

The Limits of Translation: Method in Arthur Waley's Translations of Chinese Poetry

Arthur Waley (1889–1966), the early twentieth century's greatest translator from Japanese and Chinese, remains something of an enigma. By all contemporary accounts, Waley was an extremely private person, his prodigious scholarly output matched by an extreme reticence on personal matters. To judge from the testimonials included in a tribute volume published shortly after his death, even those who knew him did not seem to know him well.¹ A recent book by John Walter de Gruchy has taken on this mystery, identifying three major undercurrents in Waley's life and work: a suppressed Jewish identity, socialist sympathies, and a hidden tendency towards homosexuality.² Indeed, how better to understand Waley's sympathy for Asian points of view than to note that he himself, born Arthur Schloss, was something of an ethnic outsider in the English upper-middle class?³ Does his early and vigorous preference for the plain-spoken and socially engaged poetry of Bai Juyi not make more sense when we know him as a Fabian socialist? And does a repressed sexuality not provide the best subtext for the tenor of the following characterization of Chinese poetry, from his first volume of translations?

To the European poet the relation between man and woman is a thing of supreme importance and mystery. To the Chinese, it is something commonplace, obvious – a need of the body, not a satisfaction of the *emotions*. These he reserves entirely for friendship.⁴

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¹ Ivan Morris, ed., *Madly Singing in the Mountains: An Anthology and Appreciation of Arthur Waley* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

² See John Walter de Gruchy, *Orientalizing Arthur Waley: Japonism, Orientalism, and the Creation of Japanese Literature in English* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), p. 10, and especially chap. 2.

³ Waley was his mother's maiden name, adopted by the family on the eve of the first World War. This raises an interesting aesthetic question: Would a "Waley translation" have the same ring to it if it were a "Schloss translation"? Would Schloss's translations have had the same cultural impact as Waley's?

⁴ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (London: Constable, 1918; also New York: A. A. Knopf, 1919), p. 4.

De Gruchy's case is well documented, but it is necessarily circumstantial, and barring the emergence of some startling document it seems unlikely that this sort of psycho-historical approach will bear further fruit. In this essay I propose not to unravel Waley's enigmatic genius but to utilize that genius, or a very small portion of it, in an inquiry into the translation of Chinese poetry. I begin by setting out a "process-inclusive" model of translation and proceed to show how Waley used a very explicit instantiation of this model to stake for his translations some sort of claim to poetry. After contextualizing Waley's method as a response to Giles and Pound, I take a critical look at a small selection of early Waley translations to see what kinds of problems arose when his literalist method was put into practice. Turning to Waley's readership, I look at what "literal" signified to them, consider the interrelationship of Waley's limits and limitations with those of his readership, and suggest how limits contributed to the creation of an "audience" for Waley's translations. In a brief conclusion I return to Waley's genius, beyond method and beyond poetry.

TRANSLATION AND METHOD

A large part of the otherwise intelligent
public still labor under the delusion that
the ventriloquist is endowed by nature
with the power of throwing his voice . . .
but what the ventriloquist really does is to imi-
tate as exactly as possible a sound as it is heard
by the ears after it has travelled some distance.

A ventriloquist's manual, E.L. Doctorow, *World's Fair*⁵

The anxieties that gather around translation are at once understandable and misplaced. If I read a work in translation, have I accessed the spirit of the original? What might have been lost, particularly in a language-oriented art like poetry? To deny the validity of these sentiments would be highly unsympathetic, yet to accept them is to acquiesce to a view of the world entirely too naïve. Translation is a fact, not a choice; it is a condition, not a position. We do not wake up one day and decide to translate things foreign into things closer to us; that necessity is forced upon us – even when we take it up with relish. If we commonly treat translation as a possibility, it is inappropriate, because a possibility that cannot be negated is no such thing at all.

⁵ New York: Random House, 1985, p. 275.

Translation is a fact of life partly because cultures have always, from the beginning of history (might this be a way to define “history”?) been coming into contact and acquiring sometimes more and sometimes less accurate information about each other. But its roots are much deeper than that, even more intrinsic to human experience, because translation does not just happen between cultures, between different languages. In the words of Roman Jakobson, “[t]he meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign ‘in which it is more fully developed.’”⁶ When those signs appear in the same language, it is what Jakobson calls “intralingual translation.” This concept underscores the essential unity of translation and interpretation, understanding “interpretation” in the most basic sense, as something we do with every single linguistic utterance in order to get its “meaning.” It is happening right now, as you transform these words into your thoughts.

On a most essential level, then, translation is part of our cognitive process, inherent in the way in which we process experience.⁷ If you do not accept translation, then you have sealed yourself into solipsism, because no one will ever understand you, nor will you ever understand them, without some “translation” into more personal sets of signs. But such a broad and idealistic formulation of the matter leaves many holes to fill, amongst which three are of particular significance for this essay. First, pointing out the pervasiveness of translation in no way diminishes its problematic nature. Like other fundamental elements of socialized human life – war, for example – translation can never be fully resolved into philosophy or science. It always, as we shall see with Waley, leaves some jagged edges. Second, there may be a qualitative difference between the essence of translation – “intralingual translation” – and its most pressing reality – “interlingual translation,” or translation between languages – such that translating between cultures, especially cultures with largely discrete histories, is in fact quite different from the negotiations of interpretation we perform in everyday life.⁸ This qualitative distance was one of Waley’s main concerns, and

⁶ Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, ed., *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), p. 429. The internal quotation is from Charles S. Peirce. See also the critical discussion in Umberto Eco, *Experiences in Translation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 67–74.

⁷ George Steiner is the most persistent expositor of this view of translation. For a recent formulation, see Steiner, “Translation as *Conditio humana*,” in Harald Kittel, Juliane House and Brigitte Schultze, ed. *Translation: An International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Vol. 1. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 1–11.

⁸ At the same time it must be stressed that assertions of historical difference are prone to exaggeration. In a hundred years, there will certainly still exist a historical gap between Chi-

it was this that prompted him to say of Judith Gautier's (1845–1917) extremely popular book of French translations from the Chinese that “if she had been able to translate [the poems] correctly, her book would not have become a classic; for the originals abound in references to customs, traditions and places unfamiliar to Western readers.”⁹ Simple historical distance may present more intractable problems than any philosophical issue.

Finally, by linking translation to the cognitive process, we introduce a complicating factor into our discussion. When we say that translation is fundamental to *the way in which we experience* the world, that is something different than saying that translation is fundamental to *our experience* of the world, even if the latter statement is true as well. Just as a translated poem may be thought of as a “meta-poem,” so the act of translation must be considered a “meta-act,” one that encompasses both itself and the grounds on which it occurs.¹⁰ It is in this sense that translation is a kind of criticism, as criticism involves both what is critiqued and the grounds for the critique itself.

This last point bestows new importance on both explicit and implicit discourse on translation. It entails that statements about translation – about *the way in which* a translation is done – are to be taken not as supplementary explanation but as part of the process of translation itself. (See figure 1.) Consider, for example, one hallowed pronouncement on the art of translation: “I have endeavored,” says John Dryden, “to make Virgil speak such English as he would himself have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age.”¹¹ This naturalizing approach to translation is one of the most well-known (and frequently attacked) positions on the subject, and it could easily be applied to Arthur Waley's work, which famously found a register for Chinese and Japanese voices in Bloomsbury-era English. The problem is that any pronouncement on translation, no matter how straightforward on the surface, always arrives in the form of paratext, as a constituent part of a holistic act of translation. As such, discourse on translation is largely

nese and English, but it may be no more (albeit no less) remarkable than that between English and German, for instance, in the present day.

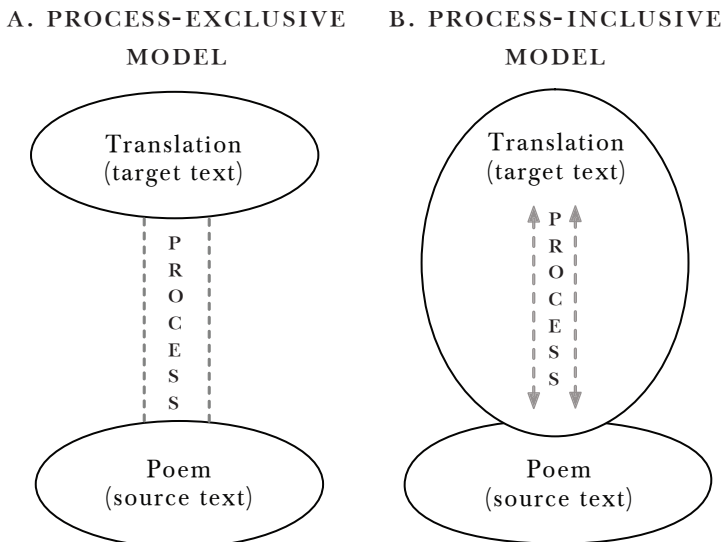
⁹ *Times Literary Supplement* (hereafter *TLS*), August 14, 1919, p. 436.

¹⁰ The useful term “meta-poem,” used to denote the fact that a translated poem is both a poem itself and a perspective on another poem, or a kind of criticism, was coined by James S Holmes in his 1969 essay “Forms of Verse Translation and the Translation of Verse Form,” included in Holmes, *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp. 23–33.

¹¹ See Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, ed., *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 26.

“rhetorical,” in that what is said is less at issue than the effect of what is said. Here, Dryden is not describing his translations but creating an ecology in which his translations will exist. “I have endeavored ... the way he would have ... if he had been ...” – this describes not the translations but the translator’s attitude to the translations, an attitude that is supposed to emerge as feeling when the words of the translations are read. The statement is part of the “ground” according to which the translations are to be read, which is no different from saying that it is part of the translations themselves.

Figure 1. Two Models of Translation



Model A would suggest that “process” merely serves to generate target text from source text. Model B depicts the role of process more accurately, with process explicitly or implicitly a constituent part of the target text.

The quotation at the head of this section illustrates this point. Translation (ventriloquism) is *not* about “throwing [one’s] voice.” Rather, it is the complex mimetic process of “imitat[ing] as exactly as possible a sound as it is heard by the ears after it has travelled some distance.” What is the difference? To throw one’s voice is a direct effect. In translation terms, it is the equivalent of transparency, the no-

tion that the translation process can be skipped over or hidden away, to make a translation read like an original. But translation does not erase whatever process or “distance” is involved, be it between ventriloquist and puppet, translation and original, or translator and author. To the contrary, one *creates* that distance, realizing it in the minds of the listeners or readers by producing not just a voice but a mimetic context for the voice to appear in. This is an essential difference, because it means that translation is not just “carrying over” but a mimesis of the process of “carrying over,” a view of its own act. When one watches a play, one does not see clothes, shadows and people, but costumes, lighting and characters. The effect is in the establishment and recognition of distance, not in its closure or erasure.

WALEY’S METHOD

For many a fair precept in poetry is, like a seeming demonstration in mathematics, very specious in the diagram, but failing in the mechanic operation.

John Dryden, preface to *Ovid’s Epistles* (1680)¹²

The foregoing discussion makes clear the integral place of method in translation. It is integral not because we need to know what a translator’s motives were before we can read his or her translation, but because the nature of translation as a mimesis of process demands that a translator’s method, or process, will figure in the translation, either as explicitly stated methodology or implicitly in the translation’s structure and detail. Here I look at what ideas were involved in Waley’s process; later we will see what kind of poetry his method produced.

The model outlined above would favor a “visible” translation strategy, or at least the visibility of the translator’s invisibility, and this is indeed where Waley positions himself. Thus he concludes a grudgingly appreciative 1923 review of Shigeyoshi Obata’s translations of Li Bai by saying:

Their great merit is one which is generally considered a defect. They read like translations, not like originals; so that the imagination, conscious that it is dealing with things incomplete, is incited to supply as well as may be what has been left out.¹³

¹² Schulte and Biguenet, *Theories of Translation*, p. 22.

¹³ *TLS*, January 25, 1923, p. 52.

The failure of the translation to attain the fluency of an original is precisely its means of success. This is not to say that Waley has deemed the translations themselves successful. The difference is that between saying a piece of music is beautiful, presuming an attribute that we then perceive or fail to perceive, and saying that the music provokes reflection on beauty, which puts emphasis on the effect of the piece without speaking directly of any inherent quality. Waley could not bring himself to approve of Obata's translations in and of themselves, but he did approve of their catalytic effect on the reader's mind, inciting the powers of imagination to recreate the poetry of the original. It may be that a more successful translation, free of "defect," would fail to achieve this effect.

Waley expresses similar thoughts when he speaks of his own work. In a 1929 essay on Japanese literature, he calls early Japanese poetry "the most completely untranslatable" of all the world's poetries, and to address this problem he issues some stage directions to his readers:

In translation, only the thought survives; the poem no longer "goes," any more than a watch goes if you take its works out of their casing and empty them upon a sheet of paper. In the few examples that I am about to give, the reader must for himself discover the *possibility* of poetry. If he is a poet, this will present no difficulty; just as a watch-maker would see in the scattered springs and wheels the possibility of a watch.¹⁴

Waley's starting point, somewhat surprisingly, is a radically negative position in the debate on translation, namely that the poem translated is no longer poetry. We will see him take a more optimistic position, below, and here he is admittedly speaking specifically of the Japanese *waka*, yet the statement is significant nonetheless. Waley's approach to translation is essentially theoretical, dealing not in the substance of the poem but in its grounds for existence, in its "possibility." He accepts, or asserts, that the poem in translation does not "go," or at least does not "go" in the same physical, organic sense of a real poem. His solution is to remove the poem from its "casing" (the original language) and spread the parts out for the reader to see, so that the poem can "go" conceptually. As was the case in his comments on Obata's translations, the translation is meant to expose something which in its very insufficiency will stir the reader's imagination to discover the

¹⁴ From "The Originality of Japanese Civilization," first published 1929, collected in Morris, *Madly Singing*, p. 334.

