A Study of the Translation of Gothic Novels from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics——Taking Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Black Cat* as an Example

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Abstract:
Translation is a bridge between Chinese and Western cultures, and the translation theory has an indispensable guiding role for different translations. This paper selects two Chinese translations of *The Black Cat* by Edgar Allan Poe as the research object. In order to discuss whether Cao Minglun and Chen Liangting meet the need of readers’ horizon of expectation and the calling structure of the text, the author will use translation strategies to explore the guiding role of the Translation Aesthetics Theory on the translation of Gothic novels. Therefore, readers can better understand the content of the article and reach a consensus with the writer.

Key Words: Translation Aesthetics; horizon of expectation; calling structure; Gothic novels
Introduction

Translation can effectively link Chinese and Western cultures, and the translation theory can guide different translations. This paper selects two Chinese translations of *The Black Cat* by Edgar Allan Poe as the research object under the guidance of Translation Aesthetics. Since Translation Aesthetics is a broad concept, this paper will mainly focus on Reception Aesthetics, an essential part of Translation Aesthetics. Using the theoretical perspective of Reception Aesthetics Theory, and using translation strategies and translation techniques, the two Chinese translations are studied to satisfy the readers’ horizon of expectation and the text’s scaling structure according to some examples. Therefore, readers can better understand the content of the article and reach a consensus with the author. This paper will also fill the gap in the translation of Gothic novels under the guidance of Reception Aesthetics Theory, to a certain extent.

The first part of the paper concludes four sub-categories, which will give a short introduction of the paper. And the second part is to give a brief explanation of Reception Aesthetics Theory. Moreover, this part will introduce two main concepts of Reception Aesthetics Theory, which will exert an indispensable part in the subsequent research. Lastly, the paper will have a case study on translation versions. In this part, the author will discuss that how to translate Gothic novels under the guidance of Reception Aesthetics Theory.
Part I Task Description

1.1 Introduction of the source text

Edgar Allen Poe has an irreplaceable position in the history of American literature. Poe’s reasoning detective novels and grotesque horror novels have been widely recognized and praised. And he was marked as one of the best novelists of the 19th century in the United States. In *The Black Cat*, Poe creatively used the “confessional monologue” approach, and described the mental journey of a psychopath before and after the crime in the first person.

Originally, the protagonist in the story was a kind and gentle person, who loved small animals. And he married a wife who loved animals, too. After marriage, the protagonist had a very close relationship with Pluto, a black cat. Later, he began to drink and became moody, often abused the wife and became cruel to animals. One night, after being drunk, he gouged out one of Pluto’s eyes. Afterwards, he regretted. However, when he wanted to get close to Pluto, he found that it didn’t want to be close to him. As a result, he became angry and hanged Pluto. After the accident, the protagonist adopted a black cat that one of its eyes has been gouged out, just like Pluto. But he treated this black cat in the same way of treating Pluto. One day in the cellar, the black cat almost tripped the protagonist, so he picked up the axe and chopped it off, but it was hacked to the wife who endeavored to stop him, and the black cat disappeared. He hid the wife in the wall in the cellar to prevent police from tracking, but his cruelty was exposed in front of the police because of the roar of the black cat that was hiding in the wall.

1.2 The features of the source text

Undoubtedly, *The Black Cat* is one of the classics in Gothic novels. The term “goth” in Gothic novels refers to some tribes of the Germanic people. The Goths living in the northern and eastern borders of the Roman Empire destroyed the ancient Roman Empire and fought against it. Therefore, the word Gothic has the meanings of “barbaric”, “blood” and “supernatural”. In the 12th century, the concept of “goth” appeared in buildings. The light cast from the towering spires, and the magical mystery created by the stained glass windows subvert the traditional Roman architectural concept. This architectural style was later introduced to the UK and became popular in the UK. This unique architectural style gave the writers a new aesthetic perspective and incorporated the feelings into their writings. Traditional Gothic novels embody a binary opposition: Justice and evil, orthodoxy and subversion, reason and desire. Most of the places appear in buildings such as castles and churches. The protagonists are generally noble and dignified. They have both the aristocratic atmosphere and the bourgeois diligence. After a series of sufferings, they generally end with evil incompetence. On the American continent, different social backgrounds and history have caused variations between American Gothic novels and European traditional Gothic novels. Slavery, civil war, and feminist movements on the American continent have impacted the conservative ideas of the colonies. Edgar Allan Poe, who is known as the “Psychological Gothic Originator”, is different from the past Gothic writers in shaping the feeling of fear with the help of Gothic scenes. This fear
is derived from the environment, not the heart.

