

The Renaissance London in Verses and The Political Imagination of The Rise of Britain

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Cities are co-built spaces by natural environment and human activities, and their formation and development rely on human activities. City spaces, according to Henri Lefebvre, are not only tangible and perceivable, but also heterogeneous, which can be reconstructed. London, as the most ancient city and the political, economic and cultural center of Britain, was depicted in verses of different periods, within which its landscape and city spaces took on different visions and had been endowed with various meanings. The heterogeneous London city spaces reveal historical changes, and, at the same time, reflect how the literary writers understand, perceive and expect from the city. From the Renaissance verses, readers can not only see what the London city was like in realistic writings, but also the imagined spaces based on the reconstructed history, which are the embodiment of the writers' geopolitical imagination.

Keywords: London, space, political writing, geopolitical imagination

A city is a space combined with natural environment and human activities. In his book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre put forward the three basic propositions of social space: perceivable material space, space under ideological projection, and a Utopian space under imagination (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 8-9). Based on Lefebvre's theory, Edward Soja proposed his "Third Space Theory", or "Heterogeneous Space" as it is called (Soja, 1996, p. 10), which is deconstructed and reconstructed based on the traditional theory of the first and second space. The third space is the differential space combining reality and imagination on the basis of material and spiritual dimensions. Soja's discovery provided a theoretical foundation for the "geographical turn" of literary study. On city research in literary works, the heterogeneous space not only reflects the natural geography of the cities, but also reveals the psychological expectations of the writers on the cities' rise and fall.

As the most ancient city and the political and economic center, London has been repeatedly presented in different literary works. As an important symbol of England, its literary image bears the historical memories of the ups and downs of the city, of the country, and of the people. Stepping out of the Middle Ages, the British people walked into the Renaissance, a time characterized by the rise of the state power, highlighting awareness of monarchy, and a strong national desire to establish the status of a major country, and an era which has been

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marked with various magnificent poetry in which poets constructed their political dreams through the writing of London.

Geopolitical Imagination on European Political and Economic Center

Geopolitics is the interdisciplinary product of geography and politics, whose focus is the interaction between international politics and geographical environment, that is, the political differences performed by political regime in international relationship caused by geographical differences. Two basic concepts are included in geopolitics: geographical position and geographical environment, the former indicating the political geographical position of a political entity, while the latter indicating the spacial relationship between this political entity and other entities (Li, 2007, p. 12). According to Li, the geographical position, which is the natural foundation for a country's survival and prosperity, is fixed and unchanged, while the geographical environment is dynamic and variable.

Throughout the Middle Age, Rome was the political and economic center of Europe, whereas England, the island country away from the continent, kept at the edge of the European center, both politically and economically. Therefore, at the end of the Middle Age and throughout the Renaissance time, British people had tried their best to improve their geographical environment by active performances in politics, economy, military affairs, diplomacy, and culture. Along with the rise of the British empire and increasingly stronger national power, England had expanded its international influence in hope of reconstructing a European political and economic center and exerting its imperial power. The English poetry in early modern period spoke of the foundation of the country and mythological history, and depicted the strong power of the nation and prosperous business of London, all proving the ambition of the early modern British people to construct London to be a new European political and economic center.

Geopolitical Imagination of the European Political Center

Early in the 14th to 15th century, the English poetry had referred to the foundation of the country, most of which embroidered the founding history with some kind of romance.

John Gower, a poet of Chaucer's time, named London as "newe Troye" in his admonishing poetry *Confessio Amantis*, and mentioned the legendary founder of London city Brut as well. Let's enjoy the two lines of the *Confessio Amantis*:

Under the toun of newe Troye, which took of Brut his ferste joye
Prayend unto the hihe regne which causeth every king to regne.

In these lines, John Gower claimed that London city, inheriting the ancient Roman tradition, was originally built by the Trojan hero Brut, and whose kings were empowered by God to govern the land (Ford, 2012, p. 27).

John Lydgate depicted the joyous occasion when the only 10-year-old Henry VI was welcomed to the London city in the year 1432 in his poem *King Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London*. His line "Citee of Citees, of noblesse precellyng, in thy bygynnyng called Newe Troye" also confirmed the legend of London's founder Trojan hero, and suggested the noble Trojan blood of the London rulers.