“possibility” of the poem’s operating mechanism. This discovery will make the poem “go” virtually – “If he is a poet,” that is.

These examples date from a slightly later period in Waley’s career, but this model of translation as an exposition of insufficiency has bearing on the translation methodology Waley set out for his own translations, first in the 1917 *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* and then in somewhat expanded form in *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1918; U.S. edition 1919) under the heading “The Method of Translation.”¹⁵ The latter begins with a circumspect statement similar to the one above: “It is commonly asserted that poetry, when literally translated, ceases to be poetry.” “This is often true,” he concedes, but he continues to say that he has selected for literal translation poems that will transcend this barrier: “I present the ones I have chosen in the belief that they still retain the essential characteristic of poetry.” The formulation is problematic. Do the poems he has translated remain poetry? Or do they merely “retain the essential characteristics of poetry,” in the way that Obata’s imperfect translations seem to have, in Waley’s view? We will return to this question below.

Waley’s method lays the groundwork for what James S Holmes has labeled “mimetic form,” that is, a translation which claims to derive its formal qualities directly from those of the original.¹⁶ But as we shall see, mimetic form is as much constructed as it is distilled. Waley begins:

Any literal translation of Chinese poetry is bound to be to some extent rhythmical, for the rhythm of the original obtrudes itself. If one translates literally, without thinking about the metre of the version, one finds that about two lines out of three have a very definite swing, similar to that of the Chinese lines.

Here Waley presents a method of translation that appears guileless, and it falls to us to dissolve that appearance. The problem with saying that any translation from Chinese will be “to some extent rhythmical” is that one could say the same of *anything*, since rhythm, as a pattern of sounds, can be identified in any string of words approached with rhythm in mind. (“...in any string of words approached with rhythm in mind”). What Waley presents here is no neutral description but an assertion that the original poem will “obtrude” through the translated version.

¹⁵ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 1.1: 53–54, *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, pp. 19–20. Quotations below are from the book version.

¹⁶ See Holmes, “Forms of Verse Translation,” pp. 24–25. It might be preferable to specify “directly mimetic form,” since Holmes’s “analogical form,” discussed below, is also a kind of mimesis.

Read as I tell you, Waley says to his readers, and you will find a “very definite swing” supposed to be reflective of the original poem.¹⁷

The remaining lines are just too short or too long, a circumstance very irritating to the reader, whose ear expects the rhythm to continue. I have therefore tried to produce regular rhythmic effects similar to those of the original.

Waley’s assertion on behalf of literal translation is contained within an eminently naturalistic formulation. The translation is portrayed as an emanation of the original, done “without thinking about the metre,” and presumably the reader should be able to approach it equally naively. But here Waley recognizes that in translation, as in poetry, naturalism will only carry one so far. There must be an element of *poesis*, of creation, and this portion of the discussion provides the first hints of Waley’s artifice. What is noteworthy is that craft is still justified naturalistically: “*just* too short or too long ... *very irritating* to the reader, whose ear *expects*...” By a rhetorical sleight of hand, Waley imputes his own reactions to his readership in general, rendering the artifice of his translations a choice driven by common human sentiment, not his own motivations.

Waley’s pursuit of “regular rhythmic effects,” then, cuts two ways. On the one hand, such regularity is, as he says, inherent to the original poems (Chinese *shi* 詩-poetry being composed almost exclusively in isometric lines). On the other hand, “regularity” refers not to the poems but to the expectations he seeks to naturalize, and as such it has less to do with the original poem than with representing it in a chosen aesthetic fashion. The rhythmic regularity he pursues is an active mimesis, related to concerns for literalness and naturalness but not at all dictated by them. He proceeds to the details:

Each character in the Chinese is represented by a stress in the English; but between the stresses unstressed syllables are of course interposed. In a few instances where the English insisted on being shorter than the Chinese, I have preferred to vary the metre of my version, rather than pad out the line with unnecessary verbiage.

Here surfaces a key term – “represent.” The stark contrast between the syntactic concision of classical Chinese and the virtual requirement of auxiliaries, articles, prepositions and conjunctions in English means that there is slight chance of achieving an easy identity between

¹⁷ Ming Xie observes that “swing” was one of Pound’s favored terms; see Xie, *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism* (New York: Garland, 1999), p. 195.

Chinese word and English word, or phrase and phrase. Waley's solution is ingenious in its way, and has been regarded as a major achievement in the development of translation strategies for Chinese poetry.¹⁸ The English word typically has several syllables but only one major stress. By establishing an equation between that stressed syllable and the monosyllabic Chinese character, Waley is able to produce lines in translation that, when read with this method in mind, apparently have the same number of "beats" as the Chinese one. It does not matter that this is not true: a Chinese line of five syllables typically has three stressed beats (the first, third and fifth syllables) when read naturally, whereas there is no established pattern of stress amongst the words in the kind of line fashioned by Waley. What matters is that Waley has set up a theory of equivalency to explain how the translation represents the original and implemented that theory, with instructions and justifications for his readers.

The second sentence here, referring to variation in the meter, is absent in the 1917 journal version and appears only the following year in the book form of Waley's "Method of Translation." The addition is significant because it shows Waley hedging on his theory, pulling it back under the guise of naturalism and fidelity to the original. He has presented a method, but when either the original or the translation "insists" he declares that he will not resist.

Thus, a direct mimetic form has been established, but it is firmly ensconced in a natural habitat. This is the direction of his ensuing comments as well:

I have not used rhyme, because it is impossible to produce in English rhyme effects at all similar to those of the original, where the same rhyme sometimes runs through a whole poem. Also, because the restrictions of rhyme necessarily injure either the vigour of one's language or the literalness of one's version. I do not, at any rate, know of any example to the contrary.

Here we must remember that rhyme had only recently lost its status as a common component of English poetry. To translators of a generation prior, rhyme would quite reasonably have been regarded both as a valid aspect of the mimetic form – reproducing a significant quality in the original poem – *and* as a natural feature of verse. To Waley, it was no longer the latter. As to the former, if, as Waley

¹⁸ For a characterization of Waley's method stressing its impact on later translators, with remarks on its potential shortcomings, see Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft, *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1997), pp. 66–67.

asserts, it is difficult to carry a single rhyme through a whole English poem, it would not seem that varying the rhyme would be in principle a concession any different from his attempt to reproduce the syllable count of the original through English stresses. Nor is there any reason to think rhyme harms the “vigour of one’s language,” whatever that might mean. What is true is that achieving rhyme can make unforced literalness hard to achieve. Thus, the real reasons for the absence of rhyme in Waley’s translation are, first, its absence from the modernist poetic mode he was working in, and second, its potential to complicate the prosaic style he was establishing.¹⁹

In the English tradition, “blank verse” was the strongest resource for poetry without rhyme. Thus Waley concludes by excluding that particular formal possibility:

What is generally known as “blank verse” is the worst medium for translating Chinese poetry, because the essence of blank verse is that it varies the position of its pauses, whereas in Chinese the stop always comes at the end of the couplet.

Blank verse is an easy target, for exactly the reason Waley gives: enjambment is used very selectively between lines in Chinese *shi*-poetry, and never, strictly speaking, between couplets. But Waley is also foreclosing another kind of mimetic possibility, what Holmes has called “analogical form,” that is, a form selected in the target language as a legitimate *analogy* to the form in the source language. A strong argument could be made that insofar as the enjambed line is a “dominant” characteristic in English poetry, it could reasonably be deployed as an equivalent of the dominant stopped line in Chinese. To entertain this possibility, however, is to move away from literal translation, which is what, above all, Waley has declared his translations to be.

In sum, Arthur Waley’s statement on method shows that his first concern is literalness. A literal rendering is supposed to be able to relay the “essential characteristics” of the poetry. But Waley is not satisfied to rest there, in the “insufficiency” of a literal translation. He claims that a literal rendering also carries over the poetic form of the original, and with this “obtrusion” as his basis he creates a mimetic form meant to

¹⁹ The general absence of rhyme from scholarly translation from Waley onward seems to be a concession to the difficulties such an enterprise would entail when one is setting out to translate a large number of poems accurately, but at least one good justification for omitting rhyme has been proposed: reviewing rhymed versions by James J. Y. Liu, Hans Frankel observes that rhyme is unnecessary because it is one aspect of Chinese poetry that native speakers of English are thoroughly familiar with from their own poetic tradition and perfectly capable of supplying imaginatively. See *HJAS* 24 (1962–63): 260–70, p. 269.

represent the original's formal qualities. The result was something no longer transparent or natural, but an obtrusively process-inclusive style of translation that later ages would immediately recognize as "Waley." Is the product of this method a translatorial triumph? Or is the method merely "very specious" (i.e., attractive) in its design, as the quotation from Dryden at the beginning of this section has it?

WALEY'S PREDECESSORS: GILES AND POUND

Superior people will be pained at the flatness of the metre;
Common people will hate the plainness of the words.
from Bai Juyi, "Illness and Idleness," trans. Arthur Waley²⁰

The one passage from "The Method of Translation" not discussed above reads:

I have aimed at literal translation, not paraphrase. It may be perfectly legitimate for a poet to borrow foreign themes or material, but this should not be called translation.

Above all, considering imagery to be the soul of poetry, I have avoided either adding images of my own or suppressing those of the original.²¹

These are pointed words. Far from being a general statement of his approach, this pronouncement is directed towards Waley's two most important interlocutors in the translation of Chinese poetry into English, one, Herbert Allen Giles (1845–1935), a generation older, and the other, Ezra Pound (1885–1972), a contemporary.

Giles was a prolific translator, but not of poetry. Relatively little poetry appeared in his 1884 anthology, *Gems of Chinese Literature*, where he remarked of the Tang that "[i]t was the epoch of glittering poetry (untranslatable, alas!)." ²² Whatever he may have meant by this comment – that poetry is essentially untranslatable? or perhaps that he was not yet confident dealing with the poetic idiom? – he would later

²⁰ Arthur Waley, *More Translations from the Chinese* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1919; also New York: A.A. Knopf, 1919), p. 35; *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校, Zhu Jincheng 朱金城, ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988), p. 331: 上怪落聲韻, 下嫌拙言詞. This is a good example of the treacheries inherent in translation. *Shang ... xia ...* can be used very loosely, almost in the sense of "on the one hand ... on the other" (see Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次, *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* 大漢和辭典 [rev. edn. Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1984] vol. 1, p. 196, no. 13, def. 16), and if a value is being implied here, it more likely refers to two grades of critical acumen than explicitly to two grades of people. Waley's "superior" and "common people" is too strong, but what would be just right?

²¹ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 19.

²² *Gems of Chinese Literature* (London: Bernard Quaritch, and Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1884), p. viii.

take on the challenge with a full book of poetry translations, *Chinese Poetry in English Verse* (1898). This work was the first listed in Waley's bibliography for *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, affixed with the note: "Combines rhyme and literalness with wonderful dexterity."²³ Perhaps he wished to show some deference to the older scholar, not aware that the two would engage in a protracted and caustic spat when Giles published a critique of Waley's efforts.²⁴ It is clearly at odds with Waley's characterization of rhyme quoted above from the same book, that it "necessarily injure[s] the literalness of one's version." "I do not," wrote Waley there, "... know of any example to the contrary." And if we look at Giles's translations, we will see, as Waley no doubt did, that Giles took immense liberties with them, to the extent that they may be better termed "paraphrase." Here is one example:

My eyes saw not the men of old;
And now their age away has rolled
I weep – to think I shall not see
The heroes of posterity.²⁵

This is a quatrain that will be immediately familiar to anyone who has learned a few of the schoolboy's favorite Tang poems, but in Giles's rendering it might be unrecognizable. Perhaps the first line, which is almost literal, and the general theme will still call to mind the original, the "Song of Youzhou Terrace" of Chen Zi'ang.²⁶ Giles has completely obliterated the play on words in the first couplet, where the directional words "in front" (*qian*) and "behind" (*hou*) have a reversed temporal meaning, "of times past" and "in the future," respectively. Likewise the scene, of a lone man ascending to a height gazing into the endless (*youyou*) vista, is meant to mesh with the poet's meditation on the eternal (also *youyou*) workings of the cosmos, but neither is present in Giles's version.

Virtually all of Giles's translations exhibit this same quality, and sometimes the hackneyed paraphrase is far worse, as when he places a cliché like "He'll find some day the bird has flown!" into the mouth of the speaker of the closing line of the first of the "Nineteen Old Poems,"

²³ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 21.

²⁴ Giles published a critical appraisal of Waley's first book in *Cambridge Review* 40 (1918), and they carried on an extended debate in the pages of *The New China Review*, published in Shanghai from 1919 to 1922. There is an excerpt of the latter in Morris, *Madly Singing*, pp. 297-305.

²⁵ *Chinese Poetry in English Verse* (London: Bernard Quaritch, and Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1898), p. 43.

²⁶ "Deng Youzhoutai ge" 登幽州台歌: 前不見古人, 後不見來者, 念天地之悠悠, 獨愴然而涕下. Peng Dingqiu 彭定球 et al. ed., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960) 83.902.

where she literally says “An empty bed is hard to keep alone” 空牀難獨守.²⁷ Yet we ought not rush to judgment on Giles’s efforts. Giles’s style may sound antiquated, but before the advent of “modernism” poetry simply sounded that way. Had he translated into the kind of diction Waley would employ, his translations would have been regarded as prose cribs, not “English verse.” And though Giles had less room to maneuver theoretically, less space to create a mimetic form, he does succeed in utilizing “with wonderful dexterity” the possibilities of analogical form, using rhyming iambic meters to echo the form of the Chinese originals, and even, one could argue, English poetic cliché to meet the use of cliché in Chinese poetry. Did the sound of the Chinese poems not signify to an educated Chinese as did the traditional English verse forms to the educated European?

