

Stuart Lyons. *Xu Zhimo in Cambridge: Life and Poetry*. Cambridge: King's College. 2021. ISBN 9781527292314. 334 pp.

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In October 1921, Xu Zhimo came to the University of Cambridge as a postgraduate student and stayed in King's College for a year. In order to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Xu Zhimo's arrival at Cambridge and introduce Xu and his poems to a wider group of international audience, Stuart Lyons published *Xu Zhimo in Cambridge: Life and Poetry* in 2021. In addition to bringing forth unpublished details about Xu Zhimo's life at Cambridge, this volume is one of the first works that brings Xu Zhimo's poems into the English-speaking world. Lyons' beautiful English translations and careful analyses of 24 selected poems by Xu Zhimo not only represent Xu's remarkable ability to unite Western and Chinese poetic styles, but also explicate what influences Xu's poetic creation was exposed to.

The first section of *Xu Zhimo in Cambridge: Life and Poetry* is an informative introduction of Xu Zhimo's life at Cambridge. In this section, Lyons explains how Xu Zhimo's friendship with Lin Changmin and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson facilitated his admission into Cambridge. One of the major contributions of this section is Lyons' revelation of Xu Zhimo's curriculum and activities at Cambridge, especially Xu's exposure to Romantic and modernist literature and his close association with the Bloomsbury Group and the Heretics Society. Having uncovered these documents from the archives of King's College, Lyons paves the way for the reader's understanding of Xu Zhimo's decision of taking the literary path at Cambridge. In the later part of this section, Xu's fruitless love life, his residential experience at King's College, his friendship with Dickinson and Roger Fry, and his last visit to Cambridge in 1928 are discussed to offer readers certain crucial contexts for Xu Zhimo's poetic creations, especially the context of his creation of Cambridge poems.

The main section of this work is composed of 24 selected poems by Xu Zhimo, which are offered in Chinese characters, Pinyin as well as English. Lyons provides a comprehensive analysis of the context, musicality, imagery and structure of each poem, and in some of the analyses, Lyons also explicates the ways in which he

translated certain expressions and lines. These 24 poems include a back translation of Xu Zhimo's translation of Christina Rossetti's "When I am dead, my dearest," fifteen poems written by Xu at Cambridge, five poems that mark "significant steps in Xu's poetic and personal development after his return to China" (Lyons 35), two poems Xu composed upon leaving Cambridge, and the last poem Xu wrote before the plane crash.

The fifteen poems written by Xu Zhimo at Cambridge are sequenced according to the time of composition, for Lyons wants to display Xu's "progress and mood-changes as an emerging poet" (34). Lyons proposes that among these fifteen poems, "Dewdrops on the Grass," "Night" and "Wild West Cambridge at Dusk" may be considered as significant milestones for Xu's literary progress. According to Lyons, impressive images are created in "Dewdrops on the Grass," the first poem Xu wrote at Cambridge, to represent Xu's "passion, ambition and enthusiasm" (58) for being a poet. However, Lyons argues that as a novice, Xu did not establish his own style at this point, so inconsistencies of structure, musicality, and images can easily be noticed in this work. As for "Night," Lyons suggests that this is one of the first works that shows Xu's attempt to integrate Western poetic elements into a vernacular Chinese poem. Lyons' use of iambic pentameter in the translation is especially noteworthy, for Lyons' translation not only explains why Richards claims that Xu Zhimo is one of the first Chinese poets who "succeeded in carrying our [Western] forms over into China" (110), but also reveals the rhythmic beauty of Xu Zhimo's work. Lyons' close analysis of Xu's frequent references to Romantic literature in "Night" is another highlight of this section, as it clearly elucidates the ways in which Xu's exposure to Romantic literature at Cambridge affected his poetic creation. Speaking of "Wild West Cambridge at Dust," Lyons argues that this work marks the establishment of Xu Zhimo's unique poetic style, and Lyons' translation of this poem is a significant contribution to this volume. Lyons' editing of this poem not only lends a fresh perspective on the musicality of "Wild West Cambridge at Dust," but also enables English-speaking readers to perceive the fluidity of this work and Xu's debt to modernist writers. In addition, Lyons' diction in his translation deserves special attention. In *Xu Zhimo and the University of Cambridge*, Professor Liu points out that one distinguishing feature of Xu Zhimo's poems is Xu's domestication of exotic sceneries (110-116). Lyons' cautious selection of vocabulary plays a key role in conveying those domesticated images into the English translation in a way that can "strike a chord with English readers" (Lyons 211). It has to be noted that Lyons' translation of "Wild West Cambridge at Dust" won the 2020 Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation.

Xu Zhimo has visited Cambridge twice in his life, and each time he wrote a poem to express his love for Cambridge. “Cambridge, Farewell!” not only exhibits Xu Zhimo’s gratitude to Cambridge, but also contains a detailed account of his autobiography. The inclusion of this poem, its English translation and an analysis of it in Lyons’ volume offers readers an opportunity to have a glance at Xu Zhimo’s experience of studying abroad and how “his efforts came to fruition” (Lyons 244) at Cambridge. Speaking of “Saying Goodbye to Cambridge Again,” this is one of the most renowned of Xu Zhimo’s poems and it has been translated several times. In this volume, in addition to offering a new translation of this poem, Lyons also discusses the structure, imagery and musicality of “Saying Goodbye to Cambridge Again” in detail. Lyons’ in-depth discussion on the calligraphy of Chinese characters, pronunciations of certain words in Chinese, and the precise meanings of the vocabulary employed by Xu is worthy of mention, for it can help English-speaking readers to gain a clear understanding of how Xu Zhimo created the beauty of images and sounds in “Saying Goodbye to Cambridge Again.”

As for the six poems Xu Zhimo wrote after he returned to China, they mark significant stages of the last few years of Xu’s life and his maturity in poetic creation. Lyons’ identification of Xu Zhimo’s employment of Western poetic styles like limerick and Xu’s echoing of Western poets and writers like Rossetti and Mansfield in these six poems is a key contribution of this section, as it uncovers how Xu Zhimo successfully brought Western poetic elements into vernacular Chinese poems.

Examining the archives of King’s College and the University of Cambridge, *Xu Zhimo in Cambridge: Life and Poetry* complements current studies on the relation between Xu Zhimo and the University of Cambridge with new historical facts. This volume is also the most comprehensive collection of English translations of Xu Zhimo’s poems to date, and it successfully introduces Xu Zhimo and his literary progress to English-speaking readers. Lyons’ back translation of Xu Zhimo’s references to Romantic and modernist literature, his efficient employment of assonance, alliteration and various metric lines, and his careful diction all deserve further attention, for the specific translation strategies used by Lyons enable him to display the beauty of Xu Zhimo’s poems in a way that can be understood and appreciated by English-speaking readers. We should call attention to Lyons’ analyses on Xu’s poems as well, as they explicate the effective assimilation of Western poetic elements into Xu’s vernacular Chinese poems and offer a new perspective on Xu Zhimo’s attitudes towards Western and modern Chinese literary encounters. In a word, *Xu Zhimo in Cambridge: Life and Poetry* should be

commended for its effort to open a window for the English-speaking world to view the literary sensitivity, wisdom and wit of Xu Zhimo. It will also prove a helpful reference for researchers who are interested in the relation between Xu Zhimo's experience at Cambridge and his literary career as well as the roles that Xu played in bridging Western and modern Chinese literature.

Works Cited:

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