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Towards a Study of Arthur Waley and China

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Arthur Waley was a renowned translator of Chinese and Japanese literature during the twentieth century, although very little critical attention has been paid to him. The author has written on Waley and Japan, and the present essay represents a proposal for a new study on Waley and China. The author looks at some other studies on Waley and suggests an organization of Waley's many texts into groups that could become chapters.

アーサー・ウェイリーは20世紀において，中国文学及び日本文学の翻訳者として高名であったにもかかわらず，これまで批評の関心が向けられたことはほとんどなかった。筆者はウェイリーと日本に関することを書いてきたが，本論文ではウェイリーと中国に関する新たな研究に向けての提案を示す。他のいくつかのウェイリー研究を参照し，ウェイリーの数多くの著作を章とでもいえるグループにまとめる。

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"Arthur Waley is the greatest translator of Asian literatures ever to have lived," a scholar of Japan has recently stated (Treat 158). Waley was without a doubt the single most important person to introduce the literatures of China and Japan to the general English-speaking public in the twentieth century. He not only had a profound effect upon Western understanding and impressions of these countries; he also greatly influenced a generation of scholars, in the pursuit of rigorous scholarship, and even in the selection of their chosen fields. "When I decided in 1946 . . . to pursue my studies of Chinese and Japanese literature at Columbia," wrote Donald Keene, "my inspiration, of course, was Waley. . . . For me, as for all others interested in translating either Chinese or Japanese literature, Waley was our only predecessor" (55). Edward Seidensticker concurred that Waley's translation of *The Tale of Genji* was his "introduction to Japanese literature" (xiv). And Ivan Morris stated: "Without Waley's books it is unlikely that the classics of the Far East would have become such an important part of our heritage" (67).

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In spite of the widely acknowledged influence of Waley on Asian studies and on helping to create for the West an Asian world to read about and imagine, there are very few studies on Waley or his works. I have found just three dissertations, one of which is my own (see de Gruchy, Perlmutter and Cheung). The only published book on Waley in English is again, my own. *Orienting Arthur Waley* focuses on Waley and his Japanese translations, even though Waley is more famous as a translator of Chinese poetry (see Hawkes 46). Japan was chosen as the subject for reasons outlined below, but since no one, to my knowledge, has yet undertaken a project on Waley and China, I have resolved to do so myself. In the present essay I would like to begin an introductory discussion of the subject of Waley and China.

It seems peculiar that an author should begin his essay by addressing himself, yet I should like to make some remarks about *Orienting Arthur Waley* as a way of embarking upon this new study of Waley and China. Japan was chosen as the subject for a study on Waley for a variety of reasons, the greatest of which was that I happen to live here and so maintain a very personal interest in Japan. Japan also represented a manageable dissertation or book-length project. Opened to the West only in 1853, the period of time in which the West had been concerned with Japan was conveniently limited to about a century and a half. I limited it even further by ending the study with Waley's translation of his final volume of *The Tale of Genji* in 1933, with a few remarks on the small number of translations from the Japanese that appeared after this date. China, on the other hand, has been in the Western mind for a much greater period of time, since at least Marco Polo's fantastic *Travels* began to be widely circulated in Europe. The historical links between China and the West extend back hundreds of years, thus greatly multiplying the amount of material on the subject in European languages. A great number and variety of leading European intellectuals have expressed opinions about China over the centuries, and their thoughts and impressions have helped shape Western images of China, which already had begun to form before the opening of Japan (see Spence). Reflecting this greater attention to China, the number of translations Waley made from the Chinese far exceeds those he made from the Japanese, and so the amount of material the scholar must take into account is considerably larger. Whereas Waley's interest in Japan seems to have waned by 1933, his interest in China, which begins as early as 1910, doesn't really end until his death in 1966; the majority of his nearly forty books and over a hundred and thirty articles are concerned with Chinese literature and other subjects related to China (see Johns). In short, Waley and China represents a more ambitious project than Waley and Japan, and this essay only intends to outline one possible approach to such a project.