Roughly at the end of 15th century or the beginning of the 16th century, a verselet named *London, thou art of townes A per se* passionately praised the landscape of London. It was said that its author was William Dunbar,

a Scottish poet who at that time as one of the Scottish Mission members attended the negotiation of the marriage union between James IV and the eldest daughter of Henry VII. As a traveler and an outsider, he examined London in his perception, describing the beautiful landscape in “*semeliest in sight, (its river whose) beryall stremys (are) pleasaunt and preclare (bright)*”, amazing at its wealth in “*its merchants are full of substaunce and myght; knights wearing velvets gownes and cheynes of fyne gold*”, and its military power in “*artillary with tonge may not be told*”. Dunbar named London as “*Swete paradise precelling in pleasure*”, and at the end of each stanza he repeated “*London, thou art the flour of Cities all*”. Like the above mentioned poets in the Middle Age, he also cited the allusion of London’s legendary founding in his line “*Gladdith anon, thou lusty Troy Novaunt, Citie that some tyme cleped was New Troy*”.

As we have seen, both poets in the Middle Age and the early Renaissance, at home or abroad, accepted the version of London’s Trojan origin, for this legend, we have to trace back to the history of the Roman Conquest. In 55 BC, under Caesar’s lead, the Romans invaded Britain, which had been conquered and taken up under the control of Roman empire. Since then, not only the Roman political and economical life, but also the ancient Roman myths and legends, arts, and literary works, had influenced Britain in the old English age. Together with the strong political power and advanced economic system, the implantation of Roman culture made British people in Anglo-Saxon age firmly believe in their identity as the descendants of Trojan heroes, the founder of ancient Roman Empire.

Another reason leading to this belief may be the geographical anxiety of the British people. England was situated away from the European continent center, which dwarfed the British people in terms of geographical advantages, thus the British people were eager to seek strong evidence to get rid of that geographical anxiety, clues of which can be seen in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Britons* in the 12th Century. According to Geoffrey, Brutus, grandson of Aeneas and descendant of the Trojan founder Assaracus, came all the way to the British island and built New Troy, namely London as people stated, under the Goddess’ oracle. Except for Geoffrey’s chronicle, Monk Layamon’s work *Layamon’s Brut* in the 13th century also provided evidence for this legend. The book, based on the Norman historical materials, mainly narrated the history of Britain, within which the author mentioned the London founder Brut’s deed.

Early in the 16th century, Sir Thomas Wyatt wrote a verselet *Tagus, farewell, that westward with thy streams* when he departed from Spain for home. He wrote the emotional lines “*With spur and sail for I go seek the Thames, Gainward the sun that show’th her wealthy pride, And, to the town which Brutus sought by dreams*” (Ford, 2012, p. 59) to express his loyalty and love for his country. In his eyes, River Thames was the great mother, whose beauty and charm attracted him back, and the London city was founded by the great Brutus who was guided by Goddess in his dream—in the myth, Diana, the goddess of the forest, had guided Brutus westward to Albion to establish his kingdom, namely London (Geoffrey of Monmouth, 1999, pp. 13-14).

In his great epic *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser also adopted the historical materials recorded in Geoffrey’s chronicle. Sir Guyon discovered an ancient book named *Antiquity of Faerie Land* in Alma’s House, indicating that the blood lineage of the British offspring was from Eve of the fairy land (FQ, II. ix. 59-60), and he was amazed by the noble birth of the Briton kings, from previous emperors to Queen Gloriana, who was the embodiment of Queen Elizabeth I in his poetry. He listed the famous kings of Britain of the past dynasties, including Brute, who named Britain after his name, and Uther, the Briton king in legend, King Author’s father.

