“TRANSLATED, IT IS: …” — AN ETHICS OF TRANSREADING

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Abstract. Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche’s idea of philology and William Gass’s concept of transreading, Huiwen [Helen] Zhang employs “transreader” to suggest the integration of four roles in one: reader, translator, writer, and scholar. “Transreader” recognizes that close reading, literary translation, creative writing, and cultural hermeneutics are interdependent activities with intertwined goals: to transfer, transvalue, transform, and transcend the canon. From this perspective, Lu Xun, China’s Nietzsche, is a twentieth-century transreader of the canon, and his prose poem “Revenge [The Second]” delivers a self-referential ethics of transreading. Zhang’s transreading of this poem shows why slow reading is today more necessary than ever, in what sense translation is a universal dilemma, how humanity grows when its expression grows more subtle, and that transreading opens a space for genuine communication.

Such a book, such a problem, is in no hurry; what’s more, we both are friends of lento, I as well as my book. One was not for nothing a philologist, one is that perhaps still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading: — ultimately one also writes slowly. Now this not only belongs to my habits, but also to my taste — a spiteful taste perhaps? — no longer to write anything that does not drive to despair every sort of man who is “in a hurry.” Philology in particular is the venerable art that demands of her votaries primarily one thing: to go aside, to allow oneself time, to become tranquil, to become slow — as a goldsmith’s artistry and intimacy with the word, which has utterly subtle, cautious work to do, and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it lento.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, Daybreak

Transreaders of the Canon

In Nietzsche’s view, “philology” as love of the word not only manifests itself in studying Greek and Latin literature, but also in reading and in writing. So by “philologist” Nietzsche means not only the classical scholar, but also the reader and the writer, of whom one thing is demanded: the lento that revolts against an era of “hurry,” cultivating instead the art and attitude of a wordsmith through “retrospects and prospects, ulterior thoughts, doors left open, and delicate fingers and eyes” between the lines. Nietzsche redefines philology in a way that both describes his approach to the study of the canon and at the same time indicates how he himself writes. This, furthermore, suggests how his writing is to be read.

Given a lento reading of the kind Nietzsche advocates, his own remarks prove to have been constructed with poetic subtlety. Take the second line, for instance: it


2. Ibid.: “rück- und vorsichtig, mit Hintergedanken, mit offengelassenen Türen, mit zarten Fingern und Augen [lesen].”
begins with the German pronoun man (one) and continues to use it as the subject. Sandwiched between sentences concerning ich [I] and mein [my], the alternation between Nietzsche’s self-reflection and his reflection upon the commonality of philologists has been overlooked by two prominent Nietzsche translators. Their failure to appreciate the implications of this alternation and share it with their readers shows that what philology demands of the scholar, the reader, and the writer applies to the translator no less. What is needed now is a term that suggests the integration of all these activities in one: transreading. This recognizes the interdependence of close reading, literary interpretation, creative writing, and cultural hermeneutics with its concern for the broad context and ultimate goal of these intertwined activities: to transfer, transvalue, transform, and transcend the canon. In this sense, the extract from Nietzsche’s prelude to Daybreak can serve as a prelude to the ethics of transreading, and Nietzsche can be deemed a nineteenth-century transreader of the canon.

Paradoxically, the complexity and sensitivity of a voice achieved via transreading can become an obstacle to the growth of its own transreaders. The reception of Nietzsche’s thought in Japan between 1893 and 1903, for example, is characterized by “so much reliance upon secondary literature, instead of the few works of the master that did reach Japan…. The sensational aspects of his writing … caught the eye of his interpreters, while the subtleties of self-criticism and irony, the shifts in emphasis and critique, went largely unnoticed.”


4. John McFarland Kennedy translates: “I have not been a philologist in vain — perhaps I am one yet: a teacher of slow reading. I even come to write slowly”; Friedrich Nietzsche, The Dawn of Day, trans. Kennedy [1911; repr. Calgary, Canada: Theophania, 2012], 15. R. J. Hollingdale translates: “It is not for nothing that I have been a philologist, perhaps I am a philologist still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading: — in the end I also write slowly”; Friedrich Nietzsche, Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality, trans. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.


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resounding impact of what Georg Brandes terms “aristocratic radicalism.”\(^7\) From this viewpoint, Nietzsche’s last letter to Brandes, the earliest advocate to spread his name beyond Europe, takes on a new meaning:

After you discovered me, it was no hard matter to find me: the difficulty now — is to lose me ...

The Crucified\(^8\)

Against the background of the early reception of Nietzsche in Japan, “to find me” can be construed as to find me under a label or category by looking me up in secondary literature; “to lose me” can be construed as to lose the so-labeled or -categorized me and to re-discover me through transreading my own voice. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s letter, conventionally deemed evidence of insanity, can be construed as his hyperbolic self-prediction that warns of his hermeneutic crucifixion.