For example, the shock in *The Black Cat* is largely from psychological feelings rather than the effects of artificial environments. The dark horror from the outside can be controlled, but the vortex from the heart seems to be a bottomless black hole that gradually engulfs the protagonist and the readers. Poe rarely describes the scenes in the story, almost all of which are self-confessions and abnormal psychological changes and detailed descriptions of actions. In addition, the protagonists in traditional Gothic novels are generally people with certain social status, while the characters in Poe’s articles are all beings. The protagonist in *The Black Cat* both hates reality and is forced by reality. In this kind of difficulty, the protagonist becomes almost crazy. At this time, the inner feelings of the protagonist are deeply dissected and deepened, revealing the nature of human.

In the ending of the story, the traditional Gothic novels are mostly comedy endings. The so-called evils are invincible. However, the characters under the Poe’s pens are almost all falling into their own soul vortex for self-destruction. The protagonist in *The Black Cat* ended up being evil because the devil in the protagonist’s heart kept doing evil.

In the previous Gothic novels, the classic description of locations are castles, churches and graves. In addition to the classic scenes such as Gothic castles, Poe’s works also chose different venues. Although these buildings have closed and dark common features, such as castles, they are closer to ordinary people’s lives. In *The Black Cat*, the secret cellar was chosen. In addition, the symbolic technique was successfully applied to two black cats: the first cat was named “Pluto”, the god of death in Greek mythology, which metaphorized the meaning of sin and lure; and the white spot on the second cat’s chest resembles a gallows and expresses the uneasiness and fear of the protagonist towards the sin.

1.3 Introduction of the translations

The paper selects the translations of *The Black Cat* by two translators, Cao Minglun and Chen Lianting. In the translation process, Cao Minglun uses the method of literal translation largely, which is conducive to readers’ understanding of the habits of Western expressions. In addition, Cao’s language is flowerier and closer to the original work. And he would like to use long and complex sentences when translating this novel.

Nevertheless, Chen Lianting uses free translation largely which enables his translation more acceptable and understandable. Moreover, he would like to use simple and short sentences and prefers to explain the potential or extended meaning in the source text so as to make his translation readable.

1.4 Significance of the report

The purpose of this paper is to explore the guiding role of Reception Aesthetics Theory in the translation of Gothic novels in theory and practice. In theory, since the introduction of Reception Aesthetics Theory into China, many scholars have explored the guiding role of Reception Aesthetics Theory on various reading materials, such as *Hunter’s Notes, Wolf Totem, The Izu’s*
Dancer and Snow Country, etc. However, few scholars have studied the guiding role of Gothic novels from the perspective of Reception Aesthetics Theory. Therefore, this paper will focus on this blank point, with Edgar Allan Poe’s The Black Cat as the research object, in order to provide some new ideas for the methods and strategies of Gothic novel translation under the guidance of Reception Aesthetics Theory.

By comparing different translation methods adopted in translating The Black Cat, this paper attempts to discuss the practical value of Reception Aesthetics theory on Gothic novel translation. It is beneficial to help learners understand Gothic novels and Reception Aesthetics Theory. And the combination of Reception Aesthetics Theory and Gothic novel is analyzed in terms of vocabularies, phrases and choices of sentences in translation in order to broaden the readers’ aesthetic perspective on reading Gothic novels and deepen the readers’ important role in the acceptance and understanding of Gothic novels.

Part II Translation Aesthetics

2.1 The background of Translation Aesthetics

Reception Aesthetics is an important part of Translation Aesthetics, so this part will mainly focus on the background of Reception Aesthetics.

Reception Aesthetics was born in the late 1960s and flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, it has gradually integrated into various new trends of philosophy and aesthetics during the following 20 years. Influenced by philosophical hermeneutics, it was transmitted to China in the mid-1980s and was widely concerned.

Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser of the Constance School are representatives of Reception Aesthetics. “Reception Aesthetics is divided into two major directions: Reception Studies and Effect Studies.” (Jin, 1998: 47) The former is represented by Hans Robert Jauss, paying attention to readers and their aesthetic experience, and attaches great importance to the meaning of readers from a macro perspective. The latter is represented by Wolfgang Iser, which focuses on the text itself, and the perspective begins with micro-cognition and then studies the connection between the recipient and the work.

In 1967, Jauss published a programmatic document on Reception Aesthetics-Literature History as a Challenge to Literary Theory, and proposed a literary and historical view of Reception Aesthetics. In 1970, Iser published The Calling Structure of the Text, which proposed the calling structure of Reception Aesthetics and the theory of readers’ reflection. The birth of these two articles marks the acceptance of Reception Aesthetics on the historical stage of literary theory.

Reception Aesthetics places great emphasis on the readers’ ability to act in the realization of literary values, which places readers in an important position. Reception Aesthetics believes that the study of literary works should focus on the readers’ acceptance, response, and readers’ aesthetic experience and the effect of acceptance. At the same time, Jauss also pointed out that the readers’
capability to act is not only reflected in its ability to determine the degree of acceptance of literary works and its status and evaluation in the history of literature, but also in its indirect influence on the reproduction of literature.

2.2 Previous studies of Translation Aesthetics

As Reception Aesthetics is an indispensable part of Translation Aesthetics, this part will mainly focus on the previous studies of Reception Aesthetics.

Since the rise of the Reception Aesthetics Theory, a large number of books have emerged. In the West, the study of the Reception Aesthetics Theory in recent years has focused on the application of inquiry. Some scholars use the practice of Reception Aesthetics to explore text media, such as Susanne Eichner’s *Textuality and Media - Analysis of Typical Cases*; some scholars take advantage of Reception Aesthetics to study the translation of the Bible. For example, Renate Andrea Klein published *Einander wahr-nehmen*.

Since Reception Aesthetics was introduced to China, there have been many publications introducing it. These books are mainly explored in two major areas. The first is to explore the theory of Reception Aesthetics. For example, in Zhu Liyuan’s *Introduction to Reception Aesthetics*, Reception Aesthetics is examined and accepted from the perspective of Chinese people, and the birth and development of Reception Aesthetics is discussed. Besides, the theories of Jauss and Iser are thoroughly explored. The second is to explore the application of Reception Aesthetics, in other words, using the Reception Aesthetics Theory to analyze different fields. For example, the book with the name of *Research on the Theory of Reception Aesthetics and Integrating into Writing Teaching——Taking the Picture Book of Three Little Pigs as an Example* that is published by Wang Qing; some people focus on literary translation, such as Zhang Jiaojiao’s *Record of Aesthetics and the True Story of Ah Q*.

2.3 The main concepts in Translation Aesthetics

Since Translation Aesthetics is a broad concept, this part will mainly focus on the main concepts in Reception Aesthetics.

2.3.1 Horizon of Expectation

“Horizon of Expectation” can be called “Forethought” or “Pre-understanding”. Jauss believes that before reading the work, the comprehension and understanding of readers about the work are not a blank piece of paper, but they have some tendency. The inner heart of readers have certain standards and some aesthetic requirements. This is the readers’ “Horizon of Expectation”. The so-called “Horizon of Expectation” refers to a kind of appreciation requirement or level of appreciation of literary works formed by the readers during the process of taking part in literary receptive activities. The readers have various experiences, interests, literacy, ideals, etc., which are expressed as a potential aesthetic expectation in the specific reading. “Horizon of Expectation” is closely related to the readers’ world view, outlook on life, level of knowledge, and artistic culture.
The readers do not passively accept literary works, but accept activities based on their own experience and knowledge, ability and interest, and changes with the improvement of personal cultivation, the promotion of time, and the development of history. The value and evaluation of literary and artistic works will also change. (Zhu, 2004: 61)

When readers read the text, “Horizon of Expectation” can awaken the readers’ prior knowledge, control or restrict the readers’ reading behavior, and then influence the readers’ judgment and assessment, so that the readers will form expectation towards the middle and the end of the text when reading the text at the first time. Since the “Horizon of Expectation” has a certain degree of thinking directivity, in the reading process, if the readers’ degree of instantaneous acceptance deviates from the expectation under the thinking directivity, the readers will produce various emotional fluctuations and mood fluctuations. And in the later stage of the reading process, there are two kinds of results in the satisfaction and failure of the “Horizon of Expectation”.