Furthermore, Waley’s “method of translation” glosses over one very significant issue: that in poetry there will always be lines that are simply impossible to translate literally. The fourth line of the Chen Zi’ang quatrain is a case in point. Literally *du chuangran er ti xia* might mean something like “I alone feel forlornly and my tears stream down.” We may not agree with Giles’s solution – he has essentially dropped the line, condensing it into “I weep” – but the problem itself is intractable. Waley in fact falls into this very trap in his criticisms of Giles. To a line which Giles had rendered (in his prose version of Bai Juyi’s “Ballad of the Lute” *Pipa xing* 琵琶行) “So fell the plectrum once more upon the strings, with a slash like the rent of silk” 曲終收撥當心畫，四弦一聲如裂帛， Waley responds: “This ... is not even an attempt to translate the text. Surely the sense is: ‘When the tune was ended she withdrew her plectrum, sweeping it (as a painter sweeps his brush) across her breast, and the four strings (played in *arpeggio*) sounded with a slash like the rent of silk.’”²⁸ As a scholarly critique, this may be unobjectionable. But how exactly would Waley see his literal understanding making its way into a stylized prose version, to say nothing of a verse rendering? Is Giles’s version in this case such a poor compromise? To turn Waley’s own words back on him, translation itself sometimes “necessarily injure[s] ... the literalness of one’s version.” The most that can be said about Giles, and the formal restrictions he worked within, is that he strayed from literal meaning too easily.

Giles was a relic of the nineteenth century, but Ezra Pound presented a different sort of problem. Pound’s significance in the intro-

²⁷ Giles, *Chinese Poetry*, p. 13.

²⁸ See Morris, *Madly Singing*, p. 299.

duction of Chinese poetry in the west and his influence on Waley are well known. William Butler Yeats, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, proclaimed that “Ezra Pound’s *Cathay* created the manner followed with more learning but less subtlety of rhythm by Arthur Waley.”²⁹ One recent scholar of the modernist period has put a slightly more positive twist on the relationship, stating that “Waley’s translations were no doubt meant to meet the challenge represented by Pound’s *Cathay*,” but still following Yeats in viewing Waley’s efforts as “pretty lame excuses” of “little originality.”³⁰ Scholars of Chinese and Japanese, however, have seemed reluctant to acknowledge Waley’s connection to Pound. Thus A.C. Graham, writing in 1966, framed the issue more generally, saying that “[t]he art of translating Chinese poetry is a by-product of the Imagist movement” and singling out Waley as “the unique instance of a sinologist who is also a poet.”³¹ Ivan Morris, editor of the Waley tribute volume, seems almost protective of Waley’s originality:

A good deal has been said about the influence on Waley’s poetry of Pound, Eliot, and especially Gerard Manley Hopkins. I doubt whether it was important. In his reactions against the conventions of rhyme and the iambic he belonged to the general trend of post-war poetry; and his discovery of the flexible use of stress in lines of unequal length came before he had ever read Hopkins or heard of “sprung rhythm.”³²

There is certainly some truth in the gentler view of Waley’s partisans. The influence of the Far East – initially centered on Japan and the visual arts, with Chinese poetry a latecomer – was decisive and diffuse in the rise of the modernist aesthetic. Pound was the straw that stirred the drink, but East Asian themes and “aesthetic” were already very much in play. Nevertheless, Pound’s direct influence on Waley

²⁹ Yeats, *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892–1935* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. xl. This of course follows T.S. Eliot’s oft-quoted claim that “Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time”; see Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), p. 14.

³⁰ Xie, *Ezra Pound*, p. 6, p. 174.

³¹ A.C. Graham, *Poems of the Late Tang* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 13.

³² Morris, *Madly Singing*, pp. 72–73. The question of Hopkins and “sprung rhythm” is a vexed one, but again Morris is too ingenuous. On at least two occasions late in his life (both included in *Madly Singing*; see pp. 137, 158) Waley asserted that he had never heard of Hopkins when he formulated his method of translation, but in an interview in that same period (also *Madly Singing*, p. 144) he admitted that Hopkins’s work was known to him “long before” Robert Bridges published it in 1918. There was certainly a line of influence, if only an indirect one. Of course, the results of Waley’s methods sound nothing like Hopkins’s “sprung rhythm” effect – at least in Waley’s first two books.

must be insisted upon. Pound received the Fenollosa notebooks in the fall of 1913 and worked his way through them the following year.³³ The result, *Cathay: translations by Ezra Pound; for the most part from the Chinese of Rihaku, from the notes of the late Ernest Fenollosa, and the decipherings of the professors Mori and Ariga*, appeared in 1915, and slightly expanded in 1916 as a portion of Pound's *Lustra*. The effect of this publication on modern poetry was immediate and permanent, and whatever independence we may grant him Waley was perforce bound up with *Cathay*. Furthermore, we know from Pound's letters that Waley visited him in June of 1915, immediately after the publication of *Cathay*, to view the Fenollosa materials,³⁴ and in 1916 Waley had a chapbook of poem translations printed privately, his first effort at Chinese poetry.³⁵ Wai-lim Yip has observed that it contains many word-for-word literal translations, a method Waley by and large abandoned in his ensuing publications.³⁶ This may be viewed both as the influence of the Fenollosa manuscripts, which contained word-for-word versions, and as a reaction to Pound's transformation of those manuscripts, which were decidedly not literal.

Pound's reaction to Waley is also informative. Pound did arrange for the publication of Waley's work in the October 1917 issue of *The Little Review*, one of the primary venues for modernist work in the U.S., but Pound was an advocate for Chinese poetry, not Waley, and if he was eager to see Waley's work reach a broader audience of poets it was because he saw him as a reliable scholar, not because he appreciated his translations. Hence in an April 1917 correspondence with Margaret Anderson, the founding editor of *The Little Review*, Pound speaks of the possibility of obtaining translations from "Waley, the best Chinese scholar in English, with an eye for good poems (but unfortunately de-

³³ Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1995), p. 61. In addition to the works mentioned the present article by Fang, Yip, Kenner, Qian and Xie, two valuable starting points for the Pound-Fenollosa connection are Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Displacements: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth Century American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling and Lucas Klein, ed., *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition* (New York: Fordham U.P., 2008).

³⁴ From a letter to his father in late June 1915: "Chap, named Waley, from Museum, in last night to see Fenollosa mss"; quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), p. 279.

³⁵ Pound's name is on a list of sixty-one intended recipients; see Francis A. Johns, *A Bibliography of Arthur Waley* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U.P., 1968), p. 8.

³⁶ Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathay* (Princeton U.P., 1969), pp. 26–28; also Xie, *Ezra Pound*, pp. 143–45, 182. A facsimile reproduction was issued by Rutgers University Library in 1965. Vestiges of his word-for-word approach are still visible in *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, where it is being displaced by the method under discussion here. Interestingly, relatively few of the poems in the 1916 work reappear in his publications of 1917 onward.

fects in his translatorial style).” In June he complains about the quality of the translations, saying that “if I had to act like a normal editor I should simply lose the man.” And in July, having finally obtained some suitable poems, Pound reports:

Have at last got hold of Waley’s translations from Po Chu I. Some of the poems are magnificent. Nearly all the translations are marred by his bungling English and defective rhythm. Actual idiom of his english [sic] an improvement on his earlier stuff.

I shall try to buy the best ones, and to get him to remove some of the botched places. (He is stubborn as a jackass, or a scholar.)

...

yours annoyed (i.e. because Waley has so much intelligence without having just a bit more. DAMN fool ought to improve on Cathay instead of falling below it.)³⁷

“Stubborn” is simply Pound’s gloss on Waley’s alternative to Pound’s style of translation. When Waley prefaces his method by saying that “[i]t may be perfectly legitimate for a poet to borrow foreign themes or material, but this should not be called translation,” he is certainly referring to Pound, who had explicitly labeled *Cathay* a book of “translations.”³⁸

One brief example will suffice for specific evidence of the challenge Pound represented to Waley. Pound’s rendering of the first couplet of a famous medieval ballad (“Moshang sang” 陌上桑) reads:

The sun rises in south east corner of things
To look on the tall house of the Shin.³⁹

Pound derived his version from Fenollosa, whose translation reads:

The sun rises in the South East corner,
And it shines on the villa of the Shin clan.⁴⁰

³⁷ The correspondence in this paragraph is quoted from Thomas L. Scott and Melvin J. Friedman, ed., with Jackson R. Bryer, *Pound/The Little Review: The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson: The Little Review Correspondence* (New York: New Directions, 1988).

³⁸ On the Japanese side, it has been argued that Waley’s work on Nō drama was also intended as a corrective to the Pound-Yeats collaboration; see de Gruchy, *Orienteering Arthur Waley*, pp. 87 ff.

³⁹ *Lustra of Ezra Pound* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1916), p. 90. This poem does not appear in the original *Cathay*.

⁴⁰ A digital image of this page of Fenollosa’s notebook is available on the Beinecke Library website: http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/dl_crosscollex/photoneg/oneITEM.asp?pid=3900204389734&iid=4389734 (accessed February 1, 2012).

Fenollosa's translation of the couplet (日出東南隅·照我秦氏樓) is quite literal.⁴¹ This is by no means Pound at his strangest, but the changes are generally symptomatic of his approach. He has left out a natural definite article, "the," in the first line, thus defamiliarizing the language of the text, if not giving it a pidgin effect. He enjoys adding in generalized non-sequitur, as in the tag "of things" at the end of the line, which has no basis in Fenollosa's notes. In the second line, he has rejected the natural verb for sun, "to shine," in favor of the anthropomorphic "look on," and his "tall house," while not wrong (Fenollosa's word-for-word version has "two-storied house"), has a distorting effect, suggesting that all things in a Chinese poem can be reduced to their most basic and primitive elements (thus "tall" over "two-storied," and "house," certainly not "villa").

This is not a criticism of Pound. As Hugh Kenner, Pound's most articulate defender, has said of the fanciful etymologies in Pound's later experiments with Chinese, "[a]ny sinologist is entitled to protest that this is like finding *iron* in *irony*; but Picasso by analogous process found a baboon's head in the shape of a toy car."⁴² As Waley allows, it is "perfectly legitimate" work for a poet. But in the words of the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) review of *Cathay*, "Mr. Pound insists upon the distance of these translations, and we should like to know whether his language makes them more abrupt than they are in the original."⁴³ Waley emerged to answer this perfectly legitimate question.

To sum up, Waley struck a middle path between Giles and Pound. Neither of his predecessors was literal and both were exhibits in stylistic excess, Giles's old-fashioned, Pound's new-fashioned. Fidelity and naturalness, by contrast, were the foundation for Waley's effort. Yet here emerge two problems. First, from the simple elements of fidelity and naturalness he actually constructed something new, a "method" that would necessarily, despite his protestations to the contrary, subsume and transform the translation into something not literal or natural. In and of itself this is not problematic, insofar as no translation can truly be literal (because languages are not equivalent) or natural (because the truly natural cannot be interpreted). The question is what kind of

⁴¹ In his word-for-word crib, Fenollosa does have "our" for *wo* in the second line.

⁴² See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 144, referring to Pound's use of the character *xian* 顯 in Canto 91. The anodyne title of Kenner's book, incidentally, belies a work of idiosyncratic brilliance by one of the twentieth century's great readers of poetry.

⁴³ "Poems from Cathay" [Review of Ezra Pound, *Cathay*], *TLS* April 29, 1915, p. 144. Like the long essay on Waley's translations discussed below, this article is unsigned but identified as the work of Arthur Clutton-Brock in the *TLS* index.

poetry this method produced. But that leads to the second question: whether or not Waley in fact expected it to produce poetry. We saw above how Waley appeared to limit himself to making available the “essential characteristics of poetry” in his first book. With his second book, *More Translations from the Chinese* (1919), he makes a stronger case for his work as poetry:

While many of the pieces in 170 *Chinese Poems* aimed at literary form in English, others did no more than give the sense of the Chinese in almost as crude a way as [a word-for-word translation]. It was probably because of this inconsistency that no reviewer treated the book as an experiment in English unrhymed verse, though this was the aspect of it which most interested the writer. In the present work I have aimed more consistently at poetic form.⁴⁴

The reader (and reviewer) is put on notice to read his translations as experiment in verse. But does this mean that the “clockworks” are meant to “go” as poems? Is Waley’s avoidance of the word “poetry” in this passage a coincidence, or is he hedging again, leaving room for some kind of deliberate “insufficiency” in his creations? Whatever the case, the result of his efforts may well be, to borrow the voice of Waley’s Bai Juyi, the “plainest,” “flattest” book of verse ever published in the English language.

WALEY’S POETRY

There is no one among men that has not a special failing;
And my failing consists in writing verses.

Bai Juyi, “Madly Singing in the Mountains,” trans. Arthur Waley⁴⁵

Modernist “free verse” was both opportunity and quandary for Arthur Waley. The essence of free verse is not that it is “free” from the usual formal restraints of verse form, but that form is freely generated by the individual poem. This is exactly what Pound did in his *Cathay* poems; but put this way, what first seemed a suitable medium for literal translation becomes on second examination a near impossibility, for how is one to allow a literal translation the freedom to generate something not literal? Waley’s method was a curious attempt to fill in this gap. By replacing freely generated form with one generated by specific strictures – his mimetic beat-rhythm – Waley actually reversed

⁴⁴ Waley, *More Translations*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 144; Zhu, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, p. 407: 人各有一癖，我癖在章句。

the momentum of modernist verse, fitting it with a “hard form” more reminiscent of traditional poetics. This is well attested.⁴⁶ Of specific interest here is the fact that his method also led him away from literal translation, his ostensible starting point and goal.