By praising the royal blood of Briton kings, Spenser endowed the Queen's family with a mythological flavor, implying the orthodox identity of Queen Elizabeth I as the God chosen king. When he wrote the heroic deeds of Queen Gloriana's knights, he described the lion in the golden shield, the coat of the arms, which was regarded as the symbol of Brute, indicating the royal Trojan blood of the British people, who inherited and promoted the brave Trojan tradition in Briton. In Book III, the poet compared Britain to be a giant tree with leafy branches deeply rooted in land: "*For from thy wombe a famous Progenee shall spring, out of the auncient Trojan blood, Which shall revive the sleeping memoree of those same antique Peres, the hevens brood*" (FQ. III. iii. 22). As he pointed in the lines, the tree (referring to Britain) was of ancient Trojan blood, which grew and gave birth to the people of "heaven blood". Spenser alluded to the legendary Trojan origin of Britain many times in his *Faerie Queene* for the purpose of endowing with the country and the people a kind of sacred identity given by God, creating public opinion and paving the way for the rise of Britain as the future maritime overlord.

From the above mentioned literary works, readers gain insight into a somewhat mythical history of Britain. Because of the ancient Roman rule as well as the historical documents recorded by ancient historians or scholars, the British both in the Middle Age and the Renaissance firmly believed in their ancestors' Trojan blood, originated from Goddess Venus in legend, and heroes of the age of God. Britain had witnessed a rise in state power, increasingly stable politics and prosperous economy in 15-16th century, which were presented in its blooming poetry and national literary works, including the highly praise of London city, strong passion for the motherland, and mythical rewriting history of the country origin. Literature had served for political purpose of reconstructing a new European center by sanctifying London as the God chosen city which was named after the Goddess' offspring and built according to Goddess' oracle, legitimately and reasonably accounting for the rise and prosperity of Britain.

Geopolitical Imagination of the European Economic Center

In early modern English poetry, London's international status and geopolitical significance had been prominent in two aspects: the city as a political center and the market as a economic center. To be modeled on Rome and construct a new Rome was a patriotic dream of British people of 15-16th century, thus we may perceive the imagination, half realistic and half fantastic, of literary writers in their works, forging London to be a world economic center under the rule of wise monarchs, attracting people from all corners coming to court.

John Lydgate described foreign guests from other prosperous cities in stanza seven of his poem *King Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London*:

And forto remembre of other **alyens**;
 First **Jeneweys**, though they were straungers,
Florentyns and the **Venycyens**,
 And **Esterlinges** gladde in her maners,
 Canveyed with sergeauntes and other officers
 Estatly horsed, after the Meire rydyng,
 Passed the subbarbes to mete with the kyng. (Ford, 2012, p. 41)

This stanza described the lively scene when Blackheath, London mayor at that time, together with foreigners (alyens) including Genoese (Jeneweys), Florentine (Florentyns), Venetian (Venycyens), and even visitors from eastern countries (Esterlinges¹), greeted the ten-year-old King Henry VI into London city.

From the late middle ages, the original European political and economic center Italy had been divided into different small countries such as Genova, Florence and Venice, which were feudal city states of republican system relying on great natural harbor. Autonomous in politics, those state cities boasted prosperous commodity economy and foreign trade, with a large accumulation of social wealth. Lydgate created the poem in about 1431. In Lydgate's writing, London had begun to take shape of a world metropolis early in the 15th century. When the foreign visitors and merchants from affluent and rich areas welcomed the king of England entering London, their attitude and manners indicated indirectly London's significant status in world economy at that time. In stanza 10 to 11, the poet applied metaphor to the London bridge and huge solid pillars as an allusion to the mighty military force of England (Ford, 2012, p. 42), a strong guarantee of economic development. He also endowed the city with somewhat mythical color by depicting the presents brought by the three goddesses Nature, Grace and Fortune, which respectively were force and justice, scientific knowledge and technology, wealth and prosperity (Ford, 2012, pp. 43-44). Following the three goddesses came seven holy and pure ladies in white, also bringing various gifts to King Henry VI such as a sword of might and victory, a mantle of prudence, a shield of faith, and a girdle of love (Ford, 2012, pp. 45-46). Those presents from Goddesses represented the most valuable and nicest qualities of British people, and at the same time, the gift givers' identities as goddesses and pure ladies of chastity implied a closely harmonious relationship between England and the God, both of which highlighted the prominent world status of England. Lydgate's poetic description conveyed the underlying information that England was coming on world stage soon as the original European center were falling apart, the people of great valuable national qualities would play an important role in the near future, and the country as a god chosen land would be blessed and sure to be prosperous as a new European and even world center.

