

# *The Explorer Who Never Left Home* —Arthur Waley

By Jonathan Spence

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ARTHUR WALEY, *March 1949:*  
*against a Chinese screen. Photograph*  
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ARTHUR WALEY selected the jewels of Chinese and Japanese literature and pinned them quietly to his chest. No one has ever done anything like it before, and no one will ever do so again.

There are now many Westerners whose knowledge of Chinese or Japanese is greater than his, and there are perhaps a few who can handle both languages as well. But they are not poets, and those who are better poets than Waley do not know Chinese or Japanese. Also the shock will never be repeated, for most of the works that Waley chose to translate were largely unknown in the West, and their impact was thus all the more extraordinary.

WALEY SAT on a quiet edge of “Bloomsbury.” Because he lived to a fine age—from 1889 to 1966—I have always associated him in some corner of my mind with E. M. Forster and Leonard Woolf, for they were all educated in the same special area of pre-World War I Cambridge, and all lived well into the 1960’s, shrewd observers