There are a number of perspectives from which one can view Waley. One would be as a key figure of the English modernist movement in literature in the early twentieth century. From this perspective, Waley is a poet associated with Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Amy Lowell, Witter Bynner, and other English writers who maintained an interest in Asia

and its literatures. He is also seen as a forerunner of poets like Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder, who also took from Asia the material they needed to create a new sense for English poetry. Another perspective is of Waley as scholar and translator, and here we might compare him to predecessors such as Herbert Giles or James Legge, earlier translators of Chinese literature. Or we might discuss his influence on the development of Asian studies, and on later sinologists like David Hawkes or Burton Watson. Yet another view is of Waley the younger Bloomsbury associate, with all the baggage that the name "Bloomsbury" implies; now we see him at King's College, Cambridge, studying under G. Lowes Dickinson and associating with John Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, E. M. Forster, Bertrand Russell, Virginia Woolf, and the Stracheys. Waley is all of these people, and no single perspective can adequately make sense of his activities and achievements. As Osbert Sitwell wrote in his *Noble Essences,* Waley had "perhaps the greatest range of friendship of any person I know, extending from dons to savants to spiritualists and members of Parliament, from his own kind, poets, painters, musicians, to those who practice Eskimo tricks in winter on the topmost slopes of mountains" (1950, 6). The point here is that the scholar of English literature must be prepared to leave the field and enter the unfamiliar waters of sinology and Japanology, while scholars from these disciplines must be willing to embrace a world of English literary culture in which Asia represents only one of many trends or ideas. *Orienting Arthur Waley* was a multi-disciplinary project, written under the supervision of professors from both Asian Studies and English Literature, and "Arthur Waley and China" will be a similar project, encompassing historical and critical views from several disciplines.

I have stated repeatedly that too little study has been made of Waley and his translations, and I shall reiterate this point once again, but in Orienting Arthur Waley I was perhaps too dismissive of Chi-yiu Cheung's dissertation, "Arthur Waley: Translator of Chinese Poetry," completed in 1979. While Ruth Perlmutter's thesis (1971) was little more than a survey of Waley's life and works, the importance of Cheung's work was that he was to my knowledge the first scholar to closely analyze Waley's translations from the Chinese as English poetry in an extended study, comparing Waley's poetry with originals to determine whether he was successful "in reproducing the effects of the original" (Cheung 6). Cheung deserves more attention and I will give him that in the study that follows, though I maintain that a more critical, historical approach may produce more interesting insights than a close reading project concerned primarily with the accuracy or inaccuracy of the translations.

As in *Orienting Arthur Waley,* "Arthur Waley and China" will be concerned with the Western study of China from a historical perspective, and I shall attempt to answer what is to me the more compelling question (than whether Waley was or was not a faithful translator) of why Chinese literature was translated at all at this particular time in history. What were the historical circumstances that produced an Arthur Waley in the early

twentieth century, and why did he devote his life to the translation of an utterly foreign literature? As in *Orienting Arthur Waley,* I shall begin with a discussion of the Western study of China in order to situate Waley within a discourse that has a definite and definable history. Throughout, I will be taking the position that Arthur Waley's Chinese translations are original contributions to English literature, to be judged as English literature, and not merely as translations. Waley is a creative writer as well as a translator.

Other than Cheung's thesis, there has been a very interesting recent study on Bloomsbury and China by Patricia Laurence. *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes*: *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and China* (2003) is a marvelously detailed and ambitious project that attempts no less than to expand English modernism into an international movement in which Chinese arts are seen not only "through the lens of British modernism," but the modern British legacy is revealed "through contemporary Chinese eyes" (Kinkley xv). Laurence's work will be invaluable to me, as she has revealed a world of connection between Bloomsbury and China the existence of which most in English literature were probably unaware. She discusses in detail the links between China and Bertrand Russell, E. M. Forster, G. Lowes Dickinson, and Julian Bell, among others. These links are critical in establishing the position of Arthur Waley, a younger Bloomsbury affiliate. But it is somewhat surprising (and relieving) that Laurence devotes so little attention to Waley himself, the one Bloomsbury member who actually understood Chinese, and the most influential interpreter of its culture in his time, or of any time. Indeed, Waley is relegated to a single chapter beside Charles Lamb and George Meredith! The brief discussion that is made on Waley is intriguing, but surely he deserves much greater attention and prominence than Laurence has given him.