As Emrys Jones had stated in his book *Metropolis*, maybe earlier than people had perceived, London had been well prepared for leading and changing the world, just like the Roman empire of its prime period (Emrys Jones, 1990, p. 93). Situated in a position away from the European continent, the country's geographical location brought a faint sense of inferiority to its people when compared with the mainlanders. This sense of inferiority was transformed into eagerness to compete for a better international status, and enhance the state significance. The war against France, the act of expanding overseas colonies, and fighting against Holland and Spain for the command of the sea, were all political embodiment of these psychological demands. Realization of political ideals relied on forceful economic support, whereas the political pursuit, together with the adventurous spirit of the British people and the perfect marine position, accounted for the rapid development of both domestic and overseas business. The overseas commodity influx brought prosperity to the British market, enhancing domestic demands, and at the same time, promoted the establishment of a new, active economic mechanism.

The prosperity of London was not only resulted from the wise ruler and mighty military force represented by solid city walls and threatening artillery depicted in the verselet *London, thou art of townes A per se*, but also because of the rapid development of capitalist commodity economy in early modern time. Stable domestic

¹ refers to the mint merchants from German Hansa League, deriving their names as easterners just because Germany was to the east of England.

economic order, rapid expansion of overseas colonization, and accelerating wealth accumulation accounted for the domestic economic prosperity. William Langland had closely observed London city life in the perspective of a plowman in his poetry *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. There was a poor man suffering from plague and finding shelter in London, who had changed jobs as a housekeeper, a servant in the royal family, and even a clergy. In the city, he was in contact with people of different walks of life, such as lawyers, bakers, beer manufacturers, butchers, tailors, tinkers, tax collectors, masons, miners, and small handicrafts-men. The author ended the stanza with cries from cooks “*Hote pies, hote! Goode gees and grys²! Go we dyne, go we!*”, and from tavern owners “*Whit wyn of Oseye and wyn of Gascoigne, Of the Ryn and of the Rochel, the roost to defie!*”³ (Ford, 2012, pp. 29-30). In the small poem, London was described as busy developed consumer city filled with all kinds of attractive products, its people actively engaging in various industries, full of life and vitality, meeting demands of its residents. The richness and abundance of living materials, though somewhat exaggerated by the writer, provided solid evidence for the economic prosperity and advancement of London in the late Middle Age and early Renaissance period.

Another small verse made by an anonymous author at the beginning of the 17th century, *The Cries of London* (Ford, 2012, p. 181), confirm the flourishing scenes of London city in the Renaissance period. In the first stanza, the poem began with merry cries in a fair, presenting to readers a busy lively scene of London daily life. Alien plants raised readers’ attention: rosemary and ivy from Middle Europe and North Africa, parsley, sage and thyme from the Mediterranean area, hyssop from Europe, Asia and Africa, etc. On one hand, those plants with their special flower language gave indication of all of London people’s noble qualities such as self-confidence (parsley), kindness and firmness (sage), fidelity (rosemary), bravery (thyme), honesty (ivy), and purity (hyssop). Speaking highly of the people was another way to praise London as a harmonious fairyland, the author tried to express his love for the country by projecting it as a dream land. On the other hand, those exotic plants mirrored an increasing overseas expansion and lively international exchanges of Britain. Another commodity called “balm” in the same stanza, which was extracted from the tropical forests, functioning as a pain-easing analgesic, mentioned as well by John Donne in his poem *Twickenham Garden*, also provided a side evidence to prove the domestic material abundance in England at that time due to rapid development of overseas trade. Interestingly, the writer continued to describe cries of selling many different seafood such as herrings and cods, mainly imported from Asia and North America, Spanish mackerels from the North Atlantic, oysters from the Pacific Ocean. These information gave an insight into the busy London business life, and at the same time, helped constructing the maritime ethnic identity of British people, stressing the importance of harbors to overseas business.