Lu Xun (1881–1936), following Nietzsche, is a twentieth-century transreader of the canon. His voice desires for itself ethical transreaders who transread lentio. Ironically, ever since Mao Zedong enshrined him as “modern China’s saint” on the first anniversary of his death, Lu Xun has acquired an uncanny celebrity that suppresses the transreading of his works. As if echoing Nietzsche’s notion of hermeneutic crucifixion, a funeral scene from Lu Xun’s story “The Loner” (1925) contains this caricatured self-prediction: “He, in the ill-fitting costume, lay silently — eyes shut, mouth closed, lip corners seeming to portend an ice-cold smile, smiling coldly at this laughable corpse.”\(^9\) Lu Xun’s projection of himself onto the self-conscious “corpse” anticipates his loneliness as another transreader of the canon who is to be canonized “in the ill-fitting costume.” At the same time, the scene urges Lu Xun’s future transreaders to free him from the hermeneutic coffin.

In this spirit, let us transread together Lu Xun’s “Revenge (The Second).”\(^{10}\) On December 20, 1924, Lu Xun composed two poems in one sitting: “Revenge” and “Revenge (The Second).” Both poems were first published on December 29, 1924, in the journal Yusi, and then included in Lu Xun’s anthology Wild Grass (1927).

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10. Ibid., 178–179.
Revenge (The Second)
Lu Xun, translation by Huiwen [Helen] Zhang

1 Because he believed himself the Son of God, the King of Israel, therefore went he to nail upon the cross.
2 Soldiers clothed him in a purple robe, put on him a crown of thorns, saluting him; they took a reed to beat his head, spat upon him, kneeled to worship him; after they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple robe, put on him his own clothes.
3 Behold, they are beating his head, spitting upon him, worshiping him …
4 He was unwilling to drink the myrrh-medicated wine, yearning to taste with discernment how the men of Israel treat their Son of God, and, for a relative eternity, to pity their future yet hate their present.
5 All around is hostility — all pitiable, all damnable.
6 Ping! Ping! The tip of a nail penetrates center of palm; they yearn to nail to death their Son of God. Pitiable men — woe … renders his pain tender. Ping! Ping! The tip of a nail penetrates back of foot, smashing to pieces a bone, and anguish penetrates heart and marrow. Yet they themselves are nailing to death their Son of God. Damnable men — woe … this renders his pain blissful.
7 The cross arose; he was suspended in the void.
8 He did not drink the myrrh-medicated wine, yearning to taste with discernment how the men of Israel treat their Son of God, and, for a relative eternity, to pity their future yet hate their present.
9 All the men passing there cursed him, the chief priests and scribes mocked him as well, the two robbers who were nailed with him also ridiculed him.
10 Behold, those who are nailed with him …
11 All around is hostility — all pitiable, all damnable.
12 He, in the anguish of hands and feet, tastes the sorrow of the pitiable men who nail to death the Son of God and the joy of the damnable men who yearn to nail to death the Son of God, anticipating the Son of God to be nailed to death soon. Suddenly, the agony of the smashed bone penetrates heart and marrow — he sinks, intoxicated, into euphoria and compassion.
13 His stomach swirls: swirls of the anguish of pity and damnation.
14 Over all the earth, darkness.
15 “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?!” (Translated, it is: My Lord, why have you forsaken me?!)  
16 The Lord has forsaken him; he in the end is a son of man. Yet the men of Israel nailed to death even the “son of man.”
17 The bodies of men who nailed to death son-of-man compared to those who nailed to death Son-of-God are particularly blood-stained, blood-reeking.
The Forsaken Quotes

A hypertext of the canonical gospels,\(^{11}\) “Revenge [The Second]” has been a subject of many Chinese and Western studies since its publication.\(^{12}\) Even without knowledge of Chinese, one can see the frequent use of quotation marks in ¶16–17 of the original:

\begin{align*}
16 & \text{上帝离弃了他，他终于还是一个“人之子”；然而以色列人连“人之子”都钉杀了。} \\
17 & \text{钉杀了“人之子”的人们的身上，比钉杀了“神之子”的尤其血污，血腥。}\(^{13}\)
\end{align*}

The visibility of the quotation marks is further accentuated by the fact that the second term in quotes, 神之子 [Son of God], has previously appeared eight times without quotes. Despite this abrupt change, these quotation marks have been forsaken by the hermeneutic discourse: the published Chinese studies take them for granted and exclude them from discussion; the published English studies take them as irrelevant and omit them from the translation.\(^{14}\) These studies effectively erase the quotation marks and thereby the difference across the nine appearances of “Son of God” as well as the difference across the three appearances of 人之子 [son of man]. Neither the nuance of the terms nor their dynamic interaction has been explored. The challenge of textual, contextual, and intertextual hermeneutics has been reduced to the binary relation between Son of God and son of man, both of which are treated as unmarked — unchanged — concepts.

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\(^{11}\) “Hypertext,” introduced by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), refers to a text that derives from or relates to an earlier work, or hypotext. James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, for example, can be regarded as one of the many hypertexts deriving from Homer’s *Odyssey*.


\(^{13}\) Lu Xun, *魯迅全集 [Complete Works]*, vol. 2, 179.