“I have aimed at literal translation... .” Thinking about Arthur Waley’s translations, we always comes back to this claim. How literal are his translations? Where and in what ways do they stray from being literal? And what exactly do we mean by “literal”? Wai-lim Yip has made a useful distinction between “two levels of literal translation, one being the reproduction of the mode of representation by attending to the syntactical literalness ..., the other being the transmission of the prose sense or dictionary sense alone,” the latter associated with Waley.⁴⁷ Indeed, scarcely a line in Waley’s translations defies or even bends the conventions of English prose grammar. In his day, this was not altogether a bad feature. Laying out the basic meaning of Chinese poetry in clear English, free of any obfuscation, met a dire need of the period. But as Yip’s formulation implies, this kind of literal translation would not seem to support poetry, since it is not duly attentive to the art of language in the original poem. Waley, to the extent that he realized this dilemma, sought a way around the problem, creating a metrical method that he alleged would elevate his translations beyond mere prose. But did it work?

Consider Bai Juyi’s “On Board Ship: Reading Yüan Chen’s Poems” (“Zhouzhong du Yuan jiu shi” 舟中讀元九詩):⁴⁸

I take your poems in my hand and read them beside the candle;
The poems are finished, the candle is low, dawn not yet come.
With sore eyes by the guttering candle still I sit in the dark,
Listening to waves that, driven by the wind, strike the prow of
the ship.

把君詩卷燈前讀，詩盡燈殘天未明。
眼痛滅燈猶闔坐，逆風吹浪打船聲。

This is a classic example of Waley’s mimetic form. Read according to his method, seven stresses can reasonably be attributed to each line, creating a steady rhythm throughout the poem. But what has he achieved by maintaining such a rhythm? Read the poem aloud. One will be hard-pressed to find anything poetic in its language and cadences.

⁴⁶ For example Xie (*Ezra Pound*, p. 195), who concludes that Waley’s “‘swing’ is not generated organically [but] remains something lifted over and imposed from the outside.”

⁴⁷ Yip, *Ezra Pound’s Cathay*, p. 89 n. 26.

⁴⁸ *A Hundred and Seventy*, p. 142; Zhu, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, p. 947.

There is something grating, and inappropriate to the poem's sense, in the curt vowel assonances of "dawn not yet come," and the phrase "still I sit in the dark" hangs there limply in a thoroughly unpoetic ambiguity.⁴⁹ This is "mimetic form" in its crudest sense, as a taxidermic replication of certain qualities of some original.

What do we want from a translation, and what do we find in this one? As Pound testified, Waley had "an eye for good poems," and Waley was right that a literal translation can convey something of the "essential characteristic" of a good poem, which might be said to consist of the poem's imagery ("the soul of poetry," according to Waley) and the poem's conceit or idea. The conceit of this poem is the "paradox" of two friends who find themselves separated and alone but drawn closer together not just through the sharing of poems in manuscript but through the finitude of those material-bound poems and the return to the eternal loneliness of midnight. The imagery of the poem is subdued until the synesthetic crescendo in the fourth line. Which is to say, the fourth line is the heart of the poem – but this brings us back to the question of literal translation, because while the first three lines can reasonably be deemed literal, the fourth line is decidedly not.

The reason for this departure from literal rendering is twofold. In his statement of method, Waley carefully avoids openly admitting that his translations stray from literalness. Explicitly, he speaks only of the rhythm of the translation, which in "about two lines out of three" will naturally mimic the line length of the original, but in the other cases will be "just too short or too long." The unstated implication, however, is that a significant proportion – one of every three lines – will need to stray from literal rendering in order to maintain the rhythm as Waley intends.⁵⁰ Thus, it is possible that a literal rendering of this line did not produce the requisite number of beats. But there is another problem, perhaps more pressing. The fourth line of this poem is one of those that does not convert simply into an English prose sentence. A literal translation might have:

⁴⁹ In a later edition, Waley revises the third line to "My eyes smart; I put out the lamp and go on sitting in the dark"; see *Chinese Poems: Selected from 170 Chinese Poems, More Translations from the Chinese, The Temple, and The Book of Songs* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946), p. 154. This fixes an earlier mistake (the verb-object relation of "put out" and "lamp"), but introduces a new instance of horrid diction with "eyes smart."

⁵⁰ A sample from Waley's translations bears out this statistic. Of 76 total lines in his translations of eight Li Bai poems (*More Translations* pp. 20–23), my analysis finds 36 (47.5%) "literal" (that is, with no or minimal adjustment to wording and syntax), 21 (27.5%) "close to literal" (that is, with some adjustments made for smoother English), and 19 (25%) "not literal" (paraphrases in Waley's mimetic beat-rhythm). Although there may be some overlap between these categories, it is not far from the mark to deem one out of three "not literal."

A headwind blows the waves: the sound of their hitting the boat.
逆風吹浪打船聲

For Waley, this is unacceptable because he requires his Chinese poets to speak in highly naturalized English prose.

It must be said that Waley was an impeccable prose stylist, and here his art does shine through – his line has a certain “wave-like” cadence to it. But the line also reveals a fundamental weakness of Waley’s translations, that he pays little attention to the actual language of the poems, or to the ways of expression that underwrite a poem’s so-called “essential characteristic.” It is fortunate that we have some special evidence suggesting how Waley viewed the problem of language for the line in question. This poem was published, in short succession, in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, the *Little Review*, and *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, and since Waley handled the last line differently in each of these versions we might be able to detect some traces of his thought process.

The earliest version, in the *Bulletin*, reads:

To the sound of waves that strike the ship driven by a headwind.⁵¹

This is the most literal version, likely reflecting the *Bulletin*’s scholarly and pedagogical orientation.⁵² In the *Little Review* version, intended for the eyes of the modernist poets in America, the line becomes:

Listening to the waves that strike the ship driven by a headwind.⁵³

Which is not far from the one cited above from *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*:

Listening to waves that, driven by the wind, strike the prow of the ship.

The crucial addition made between the first and second versions is the presence of a full verb, “listening.” This word does not appear in the Chinese, where the fourth line comes as a sort of open aesthetic comment, anchoring the experience related in the first three lines. Still, even Waley’s *Bulletin* version overdevelops the very loose grammar of the original, and with his second version, in the *Little Review*,

⁵¹ *BSOS* 1.1: 69.

⁵² de Gruchy, *Orienteering Arthur Waley*, pp. 69–72, has argued that Waley’s book of Japanese *uta* (1919) was intended to facilitate language learning at the newly established School of Oriental Studies, and it seems likely that his translations of Chinese poetry in the School bulletin’s inaugural issue were offered in the same spirit.

⁵³ *The Little Review*, October 1917, p. 4.

he has made a full prose clause. On the third revision, Waley seems to have sensed that his first two versions read too awkwardly – was it the ship that was “driven by a head-wind”? He replaced them with a smoothly styled prose line, its relative clause embedded between commas, its beat-rhythm crisp and clear with the reduction of the literal “head-wind” to “wind.”

We might imagine a similar process behind lines like the second couplet of a quatrain by Lu You:

Through the leafless branches I see the temple in the wood;
Over the dwindling stream the stone bridge towers.⁵⁴
葉凋山寺出，溪瘦石橋高

We do not know what literal version Waley started off with, but the result is pure paraphrase, acceptable to him only because it is clear prose and because the translation gives, when sympathetically read, the requisite number of “beats.” Following those beats, one might model a (false) word-for-word translation as:

Leafless - branches - see - temple - wood
Dwindling - stream - stone - bridge - towers

Part of the problem seems to be that Waley has misconstrued the first two characters as noun-adjective modification rather than a topic-comment relation, an error he makes elsewhere.⁵⁵ Restoring that adds some of the animistic energy back to the line, but his diction has also dulled the sense of the words. More literally, the couplet might read:

As the leaves are carved away, a mountain temple emerges,
As the stream grows thin, a stone bridge rises tall.

Grammar notwithstanding, Waley’s “leafless” is a weak synonym for “carved away” (*diao*), which works with the parallel “grows thin” (*shou*; not “dwindles”) to create a metaphor twice removed: as a man grows old and sees his visage “carved away” like stone, so the things of nature shrink in autumn, but, in a positive twist on the scene, as nature shrinks one sees the aesthetic accomplishments of human civilization – the temple, the bridge – just as one presumably sees the achievement of the man radiate from his wizened (*wisened*) form. Moreover, in the first line Waley has introduced the human agent into what should be a pure perception. Just as in “On Board Ship” there had to be a poet

⁵⁴ “Boating in Autumn (‘Fan Zhou’), *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 99; *Jiannan shigao jiaozhu* 劍南詩稿校注, ed., Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), j. 25, p. 1822.

⁵⁵ For example, line 2 of “The Poem on the Wall,” *More Translations* p. 31. Recall however that Waley was working without a commentary: see his remarks at *BSOS* 1.1:53.

“listening to” the waves, here the poet must actively “see” the temple, which cannot simply “emerge” (*chu*).

Undoubtedly this “prosaicization” of the Chinese poem was intended as an intervention into exotic ideas of Oriental poetry current in his time, including Pound’s translations. The Chinese poet, Waley is saying, thinks in clear, coherent thoughts just like we do. But this raises a difficult question, for Waley and for any translator of Chinese poetry. The Chinese poetic language is a sort of code, with frequently very simple meanings condensed into clipped phrases that the traditional reader would silently unpack. Are we to translate what the poem meant, beyond the language? Or what it says, on the surface, in its ways of expression? And if the reasonable answer is “both,” then how is that to be accomplished? Can an English version capture this coded aspect without exoticizing it? Or will it always veer between the poles of too coded and too explicit?

Waley is decidedly in the camp of “meaning” over “expression,” but his method adds a twist: imitating the form of the original poem is supposed to “recode” the poem, adding an expressive element to the meaning he states so plainly. Consider how, in a Bai Juyi poem called “After Passing the Examination” (“Jidi hou gui jin, liubie zhu tongnian” 及第後歸觀，留別諸同年), the poet describes how he set out from the capital after his success:⁵⁶

My covered coach is ready to drive away;
Flutes and strings blend their parting tune.
Hopes achieved dull the pains of parting;
Fumes of wine shorten the long road.
軒車動行色，絲管舉離聲。得意減別恨，半酣輕遠程。

This poem is in the five-character line, and Waley’s translation has a steady five-beat rhythm. It gives the appearance of being literal, an appearance surely bolstered by the simplicity of Waley’s phrasing, but how does it relate to the kind of literal version that would preserve the ways of expression of the original? The first line here might literally be rendered “My covered coach stirs up an appearance of travel,” or perhaps better, “My covered coach: it stirs up an appearance of travel.” It is very hard to do literally *and* naturally, and it is not so easy to criticize Waley for the decision he has made. But if Waley’s prose sense is the more artful rendering, is it poetically sufficient? Continuing with the second line, a literal rendering would have “Strings and flutes: they raise the sound of parting.” Thus there is a parallel deployment of

⁵⁶ *More Translations*, p. 24; Zhu, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, p. 302.

complementary senses between the two lines, of seeing and hearing, of appearance (*se*, “phenomenon,” a culturally loaded word) and sound. This aspect is lost in Waley’s translation. Does it matter? Or is it the sort of parallelism Waley elsewhere describes as “an annoying trick,” irrelevant to and even impeding the poem?⁵⁷ It would seem that Waley has left something important out. As in the Lu You poem, Waley’s couplet has the appearance of a word-for-word translation:

Covered - coach - ready - drive - away
Flutes - strings - blend - parting - tune

But it is not. It is a simulacrum of literal translation.

The second couplet is much closer to being word-for-word, if one excepts the “fumes of wine” for the idiom which literally says “half tipsy” (*ban han*), but it too slips just where the language would seem to warrant attention. Waley’s verbs are “dull” and “shorten.” “Dull” actually produces an intriguing contrast with the emotional vector of “hopes achieved,” but nothing can be said for “shorten” other than that it is an immediate choice for combination with “long road.” The verbs of the original are actually “lessen” (*jian*, or “cut down”) and “lighten” (*qing*), two words which can be put together as a near-synonym compound. The effect is to bring the two lines together as one idea, success and drunkenness, long parting and long traveling.

Waley’s translations, then, have a two-pronged language problem. They consistently dismiss significant points of focus in the syntax and diction of the original poems, substituting careful prose in their place. At the same time, the very method by which he would sublimate his prose into verse turns out to have an opposite effect, enforcing a leaden rhythm on the poems. To Waley, the even rhythm and stopped lines were features of the original and hence available for legitimate mimesis. This reasoning is fine in theory, but Waley regarded his translations as an experiment in verse, as practice, not theory, as doing something more than just displaying the inner workings of a clock. Consider his translation of the Bai Juyi quatrain “A Talkative Guest” (“Zeng tanke” 贈談客):⁵⁸

The town visitor’s easy talk flows in an endless stream;
The country host’s quiet thoughts ramble timidly on.
“I beg you, Sir, do not tell me about things at Chang’an;
For you entered just when my harp was tuned and lying balanced on my knees.”

⁵⁷ *A Hundred and Seventy*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ *More Translations*, p. 61; Zhu, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, p. 2266.

上客清談何臺臺，幽人閑思自寥寥。
請君休說長安事，膝上風清琴正調。

If one removed the line breaks this poem would be indistinguishable from prose. All in all, the first three lines are indeed fairly literal, even if they are straitjacketed into Waley's beat-rhythm. It is difficult to say how the end of line two *should* be translated, but "ramble timidly on" is certainly wrong, and it is there, almost certainly, because its triple accent fits the form Waley has established. But it is the fourth line that stands out as paraphrase. Once again, the paraphrase comes in the guise of literalness. Following the stresses, one might suppose the Chinese words read:

Entered - just - harp - tuned - lying - balanced - knees

The true line is much like the last line in the poem "On Board Ship." It is not a statement but an open comment, lending aesthetic ballast to the scene described explicitly in the first lines. Word-for-word it is:

Knees - on - wind - pure - harp - just - tuned.

A literal rendering might be:

The wind on my knees is pure: my zither just tuned right.