The “Horizon of Expectation” is historical and open. These two characteristics make it constantly changing and updating in the alternation of the times and the evolution of history. This means that the readers’ “Horizon of Expectation” is not static. Every new experience of reading will be constrained by the original “Horizon of Expectation”, and it will also modify and enrich the “Horizon of Expectation”. The “Horizon of Expectation” contains “oriented expectation”, which matches the readers’ original “Horizon of Expectation”, and the “innovation expectation” that refers to the part that breaking through the readers’ original “Horizon of Expectation”. Therefore, there will be a certain degree of aesthetic distance between the readers and the works, which will inspire readers to try to shorten and overcome the aesthetic gap, and then update their original “Horizon of Expectation”. Only works that is contradictory and integrated with the readers’ “Horizon of Expectation” will arouse readers’ interest.

2.3.2 Calling Structure

The “calling structure” is the main concept proposed by Iser. He believes that in order to realize its true meaning, an article needs to be re-created by readers to understand many “Blankness” and “Negation” in the article. He contends that the Indeterminacy of Meaning and Meaning Blankness of the work prompts the readers to find the meaning of the work, thus giving him the right to participate in exploring the meaning of the work. The Indeterminacy of Meaning and Meaning Blankness refers to the “calling structure”. According to Iser, the more Indeterminacy and Blankness in the work, the more space of imagination left for the readers. The readers can make full use of their own experience to make various imaginations and understandings of the article. It constitutes the “calling structure” of the work.

Iser thinks that the text has a “calling structure”, and the “calling structure” of the text is composed of three elements- “Blankness”, “Vacancy” and “Negation”. The “Blankness” refers to the part of the text that is not written or explicitly expressed. It gives the readers a hint so that their imagination can be inspired in order to complete the text. “Vacancy” is a dynamic concept that accompanying the readers’ reading process. The text is full of words that constituting sentences,
and each sentence points to the relevant picture. In the readers’ reading processes, as the viewpoint moves from words to sentences, then to the texts and to the chapters, there must be gaps between the scenes. This kind of “Blankness” is “Vacancy.” In addition to “Blankness” and “Vacancy”, Iser also proposed the concept of “Negation”, arguing that most literary texts are capable of initiating challenge and attack towards the existing norms of politics, thought, morality, ethics, law, etc. in the social reality of the readers. The “Negation” is essentially a breakthrough for readers’ expectation. Iser explains this concept in terms of both content and form. In terms of content, “Negation” means that the text can break down the old ideology and standardizing formed in the readers’ mind. Some of the readers’ old horizons will be gradually broken and negated as the reading activity progresses, and the readers’ “Horizon of Expectation” will change accordingly, thus gaining a new horizon. In terms of form, it means breaking through the “pre-image”. In the process of continuous reading, readers will inevitably think that there will be sentences that they are familiar with, but the expectations are often not realized. The text requires the readers to “negate” it instead of confirming it. “Blankness”, “Vacancy” and “Negation” together constitute the underlying structure of the literary text. The most fundamental feature of the “calling structure” is its calling.

The “calling structure” of the text is uncertain. When readers read the text, on the one hand, they will be influenced by their past experience and aesthetic perspective. On the other hand, they will embrace the imagination and expectation of the outside world, and enrich these blankness, vacancies and uncertain points in a way of re-creation. By determining, and making it concrete, the fixed text becomes flexible and readable, based on providing enough information to help the readers understand. The more Indeterminacy and Blankness in the literary text, the more possibilities for its generation of meaning; the deeper connotation, the higher quality of art; on the contrary, it is pale.