Are these quotation marks indeed superfluous? Certainly not in Lu Xun’s view. To recall two episodes: In a 1926 newspaper article, Lu Xun addresses the challenge and benefits of punctuating Chinese classics in contemporary reprints. In a 1928 editor’s note in the journal *Yusi*, Lu Xun addresses the historical urgency of appropriating European punctuation for vernacular Chinese literature. Beyond advocating, Lu Xun is a practitioner: he experiments with the imported marks, recoins them individually, and tailors them to subtly distinguished cases. For him, the art of marking is as essential as the art of wording. Therefore, Lu Xun’s transreader is obliged to investigate both characters and punctuation. For the sake of bridging the dual gap — a cross-cultural gap between diverse, language-specific practices of punctuation as well as an intracultural gap between a less regulated era prior to 1951 and the present — the transreader must explore the full repertoire of functions the quotation marks perform. These include:

- to quote
- to suggest subjectivity and reveal the perspective, motive, and tone of the speaker
- to refer to an established term or an aforementioned figure
- to emphasize
- to impose a pause upon the reader for contemplation
- to demote or relativize a conventionally glorified or absolutized notion
- to upgrade or generalize an otherwise banal or specific notion
- to alienate, rejuvenate, decontextualize, or recontextualize a worn-out term
- to signify an irony, deception, paradox, or other types of deviation from the common meaning of a term

15. The quotation marks in Nietzsche’s prelude to *Daybreak*, for instance, require careful attention: “no longer [w]rite anything that does not drive to despair every sort of man who is ‘in a hurry’”; “she [philology] entices and enchant us the most, in the midst of an era of ‘work’ — that is: of hurry, of indecent and sweaty haste — an era that wishes to get everything ‘done’ fast, every old and new book as well: — philology does not get anything done so easily; she teaches reading well” (Nietzsche, “Morgenröte,” 17). Do the quotation marks highlight some popular sayings of Nietzsche’s contemporaries who advocate the “hurry” or “haste”? Do they simultaneously emphasize the subjectivity of these quotes and thus undermine the reliability of the so-called public opinion or collective belief? Do they, from another point of view, signal disguised quotes — slogans crafted by Nietzsche in order to mock and demote the blindly glorified concepts? Or do they, from yet another point of view, force a pause upon the reader for a contemplation of the more authentic, productive meaning of a worn-out term, such as “work” or “done”?  


17. Ibid., vol. 8, 249–250.  

• to separate several characters from the rest of the line, in order to eliminate misreading
• to integrate several characters into a unit, in order to generate a new model, concept, exemplar, category, prototype, or archetype

These functions often coexist in one text or even one word. While their interaction makes interpretation difficult, the repetition or disappearance of the quotation marks in relation to the same phrase suggests a particular sequentiality in its multiple appearances across phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. Hence, it is crucial to sift through these to see which could make sense in order eventually to decipher the encrypted message in each quote.

THE ENCRYPTED “SON OF MAN”

On first encounter, the quotation marks around “son of man” in ¶16 seem to imply a source, namely, that the narrator is quoting somebody or citing a term. This presumption is underlain by the first use of quotation marks in “Revenge [The Second]” — in ¶15, around the Chinese transliteration of “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?!” This is a quotation of both the protagonist’s speech and Mark 15:34 in the Chinese Union Version (CUV) — a ground-breaking, style-setting translation of the Bible. If the quotation marks around “son of man” hint at an original, then the transreader expects it would be found in the CUV.

Completed in 1919 amid the New Culture Movement, the CUV delivers three versions of the Bible: one in classical Chinese, the other two in vernacular Mandarin Chinese. The latter two differ solely in the way “God” is translated.19 Despite their differences, all three versions unanimously adopt the two-character term 人子 (literally: “man-son”) as an equivalent for “son of man” and invariably use it to render Jesus’s references to himself in the New Testament. Lu Xun’s friend and fellow writer Mao Dun also follows the standard and adopts 人子 in his retelling of the gospels — a 1942 short story titled “The Death of Jesus.” Against this background, Lu Xun’s three-character term 人之子 (literally: “man-of-son”) in “Revenge [The Second]” is idiosyncratic. The possessive particle 之 (of) finds no echo in either the CUV or other Bible-related writings by Lu Xun’s contemporaries. While the nuance of this word-building has not been examined in the published studies, the deviation should prompt the transreader to ponder the true origin of the term 人之子: If not from the CUV, whence does it come? If not derived from the gospels, what connotation does it possess other than the biblical? If not identical with the biblical “Son of man,” how can the English

19. Due to an irresolvable dispute among Chinese Christian communities, two vernacular Chinese versions of the Bible were produced. They are identical except for the term each version chooses to translate God: one version chooses the two-character term 上帝, and the other chooses the one-character term 天. Each version uses its term for God consistently and exclusively. For further reading on this point, see Lauren Pfister’s articles “Bible Translations and the Protestant ‘Term Question,’” “Attitudes towards Chinese Cultures, 1860–1900,” and “China’s Missionary-Scholars,” all in Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume 2: 1800 to the Present, ed. R. G. Tiedemann [Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010], 361–370, 405–416, and 742–765, respectively.
translation distinguish Lu Xun’s own coinage and concept from the standard epithet?

