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旅遊、主體和帝國 英國浪漫時期個案研究(2/3)

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茲因下述原因，申請延期繳交：

本計畫第一年包括赴英國倫敦四周，往大英圖書館收集資料的部分，惟本人因教務所囿，只能在今年六月下旬至七月下旬期間才可以出國研習；執筆之際尚未出國，必須待研習完成返國後才可撰寫該心得報告，故申請延後至七月底繳交，敬請見諒。

執行單位：國立交通大學外國語文學系

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The Second Year of the “Travel, Subjectivity and Empire” Project

Urban Travels, Modernity, and Anxieties of Empire:

The City in Such Male Romantic Writers as Thomas De Quincey

Aims:

In this year of my project, my focus falls on urban travels and the early experience of modernity, based on three Romantic to early Victorian writers, namely, William Wordsworth, Thomas De Quincey, and Charles Lamb. My chief aim is to uncover some early, if haphazard and sporadic, discourses of modernity concerning the depiction of cityscapes or different forms of *flanerie*. Another related aim, originally, is to rethink the validity of reading “anxieties of empire” in De Quincey’s works. Concentrating my effort on the first objective, I did not make as much progress in the second though.

Results:

So far in my exploration of the urban writings of the three writers mentioned above, some interesting patterns have already emerged. Rendered below is a brief summary of my initial findings:

I. A Stranger’s Gaze: Paris and London in Wordsworth’s The Prelude

William Wordsworth is most famous for his idealization of rustic life and his attribution of what he sees as the deterioration of literary taste to urbanization: “the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies” (Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*). Not too many critics have noticed, however, that Wordsworth has written interestingly about his experience of an early form of the Parisian arcades in the heat of the French Revolution:

I saw the revolutionary Power
Toss like a Ship at anchor, rock’d by storms;
The Arcades I traversed in the Palace huge
Of Orleans, coasted round and round the line
Of Tavern, Brothel, Gaming-house, and Shop,
Great rendezvous of worst and best, the walk
Of all who had a purpose, or had not;
I star’d and listen’d with a stranger’s ears

To Hawkers and Haranguers, hubbub wild!
And hissing Factionists with ardent eyes,
In knots, or pairs, or single, ant-like swarms
Of Builders and Subverters, every face
That hope or apprehension could put on,
Joy, anger, and vexation in the midst
Of gaiety and dissolute idleness. (*The 1805 Prelude* IX 50-62)

Ruminating on the figure of the *flâneur*, Walter Benjamin claims that it is a peculiar product of the nineteenth century Paris, an urban stroller most at home in the arcades. Wordsworth in the Paris of 1791 was of course no Baudelairean *flâneur* “botanizing on the asphalt.” In fact, as a visitor rather than a native urbanite, he could hardly distinguish the various urban types as he implied he was able to do in the text. Not even fluent in French, he could scarcely “hide” himself in the crowd, enjoying some sort of solitude there and gaining inspirations like a Baudelaire or a Dickens. As a university student with limited means on his eighteenth-century style “grand tour,” initially wishing to “speak the language more familiarly,” Wordsworth was a passer-by fascinated by the colorful life of the metropolis dazzling with its remarkable commercial as well as political activities. He had visited such places as the Champ de Mars, the Pantheon, the ruins of the Bastille and even attended the Legislative Assembly. Complaining that he could not find what he was looking for there, that “all these various objects” in the most vibrant city at the time failed to “recompense the Traveller’s pains,” he departed for Orlean as originally planned in just a few days. Given the short period of stay and restricted linguistic and financial resources at the time, his inability to fully enjoy the intoxicating Parisian life is understandable. Still, this 5-day sojourn had helped produced probably one of the best early descriptions of urban modernity in the English language. If “uniformity” is the keyword in the characterization of the city (modeled on London) in Wordsworth’s preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, then in Book IX of *The Prelude* we find its exact opposite: diversity and hybridity. What is of particular interest here is the sense of seductive consumptions (“Brothel, Gaming-house, and Shop”) mixed with an intense feeling of ambiguity or ambivalence (building vs. subversion, hope vs. apprehension, joy vs. anger, gaiety vs. idleness) associated with the great expectations and confusions of the ongoing revolution. In Wordsworth’s descriptions one can detect a keen sense of “newness” in the air, no longer a repetition of the Babylonian stereotype of the fallen city, but a city of immoderation as well as newborn freedom and uncertainties. Besides, as what he calls a “stranger” (culturally and linguistically speaking) and a traveler en route, Wordsworth could hardly have developed what the “blasé” attitude

characterizing modern urban life as discussed by Georg Simmel. Thrilled, if not exactly intoxicated, he hurried on to the much less modernized Loire Valley.