Abundant commodities, especially alien imported goods, emerging in Renaissance English poetry, vividly presented the daily social life of ordinary British people. Foreign merchants and visitors rushing into London was an outward evidence of prosperity of the city economy. The variety of industries and people from all walks of life illustrated London’s economic development. In these poetry, poets shaped London to be a fashionable and flourishing city attracting people from all corners of the world for its developed economy and busy commercial

² gry: pork

³ wyn: wine; Oseye: Alsace; the Ryn: the Rhine; the Rochel: La Rochelle.

life. Through writing the city business life, poets realized their geopolitical imagination of London as the European and even the world's economic center.

Landscape Writing of London and Power Space Construction

According to Mitchell, landscape is not only a noun but sometimes also a verb. "Landscape does" means landscape is a tool of cultural power, and also a kind of cultural practice whereby the society and the identity of people form, and the class concept formulates itself (Mitchell, W. J. T., 1994, pp. 1-2). When Wendy Joy Darby had taken landscape as her research perspective, she discovered that the silent landscape imagery will voice the underlying social nature and power relationship existing in the scenes (Darby, 2011, p. 9). In early modern English poetry, the urban landscape of London had been presented over and over again, including River Thames, royal gardens, local plants, ships, palaces, grand cathedrals, London bridge, and market fairs, etc. The poetic images of those landscape shed light on the general situation of London social life in Renaissance period, sometimes implying the political identity or religious position of the poets. Moreover, the ideological contents refracted by the writing of the city landscape had played an important role in the construction of London city space of political power.

Political Power Embodiment in London Leisure Landscape

As the mother river of the British people, flowing from west to east into the sea, passing through the center of London, River Thames has beautified the cityscape and nurtured the long standing London culture as well. Having witnessed the historical changes, River Thames embodies the city memory and represents London image, providing various writing materials for poets. Renaissance poets voiced their most loving emotions for their mother river, not only because River Thames had nurtured their civilization, but also because it was the material basis for London's economic takeoff, foundation for the establishment of British maritime hegemony, and the medium for setting up the British political image in the world. No wonder River Thames had always been the most favorite writing object for Renaissance poets.

John Gower, in his *Confessio Amantis*, described his chance meeting of King Richard II cruising on boat in Thames. Solemn and joyous as the occasion was, he showed his allegiance and obeisance to the King whom the "high ruler (the God)" assigned to reign the kingdom. He wrote:

Under the toun of newe Troye,
Which took of Brut his ferste joye,
In Temse whan it was flowende,
As I by bote cam rewende, ...
Out of my bot, whan he me seigh,
He bad me come in to his barge. (Ford, 2012, p. 27)

Readers may never miss the poet's honored feeling when he met the King and was called in to the King's barge. To express his great honored excitement, John eulogized the great town of new Troy (London) and Thames as the medium by which he could get close contact with the King, the God assigned ruler. The King's barge and the poet's boat, together with the flowing Thames getting them close, formed a particular space where a hierarchical relationship was highlighted. Thus the reference to the River Thames in the poem is to display a space of political power.

Other poets also made great contributions to the celebration of the beauty of the mother river. In *London, thou art of townes A per se*, Thames was the “pleasaunt and preclare (bright) streams” with many “sailing barges” (Ford, 2012, p. 57). George Turberville wrote in his *The Lover to the Thames of London, to Favour His Lady Passing Thereon* about “snow-white swans do fish for needful meat” in Thames “where barge and boat doth ride” (Ford, 2012, p. 65). Sir Thomas Wyatt expressed his loyalty and love for his country by depicting the Thames showing “her wealthy pride”, which “to the town Brutus sought by dreams” as well as he did (Ford, 2012, p. 59). The famous Renaissance royal poet Edmund Spenser sang with affectionate love in his *Prothalamion* about the sweet mother river, “Swee Thames, run softly, till I end my songs”, which became famous quotes that had been passed down for centuries. In *Prothalamion*, the beauty of Thames, including its “silver streaming Thames” and the “variable flowers” along its banks, set off by contrast the grand solemn noble wedding as well as the poet’s ambition for political achievement. Michael Drayton, in Song XVII of *Poly-Olbion*, his topographical poem, personalized the “fairly and goodly” Thames, along which the most outstanding buildings, royal palaces, temples, and cathedrals stood, and expressed his deep emotion for the land of which wealth and bravery showed itself (Ford, 2012, p. 84). Those poems rendered visual pleasure for readers of the excellent terrific landscape of London cultivated by the fairly Thames, through which poets voiced their love for the country, their praise for the history, and their ambition for individual success.