A second discrepancy between Lu Xun’s text and the CUV lies in the modifier 一个(a) that stands immediately before the quotation. All three versions of the CUV use the term 子 without any modifier as Jesus’s self-given epithet. Lu Xun, by contrast, launches his term 子 in ¶16 of “Revenge (The Second)” with a premodifier: a compound of the numeral 一 and the general classifier 个. The transreader has to decide how much emphasis to give to the compound. If the compound is given little emphasis, then the phrase 一个“人之子” indicates an unknown, indefinite individual who is representative of the inclusive term in the quotation marks, which deviates from the known, definite, and exclusive “Son of man.” If the compound is emphasized — namely, 一个“人之子” — then the numeral 一 draws attention to itself, indicating the vulnerability, impotence, forsakenness, and desolation of the individual. The published English translations of “Revenge (The Second)” solve this problem by replacing the premodifier with the definite article “the,” making Lu Xun’s term indistinguishable from the biblical term. This decision, coupled with the omission of the quotation marks, deprives Lu Xun’s coinage of its conceptual novelty and provocation. In fact, it altogether erases Lu Xun’s voice.

The published translations continue to apply “the” to the next two instances of the noun phrase 子, even though in Lu Xun’s text the second instance is preceded by a different modifier (an intensifier) and the third is bare of any modifier. So while the shared characters and marks may suggest the shared identity of the three instances of the quotation, the changing modifiers warn against identifying them as the same.

Thus far, the transreader has gained two insights. Regarding the coinage: Lu Xun’s “son of man” is neither identical with nor drawn from the biblical “Son of man.” It is either born in the finale of “Revenge (The Second)” or has been developed somewhere other than in the CUV. Both its form and its conception thus require further exploration. Regarding the premodifier: Within the finale, the rapid succession from a compound to an intensifier to the absence of any qualifier indicates a differentiated sequence. Not only is the first instance of “son of man” distinct from Jesus’s self-reference in the CUV and the Bible, but all three instances are likewise distinct from one another.

With these insights, the transreader returns to the problem of sifting through the various possible functions for the quotation marks in ¶16–17. It has become clear that the quotes around the first instance of 子 do not indicate a quotation from the CUV. So what is their function? For one thing, if there were no quotation marks, the premodifier could either be taken together with the first character 人 of the noun phrase, yielding 一个人之子 (a son of a man), or it could be separated from the noun phrase, yielding 一个/人之子 (a son of man). Not only do the quotation marks eliminate this ambiguity, they underline the fact that this is a new coinage whose aura changes the way the transreader should regard the surrounding context, such as the adverbial phrase 终于 (in the end). Drawing
attention to this phrase only generates more ambiguity: Does it mean that at the end of his life the protagonist is a son of man? Or that at the end of the text the protagonist is a son of man? Or that by the end of the text the protagonist is called, perceived, or understood to be a son of man by other characters, the narrator, or the transreader? Has the protagonist really changed, or is he just said or interpreted to have changed, and, if the latter is the case, by whom? These are thorny questions that seem to get at the essence of Lu Xun's piece; thus, rather than reject them, the transreader will take the ambiguity as an opportunity to reflect. It now seems evident that the quotation marks are functioning in multiple ways at the same time: they eliminate misreading, highlight a new coinage, and generate ambiguity that initiates productive contemplation. In the English translation, quotation marks will not serve because they do not fulfill all these functions. Italics, on the other hand, may suggest all three functions of Lu Xun's quotation marks: “he in the end is a son of man.”

Coming to the second instance of “人之子,” the transreader cannot construe the quotation marks as eliminating a misreading or highlighting a new coinage because both of these have already been done. Rather, the identical coinage suggests a reiteration. The recognition of the protagonist is reiterated — but by whom? One possibility: by the narrator himself. In this case, the second instance is a continuation of the narrator's perspective — to reinforce his view of the protagonist with increased empathy and to sharpen his observation of the men of Israel with increased contempt. Thus, the intensifier “even” brings the narrator's emotional involvement to a new level: it is an extreme tragedy that the men of Israel crucify a son who shares a common ancestor with them. The tragedy applies to the protagonist who assigns himself the mission to enlighten his people yet is crucified by exactly those whom he aspires to enlighten. The tragedy also applies to the men of Israel who are blind to the commonality between their victim and themselves, to their illusory triumph over an alien deity, and to the nature of their crime.

But there is another possibility: the quotation marks indicate not a continuation of the narrator's perspective, but the introduction of a new perspective — that of the men of Israel. In this case, the second instance would signal their recognition of their victim: not “the Son of God” as he claims to be, but “the son of man” who is a nonconformist among them and whose vision threatens them. In this reading, the intensifier “even” brings the narrator's moral judgment to a new level: it is an extreme crime of the men of Israel to crucify one of their own deliberately and hypocritically. Considering the two possibilities, the transreader realizes that the quotes around the reiterated “son of man” signify, on the one hand, an identified figure in narrative continuity, and suggest, on the other hand, the subjectivity of the alternative identifiers. To capture this, the transreader may retain Lu Xun’s quotes, along with the adjusted premodifier and article: “Yet the men of Israel nailed to death even the ‘son of man.’” Since the quotes indicate the sight and voice of both the narrator and the men of Israel, the phrase “even the ‘son of man’” can be transread in a dual accent: it underscores either the paradox of the protagonist’s fate and the absurdity of the collective frenzy of the men of Israel, or the
cause of the protagonist’s death and the inhumanity of the collective conspiracy of the men of Israel.\textsuperscript{20}