Wordsworth returned to Paris, leaving his pregnant French girlfriend Annette Vallon, at the end of October 1792, during an even more turbulent time shaped by violent struggles for power among the revolutionaries such as Jean-Baptist Louvet and Maximilian Robespierre. Stephen Gill argues that it is “doubtful whether Wordsworth could have understood much of the situation in Paris.” Nevertheless, while a sense of exclusion lingered on, Wordsworth was, as he himself confides to us in *The Prelude*, “greatly [...] agitated” in the face of the fast-moving political events (Book X 116-17). At one point he even exclaims:

An insignificant Stranger, and obscure,
Mean as I was, and little graced with power
Of eloquence even in my native speech,
And all unfit for tumult and intrigue,
Yet would I willingly have taken up
A service at this time for cause so great,
However dangerous. [...] (Book X 130-36)

Paris as a modern metropolis had probably captivated Wordsworth not so much because of her cityscapes, her palaces, arcades, taverns, brothels, or gaming-houses, but in respect of the peculiar ambience in the course of a seemingly unprecedented democratic revolution which involved the mixing of different social groups, exchange of ideas, open struggles and dark conspiracies. Somewhat confused but still cherishing the hope of great social progress, Wordsworth returned to England “reluctantly,” “compell’d by nothing less than absolute want /Of funds for [his] support, else, well assured /That [he] both was and must be of small worth, /No better than an alien in the Land” (Book X 189-93).

It will be a big mistake to claim that Wordsworth also felt like an “alien” while staying in London. In early 1791 he stayed there for about 4 months, where his political awakening must have arisen as he read enthusiastically pamphlets of the day and attended debates in the Commons at an exciting time when Edmund Burke broke with Charles James Fox regarding their views on the French Revolution and political reforms. He even mixed with Unitarian Dissenters who were then struggling against the Test and Corporation acts which limited their civic rights, if not having also met radical thinkers like William Godwin. On the other hand, not unlike an eager tourist, he had visited most of the famous places, such as the gardens by the Thames

(Vauxhall and Ranelagh), St. Paul Cathedral, the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, and Guildhall. In his later journeys to London he would visit friends like Charles Lamb, attend parties and other kinds of social gatherings. In his poems like “Composed upon Westminster Bridge” (“Earth has not anything to shew more fair”), one can see the beauty of London. What “always affected him,” in Gill’s analysis, was “the city’s potential for beauty brought out by the dawn light or a transfiguring snowstorm” (210). However, Book VII of *The Prelude*, entitled “Residence in London,” must have given readers a strong impression of a stranger’s unpleasant experience in the metropolis:

The broad high-way appearance, as it strikes
On Strangers of all ages, the quick dance
Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din
The endless stream of men, and moving things,
[... ...]
The wealth, the bustle and the eagerness,
The glittering Chariots with their pamper’d Steeds,
Stalls, Barrows, Porters; midway in the Street
The Scavenger, who begs with hat in hand,
The labouring Hackney Coaches, the rash speed
Of Coaches traveling far, whirl’d on with horn
Loud blowing, and the sturdy Drayman’s Team,
Ascending from some Alley of the Thames
And striking right across the crowded Strand
Till the fore Horse veer round with punctual skill;
Here there and everywhere a weary throng
[... ...] the string of dazzling Wares,
Shop after shop, with Symbols, blazon’d Names,
And all the Tradesman’s honours overhead [... ...]
(*The Prelude* Book VII 155-75)

Here the emphasis is not on diversity and hybridity as such but the disorienting experience of speed, noises, crowding, over-stimulations, profane social and racial mixing, the contrast between the rich and the poor, and glaring signs shamelessly glorifying the commercial life. Curiously, unlike the counterpart about Paris, the agitated political life of London in the wake of the French Revolution is suppressed in Wordsworth’s text. Instead, emphasis is put on the unsavory “spectacles” of the city: the raree-show with monkeys and dancing dogs (VII 190-94), St. Bartholomew’s Fair

with buffoons, “Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs, /The Horse of Knowledge, and he learned Pig, /The Stone-eater, the Man that swallows fire, /Giants, Ventriloquist, the Invisible Girl, /The Bust that speaks, and moves its goggling eyes [... and] All out-o’-th’-way, far-fetch’d, perverted things, /All freaks of Nature” (681-89). The alien and alienating urban experience of London here is barbarian, infernal and monstrous, causing, Wordsworth claims, nothing other than “blank confusion” (696). If Paris of 1791 and 1792 is represented in *The Prelude* as blessed with new social possibilities, then London in the same autobiographical poem, based not only on his 1791 stay but also on a few later visits, is one of dehumanization and meaningless existence, a sort or prison house:

An undistinguishable world to men,
The slaves unrespited of low pursuits,
Living amid the same perpetual flow
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end [...]
(VII 700-705)

Paradoxically, the idea of “uniformity” in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* reappears here. All the great diversities, spectacles, mixing and rapid flows, in the end, are supposed to produce “slaves” of mercantile modernity, individuals lost in trivialities, unable to develop their individuality, or “one-dimensional men,” to borrow Marcuse’s later expression. Impressive as Wordsworth’s portrait of London is, it is also very lopsided. He has to suppress his fascination by the metropolis, his early political awakening, genuine friendship and pleasant social life there and condemn the city en bloc at a great critical distance. The blind beggar episode in Book VII is most symptomatic. Not writing as an urbanite feeling at home in the city and being able to decipher urban “physiognomies” like a Charles Lamb or Leigh Hunt, Wordsworth turns a blind beggar in the street into an “emblem,” a symbol of admonition “from another world” (623). But such an “apocalyptic” reading, arguably, must imply the loss of social sympathy and blindness (deliberate or not) to the delights and intoxication of the great metropolis.

II. Mixing with the Lowly City-dwellers: De Quincey’s flanerie

De Quincey is equally notorious for his “opium-eating” as for his running away from school and the subsequent wandering in Wales and London. The waywardness

in his youth enabled him to taste what was normally outside the range of usual middle-class experience: sixteen weeks of poverty and gnawing hunger, the somewhat compensative pleasure of contacting social outcasts, and, finally, debts. What is most striking in De Quincey's writing is perhaps not so much the discovery of any new kind of urban space or new social relations and lifestyles of the native inhabitants. Rather, it is the unique personal experience that he depicts in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* which offers us something enormously fascinating, experiences arguably "modern" if not altogether "urban." Generally in Wales and "always for the first two months in London," he was "houseless, and very seldom slept under a roof" (16) until finally he found an "unoccupied" house in London. The so-called "unoccupied" house was not exactly so. The master of the house was probably "one of those anomalous practitioners in lower departments of the law," who was, mysteriously, "in constant fear of bailiffs." Since every night he had to sleep in "a different quarter of London," the house was left to a 10-year girl to live in, who served him as a menial servant. Allowed to move in and share that furniture-less, rat-infected place with the forsaken child, De Quincey led a life of impoverished urban life. Devoid of beds and quilts, he and the girl had to lie on the floor, covering themselves with a rug and some old clothes. They must cling to each other for warmth if not for a sense of comfort. Most memorable in this stage of De Quincey's London travel is not the busy city life outside but the detailed depiction of his curious inner sufferings in that free, empty lodging:

[...] my sleep distressed me more than my watching; for, besides the tumultuousness of my dreams [...], my sleep was never more than what is called *dog-sleep*; so that I could hear myself moaning, and was often, as it seemed to me, wakened suddenly by my own voice; and, about this time, a hideous sensation began to haunt me as soon as I fell into a slumber, which has since returned upon me, at different periods of my life, viz. a sort of twitching (I know not where, but apparently about the region of the stomach), which compelled me violently to throw out my feet for the sake of relieving it. This sensation coming on as soon as I began to sleep, and the effort to relieve it constantly awaking me, at length I slept only from exhaustion; and from increasing weakness [...] I was constantly falling asleep, and constantly awaking. (17)

This kind of painful experience might not be unfamiliar to a champ, but it takes an educated, sensitive literary man, an exceptional *flâneur* like the young De Quincey, to articulate the extraordinary perceptions concerned in vivid details. The relation

between this famishing scholar” and the “neglected child,” De Quincey implies, is entirely “Platonic.” She was “neither pretty, nor quick in understanding, nor remarkably pleasing in manners”; but “plain human nature, in its humblest and most homely apparel, was enough” for him (20). He “loved” the girl because “she was [his] partner in wretchedness” (20). A similar “innocent” relation is to be found between De Quincey and Ann of Oxford Street, a sixteen-year-old streetwalker. He states humorously that “it may well be supposed that in the existing state of my purse, my connexion with such women could not have been an impure one” (20). Their encounter was not improbable. As a poor “walker of the streets,” he “naturally fell in more frequently with those female peripatetics” (20); in fact, his temporary status as a “pariah” allowed him to mix well with these women. Ann, in particular, had accompanied him on his night walks up and down Oxford Street, “or had rested with [him] on steps and under the shelter of porticos” (21). It was through Ann that he could “penetrate” the mystery of lower-class life. Another theme which runs through the entire *Confessions* is debt. De Quincey owed Ann a heavy debt, because once she saved him from severe illness because of hunger and exhaustion. The rest of London narrative has to do with how he tried to borrow money from money-lenders and how, after trying to secure his loan by going to Eton to see his aristocratic friend, he had lost Ann forever. The now-familiar idea of the city as a labyrinth, a place of futile search and frustrated desire is found in De Quincey’s text in relation to the disappearance of Ann:

If she lived, doubtless we must have been sometimes in search of each other, at the very same moment, through the mighty labyrinths of London; perhaps, even within a few feet of each other – a barrier no wider in a London street, often amounting in the end to a separation for eternity! [...] I may say that on my different visits to London, I have looked into many, many myriads of female faces, in the hope of meeting her. (34)

The reader might well question De Quincey’s sincerity. If he really loved this “savior of his life” “as affectionately as if she had been [his] sister” (27), then why would he not have asked for and remembered her surname in order to track her down later? In any case, as a “debtor” he did eventually come up with a wishful solution. He no longer sought after her but preferred to “see her no longer, but think of her, more gladly, as one long since laid in the grave; in the grave, [he] would hope, of a Magdalen; taken away, before injuries and cruelty had blotted out and transfigured her ingenuous nature, or the brutalities and completed the ruin they had

begun” (34). Such a “benevolent” thought would help dissipate his guilt and serve as a symbolic return of the unpayable debt. In a sense, the Ann scenario in De Quincey had anticipated the kind of Victorian writing about how middle-class men visited the fallen or lowly women and probed into the “secrets” of their lives. There must be a “libidinal economy” in De Quincey’s text awaiting our further examination.

Finally, there is another kind of *flanerie* in De Quincey the notorious “English opium-eater,” also related to sympathizing with the poor.

For the sake [...] of witnessing, upon as large a scale as possible, a spectacle with which my sympathy was so entire, I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London, to which the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages. Many a family party, consisting of a man, his wife, and sometimes one or two of his children, have I listened to, as they stood consulting on their ways and means, or the strength of their exchequer, or the price of household articles. Gradually I became familiar with their wishes, their difficulties, and their opinions. (47)

Opium magically broke down the barrier between social classes, enabling him to mix with and better understand the working-class people, to fashion a curious kind of solidarity, without having to endure their hardships. As Nigel Leask puts it, “as an opium-eater he is at one with the poor on Saturday night, *no longer* poor and overworked, but ‘rich’ and at leisure, with ‘some luxury of repose’ to enjoy” (201). He was thus able to idealize the working people as “far more philosophic than the rich [for] they show a more ready and cheerful submission to what they consider as irremediable evils, or irreparable losses” (47). Furthermore, opium also empowered him to go beyond his usual daytime “normal” self, to defy time, overcome exhaustion and sustain a daring kind of long-distance nocturnal *flanerie*, discovering by chance the hidden corners of the labyrinthine cityscape in a euphoriant mood:

Some of these rambles led me to great distances: for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards [...] I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx’s riddles of streets without thoroughfares, as must, I conceive, baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney-coachmen. I could almost have

believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted, whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. (47-48)

And yet he had to pay a “heavy prize” for the dark pleasures of such laudanum-soaked urban wanderings: in later years, “the human face tyrannized over [his] dreams, and the perplexities of [his] steps in London came back and haunted [his] sleep, with the feeling of perplexities moral or intellectual, that brought confusion to the reason, or anguish and remorse to the conscience” (48).

III. An Urbanite at Home: Charles Lamb's Knowable London

The Charles Lamb part might be considered a counterpoint, if not exactly the anti-climax in the present study. Lamb suffered from a hereditary taint of insanity in the family. He was once committed in a madhouse at Hoxton. However, with the help of Samuel Salt, Lamb was able to secure a clerkship in the accountant's office of the East India Company, where he had led a rather monotonous working life for 33 years before he applied for an early retirement in 1825. Although he confessed he was a heavy smoker and a drunkard, nowhere in his writings can we see extraordinary perceptions of the city, not to say “shocks.” Obviously, Lamb was not particularly interested in exploring the sickly and the monstrous in urban life. He knew the city well; when you fail to discover a particular kind of social reality in his writings, chances are he did not find it interesting to write about even if he knew about it. The ideas of the city as a labyrinth (De Quincey), an illegible text, or “Parliament of Monster” (Wordsworth, *The Prelude* VII 692) are utterly absent in Lamb. A great lover of literature and the theater, Lamb was well-known for his gentle or urbane writing style. In a letter to the editor of *The Reflector*, signed as “a Londoner,” Lamb characteristically celebrates the material comforts and “civility” of London life:

The endless succession of shops where *Fancy miscalled Folly* is supplied with perpetual gauds and toys, excite in me no puritanical aversion. I gladly behold every appetite supplied with its proper food. The obliging customer, and the obliged tradesman – things which live by bowing, and things which exist but for homage – do not affect me with disgust; from habit I perceive nothing but urbanity, where other men, more refined, discover meanness. (376)

Unlike Wordsworth, Lamb was totally at home in London:

I love the very smoke of London, because it has been the medium most familiar to my vision. I see grand principles of honour at work in the dirty ring which encompasses two combatants with fists, and principles of no less eternal justice in the detection of a pickpocket. The salutary astonishment with which an execution is surveyed, convinces me more forcibly than a hundred volumes of abstract polity, that the universal instinct of man in all ages has leaned to order and good government. (376)

There are, of course, self-ironies here, as in the expression “salutary astonishment” for example. To Lamb, there was perhaps something “unnatural” in the commercial transactions, but “habit” had already naturalized it. There were, admittedly, “dirty ring,” “execution,” and beggars (which is the theme of his Swifdean essay “A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars”), yet Lamb remained fascinated and he in effect tried to justify the necessary imperfections. If, for the Surrealists, Paris in the early twentieth century was intoxicating with its countless distractions and artifacts, London almost a century ago, to Lamb, was equally enticing: “Humor, Interest, [and] Curiosity suck at her measureless breasts without a possibility of being satiated.” (376) “Nursed amid her noise, her crowds, her beloved smoke,” Lamb just could not imagine to live anywhere else.

Perhaps like Benjamin’s Berlin, London was an indispensable part of Lamb’s personal identity, weaving memories with various urban images and social relations, past and present. *Familiarity* must be a keyword underlying Lamb’s discourse on London. He had written on happy “drinking tours” in the city. In a letter he tells of how Mary, his sister, in her first walk out of the house after the confinement due to a nervous breakdown, “would read every Auction advertisement along the road” to cheer herself up, and how he himself loves to stroll leisurely along the road to his favorite inn (1022). He doubted if there was any building in Paris which was at all comparable to St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Perhaps the difference is not so much architectural form per se but the specific meaning of the place in relation to the perceiver’s particular spatial practice: Lamb explains in a letter that he had “looked up to [St. Paul’s] with unfading wonder, every morning at ten o’clock, ever since it has lain in [his] way to business” and, at noon, he “casually glance[d] upon it, being hungry” (720). In a rhetorical question he asks: “Is any night-walk comparable to a walk from St. Paul’s to Charing Cross, for lighting and paving, crowds going and coming without respite, the rattle of coaches, and the cheerfulness of shops?” (720) What Lamb cherished most is surely what his friend Wordsworth apparently considered the unintelligible, traumatic experience of the city. But Lamb’s focus

was not on urban modernity in general, for his love for London was rather specific, far exceeding that of any other cities, Paris included. Shortly after his return from Paris on a short trip in 1822, Lamb wrote little about it except the impression that “Paris is a glorious picturesque old city” and “London looks mean and new to it” (843). Having said that, he seemed not to have been much impressed. The only other thing he found worth recounting to his friend in some detail is he and Mary had eaten frogs there: “the nicest little delicate things – rabbity-flavoured” (843). London would always remain Lamb’s home, at once an interesting, familiar and somewhat “mean,” “corrupt” site where he took his daily walks, met his friends, drank and smoke, watched his favorite plays, published reviews in particular magazines for sophisticated urbanites, and took care of his family, especially his sister Mary, in the time of profound distress.

Conclusion:

My initial findings have proven to be quite interesting. Originally I intended to cover Leigh Hunt’s urban writings as well. Because of the delay of my London research trip, unfortunately, I am still unable to read some of the important pieces on his “sauntering” in London. I have also noticed that there is a relatively recent scholarship on Victorian urban travels in relation to middle-class males writers’ (such as Derek Hudson) exploration of lower-class life and the “dreadful delight” which ensues, but I have yet to read more about this exciting topic related to my present study. On the other hand, I have already read most of the standard readings regarding urban space and *flanerie*, including Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, and Benjamin. In the summer, after my London trip, I plan to work harder to make better use of these theories in order to integrate and further elaborate my present, if still piecemeal, findings. A special issue to be launched by a Taiwanese journal on literary London may well be an occasion for me to publish the results of this year’s study of urban travels.