As in "On Board Ship," there is something undeniably poetic in the conceit, here of a well-tuned zither (Waley's "harp") rejecting an out-of-tune guest. This comes across in Waley's translation. But despite having averred imagery to be the soul of poetry, Waley drops the imagery. The notionally pure breeze, representing at once an inner state, a physical sensation, and the magical efficacy of music – this image complex is diluted to the zither alone. At best, a generous reader could say only that Waley has transferred the image into a not unpleasant "balance."

The last six lines of Bai Juyi's "Planting Bamboos" ("Xinzai zhu" 新栽竹) offer another example of the triumph of conceit over language and imagery:

Do not say that their roots are still weak.
Do not say that their shade is still small;
Already I feel that both in garden and house
Day by day a fresher air moves.
But most I love, lying near the window-side,
To hear in their branches the sound of the autumn wind.⁵⁹
勿言根未固，勿言陰未成。已覺庭宇內，稍稍有餘清。
最愛近窗臥，秋風枝有聲。

⁵⁹ *More Translations*, p. 28; Zhu, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, p. 466. Later editions read "courtyard" for "garden."

The five-beat rhythm stands out. The first two lines have received a minor conversion, from “not yet strong” (*wei gu*) and “not yet fully formed” (*wei cheng*) to “still weak” and “still small.” Does the difference signify? Does it matter that in the original the strength was negated, rather than weakness perpetuated? On what grounds would one make that judgment?

The third line contains an infelicity that is due either to an error of understanding or to the demands of Waley’s beat rhythm – the compound *tingyu* is really just “home” – but the fourth line is more problematic. Literally, it would have something like “Gradually it [the house] comes to possess (*you*) a surplus purity.” Waley’s version is a product of his beat-rhythm imperative, and of a propensity to naturalize that supplies a carrier (“air”) for the purity, and an active verb (“moves”) in place of simple possession or existence.

The penultimate line is literal, but the last line, through the addition of an active verb, is once again diluted of its absolute qualities. Literally the line might read, “With the autumn wind, the branches possess (*you*) sound.” Translated that way, the line does sound exceedingly odd, and on this count Waley must have our sympathy, but the limitations of any given translation decision notwithstanding, bringing in the verb “to hear” in the final line of this poem spoils the integrity of the scene and erases the echo of possession from the fourth line.

So far we have primarily focused on cases in which Waley’s additions, to fill out the prose sense and to complete his set beat-rhythm, have over-substantialized lines that should be more open. Elsewhere, however, Waley’s inattention to language subtly alters the tone of a poem. Waley’s rendition of “Illness and Idleness,” for instance, opens:

Illness and idleness give me much leisure.
 What do I do with my leisure, when it comes?
 I cannot bring myself to discard inkstone and brush;
 Now and then I make a new poem.⁶⁰
 癩病每多暇，暇來何所爲。未能拋筆硯，時作一篇詩。

This completely forsakes the “idleness” inherent in the echoing of “leisure” (*xia*) in the first two lines. *Xia* appears as an object in the last position in line one, and then straight away in the first position in line two, as a topic that prompts playful exasperation – “... leisure, / Oh leisure, what can I do with it?” The second line of the poem shows full awareness of the paradox between leisure (*xia*) and doing (*wei*). In Waley’s version, the two lines are dead statements, albeit in five-beat

⁶⁰ *More Translations*, p. 52; Zhu, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, p. 331.

rhythm, lacking expressive connection to one another and to the couplet that follows.

Tone was one of Waley's distinctive achievements.⁶¹ Arch and dry, immediately recognizable and easily parodied, it may have had roots as much in Waley's personality as in the poems he translated. Here is one final poem, Bai Juyi's "Invitation to Hsiao Chü-Shih" ("Zhao Xiao chushi" 招蕭處士), quoted in full:

Within the Gorges there is no lack of men;
 They are people one meets, not people one cares for.
 At my front door guests also arrive;
 They are people one sits with, not people one knows.
 When I look up, there are only clouds and trees;
 When I look down – only my wife and child.
 I sleep, eat, get up or sit still;
 Apart from that, nothing happens at all.
 But beyond the city Hsiao the hermit dwells;
 And with *him* at least I find myself at ease.
 For *he* can drink a full flagon of wine
 And is good at reciting long-line poems.
 Some afternoon, when the clerks have all gone home.
 At a season when the path by the river bank is dry,
 I beg you, take up your staff of bamboo-wood
 And find your way to the parlour of Government House.⁶²

峽內豈無人，所逢非所思。門前亦有客，相對不相知。
 仰望但雲樹，俯顧惟妻兒。寢食起居外，端然無所為。
 東郊蕭處士，聊可與開眉。能飲滿杯酒，善吟長句詩。
 庭前吏散後，江畔路乾時。請君攜竹杖，一赴郡齋期。

Waley has excised the rhetorical question from line one, making a plain statement out of what should be a lightly ironic complaint. Likewise in the third line, the third character, *yi* 亦, does mean "also," but it has an emotional valence that somehow must be conveyed. "People one cares for" (more appropriately, people one *longs* for) and "people one knows" are not abstract entities in the reflections of the poet, but vectors of feeling shooting forth from a poetic tradition in which longing and understanding are foundational values.

⁶¹ In the words of Donald Keene, speaking of both Waley's Chinese and Japanese work: "Whatever new translations scholars may produce in the future, hoping to improve on the accuracy of Waley's versions, they are unlikely to alter his tone" (*Madly Singing*, p. 57). Keene's prediction proved untrue, but it testifies to Waley's influence.

⁶² *More Translations*, p. 48; Zhu, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, p. 588.

Where is the emotion in Waley's version? We hear that "nothing happens at all" (l. 8), when in fact the point is that the poet "does nothing at all," that is, compelled by no special desires he is a perfect playmate for the poem's recipient. Of this recipient we learn merely that he "is good at" reciting poetry (l. 12), but surely something stronger is needed for the word *shan*, which involves a special talent or propensity. But the translation is most incongruous in its conclusion. "And find your way to the parlour of Government House" is another of Waley's simulacra. The original line is impossible to do literally ("at once – go forth – district – residence – appointment"), but something must capture the sense of rush in *yi fu* 一赴, like water rushing through the gorges, and something must carry the inevitability of *qi* 期, an appointment or even a tryst that should not be broken and for that reason is tinged with anxiety. The point is not that Waley has failed to capture the original, but that the potentialities the original provided for him have been given such a cold reformulation, however much the "essential characteristic" may remain.

Any translation involves decisions that introduce limitations, and as such any translation can be critiqued for what it has "left out." In analyzing here a small but representative portion of Waley's early translations, I make two arguments. First, I have sought to demonstrate how Waley, faced with a choice between making his translations eminently intelligible and sacrificing clarity for a more strict focus on the linguistic features of Chinese poetry, chose the former course, casting them in a carefully crafted prose register. This was his choice and we should not imply that it was the wrong one, given the outlandish ideas of Chinese poetry then in circulation. In 1915, Harriet Monroe (1860–1936), the founding editor of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, had closed a fanciful Peking travelogue with this image:

The Son of Heaven sits motionless in his yellow robe with its twelve symbols of power, his brow lit green by the magic emerald. Hour after hour he sits cross-legged, contemplative, while the long procession waits in the sun.

For the Son of Heaven is making a poem – a little poem in five lines which shall give sound and shape to the world.⁶³

Had Waley stressed the special linguistic effects of Chinese poetry, he would have contributed to the defamiliarization of something

⁶³ *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, August 1915, p. 247.

already none too familiar to his audiences. His prose was an antidote to the myths of his age, handing his exuberant contemporaries a much needed dose of “plainness” and “flatness.”

My second argument may be harder to distinguish from subjective judgment. Waley did not accept that his prose versions of Chinese poetry were just that – prose. To the contrary, by endowing them with a mimetic form Waley thought that his prose lines would acquire the valence of poetry. It is not that a steady rhythm in free verse is *a priori* deficient. Take for example a 1916 poem by Edgar Lee Masters entitled “Hokku”:⁶⁴

I lift my eyes from the humus
Up the sea-green stalk to the flower.
The base of the petals is red as blood;
But I cannot see the line that divides
The rim of the petals from the sun light.

It is true that part of this poem’s achievement comes from its weirdness, the flower juxtaposed with blood, but even so its aural element is superbly crafted. In the Waley examples given so far we find some elegant prose cadences but never a line like the third one here, in which “p”s play with “b”s and an “r”. Masters’s poem has a basic four-beat rhythm and its grammar is essentially indistinguishable from prose, but read it aloud and contrast the sound with one more example from Arthur Waley:

Swiftly the years, beyond recall.
Solemn the stillness of this fair morning.
I will clothe myself in spring-clothing
And visit the slopes of the Eastern Hill.
By the mountain-stream a mist hovers,
Hovers a moment, then scatters.
There comes a wind blowing from the south
That brushes the fields of new corn.⁶⁵

邁邁時運，穆穆良朝。襲我春服，薄言東郊。
山滌餘靄，餘靄微消。有風自南，翼彼新苗。

The poem, in its “essential characteristic,” is a masterpiece, but the translation? A.C. Graham had the audacity to claim that this version, not being completely literal, sees Waley “soar[ing] on the rhythms of

⁶⁴ *The Little Review*, June-July 1916, p. 19.

⁶⁵ “New Corn,” *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 79; Lu Qinli 邊欽立, ed., *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), p. 968. Two quite different versions of line six have been transmitted in editions of Tao’s collection and here I print the one Waley evidently followed.

his own English,” writing “on a different and higher level from his other versions” of Tao Qian.⁶⁶ In a not unrelated claim, Graham asserts that “[i]t required Waley’s talent and special affinity to render Po Chü-i’s verse without turning it into the flattest prose.”⁶⁷ One can only remark that it is curious that the phrase “flattest prose” should have come to Graham’s tongue. We must respect the talents and contributions of Arthur Waley, but we need not genuflect. Perhaps, like his favorite poet Bai Juyi, poetry was just his “special failing.”

This raises serious questions about the translation of traditional Chinese poetry in general. Waley’s method may be idiosyncratic but his approach is not, for the idea that Chinese poetry can and should be represented by literal translation, in some sense of that term, is frequently accepted without further inspection.⁶⁸ The reason is that the alternative – renditions, like Pound’s, that do not adhere to literal meaning – is rejected out of hand as not translation proper, just as it was rejected by Waley in 1917. (“It may be perfectly legitimate for a poet to borrow foreign themes or material, but this should not be called translation”). We may agree with this verdict on the boundaries of translation, but to do so in no way justifies the corresponding belief that literal translation is a sufficient means of translation.

It might be argued that, given doubts about the legitimacy of both literal translation and free adaptation, one is entitled to choose one option and pursue it with a blind faith in its potential. Examination of Waley’s translations suggests, however, that faith in literal translation ought not be too blind, blinding us from sensing its obvious shortcomings and accepting the doubts that come with it, doubts which far from being hidden shadows can be fleshed out as legitimate problems. Literal translation entails acceptance of a limited set of choices for words and

⁶⁶ *Poems of the Late T’ang*, p. 33. If we accept Graham’s judgment at face value, I am essentially impugning his taste, and for that there is no real recourse to evidence. But to the extent that his judgment was motivated (for the moment my own motivations can be left aside), there is good reason to doubt him. The first couplet of this translation happens to be the very one quoted as an illustration by William Empson in his famous work *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). Since Graham has just cited Empson as an authority (pp. 19–20), one suspects a sort of “horizon of expectations” at work, an influential early judgment emboldening the later critic’s high appraisal. Ming Xie (*Ezra Pound*, pp. 74–75 and 158–59) cites some other contemporary invocations of this translation.

⁶⁷ Graham, *Poems of the Late T’ang*, p. 31. Graham acknowledges Waley in the preface to the book, and one might suggest that Graham saw himself filling the same role for the 1960s as Waley had in the 1910s, the reliable scholar-poet.

⁶⁸ A good deal of literal translation is done for research purposes, or for the purposes of further exposition, and as such is relatively immune to questions about its aesthetic value. However, these translations are frequently repurposed for larger audiences, a practice that has not received much critical examination.

syntactic patterns. Within that set of choices numerous combinations can be produced, and no doubt some of them will be felicitous, but a successful translation would seem to require that all, or at least most, of the translator's choices be aesthetically successful, and this condition the paltry set of literal choices purely by statistical calculation has little chance of satisfying.

Translations done in the literalist faith are like guests at a ball who are dressed to fit the part but, not knowing how to dance, must sit along the wall while the others pick their partners. We should not mistake the clothes for the man, or allow the occasional success story to invalidate the general principle: that the strictures of literal translation do not produce poetry. One alternative is to return to Waley's formulation of desired insufficiency, accepting that the translation will never "go" as a poem and that its proper role is as a diagram, showing how the thing works, if perhaps an artfully drawn diagram. Perhaps it could even be drawn plainly and flatly, to force the imagination to work harder. And could the diagram alone – which is to say, the idea of a poem – become poetry – which is to say, an aesthetic force? This is an interesting question, one that shines a light on the nature of "aesthetic." Must the aesthetic be a perception that is somehow felt, as if by the body, or can it be purely something perceived, completely within the rational mind? Can the mind feel? Is a purely theoretical mimesis valid, or must it take place in practice, and convincingly to the senses, "as it is heard by the ears after it has travelled some distance?" Can the translator give the score and expect the reader to supply the music?⁶⁹

Thus Waley's method is suspect as a poetic device, but it helps call forth questions about literal translation in general. Not all literal translations are as prosaic as Waley's, but many share his tendency to explain "what the poem is saying," as opposed to "how it is said," and even where the literal translator devotes her attention to the latter, a forceful presumption rears its head – that the translation is supposed to make sense. We read translations for clarity, to have a view of another culture, to know as best we can what an ancient poet said. But I would maintain that this is not how we read poetry. In a poem, we do not expect everything to make sense, as we accept that every reading

⁶⁹ A related issue is that there appears to be a hierarchy of senses, such that hearing and seeing are at the top and in control of the arts, while taste, smell and especially touch (the most sensuous and scandalous of the group) are only exceptionally considered in terms of aesthetic perception. The top of the hierarchy is more closely associated with the mind, the bottom with the appetites and desire. This suggests that a purely rational aesthetic is not so much an odd impossibility as a perversion of justice, the way a lord might demand the return of land cultivated by his serfs.

of a poem will produce a partial understanding. The appointed task of literal translation is to erase all partialities.