Part III Case Study on Translation Versions

3.1 Horizon of Expectation in translation

According to the “expectation theory” of Reception Aesthetics, an essential part of Translation Aesthetics, readers’ reading experience of literary works will constitute thinking orientation, which means that readers have a variety of aesthetic tastes and experiences before reading a literary work. Therefore, this part will analyze how the translator adapts to the readers’ requirements in translation and cares about the readers’ “Horizon of Expectation” through specific examples of Cao and Chen’s version.

3.1.1 A study at lexical level

Source text: Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators.
Target text: 我昏头昏脑，踉踉跄跄地走到那堵墙边。那具尸体已经腐烂不堪，凝满血块，赫然直立在大家眼前。 (Chen, 2012: 108)

我当时昏头昏脑，踉踉跄跄地退到对面墙根。那具已经腐烂并凝结着血块的尸体赫然直立在那帮警探眼前。 (Cao, 2017: 139)

This part is the detailed description that the protagonist knows that his crimes are about to be revealed. Readers will have this kind of expectation: the protagonist is very panic and fearful before the crime is about to be exposed. In the translation of the second sentence, Chen’s version is more common, allowing readers to clearly capture the specific scene at the time. However, compared with Chen’s version, Cao’s version is more faithful to readers’ expectation. “退” shows the panic of the protagonist accurately that is what the readers are eager to get in the novel.

Finally, by looking at the description of the corpse, the readers will have such an expectation in this part, a dead and bloody body. In this part, Chen Liangting pays attention to the word “greatly”, translating it into “腐烂不堪”, and he subtly translates “clotted with gore” into “凝满血块”. Compared with the version of Cao Minglun, “不堪”and “满” better meets the horrible details that readers want to read in Gothic novels.

Source text: ...opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket!

Target text: ..........................解开刀子,攥住那可怜畜生的喉咙,居心不良地把它眼珠剜了出来！(Chen, 2012: 98)

..........................一手将其打开,一手抓紧那可怜畜生的咽喉,不慌不忙地剜掉了它一只眼晴！ (Cao, 2017: 130)

This is the detailed description of the first atrocities committed by the protagonist in the novel after drinking alcohol. Through the expansion of the field of vision, the readers will have such a vision of expectation - the protagonist can not control the inner “PERVERSENESS” and he wants to get rid of the black cat’s eye. “Deliberately” has two meanings - one is “故意,蓄意,存心”, and the other is “不慌不忙地,小心翼翼地,从容不迫地”. Chen translates “deliberately” into “居心不良”, attaching great importance to the protagonist’s psychological intentions, that is, under the guidance of the protagonist’s inner thoughts of evil, he got the pleasure of crime by hurting other creatures. But Cao pays attention to the action itself. In this episode, the slow action is more horrifying than the direct action. So in order to show the readers the bloody scene at the time, he translates “deliberately” into “不慌不忙地”, using the slow motion and creating the effect of magnifying this bloody process and creating a horrible atmosphere that satisfies the readers’ expectation for this episode.

Source text: ...sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder...

Target text: .......它捣了鬼，诱使我杀了妻子。(Chen, 2012: 108)

......是它的狡猾诱使我杀了妻子。 (Cao, 2017: 139)

This is the description of the last part of the novel. The readers will have such an expectation in this part according to the previous description: the black cat is the root of the protagonist’s crime. The literal meaning of the word “craft” is “诡计,手腕”. Chen translates it into “捣鬼”, that is, “暗
中玩弄诡计进行搅扰或破坏”，which subtly expresses the protagonist’s fear towards ghosts. In terms of language style, Chen’s version is more colloquial, which eliminates the aesthetic distance and conforms to the readers’ expectation. Cao translates it into “狡猾” that breaking the readers’ expectation horizon, and produced an aesthetic distance. Therefore, Chen’s version is more wonderful.

Source text: I withdrew my arm from her grasp, and buried the axe in her brain.