Coming to the third instance of “人之子,” the transreader will have become sensitive to the subtlety of textual and contextual nuances and catch sight of two factors. First, standing alone without any modifier, the third instance departs from the first two where the singular “son of man” is clear. Since the Chinese character 子 can refer to both the singular and plural forms of “son,” the compound 人之子 can be transread as “son of man” or “sons of man.” The bare term also permits another reading: a group of individuals under one name — “son-of-man.” The inter-paragraph context is a factor in the transreading as well. Unlike the sequence from the first to the second instance that occurs within one paragraph, the third instance recurs as the text takes an abrupt turn and plunges into a new paragraph that is also the final sentence of “Revenge (The Second).” Were the last two paragraphs mingled together, the overlapping “men” in the last clause of ¶16 (“Yet the men of Israel nailed to death”) and in the first clause of ¶17 (“The bodies of men who nailed to death”) would most likely refer to the same people. Because of the separation of ¶17 from ¶16, however, the second “men” seems instead to signal an expansion from a culturally and historically particular circle — the crucifiers of Israel at a specific point in the past — to a culturally and historically universal circle — the crucifiers of any ethnicity and nationality at any point in human history. Based on the bare term 人之子, the transreader infers the possibility of an expansion from the protagonist to his like — from a new figure to a new archetype of humanity, or from a characteristic individual to a category of individuals who share the identifying characteristics. The accompanying circumstance — the expansion of “men” — turns the possibility to necessity. Thus, the transreader eliminates the singular and concentrates on the plural: “sons of man” or “son-of-man.” Artistically speaking, “sons of man” is less desirable because the extra “s” deviates from the first two instances — “son of man” and “son of man.” Since the three instances in Chinese are identical in both wording and marking, yet different in conception, it seems best to replace the identical Chinese quotation marks with English markings capable of precisely and effectively differentiating each successive nuance. Hence, “son-of-man” seems the best choice for the third instance. Taken together, the triple quotation is transread as follows:

\begin{quote}
16 The Lord has forsaken him; he in the end is a son of man. Yet the men of Israel nailed to death even the “son of man.”
\end{quote}

20. The intrahuman crucifixion implies the probability of interhumanity: the nonidentity in the shared human character of “the ‘son of man’” and “the men of Israel,” which is visually present in the identical Chinese character 人 (man/men) in the two terms. Both are, for instance, daring, but the difference is fundamental: The “son of man” dares to claim to be the “Son of God” in order to distinguish himself from those who have spoiled the category “man” and to awaken the humanity that has fallen asleep in them. The men of Israel dare to claim to crucify the “Son of God” in order to cover up their calculated slaughter of a rebellious forseer.
The bodies of men who nailed to death son-of-man compared to those who nailed to death Son-of-God are particularly blood-stained, blood-reeking.21

This version acknowledges a problematic aspect of Lu Xun’s original — the nonidentity of identical-seeming individual instances. The interaction of the distinct registers around the unchanged compound “son of man” reconstructs the synthesizing effect of the quotes around the coinage 人之子. The sequentiality of the three instances of the quotation is not alternative, not complementary, not competitive, not contradictory, but progressive. In this sense, the characters 人之子 are like that which they signify: the form is unchanging; the conception is progressive.22

21. The term 神之子 (Son of God) that has previously appeared eight times without quotation marks returns to the final sentence of the poem in quotation marks. These quotation marks, along with those around the term 人之子, have been omitted from the published translations. Yet they are in various respects significant. Within ¶17, the marked 神之子 and the marked 人之子 build an aesthetic symmetry and conceptual duet in the universal verdict. Beyond ¶17, the quotation marks alienate the known term “Son of God” and initiate contemplation of its own distinction from the biblical term and its own progression in “Revenge [The Second].”

22. Formally born in Lu Xun’s “Impromptus” of 1919, the coinage 人之子 has been quoted by its own creator twice — first in his 1924 prose poem “Revenge [The Second],” then in his 1933 preface to Frans Masereel’s A Man’s Passion. Each time, Lu Xun’s self-quotation — in accordance with his understanding of quotation — involves a conceptual differentiation or renewal. First, “Impromptus (40)”: “But in the east rises the sun, mankind demands from each people man, — and so naturally also son-of-man — what we have is merely a son of a man, is the wife of the son or the husband of the wife of the son, none of whom can be dedicated to mankind” (Complete Works, vol. 1, 338). Next, “Revenge [The Second]”: “The Lord has forsaken him; he in the end is a son of man. Yet the men of Israel nailed to death even the ‘son of man.’ / The bodies of men who nailed to death son-of-man compared to those who nailed to death Son-of-God are particularly blood-stained, blood-reeking.” And, finally, “Preface to A Man’s Passion”: “In front of the portrait of the suffering ‘Son of God’ Jesus, this ‘son of man’ is suffering the trials” (Complete Works, vol. 4, 573). Via two dashes, “Impromptus” shifts from the term “人” (man), to the term 人之子 [son of man], to the term 人之子 again but without the quotation marks in this case. “Preface to A Man’s Passion” juxtaposes 神之子 [Son of God] and 人之子 [son of man] with biblical and Marxist-Kropotkinist associations, respectively. In “Impromptus,” quotation marks are used in a comparable way to the second instance of the triple quotation 人之子 in “Revenge [The Second]”: to emphasize the conceptual novelty of an existing term and to generate a new archetype distinguished from old ones. In “Preface to A Man’s Passion,” quotation marks are used in a comparable way to the second instance of the triple quotation 人之子 in “Revenge [The Second]” to emphasize the conceptual novelty of an existing term and to generate a new archetype distinguished from old ones. These intertextual echoes reinforce Lu Xun’s idea of difference-in-identity, his usage of multifaceted quotes, and the poetic strategy characteristic of his oeuvre: Lu Xun plays simultaneously with coinages and marks in order to tease, provoke, and inspire his reader. His legacy has always been an assignment, not a statement. At the same time, the three intertexts yield a constellation that grants a glimpse into what can be deemed the etymology or genealogy of “son of man.” The puzzle left unsolved in our transreading of the triple quotation — the origin of the peculiar coinage — is solved: the three-character term 人之子 is neither formally identical with the two-character term 子 in the CUV, nor is it conceptually drawn from the biblical Son of man. Rather, it is a progressive concept grown out of Lu Xun’s lifelong meditations on cosmopolitanism and humanism. Deviating from the norm of his Chinese contemporaries, this coinage is consistent, consequent, and irreplaceable in the intertextual constellation.
The “Self”-Betraying Quotes