Need our (literal) translations carry any poetic qualities at all? Or should we continue to dress them up in evening clothes, lest they stand out sorely in the ranks of poetry? Does translation have an aesthetic, or merely a decorum? Pursuing this thought further: Is it possible to admit that translation and poetry do different things? Or is to do so equivalent to admitting that translation of a poem is impossible? The answer to these questions was given in the second part of this essay: there is no answer, because translation is a condition, not a position. No dim view of the translatability of poetry will stop us from translating it, but we might be wary of letting the inevitability of translation lull us into too rosy a view of its possibilities, or trusting too naively in the positions translators establish for themselves.

WALEY'S RECEPTION, WALEY'S LIMITS

Pound's translation, of course, I've always known and admired; but when one comes to read yours, it seems to me that the feeling that one is getting a more accurate translation adds a great deal. . . .

Roy Fuller, interview with Arthur Waley, 1963⁷⁰

Of Mr. Waley's qualifications as a translator I say nothing.

John Gould Fletcher, review of *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, 1919⁷¹

The preceding section might be summarized by saying that Waley produced a legitimate translation strategy but the limits inherent in it led to a very limited kind of poetry. Here I turn to Waley's readership, looking at some contemporary responses to Waley's early work and his relationship to those responses, and then considering how the latent concept of "audience" might have had a role in Waley's method.⁷²

As we have seen, Waley prefaced his second book with the complaint that readers had not recognized his work as poetic experiment.

⁷⁰ *Madly Singing*, p. 148.

⁷¹ Fletcher, "Perfume from Cathay," in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, February 1919, pp. 273-81.

⁷² When we speak of Waley's contemporaries, some acknowledgement should be made that they constituted discrete, if interrelated, groups. An idea of this can be had from the venues in which Waley published most of his early translations. He published ninety-seven poems over the first three issues of the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*; this represents an investment in the scholarly community. The poetic community was represented by eight poems in *The Little Review* and ten in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. Equally significant, however, were the thirty-seven poems that appeared in a span of just over two years in the *New Statesman*, a London organ of progressive intellectual culture.

How, then, did they receive it? A favorable *Times Literary Supplement* notice of that second book could only speak blithely of an “atmospheric charm which is, for the ordinary reader, the distinguishing feature of his translations.”⁷³ “Atmospheric charm” sounds suspiciously like euphemism. John Gould Fletcher, writing of *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, would only commend “the devoted labor and scholarly skill of their translator.”⁷⁴ Declaring it “a skill that is above suspicion,” Fletcher said nothing of the translations beyond: “Let the extracts speak for themselves.” This was very faint praise. And Pound, ostensibly Waley’s patron in the modernist community, was more direct. “The style of his versions is simple, not by any means free of dead and lifeless phrases, not always swung with emotional cadences, but at any rate free of the trivialities and frivolities of his predecessor Dr Giles.”⁷⁵ This is not much of an endorsement, and we have seen his frustrations with Waley over the poems he solicited for the *Little Review*.⁷⁶

The more positive comment by Roy Fuller at the head of this section, however, identifies a key aspect of Waley’s reception. Fletcher and especially Pound show little of Fuller’s reverence, but they essentially endorse this same “feeling that one is getting a more accurate translation” as the reason to read Waley. These readers did not know Chinese and they had no way of ascertaining Waley’s accuracy independently, but they trusted him. This trust was facilitated externally by Waley’s position as a researcher at the British Museum and by his reputation in the scholarly community, but it was fostered internally by Waley’s declaration of “literal translation” and by the method he evolved for presenting literal translations.

If Pound and others were nonplussed by the art of his mimetic method, then, they were nevertheless believers in the mimesis. They experienced an ethical gravitation to the literal, or to what was claimed as literal, or to what appeared as literal. In fact, there is some evidence that readers craved more literalness, not more art. When Waley issued his complaint, he offered two word-for-word translations as examples of poems he had appreciated but been unable to work into acceptable poetic form, but the *TLS* reviewer just cited actually singles out these two “exquisite” specimens for special praise; the translations-proper

⁷³ H.O. Lee, “From the Chinese.” *TLS*, October 9, 1919, p. 545.

⁷⁴ Fletcher, “Perfume from Cathay,” p. 279.

⁷⁵ *Future* (Nov. 1918). Cited in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character*, p. 270.

⁷⁶ In private correspondence Pound even referred to Waley as “corpse-like”; see *ibid.*, p. 83, citing a letter to Wyndham Lewis.

apparently provided only “atmosphere.” More recently, the newest edition of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* has also selected three of Waley’s few word-for-word versions.⁷⁷ This preference for the literal bolsters the impression that Waley was read as a scholar, not as a poet.

This does not mean, however, that Waley’s translations were read as scholarship rather than as poetry. Reviews were overwhelmingly enthusiastic, because they found, or believed they were finding, the “essential characteristic” Waley claimed to be transmitting. Nowhere is this reaction more articulately and fully developed than in a *Times Literary Supplement* lead article by Arthur Clutton-Brock (1868–1924), a prominent essayist of the time, singing the praises of the Chinese translations Waley published in the inaugural issue of the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*.⁷⁸ Waley later identified this piece as a “turning-point” in his exposure to a larger audience.⁷⁹ In fact, “A New Planet,” as it was entitled, is both a seminal document in the story of Waley’s success and a monument in the short line of a particular genre of criticism, that written about Chinese poetry by critics who know no Chinese. Its flaws deserve to be pondered, both as records of their age and as potential insights into Chinese poetry.

The essence of “A New Planet” may be encapsulated in one phrase: it is a paean to the commonplace. That means, of course, that the commonplace is no longer commonplace, as it has been idealized. To do so requires the creation of a strange economy wherein the literalness of the translation reflects a value in the original, one which is sorely needed by the contemporary Englishman and fortunately can be purchased for nothing more than the forfeit of the desire for it.

“[I]t is the peculiar virtue of Chinese poetry,” Clutton-Brock writes,

that it remains poetry in a literal translation. ... Mr. Waley has made his translation as close as he could ... and this poetry seems to speak naturally to us in our own language, without any addition of English poetic ornament. ... [It] seems to supply something that has always been wanting to the poetry of Europe.

⁷⁷ Christopher Ricks, ed., *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U.P., 1999), p. 567.

⁷⁸ For the review, which was published unsigned, see *TLS*, November 15, 1917, p. 545; all ensuing quotations are from this source.

⁷⁹ In the new introduction to the second edition (1962) of *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*; see Morris, *Madly Singing*, p. 135.

Every idea here has its source in Waley and his method, but with a twist. Waley had asserted that literal translation was his approach and that such an approach could preserve the essence of the poems he had selected; Clutton-Brock takes Waley's word and then some, apparently declaring that *all Chinese* poetry, in contrast to poetry from other languages, is suited to and even requires literal translation. "Literal translation" has dual value here. It is desirable because the author wants the poetry to "speak naturally" to the English reader, in the way that literal translation of the prose-sense type does. Yet it is also desirable because in his view Chinese poetry *is* literal, in the sense of being unmediated by language:

[T]he Chinese poet starts talking in the most ordinary language and voice of the most ordinary things; and his poetry seems to happen suddenly out of the commonplace, as if it were some beautiful action happening in the routine of actual life. That, no doubt, is why it suffers so little in a literal translation. Its beauty is the beauty of thought itself; and the poet does not try to raise himself to beauty of thought by beauty of language.

In this conception, there is no language-problem in the translation of Chinese poetry, because, as he later says, "for the Chinese, poetry is something beyond language." He then quotes one of the most famous parables of the *Zhuangzi*:

"The *raison d'être* of a fish trap is the fish. When the fish is caught, the trap may be ignored. The *raison d'être* of language is idea. When the idea is expressed, the language may be ignored." And Chinese poetry has a strange power of making us ignore language, as if the pure idea happened to us when we read it.⁸⁰

Within the Chinese tradition itself, few notions have had a more deleterious effect on criticism of Chinese poetry than this one, the false idealism that would forget language, and it is just such a canard that draws the attention of the English critic. The "pure idea" is all he wants. This is not far from Waley, who at one point speaks of "only the thought surviv[ing]" in a translation, but again what to Waley seemed sufficient is to Clutton-Brock ideal.

This idealization of Chinese poetry is taking shape against something: European poetic practice and, especially, the suspect "desire" that motivates the European poet:

⁸⁰ The internal quotation is slightly abridged from Herbert Giles's translation of the *Zhuangzi*; see Giles, *Chuang-tzu: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1869), p. 362.

These poets have not that desire which makes us and our poetry ugly and restless. For them beauty is in things as they are and their business is to find it, beauty in all the simple things that happen to men, not in the peculiar misunderstood passions of poets.

In Clutton-Brock's eyes, English poetry has grown ugly as its poets wallow in their abject passions, "insist[ing] that they are poets." Chinese poetry, by contrast, "is more civilized than any poetry of our own, more reasonable and nearer to prose." Nearer to prose! The very point on which I have critiqued Waley's translations is here transmogrified as a positive value, for being "reasonable" and "civilized." The Chinese poet, he continues, has "beautiful manners." His work is "the poetry of the sober who need no incitement of the appetites and no mob-contagion to put them in love with life." With "no desire to be what [he] is not," he owns a "passive attitude...

as if his art were a process of nature, as if he were a plant absorbing the sunlight and pouring it out again in scent. ... But Western poets have always been too wilful; they have been resolved to make this or that happen to them; and so they have a class of poetic themes and also a poetic language.

The Chinese poets have no need for rhetoric. They may write in degree-zero prose, because their poetry lies in what happens to them, not what they do:

It is the universal that is in us all, men, women, and children, and we do not need to force ourselves into some unnatural state of mind to enjoy it. One could quote these poems anywhere and to anyone, in the midst of conversation, without change of voice and without any sense of incongruity; for to the Chinese poet there are no incongruities and no separation of poetry and prose in life. All life trembles into beauty like leaves stirred by the wind; and it remains itself even while it trembles.

Clutton-Brock has experienced something beautiful in these poems, and if it prompted a beautiful thought like that of his last sentence it may not matter a great deal whether what he experienced was Chinese poetry or not. Yet there is an unacknowledged kink in his line of argument. The dichotomy of a foolishly impassioned European poet (or would-be poet) and the wise dispassionate Chinese one is beyond doubt idealized and overly simplistic, but the real stumbling point is in the complexity of desire that Clutton-Brock avoids addressing, even as it shows through his discourse. The European poet is told that in Chinese

poetry he will find beauty “so quiet, so reasonable, so *irresistible*, like the actions of a saint” (emphasis added). In finding it “irresistible,” the European reader of Chinese poetry loses the reasonable objectivity that the poem is meant to convey. His desires, the very problem Clutton-Brock identifies, are stirred by it. They are stirred negatively: “So to read this poetry gives you a disgust for the outworn professionalism of our poets.” And positively: “Here are the values, at once simple and subtle and clear, that we desire,” he proclaims. And again: “It is the poetry and the language and the desire of all men.”

Passivity is a desire, and the fatal flaw of his essay is that he fails to recognize the possibility that it was so for the Chinese poet as well. “[T]hey convince us that poetry is not a rare and exotic luxury, but something that happens in life itself, something that one needs only to watch for and record.” Emphasis should be put on *convince* here, and on the complicity of prosaic translation in presenting Chinese poetry as a thing free of all desire. This knot in his argument leads him to a curiously contorted exhortation in the concluding section of the essay:

Do not be afraid that the commonplace will make you common. The commonplace is always your own failure, it is you that make it. So it is useless to seek for that which is not commonplace, either in unusual experiences or in unusual words. To do that is to *inhibit* yourself from both experience and expression; and this *inhibition* is the cause of the decadence of literature and all art. Behind all the *contortions* of decadence, as behind the *contortions* of bad manners, there is always *inhibition*; and the Chinese poets have such perfect manners because they are free of all *inhibitions*.... The Chinese poet gives us no commonplace because he does not make any; so he has no need to flee from it. He cultivates his garden, and his flowers grow in it. [emphasis added].

With the allusion in the last sentence to Voltaire’s *Candide* we see how fast Clutton-Brock has pinned his hopes on Chinese poetry as a source of Enlightenment. Chinese poetry arises naturally, beyond the inevitable imperfections that come with human “making.” The Chinese poet is free of “inhibition,” while the European poet is caught up in it. But what is it that is inhibited or free of inhibition? It is desire. In fact, the desires of the Chinese poet are hardly elided from his poetry. They disappear only under the covetous eye of the critic who wishes they were not there, and the translator who dissolves emotional poetic language into reasonable prose. After all his carping about the desires of the European poet, it turns out he wishes only to give them free reign,

in the belief that once free they will cease to exist. That may be true, but desires, like free verse, are not really free.

“A New Planet” must have struck a chord with the times. Not only did it lead to Waley’s being published in book form, its viewpoints were also voiced (probably not coincidentally) by other reviewers. Thus John Gould Fletcher, in the same review cited above, writes of the Chinese poets’ “absolute refusal to accept any make-believes about life:

This refusal to see anything fine or heroic about man and his destiny, is the elementary principle of the Chinese character. From this it comes about that the Chinese poet has no use for the figures of speech, huddled adjectives, verbal climaxes, tortured metaphors, and so forth, which his occidental rival uses so constantly. ...[T]he vanity and the nothingness of existence, this is the one fundamental idea that all these Chinese poets accept quite comfortably and complacently.⁸¹

In praise of the “complacency” of the Chinese poet, Fletcher quotes a poem “where every word is sheer commonplace, but where the total effect is simply overwhelming.” Likewise, when Harriet Monroe reviewed both Waley volumes in the February 1920 issue of her magazine, she wrote in terms strikingly similar to Clutton-Brock’s:

Acceptance of life, with all it brings, is implicit in all these poems. There may be sorrow, but there is no rebellion. ... Through this acceptance of his fate the Chinese poet loses drama, no doubt, but gains security ... [with] beauty the only sure refuge.⁸²

What can one make of such ideas? Are they simply nonsense, reflective of the desires of the Western reader, especially the reader writing in the catastrophic tides of the Great War? Or is there some grain of truth in them?