Target text: 趁势挣脱胳臂，对准她脑袋就砍了一斧。 (Chen, 2012: 104)

我从她手中抽回我的胳膊，一斧子砍进了她的脑袋。 (Cao, 2017: 136)

This is the detailed description that the protagonist kills his wife cruelly after losing his reason completely. In the Oxford Advanced English-Chinese Dictionary, the word “bury” means “put deeply into sth”. Being taken into the context of the novel, it depicts that the protagonist spares no effort in the explosion. The readers will have such an expectation in this part. The wife tries to stop the protagonist killing the cat, but the protagonist cuts the axe into his wife’s head instead of stopping his behavior. Compared with Chen’s translation, Cao is more responsive to the readers’ expectation when translating the word “bury”. Cao Minglun added “进” to the translation, which made the amplitude of the movement bigger, and also changed it from a short momentary movement to a continuous movement, which makes the readers feel more visual in the process of reading and increases the sense of terror.

3.1.2 A study at rhetoric level

In addition to the lexical level, this paper will also explore the guiding role of the Reception Aesthetics Theory on Gothic novels from the perspective of rhetoric level. This part will focus on the use of the parallelism in The Black Cat.

Parallelism is a figure of speech that uses three or more words that are related or similar in structure. By putting the words and sentences with the same or similar structure or the same tone side by side, it can achieve an effect of reinforcing the language. It can make the rhythm of the article stronger, more rational, and more conducive to expressing strong feelings.

Source text: ...these events have terrified - have tortured - have destroyed me.

Target text: ......我饱尝惊慌，受尽折磨，终于毁了一生。 (Chen, 2012: 95)

......我一直担惊受怕，备受折磨，终至毁了自己。 (Cao, 2017: 128)

After reading the previous parts, the readers have sensed the extreme trepidation of the protagonist, and they would like to find the specific performance in the following part. Cao’s version retains the original pattern of sentence, which is faithful to the original text, but it widens the distance between readers and the author. Although Chen Liangting’s version retains the original sentence, “饱尝” “受尽” “毁了一生” is more preferred for readers.

Source text: I blush, I burn, I shudder…

Target text: ......我不禁面红耳赤，不寒而栗。 (Chen, 2012: 98)

......我面红耳赤，我周身发热，我浑身发抖。 (Cao, 2017: 130)
The protagonist uses three short sentences in a row and progressive way, expressing his inner pain and remorse. From the perspective of Chinese readers, it is easy for them to get that the protagonist endeavors to win sympathy from the readers, and they are keen on to reading it. Chen Liangting’s version merges the first two states into a four-character idiom, “面红耳赤”, which translates the original text concisely while widen the aesthetic distance. Cao Minglun translates the three sentences one by one, which can stimulate readers to construct images in their mind. According to “面红耳赤,周身发热,浑身发抖”, Cao’s version is more readable and acceptable for readers.

Source text: ...the image of a hideous - of a ghastly thing - of the GALLOWS!

Target text: ......原来这件东西是个吓人的幻象，是个恐怖东西的幻象——一个绞刑台！

(Chen, 2012: 103)

......那是一个可怕的图形，一件可怕的东西的图形，一个绞刑架的图形！

(Cao, 2017: 135)

This sentence describes a horrible atmosphere based on the “image”. And readers will have this kind of expectation: the protagonist is aghast at the white splotch on the breast of the adopted cat. Cao translates “image” into “图形”, which is not in accordance with the atmosphere and breaks the horizon of expectation of readers. Chen translates it into “幻象”, which is more preferred for the readers of Gothic novels.

3.2 Calling Structure in translation

The “calling structure” of the text is where the translator needs to pay attention to the translation of the article. That is to say, the translator needs to regard himself as the original reader when translating the novel, so as to understand the novel better and translate better works. The author will explain this part from the narrative perspective, rhetorical questions in Edgar Allan Poe’s novel The Black Cat.

Narrative perspective

In The Black Cat, the writer uses the first person narrative to show the inner monologue of a murderer, allowing readers to experience the thrills in the story, and to understand the incomprehensible murder motive and supernatural bizarre events at close range, which enhances the horror effect. And when Poe talks about memories, he often snarls in a calm tone and plain language. While increasing the authenticity of the story, Poe casts a mysterious veil on the fierce and horrifying events. The narrative style of the first person enhances the authenticity of the story; the feeling of recollection of the past gives people a sense of distance; the plain narrative adds to the mystery of the story. As a consequence, the translation of narrative perspective is rather important.