There are numerous other works on English modernism and Chinese poetry that deserve comment, however most of them focus on the work and activities of Ezra Pound, with passing references to Waley, Lowell and Bynner, who are seen as successors of Pound. The idea that it was Ezra Pound who was "the inventor of Chinese poetry" in the early modern period was first put forward by T. S. Eliot in his 1928 introduction to Pound's *Selected Poems* (Eliot 15). Hugh Kenner then wrote rather unfairly that "Waley was but one of the many who rushed in as word of the two-shilling pamphlet, *Cathay,* got around" (Kenner 192). More recently, Ming Xie has stated in his *The Age of Chinese Translation* (1999) that "Ezra Pound, Arthur Waley, and Amy Lowell were all influential . . . [but] because Pound himself influenced Waley and Lowell and was by far the more original poetic intelligence, it is upon his early development and practice that this book will concentrate" (Xie 4).

I will not debate the question of who is "the more original poetic intelligence," since it appears to me more a matter of personal preference than fact, but I will challenge the view that it was Pound who lead Waley to Chinese poetry. First of all, other than the coincidence that Waley also attempted to reproduce Chinese poetry in unrhymed English "modern" verse, there is no evidence that it was Pound who was Waley's inspiration.

Waley's *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* did appear three years after the 1915 publication of *Cathay,* but Waley's privately printed *Chinese Poems* followed very quickly in 1916, too quickly, in my opinion, to have been significantly influenced by *Cathay.* We must bear in mind that Waley had been working independently on Chinese since 1913, and *Chinese Poems* was the first fruit of his labors. Moreover, in Waley's own account of how he came to study Chinese and on his method of translating the poetry, a story he only told in 1960, Pound is given no mention, but Waley does suggest that Roger Fry may have had some influence (Waley 1969, 5). And in his BBC interview with Roy Fuller in 1963, Waley responded directly to the question of whether Pound had influenced him with this reply: "I don't think so, I think we differed very much. Pound objected to my retaining the length of line of the orginal, and kept on screaming, 'Break it up – break it up'" (Waley 1970, 145). Waley was adamant that he had himself invented a "sort of Sprung Rhythm" (Waley 1969, 8), and in his introduction to *More Translations from the Chinese* (1919), he expressed the wish that reviewers would recognize the originality of his translations "as an experiment in unrhymed verse" (Waley 1919, 5). Contemporary reviewers eventually did, and perhaps not surprisingly, none suggested that Waley had learned from Pound.

There is also evidence to show that Waley was introduced to Chinese culture even earlier than 1913 at Cambridge, which he attended from 1907 to 1910, notably through the influence of his tutor, G. Lowes Dickinson, who had a strong passion for Chinese culture and who actively promoted it. This issue will be discussed at length in a chapter on Waley's development. Suffice it to say here that Dickinson and Roger Fry were both older mentors of the Bloomsbury group. They became lifelong friends of Waley, and their enthusiasm for China and its culture as expressed in their own works was transmitted to the younger poet.

Let me now make a few brief comments about Waley the man. In *Orienting Arthur Waley,* I made use of the limited material available to produce a very sketchy biographical portrait of Waley from his birth in 1889 until he began his public career in 1913, with some remarks on his personal activities in later years (see pp. 34 – 63, also notes pp. 171 – 175). At present I have no intention of investigating his life any further, since to my knowledge no new material on Waley has come to light that would make a biography any less impossible. There is no need to reproduce this portrait in "Waley and China," other than to provide what biographical information is necessary to shed light on the development of his career as a translator of Chinese literature.

