

On 17 February 1966, while on his way to a meeting Arthur Waley was gravely injured in a motor accident and found to be suffering from cancer of the spine. An operation to alleviate his condition was unsuccessful, and as the disease progressed, paralysis became almost total. He died on 27 June at his house in Highgate, in a little room from whose windows he had, during the last years of his life, delighted to look down on the urban panorama, darkening in the dusk or illuminated with a myriad lights, stretching far below him towards a valley. His grave is in Highgate Cemetery, most romantic of London's burial grounds, though known to most for its unromantic association with the name of Karl Marx.

Death at seventy-six however lamentable is not usually felt to be premature; yet Waley's death was a tragic one not only because it was protracted and painful. In 1962 a number of personal and domestic blows, culminating in an accident which looked as if it would deprive him permanently of the use of his right hand, had convinced him that his working life was over and that he would never write again. The devoted attention of Mrs Waley, however, enabled him to make a gradual recovery from despondency and prostration of that period, and his zest for work had fully returned to him by the time he was struck down. There is every indication that a period of vigorous and productive work was abruptly ended by the unlucky conjunction of accident and disease.

Waley's fertility and industry were amazing. He published some three dozen full-length books, an output which would be creditable in a hack translator or a writer of detective fiction, although in fact each was the product of massive reading and painstaking scholarship. He undoubtedly had genius, and it is a cause of rejoicing that he turned his genius in the direction of oriental literature, when there were a dozen other ways in which he might equally well have given it expression. He was a poet on familiar terms with some of the major poets of his time – Yeats, Eliot, Pound, to name no more – whose own poetic gifts found their fulfilment in translation. He belonged not only to the world of oriental studies, but to the world of literature, and this enabled him to win for Far Eastern studies a prestige and a lustre in circles where they had not previously been regarded as of serious intellectual concern.

His achievement as an interpreter of Chinese poetry lies in the creation or evolution of a form both suitable to the Chinese style of verse and acceptable to the literary tastes of his own day. This “sprung rhythm” style he handled with a strength and delicacy which are inimitable but clearly had something to do with a mastery of language and a fastidiousness in searching for the *mot juste* or the right turn of phrase which sometimes caused him, to use his own words, to sit “hundreds of times ... for hours in front of texts the meaning of which I understood perfectly, and yet was unable to see how they ought to be put into English ...”.

Precisely what his assessment as a scholar should be, however, is extremely difficult to determine. Certainly he was abreast of all that went on in any of the numerous fields which interested him – a range equalled by very few indeed of his contemporaries, even though some may have excelled him in one or another particularly. He was, moreover, astonishingly well read in Chinese literature. It is probable – though such assertions are impossible to verify – that in sheer bulk he had read far more of it than any other Occidental living.

As a man Waley was often called eccentric and sometimes thought to be formidable, although in fact his friends, of every calling and profession, were legion. Certainly he was somewhat eccentric in his habits – a *private* person in every possible sense of the word. He disliked pretence and pomposity, particularly the institutional kind, and no one, even his nearest and dearest, was exempt from the somewhat bleak candour with which he confronted polite or jocular untruth. His intellectual humility (a quality totally unconnected with any kind of modesty) was so great and so surprising in a person of his pre-eminence that it was sometimes mistaken for irony.

Greatness in men is a rare but unmistakable quality. In our small profession it is unlikely we shall see a man of such magnitude again.

[David Hawkes, *Arthur Waley* (1967)]

特別鳴謝

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