meant the state of Delaware. It was not until much later when I came across the recurrent phrase “the Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio” (173, 183) that I realized my mistake. Furthermore, the text is replete with references to the history, geography and culture of the American south and the state of Ohio, like the Middle Passage, Dred Scott, the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, the Underground Railroad, juba, Cumberland, Oberlin, Selma, Trenton, and Mobile. With a view to helping the Chinese reader, I usually footnoted these historical, geographical or cultural references.

#### IV. Epilogue

The story of *Beloved* originated from an article Toni Morrison came across in the early 1970s, while she was helping a friend named Middleton Harris gather material for *The Black Book*. Entitled “A visit to a Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child,” the article about Margaret Garner kept haunting Morrison. So, in writing *Beloved*, Morrison has, in a sense, “translated the historical into the personal” (McKay 1998:11). Yet, the story about slavery and its impact upon the human psyche seems too much for the characters and the author to bear. Hence, the omniscient narrator comments at the end, “This is not a story to pass on” (275). Paradoxically, by giving voice and paying homage to those “sixty million and more” who died as a result of slavery, Morrison herself has guaranteed that this story will be passed on, or *translated*, and that the issue of slavery will not be consigned to collective oblivion or amnesia. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has astutely remarked,

. . . here the author represents with violence a certain birth-in-death, a death-in-birth of a story that is not to translate or pass on. Strictly speaking, therefore, an aporia. And yet it is passed on, with the mark of *untranslatability* on it, in the bound book, *Beloved*, that we hold in our hands. (195)

Viewed in this light, the Chinese version of *Beloved* is already a translation of translation, bound to be passed on to Chinese-speaking readers not in the American South, but on the other side of the globe. As such, it “marks [*Beloved*’s] stage of continued life” (Benjamin 71).

Now, the more I examine my Chinese version against the English, the more I feel I could have done better. This growing dissatisfaction echoes what Gregory Rabassa has said about a translation's perennial unfinishedness:

The translator can never be sure of himself, he must never be. He must always be dissatisfied with what he does because ideally, platonically, there is a perfect solution, but he will never find it. He can never enter into the author's being and even if he could the difference in language would preclude any exact reproduction. (12)

Recently, I have discovered that the compound noun “Bluestone” in the very first paragraph of the novel may also be a combination of “Blues” plus “tone” (「藍調」), besides being a combination of “Blue” plus “stone” (「藍石」). A part of the compound's dual significance is therefore lost in my translation. As *Beloved* is indeed “a *big* book,” it is my fondest hope that my Chinese translation retains some of the “bigness” perceptively mapped out by Nellie Y. McKay:

*Beloved* is a *big* book, not in its 273 pages. . .but in the depth of the feelings it invokes by way of what critics Ann Snitow calls “the terror of its material” as well as its spiritual richness; in the complexities of its layers of meaning embedded in meticulously crafted yet passionate prose; in the author's powers of imagination and mastery of language; and in its impact on readers. (1998: 10; italics original)

If “every translator is in a position to speak *about* translation” (Derrida 184, italic original), then the following observations concerning the craft and

art of translation derive from my own experiences with it. First, a good literary translator has to be a good writer, but a good writer is not necessarily a good literary translator. Second, proficiency in both source and target cultures is a key precondition for a good translation. Third, as “a purposeful activity” (Nord 1), translating is the closest or the most intimate form of reading. Fourth, translation is a conditioned form of creation, and its originality lies in its expression, in addition to its faithful transmission of content. Homi K. Bhabha also looks upon translation as a generative and creative activity (38). Another observation is that, metaphorically speaking, a good translation is always a labor of love. In his reading/translation of Benjamin’s metaphorical essay, Derrida points to the presence of love in the process of translation (189-90), for Benjamin writes, “. . . a translation . . . must *lovingly* and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel” (78, emphasis added). In other words, translation is not just a craft but an art of cross-cultural exchange. Just as the word “translation” means, etymologically, “carried from one place to another,” transported across the borders between one language and another, one country and another, one culture and another (Miller 3), so my translation carries Toni Morrison and her *Beloved*, trans-hemispherically, from the United States over to the other side of the globe, making the arguably most difficult work of the difficult writer more accessible to the Chinese-speaking public. Through a lengthy contact between the bodies of the English and Chinese languages, I have given birth to another *Beloved* which, now in its third printing, “will truly be a moment in the growth of [Morrison’s *Beloved*], which will complete itself

*in enlarging itself*” (Derrida 188). As Benjamin has famously observed,

a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life. (71)

It is hoped that in the process of translating Morrison’s *Beloved*, I have, to paraphrase Derrida, produced a harmonious accord or a complementarity between English and Chinese, thereby redeeming in Chinese that pure language exiled in English (Derrida 202, 188).



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