I focused in *Orienting Arthur Waley* on three aspects of Waley's identity that appeared to "intersect in intriguing ways with the socio-historical context" that I was constructing, and the three were his Jewish background, his socialism, and his ambiguous sexuality (de Gruchy 2003, 35). It still seems to me that these aspects of Waley were relevant to his interest in Asia, and while for lack of more conclusive evidence I have had my doubts about his tendency towards homosexuality (he did have at least two women in his life) a careful

reading of his Chinese translations has added weight to my argument that homoeroticism in Asian literature was an attraction for Waley. By recreating it in English poetry he was "surreptitiously transferring" his "illegitimate sexuality" into a "clandestine, circumscribed, and coded" type of discourse, as Michel Foucault writes (1990, 4). Waley, as Fuller noted, was "able to find in Chinese poetry qualities which [were] obviously native" to Arthur Waley; that is, he selected to translate from thousands of choices those that provided him with a voice for his own personality (Waley 1970, 151). It is not an issue that needs to be underlined or harped on, but it is one that needs to be acknowledged and understood if one is to know Waley.

Turning now to Waley's translations from the Chinese, I think it would be useful to organize them into groups so as to facilitate their analysis, but by no means do I wish to suggest that these groups are exclusive, nor would this be the only way to organize Waley's Chinese texts. First of all, Waley translated Chinese poetry, and this group contains A *Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1918), *More Translations from the Chinese* (1919), *The Temple and Other Poems* (1923), *Translations from the Chinese* (1941) and *Chinese Poems* (1946). The latter two texts are actually anthologies of the first three, with important revisions made to the earlier poems as Waley's knowledge of Chinese improved. One could also include *The Book of Songs* here, but I intend to examine it elsewhere. Secondly, Waley published several texts on Chinese art, including *An Index of Chinese Artists Represented in the Sub-department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum (1922), An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (1923), and *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang by Sir Aurel Stein* (1931). In the next group can be included translations of Chinese philosophy, and here we have The Way and Its Power (1934), *The Analects of Confucius* (1938), and *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (1939); *Travels of an Alchemist* (1931) and *The Real Tripitaka* (1952) combine religion with history, but we will include them here. A fourth group of texts we might call, "Waley's art of biography," and this group includes The *Life and Times of Po Chu*-i (1949), *The Poetry and Career of Li Po* (1950), and Yuan *Mei: Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet* (1956). All three unique biographies are of Chinese poets, and thus combine numerous translations of poetry within the biographical narrative. Several other texts also combine genres and are not so easily categorized, however since they all contain a certain folklorist or anthropological appeal, I shall group these together: *The Book of Songs* (1937), *The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China* (1955), *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang* (1960), and *The Secret History of the Mongols* (1964). Included in this last group is the tremendously successful abridged translation of *Monkey* (1942), a sort of fairy-tale novel or folk epic that completely defies categorization, but the sheer fun of this text, appearing as it did in the midst of World War II, might be called a humorous escape from the horrors of war, just as Waley's *Tale of Genji* was "a romantic escape in prose from the aftershock" of the First

War (de Gruchy 2003, 119). Then there is *The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes* (1958), a more serious text that demonstrated like no other Waley's sympathy with the Chinese side against the encroachments of British imperialism. It too defies easy categorization, though we might discuss it between chapters, as an interlude in itself.

At present, I am envisioning these groups of texts as possible essays, or perhaps even as chapters of a book, but obviously since the book is as yet unwritten, the feasibility of this organization is still in question. Fortunately, there does appear to be some chronological sense to Waley's vast *oeuvre*: while he translated poetry throughout his life, he also moved in a clearly defined direction, from pure translations of poetry and discussions of painting, to prose narratives in which poetry, religion, biography, history and folklore were combined. Proceeding chronologically through these associated texts will greatly facilitate the order and structure of my study.

I would like to reiterate the point that I am treating Waley as a creative writer who made an enormous contribution to English-speaking culture through his Chinese-inspired works. I am therefore less concerned with the Chinese originals from which he translated than I am with his English texts, the prefaces and introductions and bibliographies included in those texts (what Tejaswini Niranjana calls the "outwork" of a translation), the critical reception of those texts in the West, and the influence they had on other Western writers (13). This does not mean that no knowledge of the originals is required for such a study; on the contrary, the greater the understanding of Waley's sources, the better an appreciation of Waley's achievement. I simply wish to emphasize that the focus of my attention is Arthur Waley and China in the English-speaking world during the twentieth century.

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