If the transreader has learned anything from the thrice-iterated “人之子”, it is that Lu Xun’s quotation marks do not necessarily signify a quotation. This gives the transreader cause to suspect the reliability of another quotation in the poem — one appearing in the first half of ¶15: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?!”. Initially, this quotation seemed to signal both the voice of the protagonist and a passage from the CUV. But once again, this quotation is not quite what it seems to be. Its quotation marks actually mark only quasi-direct speech and a quasi-cited passage and thus draw attention to the occluded “original” in all senses of the word:

- The narrator’s original is the protagonist’s utterance in a foreign tongue, which the narrator transliterates into an incomprehensible Chinese.
- Lu Xun’s original is Mark 15 in the two vernacular versions of the CUV, from which Lu Xun transplants the Chinese transliteration.
- The CUV’s original is the Greek New Testament, which the CUV translates simultaneously into two vernacular Chinese versions and one classical Chinese version.
- The Greek New Testament’s original is Jesus’s utterance in Aramaic, which the Greek New Testament decides to transliterate presumably for the sake of authenticity.

From this perspective, the transreader recognizes the accordance of the quotation in ¶15 with the second instance of the triple quotation in ¶16: even on an occasion when Lu Xun’s quotation marks can be retained in the English translation, they are not an indication of an accurate quotation, but are quasi quotes that betray their own quasi-ness or treason. This recognition prompts the transreader to proceed to the second half of ¶15 and compare the whole to its parallel in one of the vernacular versions of the CUV:

Vernacular I of the CUV, Mark 15:34

At the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. Translated, it is: My Lord, why have [you] forsaken me.

Lu Xun’s “Revenge (The Second),” ¶15

“以罗伊，以罗伊，拉马撒巴各大尼？！”（翻出来，就是：我的上帝，你为甚么离弃我？！）

“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?!” (Translated, it is: My Lord, why have you forsaken me?!)
On first viewing, ¶15 is an extract from its hypotext. Upon a closer look, there is a chain of differences in wording and punctuation. The CUV passage can be divided into three sections: the clause before the utterance — an advance interpretation; the utterance itself — an incomprehensible transliteration; and the clause after the utterance — an afterward interpretation. Paragraph 15 omits the first interpretation while leaving the transliteration intact. The second interpretation in the CUV, “Translated, it is my God, my God, why have [you] forsaken me,” is altered in three respects. First, the one-character term (God), adopted elsewhere in “Revenge [The Second]” to coin the three-character term (Son of God), is replaced with the two-character term (the Lord), another Chinese name for God drawn from the other vernacular version of the CUV; hence, the two distinct versions of the CUV are mingled. Then, the reiterated “my God” is omitted, while the absent “you” is restored.

In terms of punctuation, the CUV employs traditional Chinese marks that indicate only long and short pauses. Paragraph 15 takes advantage of the European punctuation marks for quotation, question, and exclamation, turning the chanted utterance into an encrypted utterance: “‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?!’” The quotation marks imply direct speech or narrative authenticity. The combined question and exclamation marks imply mental confusion and emotional explosion: the protagonist seems to utter at once a request for explanation and a cry of despair. What he truly and exactly utters, however, is coded and sealed in the incomprehensible transliteration. The post-utterance clause in the CUV is encrypted with parentheses, a colon, and question and exclamation marks in ¶15, changing from “Translated, it is my God, my God, why have [you] forsaken me.” to “[Translated, it is: My Lord, why have you forsaken me?!]” Strikingly, the quotation marks around the utterance in the first half of ¶15 are erased from its interpretation in the second.

Taken together, ¶15 is a disguised double betrayal. The first betrayal occurs in the parenthesized translation of the protagonist’s utterance by an anonymous interpreter, whose presence can be inferred from the parenthetical comment, “(Translated, it is: ...).” The second betrayal occurs in Lu Xun’s extraction from the CUV. All the particulars — the omitted or altered lines, the added or modified marks — prompt the transreader to confront the dilemma: the unreliable or unfaithful translation, on the one side, and the incomprehensibility or inaccessibility of the foreign, on the other. Essential to the recognition is the reflexive moment: “[Translated, it is: ...].”