⁸¹ Fletcher, “Perfume of Cathay,” p. 275.

⁸² Similarities here notwithstanding, when “A New Planet” first appeared Harriet Monroe assailed it as a late-arriving confirmation of what modernist poets were already practicing: “*Poetry* from the first has been urging upon occidental poets the qualities for which the *Digest* [i.e., “A New Planet,” reprinted in *Literary Digest* of December 1917] now praises the Chinese – simplicity, immediacy, unpretentiousness, etc.” Quoting from the essay at length, she dismisses it as “an admirable reinforcement of principles no modern poet can afford to neglect.” See Monroe, “Back to China” (*Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, February 1918, pp. 271–74).

Elsewhere, Monroe gives one of the earliest accounts of the influence of the East, which she regarded as “perhaps the most important of all” influences on modernism: first, the arrival of graphic arts from Japan, after it was opened (or the Japanese were “let out,” in Monroe’s alternative) by Commodore Perry; then Japanese poetry – “*hokku* and other forms”; and finally, the more recent discovery of Chinese poetry. See Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, ed., *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), pp. xi–xii.

Which brings us back to Waley. Reading through the reviews of his work, of which “A New Planet” is far and away the most sophisticated, one might be led to two opposing conclusions: that by presenting accurate translations and contextualization Waley was providing for a genuine need of his time, or that Waley, to the extent that his reviewers continue to hash up old stereotypes and idealizations, was wasting his time with these people. Fletcher and Monroe both seem almost at pains to evidence a blasé ignorance of the Chinese tradition Waley was trying to represent. Fletcher complains that Waley’s selection contains too many poems that are “dull, and crammed with obscure historical allusions” – that is, poems Fletcher was unfamiliar with – while leaving out the real classics – that is, poems Fletcher had read in Giles’s translations, like Bai Juyi’s *Everlasting Wrong*, which he declares “one of the finest poems ever written in Chinese or any other language.”⁸³ Monroe is slightly less egregious, but when she calls Bai Juyi “perhaps the closest parallel to Chaucer who may be found in literary history,” she testifies to the utter paucity of reference points Western readers were working with, despite Waley’s efforts to expand their horizons.⁸⁴

There was something novel and almost scandalous about Chinese poetry as Waley presented it. His first book, for example, completely omitted Li Bai (Li Po) and Du Fu, the two poets that Western readers would most expect to find in a book of Chinese poems. His second book grudgingly included a handful of Li Bai poems, but a 1918 lecture makes clear his distaste for the poet, or for readers (i.e., Pound) who favor him: “Like Miss Havisham’s clock, which stopped at twenty to nine on her wedding-day, the clock of Chinese esteem stopped at Li Po centuries ago, and has stuck there ever since. But I venture to surmise that if a dozen representative English poets could read Chinese poetry in the original, they would none of them give either first or second place to Li Po.”⁸⁵ Waley gave his readers many Chinese poems, and kinds of Chinese poems, that they could never have imag-

⁸³ Fletcher, “Perfume of Cathay,” pp. 279–80.

⁸⁴ Monroe, “Waley’s Translations from the Chinese” (*Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, March 1920, pp. 337–42), p. 341. Along these same lines mention should be made of a poem by Allen Upward (1863–1926) in which he describes how he came to appreciate Chinese poetry. He concludes: “And thou unborn literary historian (if you ever mention my name) / Write me down an imitator of Po Li and Shakespeare....” I hereby grant him his wish. See “The Discarded Imagist,” quoted in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, August 1915, pp. 317–18.

⁸⁵ *The Poet Li Po: A.D. 701–762: A Paper Read before the China Society at the School of Oriental Studies on November 21, 1918* (London: East and West, 1919), p. 5. See also Achilles Fang, “Fenollosa and Pound,” *HJAS* 20.1/2 (1957): 213–38, pp. 221–22.

ined before.⁸⁶ To what extent his readership truly took advantage of his efforts is questionable.

Yet the matter of Waley's reception is not so simple. Waley was doing something new, an intervention into contemporary opinion, but again we find a befuddling ambivalence in his expression of his intentions. The most emblematic document in this regard is the first section of his introduction to *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, entitled "The Limitations of Chinese Literature." Waley retracted this introduction when the work was reissued in 1962, finding his conclusions there immature, and contemporary readers were less than impressed as well.⁸⁷ When the very same Arthur Clutton-Brock reviewed this book in the *TLS*, he complained that in his introductory remarks "Mr. Waley is inclined to depreciate Chinese poetry, perhaps because he has caught the Chinese convention of politeness; for we are sure that he loves it."⁸⁸ John Gould Fletcher opined that "[e]ither Mr. Waley has failed to understand the depths of the oriental temperament, like many another western observer, or his introduction is nothing but an elaborate piece of *camouflage* designed to conceal his true views."⁸⁹

Fletcher and the *TLS* reviewer thought Waley was needlessly belittling his subject-matter. In fact, he was trying to put limits on the "idea" of Chinese poetry in their age, but was doing so from a peculiar standpoint. Consider the rhetorical stance of the following statement:

To most Europeans the momentary flash of Athenian questioning will seem worth more than all the centuries of Chinese assent.⁹⁰

This can be boiled down to a central proposition (P), which is expressed using a statement (S) reformulated by an intricate process of modification:

P: Chinese thought has its own distinctive worth.

S: Western thought is worth more than Chinese thought.

1. *It seems that* Western thought is worth more than Chinese thought.

2. *To most Europeans it will seem that* ...

3. To most Europeans it will seem that *a momentary flash* of Western

⁸⁶ The originality of Waley's selection can be contrasted with the utterly conventional selection of Tang dynasty gems in a contemporary volume of translations by W.J.B. Fletcher, *Gems of Chinese Verse* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1919).

⁸⁷ The passage on the relation of men and women, quoted in the introduction to this paper, also comes from this section of Waley's introduction. Like all of Waley's writings, however, this introduction does contain insights still worthy of consideration today.

⁸⁸ "More Chinese Poems" [Review of *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*], *TLS* August 15, 1918, p. 380.

⁸⁹ Fletcher, "Perfume of Cathay," p. 276.

⁹⁰ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 3.

thought is worth more than *all the centuries of Chinese thought*.

4. "To most Europeans the momentary flash of *Athenian questioning* will seem worth more than all the centuries of *Chinese assent*"

One might assume that Waley, having brought this book to publication, essentially wishes to make point "P." But he will not do so directly. He begins with its antithesis, "S." He then projects that statement as an imagined false consciousness (1), and attributes that false notion to the plurality of his readership (2). How is this supposed to be received by Waley's reader? Is it an invitation to distinguish oneself from the common run of "most Europeans," or does it position Waley against his reader? This ambivalence intensifies as Waley returns to modify the interior of the statement (3). Casting the foundations of Western thought as a "flash" has contradictory implications: is it a "flash" of brilliance that opened the way for later ages, or a mere "moment" to which unduly historic significance has been attached? His qualification of Chinese thought works exactly the same way: "all the centuries" may describe an ideal permanence, but it hints strongly at an unwanted condition of stasis. Finally (4), he replaces "thought" with highly charged figures. "Athenian questioning" is in fact Waley's approach to Chinese poetry, approaching it with a skepticism too easily suspended by his contemporaries. "Chinese assent" is exactly what Clutton-Brock idealized as the passionless state of the Chinese poet, what Monroe praised as the Chinese poet's drama-free "security." But what exactly is it to Waley? Is he siding with those who would praise that "assent," or is he implying that there is some truth in what would be the common reaction to Chinese poetry if Europeans really understood it?

To some degree, the "limitations" of Waley's introduction were, like his literal method of translation, an intervention into the wild ideas his contemporaries held about Chinese poetry. At the same time, however, it is clear that Waley himself shared many of these limitations. He basically shared Clutton-Brock's worldview, finding "rationality and tolerance" in Chinese culture, and praising its poets for their ability to "excel in reflection rather than in speculation," for "a power of candid reflection and self-analysis which has not been rivalled in the West."⁹¹ He also shares Clutton-Brock's exasperation with the passions of the European poets:

Accordingly we find that while our poets tend to lay stress on physical courage and other qualities which normal women admire, Po Chü-i is not ashamed to write such a poem as "Alarm at Entering

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 4. "Self-analysis" begs for emendation.

the Gorges.” Our poets imagine themselves very much as Art has portrayed them – bare-headed and wild-eyed, with shirts unbuttoned at the neck as though they feared that a seizure of emotion might at any minute suffocate them. The Chinese poet introduces himself as a timid recluse, “Reading the Book of Changes at the Northern Window,” playing chess with a Taoist priest, or practising calligraphy [sic] with an occasional visitor. If “With a Portrait of the Author” had been the rule in the Chinese book-market, it is in such occupations as these that he would be shown; a neat and tranquil figure compared with our lurid frontispieces.⁹²

We see here the same skittishness about “lurid” emotion that was on display in “A New Planet.” Certainly, no Chinese poetry for “normal women.”⁹³ So in a sense Waley’s limitations represent a kind of purity, like the “manners” and the “passivity” Clutton-Brock espoused. They are limitations for the masses who do not understand artistic subtlety. But they are also limitations in a positive sense, for those who would wish to pursue the passionless path that Clutton-Brock outlined, towards an ideal commonplace.⁹⁴

Central to Clutton-Brock’s conception was the notion that literal translation accurately conveyed Chinese poetry because Chinese poetry itself was literal, in the prosaic sense. It was a poetry that was really prose at heart. We have seen that Waley’s method of translation led to a similar “language problem,” and the comments on the linguistic aspect of Chinese poetry in Waley’s introduction are worth quoting at length:

The “figures of speech,” devices such as metaphor, simile, and play on words, are used by the Chinese with much more restraint than by us. “Metaphorical epithets” are occasionally to be met with; waves, for example, might perhaps be called “angry.” But in general the adjective does not bear the heavy burden which our poets have laid upon it. The Chinese would call the sky “blue,” “gray,” or “cloudy,” according to circumstances; but never “triumphant” or “terror-scourged.”

⁹² Ibid. p. 5. We do not know when Waley drafted his introduction, but it was published well after the appearance of Clutton-Brock’s essay and it is reasonable to assume that Waley was writing in conversation with it and perhaps even under its influence.

⁹³ “Normal” in this context commonly meant “heterosexual.”

⁹⁴ A “tribute to Marcel Proust” printed in the January 4, 1923 issue of *TLS* and signed by Waley and a dozen luminaries of the time (Clive Bell, Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, Roger Fry, Aldous Huxley, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf and others) also confirmed this ideal, praising Proust’s representation of “common and everyday experience, but enriched and made beautiful and important by the alchemy of art.”

The long Homeric simile, introduced for its own sake or to vary the monotony of narrative, is unknown to Chinese poetry. Shorter similes are sometimes found, as when the half-Chinese poet Altun compares the sky over the Mongolian steppe with the “walls of a tent”; but nothing could be found analogous to Mr. T. S. Eliot’s comparison of the sky to a “patient etherized on a table.”⁹⁵

What Waley says about Chinese metaphor is essentially sound; metonymy is probably a more useful concept to apply to the Chinese poetic language.⁹⁶ But Waley is laying the groundwork for his disavowal of language, and its replacement by literal (prose) sense and mimetic form. In other words, the limitations of the Chinese poetic language become justification for the imposition of limits in his translation strategy. “In general the adjective does not bear the heavy burden which our poets have laid upon it”: Waley is perhaps less judgmental than Clutton-Brock, but he gives notice that the diction of his translations will be flatter than what European readers of poetry expect, and entirely without the jarring figures of modernism. True, as far as it goes, but has Waley not “etherized” the potentialities that Chinese diction *does* have?

Waley, then, sought to place some limits on contemporary enthusiasm for Chinese poetry, but to that task he brought some of the same limitations and some that were apparently his own. These limitations play a role in the translation process. A text exists in a meaningful sense only through some text-audience relation, and translation likewise produces not a text but a relation. We have seen that Waley adopted a directly “mimetic” approach to the poems, identifying a key structure (syllable rhythm) and claiming that it could be replicated in literal translation. His creation of an audience is more “analogical”: Waley connects the source language text-audience relation to a salient “structure” in his contemporary readership – their limitations with regards to the Chinese poetic tradition. (See figure 2.) This mimesis of insufficiency would explain the “plainness” and “flatness” of the translations, and the diffident irony of his pronouncements on the “limitations” of Chinese literature. Where Pound had made an inscrutable distance the basis of his translations, Waley makes his distance seem sharply delineated, almost “literal,” at every turn. This, perhaps,

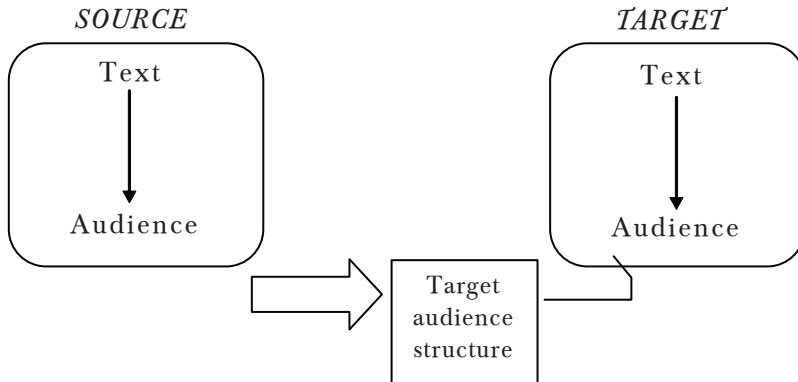
⁹⁵ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 5. The quotation from Eliot is from the opening lines of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” first published in the June 1915 issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*.