Source text: For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence.

Target text: 我要开讲的这个故事极其荒唐，却又极其平凡，我并不企求各位相
信，就连我的心里都不信这些亲身经历的事，若是指望人家相信，岂不是发疯了吗？

(Chen, 2012: 95)

对于我正要写出的这个荒诞不经但又朴实无华的故事，我既不期待也不乞求读者相信。若是我期望别人相信连我自己的理性都否认其真实性的故事，那我的确是疯了。(Cao, 2017: 128)

This is the beginning of *The Black Cat*. “For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen” assuredly increases the credibility of the narrative. While the second sentence leaves some Indeterminacy of meaning and Blankness, which makes the readers unconsciously participate in the story and want to know the story. Chen translates the second sentence into “就连我的心里都不信这些亲身经历的事，若是指望人家相信，岂不是发疯了吗？”. In Chen’s version, “心里都不信”， “亲身经历” and the rhetorical question clearly depict that this is the protagonist’s own story, which reduces the Indeterminacy of meaning and fills in the Blankness of the beginning. In Cao’s version, “连我自己的理性都否认其真实性的故事” is closer to the original works, but it ignores the Indeterminacy of meaning, to some extent. As a result, Chen’s translation of this part is better.

Rhetorical questions

*The Black Cat* is full of rhetorical questions, and the calling of the text is constructed from the side. The role of rhetorical questions is to strengthen the tone and express the established meaning more strongly. It is more powerful and vivid than the statement. The rhetorical questions generally do not need to be answered, because the answer itself is hidden in the question and is the only one. Poe often uses rhetorical questions in expressing the emotions, feelings, and moods of the characters in the works, which avoids directly describing the inner activities of the characters and leaves the reader with room for imagination.

**Source text:** Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?

**Target text:** 谁没有在无意中多次干下坏事或蠢事呢？而且这样干时无缘无故，心里明知干不得而偏要干。(Chen, 2012: 98)

谁不曾上百次地发现自己做一件恶事或蠢事的唯一动机就仅仅是因为他知道自己不该为之？(Cao, 2017: 131)

In this above example, “found himself committing a vile or a silly action” leaves some Indeterminacy of meaning and Blankness, which calls the translators to determine the meaning of the text and fill in the Blankness. When translating the rhetorical questions, Chen Liangting and Cao Minglun automatically and consciously guessed the inner thoughts of the protagonist and analyzed the emotional state of him. In Chen’s version, “而且这样干时无缘无故，心里明知干不得而偏要干”is closer to the protagonist’s psychological state. Moreover, compared with “唯一动机就仅仅是因为他知道自己不该为之?” in Cao’s version, “无缘无故，心里明知干不得而偏要干”can better fill in the calling structure of the text. Therefore, Chen Liangting’s version is preferred.
Conclusion

This thesis takes the Chinese versions of The Black Cat as the research objects, and studies the original text of Allan Poe’s The Black Cat. At the same time, it compares and analyzes the two Chinese versions, and uses the Reception Aesthetics Theory, an important part of Translation Aesthetics, to discuss that how the translators conform to the readers’ “Horizon of Expectation” and satisfy the “calling structure” of the text.

In the translation of the novel The Black Cat, first of all, the translator must clarify his identity. The translator is the first reader of the original text who constructs the meaning of the original work before the other readers. In other words, the translator is indispensable when translating a novel. The translator needs to take into account the readers’ horizon of expectation when translating the words and rhetoric sentences in The Black Cat, and ensure that the translation is accepted by the readers. Secondly, the translator needs to give full play to the subjectivity, and deal with the “Blankness”, “Vacancy” and “Indeterminacy” in The Black Cat. Therefore, the translator’s brand will be deeply imprinted in the translation, and its status is important and cannot be ignored.

The two Chinese versions of The Black Cat have their own advantages. According to the viewpoint of Translation Aesthetics, literature is set in a polysystem, influenced by many factors such as history. It is necessary to look at literary translation with the perspective of historical development. With the development of the times, the readers’ expectations will change. So do the aesthetic level, comprehension ability and personal needs. Each translation is the product of the time, and it is the most suitable and appropriate translation at the time.

Bibliography