However, when reading about the beauty of the river and its surroundings, readers always ignored how this kind of beauty came into being. Behind the beauty of the glistening river, busy barges, various plants, and even leisurely fishing swans, the laboring practices by working classes became invisible. The beauty of the environmental surroundings could not do without labor efforts such as cleaning up the river channels or planting flowers. Nevertheless, it displayed in a silent and perfect manner in the perspective of privileged ruling class. It’s true that most of the working class in Renaissance period were deprived of the right to be educated, resulting in the fact that seldom literary work voiced their sacrifices and devotions. Thus what we read through the lines are the fruit of countless working efforts, implying the exploitative behaviors and free enjoyment of the privileged class. Just as Darby has pointed out, landscape, including the geographical space, is “constructed according to hierarchical social order”, underlying which the “complicated cultural process” plays a critical role (Darby, 2011, p. 12). The city landscape and leisure beauty are the political embodiment of British feudal monarchy, as the guests enjoying views on the barges could only be nobles or the rich, and the people who appreciated various flowers and swans would never be hawkers or plowmen. As readers, we will definitely sense the imprinted political nature and the exclusiveness of the common working people while we enjoy reading about the large green spaces and the open royal domain.

Embodiment of Ruling Class in Historical Buildings

Michel Foucault illustrated that space acts as the key ingredient for the discourse of power or knowledge turning into real power relationship (Foucault, 1982, p. 69). London, the ancient city with a long history, has witnessed changes of thrones in different periods. Its city space, including the most historical buildings such as the London bridge, London Tower, Westminster Abbey, and royal palaces, exerts both political and religious functions, serving the need for royal rule and religious control.

Of the above mentioned poem *King Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London* by John Lydgate, in Stanza Ten, the poet wrote about the route King Henry VI entering London: "First, whanne he passed was the fabour, entryng the Brigge of this noble town, Ther was a pyler reysed lyke a tour, And theron stoode a sturdy champeoun, Of looke and chere sterne as a lyoun" (Ford, 2012, p. 42). Lydgate compared the giant pillar as a lion, which is the symbol of Britain, as well as the symbol of the legendary hero and founder of Britain, Brut, as was also mentioned by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* (FQ, III. i. 4). In the poem, a political narrative was focused as the national symbol lion was mentioned, and the sturdy pillar of London Bridge was described when King Henry VI entered the city directly to the center, which implied the King's reign over the whole country. Lion is the metaphor of heroic national spirit, and the sturdy pillar represents the forceful state power, by which the King would maintain his rule and the country would defeat its external enemies.

Except for the London Bridge, Westminster Abbey was also popular in literary works, not only because of its grand and towering architectural appearance, but also for its political meaning, especially for the royal family. As we all know, coronation in Westminster Abbey is a traditional process for every king or queen, and only in this way could he or she formally and legally obtain the ruling power as a monarch. So the Westminster Abbey does not only gain religious meaning, but also political significance. In 1553, an ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire wrote to Charles V about the coronation of Queen Marry I, who "went from the Hall of Parliament and Justice to the church (referring to the Westminster Abbey)" (Greenbratt, 2006, p. 665). Six years later in 1559, Queen Elizabeth I repeated the route as her elder sister did, which opened a new chapter for the rise of the British Empire.

London Tower is another popular focus in British poetry on city landscape. As a famous castle in English history, it is more well-known as a prison rather than a palace. The English phrase *send to the tower* (which means "send to the prison") gained its meaning from London Tower's previous usage. Many upper class nobles suffering from political or religious persecution, including Henry VIII's wives and Charles I, were confined in London Tower, which also acted as an execution ground ending their lives. Sir Thomas Wyatt ever recorded the execution scene of his adoring queen Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife, in his poem *Who list his wealth and ease retain* written when he was imprisoned in London Tower.

The bell tower showed me such sight
That in my head sticks day and night.
There did I learn out of a grate,
For all favour, glory, or might,
That yet *circa Regna tonat*. (Ford, 2012, p. 60)

Confined in the bell tower, Wyatt witnessed the bloody terrible scene, which lingered over and over again in his mind, and made him lament for his executed beloved and revere for the inviolable mighty kingship. The phrase *circa Regna tonat* was quoted from Seneca's *Phaedra*, which means "about the throne the thunder rolls", implying that the mighty power and supreme glory were always accompanied by great danger or cruel death.