⁹⁶ For some ideas about metonymy, see J. H. Prynne, “China Figures,” *Modern Asian Studies* 17.4 (1983): 671–88.

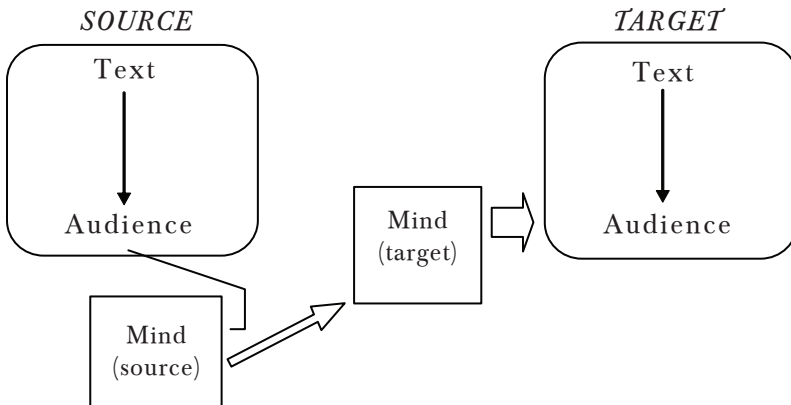
is what it meant to represent Chinese poetry “as it is heard by the ears after it has travelled some distance,” that is, with the sense of measured distance incorporated into the representation.

Figure 2. Analogical and Organic Translations of Audience

A) ANALOGICAL



B) ORGANIC



Model A shows the source text-audience relationship funneled into an analogical audience derived from some characteristic structure of the target readership. For Waley, this structure was “limitations.” Model B is a potential “organic” alternative: some essence or “mind” is abstracted from the source relationship and translated as a pre-projected mind governing the target relationship. The challenge is how Waley, or any other translator, might effectively put this organic model to use.

ZEB RAFT

WALEY'S TALENTS

Roy Fuller:
"I gather that you started by thinking of
yourself as a poet at a very early age."

Arthur Waley:
"Well, I really thought of myself as writing stories."
Interview, 1963⁹⁷

The reading of poetry, the writing of poetry,
the nature of poetry, the nature of the poet have
all been consistently overridealized throughout the
last hundred and fifty or even two hundred years.
Harold Bloom⁹⁸

The achievement of Arthur Waley is indisputable. He presented a relatively accurate picture of Chinese poetry in an age in which none existed. He inspired poets writing in English to borrow from Chinese poetry in ways that had not been possible before.⁹⁹ He was virtually the only scholar of the time to take Chinese poetry as a serious object of study, and his example showed the way to students of Chinese poetry in several later generations.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, there are many points in his translations worthy of admiration. While it is true that he generally paid too little attention to diction and syntax, it is equally true that his skillful handling of difficult lines was at times alchemical, producing gold from what others would leave as base metal. Consider for example the first line of one of Tao Qian's most beloved poems. Literally it might read, "In my youth I lacked the tone that would accommodate the ordinary customs" 少無適俗韻. It is exceedingly hard to choose proper English words for the last three characters (*shi*, *su* and *yun*), to say nothing of arranging them in a fair sentence. Here are a few translators' attempts to tackle the line:

⁹⁷ Morris, *Madly Singing*, pp. 150–51.

⁹⁸ Robert Moynihan, *A Recent Imagining: Interviews with Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, Paul de Man* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1986), p. 9. To apply this quotation to the Chinese case, one has only to turn "hundred and fifty or even two hundred years" into "one thousand five hundred or even two thousand years."

⁹⁹ See, for example, the discussion of Waley's translations' influence on William Carlos Williams in Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism*, pp. 128–141.

¹⁰⁰ It is true that, as Waley mentions in the introduction to *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (p. v, pp. 21–22), there was a certain amount of German-language scholarship ongoing in his time. A glimpse of this tradition can be had in the early issues of *Asia Major*. But it is indicative of the circumstances that a survey of the premier sinological journal of the time, *T'oung Pao*, reveals hardly any discussion of Chinese poetry between 1915 (when Pound published *Cathay*) and 1923 (when Waley published his third major volume of Chinese poetry), the exceptions being Paul Pelliot's (1878–1945) review of the Giles-Waley debate (*TP* 20.2 [1921–22]: 174 and *TP* 21.1 [1922]: 84–5), and a somewhat longer review essay by Pelliot dissecting the unreliable introduction in Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough, *Fir-Flower Tablets* (*TP* 21.2/3 [1922]: 232–42). Note also the study of Chinese prosody published by Waley in the 1918 *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

In youth I had nothing / that matched the vulgar tone (William Acker)
 From early days I have been at odds with the world (James Robert
 Hightower)
 In youth I was out of harmony with the common rhythm (A.R. Davis)
 My youth felt no comfort in common things (Stephen Owen)¹⁰¹

Acker has tried to be literal to the syntax as he apparently understood it, but has also split the line in two and installed an iambic template. Hightower seems to be trying to make it more natural with the insertion of the idiomatic “at odds with.” The less said the better about Davis’s mix of metaphors – “out of harmony” with “rhythm”? Owen has chosen to add substance to the line, transforming “accommodate” (*shi*, or “fit with”) into the more intuitive “comfort,” and “ordinary customs” (*su*) into the more tactile “common things.”

All owe something to Waley’s version, which is at once the most natural, the boldest, and the best:

When I was young, I was out of tune with the herd¹⁰²

“Herd” is quite an image to be adding to a poem, particularly for a translator who has flatly declared that he has added no image to his translations. None of the later translators, all of whom were or are members of an academic field that Waley helped initiate, dare go so far as he. The insertion of a half-stop after the first clause contributes to a prosaic effect – the other translators seem to think it would break the integrity of the line – but clarifies the conceit: youth, and then reflection. “Out of tune” is such a harmonious rendering that one suspects the translators quoted here avoided it simply because it was already Waley’s.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ See William Acker, *T’ao the Hermit: Sixty Poems* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1952), p. 52; James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T’ao Ch’ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 50; A. R. Davis, *T’ao Yüan-ming, AD 365–427: His Works and Their Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), p. 45; and Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 316. The poem is the first of the “Gui yuantian ju” 歸園田居 series; Lu, *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi*, p. 991. None of the translators seems to have followed the variant reading (願, “longing”) for the last character.

¹⁰² *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 77.

¹⁰³ Not all translators are too shy to share Waley’s “tune.” Thus Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough translate: “Even as a young man / I was out of tune with ordinary pleasures”; *Fir-Flower Tablets: Poems Translated from the Chinese* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), p. 132. Robert Kotewall and Norman L. Smith: “In my youth I was out of tune with the common folk”; *The Penguin Book of Chinese Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962). Wai-lim Yip: “Out of tune with the crowd since young”; *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 219. Burton Watson: “In youth I couldn’t sing to the common tune”; *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1984), p. 129. But no one else, to my knowledge, dares place Tao Qian in a “herd.”

There are many such examples of the magic Waley worked with individual lines and couplets, but there are also whole poems that stand out. Here is one of Waley's discoveries, a little-known work by the fifth-century poet Zhan Fangsheng 湛方生 that Waley called "Sailing Homeward" ("Huandu fan" 還都帆, literally "A Sail Back to the Capital"):

Cliffs that rise a thousand feet
 Without a break.
 Lake that stretches a hundred miles
 Without a wave.
 Sands that are white through all the year.
 Without a stain,
 Pine-tree woods, winter and summer
 Ever-green,
 Streams that for ever flow and flow
 Without a pause,
 Trees that for twenty thousand years
 Your vows have kept.
 You have suddenly healed the pain of a traveller's heart.
 And moved his brush to write a new song.¹⁰⁴

高岳萬丈峻。長湖千里清。白沙窮年潔。林松冬夏青。
 水無暫停流。木有千載貞。寤言賦新詩。忽忘羈客情。

Waley's brilliance lies in his grasp, or manipulation, of the poem as a whole. The first four lines of the original are equivalent grammatical constructions. He seizes that similarity and exaggerates it by translating them as clauses ("that rise... that stretches..." etc.). The fifth and sixth lines of the original have a different grammar, but Waley ignores that difference to keep his clauses running towards the end. The closing lines are far from literal: the original has no direct address, and even in his paraphrase he has reversed the two lines. Here is the poem as it was translated in a 1967 anthology:

Famed mountains, soaring a hundred thousand feet,
 Long lakes, crystal-clear for a thousand leagues.
 White sands, unsullied till the end of time,
 Pine-forest, evergreen summer and winter.
 Rivers, whose streams stay not a moment's space,
 Trees that stand firm for a thousand years.
 I lie awake, composing new poems,
 Suddenly forgetting my sadness at the journey.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, p. 82; Lu, *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi*, p. 944.

¹⁰⁵ J.D. Frodsham and Ch'eng Hsi, *An Anthology of Chinese Verse: Han, Wei, Chin and the*

The translators of this version are neither willing to follow Waley so far nor give up entirely the form Waley discovered in the poem. Their first six lines are still clauses, but less obviously so, never far from the full verb forms (e.g., “soaring” to “soar,” “crystal-clear” to “are crystal-clear”). Waley’s lines rush forward; these are static. The later translators have tried to handle the last couplet literally, and failed; Waley abandons the literal and succeeds.¹⁰⁶

The larger point that this analysis leads to is that when Waley is successful, it is because he has grasped some narrative conceit in the poem and crafted its momentum in his translation.¹⁰⁷ As he recounted to his interviewer, Waley saw himself “telling stories,” and when we look at his books through that prism we see something very different from Graham’s description of “a sinologist who is also a poet.” In *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* we already find numerous early ballads, as well as marvelous long narrative poems from later poets. Who could forget not the poetry but the story of Bai Juyi’s “The Prisoner” (“Fu Rong ren” 縛戎人), in which a “Tartar” captive tells his tale: a native of the Chinese regions captured by the Tartars as a boy, he escapes to his native land after forty years only to be mistaken for a Tartar and bound in chains again.¹⁰⁸ Waley’s presentation of a great number of works of Bai Juyi, chronologically arranged, also reflects a sense of narrative. With *More Translations* the sense is stronger, with two Tang tales taking up a sizeable portion of the work, and the word “poems” absent from the title. By his third book of Chinese translations, Waley had emerged into the master of narrative that was his true identity. *The Temple and Other Poems* (1923) was devoted to the *fu* (“rhyme-prose”), a genre noted both for its narrative frames and for its marvelous word-play. This is the book that contains Waley’s most satisfying poems, free translations full of creativity in form (e.g., enjambment) and diction.¹⁰⁹ Free – but by the standards he set out in 1917, this could not be called “translation.”

Northern and Southern Dynasties (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 98. This work is dedicated to Waley.

¹⁰⁶ Since “lying awake” makes little sense here, it is likely that 寤言 should be read as 晤言. This phrase, with roots in the *Shijing* (Mao 139 東門之池) and parallel usages in Ruan Ji (Yong-huai 17 and 19), is highly ambiguous but conveys a sense of abruptly arriving emotion.

¹⁰⁷ de Gruchy (*Orientalizing Arthur Waley*, pp. 8–9), presenting Waley’s translation of the *Genji* as a masterwork of English prose literature, also stresses Waley’s narrative talents.

¹⁰⁸ *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, pp. 127–30. Shorter poems can also possess a strong narrative element; see for instance, “Parting from the Winter Stove” (*More Translations*, p. 54), where the titular sentiment voiced in the last couplet lends a storyteller’s frame to the meditation on spring beauty in the poem’s main body.

¹⁰⁹ Waley’s “Bones of Chuang-tzu” (Zhang Heng, “Dulou fu” 獨樓賦), often cited as Wa-

After these early works, Waley's attentions by and large turned away from Chinese poetry. The 1920s were spent on his monumental translation of the *Tale of Genji*. The 30s saw Waley turn to the culture and thought of early China – this was the context in which he produced his translation of the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*; 1937). The novel *Monkey* (Journey to the West; 1942) may be his most popular work. Discounting reprints of earlier publications, and his influential translation of poems from Han Shan 寒山 (1954), the work he did on Chinese poetry after the war was largely within the framework of literary biography – books on Bai Juyi (1949, still a masterpiece), Li Bai (1950) and Yuan Mei (1956) – and introduction to Chinese culture – *The Nine Songs* (1955, on shamanism), *Ballads and Songs from Tun-huang* (1960, on the vernacular tradition). The poems were important, but as artifacts in the story of a life or a culture. To the end, Chinese poetry was prose for Waley's purposes.¹¹⁰

But poetry was Poetry. No matter how prosaic the translation, no matter how much it is outweighed by a body of work in narrative, it was poetry for which Waley received an honorary appointment at the School of Oriental Studies (1948), and for which he received the Queen's Medal (1953).¹¹¹ One wonders what the Queen found remarkable, the translations or the pure idea of them.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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ley's favorite out of all his translations, is a good example. By and large this free style does not carry over into Waley's later translations.

¹¹⁰ An essay on translation published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1958 (rpt. in *Madly Singing*, pp. 152–64; see also *Chinese Poems*, p. 5) suggests that Waley's method remained essentially intact over his career, as do his reprints of earlier poems, where revisions are numerous but generally limited to where his understanding of the sense had changed. Still, a careful examination of these revisions might yield some insights: what does it signify when Waley changes the first line of a poem from “We had rode long and were still far from the inn” (*More Translations* [1919], p. 44) to “We had ridden long and were still far from the inn” (*Chinese Poems* [1946], p. 173)?

¹¹¹ These dates and those above are from the chronology in *Madly Singing*, pp. 392–93.