Concerning the first betrayal: the narrator uses the parentheses and colon to highlight the nonidentity of the utterance and its interpretation — the single “my

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25. “Hypotext,” introduced by Genette in *Palimpsest*, refers to an earlier text that serves as the source of a subsequent piece of literature, or hypertext. For instance, Goethe’s *Faust* is a hypotext of Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* on the palimpsest “Faust.” The CUV is a hypotext of Lu Xun’s “Revenge [The Second]” on the palimpsest “Crucifixion” or “Passion.”

26. In the *Chinese Union Version with New Punctuation* of 1988, the punctuation is updated to accord with contemporary usage.
Lord” that betrays the double “Eloi” and the erased quotation marks that signal the treason. There is yet a more fatal treason: the protagonist is alleged to have called upon 上帝, the Chinese name for “God” that is theologically, ideologically, and politically — as ruled by the CUV — incompatible with the other Chinese name for “God,” 神. Since the protagonist has persistently called himself Son of 神 from the first line of the text until this moment, it can be inferred that he names “God” 神, not 上帝. In this sense, the interpreter hidden in the parentheses accidentally (if ignorant of the “rule”) or deliberately (if informed) betrays the protagonist. In fact, in China at the time of Lu Xun’s writing, improper use of certain terms could be a capital offence. From this point of view, the transreader will recognize in Lu Xun’s parody of the canonical distinction between the two mutually exclusive Chinese names for “God” a judgment of the clash between rival orthodoxies and the threat they pose to dissenting individuals.27

The second betrayal resonates with the first. While the CUV is a coordinated collaborative translation of the Bible,28 “Revenge (The Second)” is Lu Xun’s independent individual transreading of the CUV. If each norm or taboo born with the CUV conceals a problem of broader scope, then the dissidence or collision in “Revenge (The Second)” exposes not only the problematic of the CUV, but also the problematic of their shared cultural-historical context. This involves the transition from traditional to modern, classical to vernacular Chinese language, which is especially sensitive for those who are tied to both tongues (such as Lu Xun); the appropriation of foreign concepts, icons, theories, and principles, which is especially tough for those who are intimate with both the alien and the native (such as Lu Xun); the blending or clashing of the new and the old, the revolutionary and the conservative, the religious and the atheistic, the nostalgic and the avant-garde, etc., and, consequently, the sacrifice of those who are caught between them, ground under by them, and suspended in the void they create (such as Lu Xun).29 If, in his 1925 story “The Loner,” Lu Xun foresees himself in the ill-costumed “corpse,”

27. I thank Christopher Higgins and Victor Udwin for inspiring me to read the forbidden shift between mutually exclusive terms in “Revenge (The Second)” as Lu Xun’s subversive parody of the canon and his critique of enforced orthodoxy.


29. In ¶7 of “Revenge (The Second),” the protagonist is graphically and metaphorically “suspended in the void”: he is unable to orient himself, incapable of moving, exiled from past and future, and deprived of the present. This moment echoes Lu Xun’s self-portrayals as a historical go-between — an exile from both old and new forts, hence a particle of a bridge or a link in the chain of evolution — and as a lone warrior caught between two fronts, hence at home in neither. See, for example, Lu Xun’s 1926 essay “Behind the Grave”: “In the course of evolution — perhaps I may even say — everybody is a go-between. ... His task is to be vigilant and howl new war cries. Because he has insight into the old fort from which he comes, should he turn around and strike, he can easily get a strangle hold on his mortal foe. Yet nevertheless he shall go with the setting sun, fade away and die — at his best no more than a piece of wood or stone in a bridge, not at all a model or example for the future” [鲁迅全集 | Complete Works], vol. 1, 302. See also Lu Xun’s 1933 epigraph to Wandering: “Quiet, the new literary field / Peace, the old battle ground / Between—a warrior forsaken / Bearing a spear, wandering alone” [鲁迅全集 | Complete Works], vol. 7, 156.
then on December 20, 1924, Lu Xun transreads himself into a son of God and transreads Jesus into a third-person singular pronoun — the nameless protagonist of “Revenge (The Second)” who was crucified for what Nietzsche would call “untimely meditations,” by which he meant the most pressing criticism. Lu Xun portrays the untimely meditator as “suspended in the void,” that is, suspended between explicit criticism for which he will be punished with death, and a coded story that might well result in the loss of identity or erasure through too rapid reading.