Chidioc Tichborne wrote an Elegy for himself in London Tower before his execution. In 1586, as the fierce conflict escalated between the Elizabethan court and the Catholic nobles, Anthony Babington and his adherents plotted to murder Queen Elizabeth I and support Queen Mary succession, which resulted in failure. The failure of the plot led to a mass execution of Babington, Queen Mary and a great number of Catholic disciples, and

Chidiok Tichborne was one of them. He lamented his impending death without realizing his ambition: “all my good is but vain hope of gain; ... I saw the world and yet I was not seen” (Ford, 2012, p. 83). Both Tichborne’s elegy and Wyatt mournful poem related London Tower to the power of the monarch, either politically or religiously, which was the evidence that London Tower was the embodiment of mighty kingship.

Michael Drayton described the morphology of River Thames in Song XVII of *Poly-Olbion*.

“With wonderful delight doth his long course pursue,
Where Oatlands, Hampton Court, and Richmond he doth view.
Then Westminster, the next, great Thames doth entertain,
...
The crowning of our Kings, their famous sepulchres.
Then goes he on along by that more beauteous strand,
Expressing both the wealth and bravery of the land.” (Ford, 2012, p. 84)

Thames in Drayton’s poetry was incarnated as a joyful youth, running under the gentle gaze of the royal palaces, embracing the famous cathedral, and saluting to the resting place of successive emperors. The standing palaces, representing the central power of the monarch politics, were surrounded by the Thames, which then flew to various places of London city. This constituted a political imagery of the power of the monarch exerting to every corner of the country, and the river functioned as an important medium. Different from other poets, Drayton referred “he” rather than “she” to the mother river, highlighting its characteristics as a forceful protector rather than a mild female. In Drayton’s political writing of the River, it was like a faithful guard defending the wealth of the land and the royal dignity.

Conclusion

Since the Medieval times, England had experienced regime changes and alien attacks. Alfred the Great, King of Anglo Saxon, built London into a military fortress in order to defend enemy invasion. Though it was not the capital city at that time, London had been a significant city of commerce and politics. As one of the positive results of Roman Conquest, the essence of Roman culture and politics spread into England, which to a great extent contributed to the formation of British culture in early modern ages. Till the disintegration of Italian political power in the Middle Age, England centered around London had gain great improvements in many aspects such as politics, military affairs, economy and national culture. Based on its geographical advantages like excellent harbors and river systems, England achieved rapid development in overseas trade and colonial exploitation, which paved the way for the strong rise of the national state and a greater voice in international affairs.

Till the period of Renaissance, especially in the the late 16th century, England had been strong in maritime forces, stable in domestic politics, prosperous in economic activities, and thriving in national culture, all of which reflected in poetry at that time were the awakening nationality, thriving ambition for the rise of the country, and the political imagination on the future national blueprint.

As David Harvey stated in his book *Justice, Nature, And The Geography*, a place, constructed and experienced as material, ecological man-made object and a complex social network, is always the focus of imagination, religion, aspiration and desire (Harvey, 2007, p. 364). As a hot spot of discourse activities, a place, given symbolic significance and reproduced meanings, is a special product of the institutionalized society and the

political and economic power. As the capital city of England, London has been endowed with rich political significance, which can never be ignored in the study of the city. In the portray of London in early modern English poetry, writers created various spaces of political significance via literary words. As national symbol, London landscape in the verses, including its plants, buildings, rivers, and people's daily living surroundings, carried the national dreams of the people, expressing their love, their ambition, and their desire. The city scenery, leaving out the laboring efforts of the working class, is exclusive to the privileged class, concealing the fact of exploitation under the monarchy. Moreover, historical buildings constructed on political or religious purposes were not only the witness of national history, but also the projection of ruling power, which echoes with what Henri Lefebvre has appreciated—cities are political tools in nature, as their survival and development embody the national dreams, and they are empowered with political functions implementing the intentions of the ruling classes.

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