“Translated, it is: …”

While this transreading began with the puzzle of the functions performed by the quotation marks in ¶16–17, it has led to the discovery of a dual confession and self-reflection in ¶15. At the textual level, “translated, it is: …” is the narrator’s ironic confession of the false claim to translate the protagonist. From a second perspective, it conveys the narrator’s reflection upon the dilemma between retaining the authenticity of the protagonist’s utterance by transliterating it into an incomprehensible tongue, or making it comprehensible by relying on an unreliable translation. At the hypotextual level, “translated, it is: …” is Lu Xun’s ironic confession of the false claim to translate the Bible. From a second perspective, it conveys Lu Xun’s reflection upon his mission and method as a Chinese transreader of the Western canon, namely, to investigate a decisive moment in the history of Western civilization and transplant it onto the stage of twentieth-century China for his native contemporaries.30

In light of this discovery, the transreader will read backwards and pass through new doors now opening into “Revenge (The Second).” In ¶4, 8, and 12, the protagonist declines the myrrh-mediated wine or anesthetic agent for the sake of the absolute, uncompromised immediacy of experience; yet his first and last utterance in the text — his oral testament in ¶15 — is so foreign that it depends solely on interpersonal mediation and translingual interpretation. From this point of view, ¶15 reverses ¶4, 8, and 12, as well as the opening line that suggests the protagonist’s sovereignty or autonomy: “Because he believed himself the Son of God, the King of Israel, therefore went he to nail upon the cross.”31 It is probably also from this point of view that the narrator recognizes the protagonist’s utmost vulnerability and limits, commenting in ¶16: “The Lord has forsaken him; he in the end is a son of man.” The questions are, however, whether every human being is more or less like the protagonist, that is, foreign and at the same time blind to the foreignness inherent in oneself and the other, and, accordingly, whether

30. By the time he died at age 54, Lu Xun had translated into Chinese the works of more than 110 authors from approximately fifteen countries through their German and Japanese versions. His transreading of the CUV and the Bible is but one example of his intertwined activities of reading, writing, translation, interpretation, cultural transfer, and, to quote his own expression, “spiritual transformation.”

31. “Revenge (The Second)” uses “he” as the subject of the first paragraph in a way that reads as if “he” himself, not somebody else, went to nail himself upon the cross. For this reason, it seems impermissible to render it as: “he went to be nailed,” or, as in the published translations, “he is to be crucified.”
man and man’s expression are necessarily always both subject to translation and interpretation. Take Lu Xun and his poem, for example. The quotation marks in ¶16–17 have been forsaken by the hermeneutic discourse. As the transreader proceeds to examine what has happened to ¶15, a chain of differences in wording and punctuation between the original and its published English translations emerges. These changes build upon the double betrayal — the third occurs in the interpretations of Lu Xun’s own expression. Thus, the dual confession and self-reflection, “translated, it is: …,” becomes a prophecy of its own fate; the title of the poem, “Revenge,” becomes a self-reference: “revenge” enacted in advance by a man’s expression that predicts its destiny of being unfaithfully interpreted.

Lu Xun’s poem, therefore, transcends both the biblical scene of crucifixion and a snapshot of the critical situation in his native China. It draws attention to the ambiguity and impact of translation as a common dilemma or universal phenomenon. The reflexive moment in ¶15 forms an axis not only of the text, but also of the hypotexts (the CUV and the Bible), the hypertexts (the published studies of “Revenge (The Second)”), and the broad and ultimate context of humanity. In this sense, “translated, it is: …” makes the interrelated texts revolve around the problem of translation itself as a nexus for the problem of quotation, the problem of naming, the problem of understanding, the problem of actual speech, imagined speech, simulated speech, and so on: What is real? Who knows what is real? Who can say what is real? How can we talk about it? How can we communicate without misinterpretation?

An Ethics of Transreading

Like the epigraph by Nietzsche, “Revenge (The Second)” delivers a self-referential poetics of transreading in poetry. On the one hand, the text is the outcome of transreading in the sense of creative rewriting and transformative transfer; on the other, it cultivates the art and attitude, techniques and ethics of its own transreaders. Instead of explicit instructions, the text teaches through word and punctuation choice, sequentiality across lines and paragraphs, hypertextual, intertextual, and contextual allusion, and so on; these subtle expressions prompt transreaders constantly to detect or generate, answer or pursue questions in and outside of the text. In this light, the second half of the title takes on a new look. Not only does its wording, “The Second,” seem to offer a second opinion upon “revenge,” but its punctuation also seems to respond to the likewise parenthesized reflexive moment, “[Translated, it is: …].” If the reflexive moment hints at the problems around translation, then the title hints at a solution, namely, a second

32. In terms of wording, the published English translations by Yang and Lee erase the nuance between the two Chinese names for “God” and thus the signal of the treason. They both add the deliberately omitted equivalence for the second “Eloi” back to the post-utterance clause. In terms of punctuation, they use a question mark in place of the combination of question and exclamation marks at the end of the utterance as well as in its interpretation. Most significantly, the translation by Yang omits the reflexive comment embedded in the second half, “[Translated, it is: …],” while the translation by Lee adds the intentionally omitted quotation marks back to the interpretation of the utterance. See Yang’s translation in Lu Xun, Wild Grass; and Lee’s in “Wild Grass: The Impasse Between Hope and Despair.”
thought. This includes a second reading angle, a second rendition attempt, a second interpretive possibility, a second hermeneutic approach ..., all of which can be deemed a second ripple or swirl animated by transreading — a continuous process of confrontation, investigation, and discovery.

Granted, translation is a human dilemma, for it is both indispensable and imperfect. Through transreading, however, we open a space for genuine communication — one that does not betray because it confesses its own betrayal and accepts its necessity. As demonstrated in our transreading of Lu Xun’s transreading, the more subtle one’s expression, the more complex and challenging, and yet simultaneously more faithful and fruitful, its interpretation. Humanity grows whenever its expression grows more subtle.

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