A Literary Geographical Analysis of *Odour of Chrysanthemums*

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D. H. Lawrence is one of the most prominent writers in the history of English literature, his works have received widespread attention and criticism. Living in the era of the Industrial Revolution, D. H. Lawrence has a deep understanding of the process of industrialization. This study interprets his work *Odour of Chrysanthemums* from the perspective of literary geography. The colliery, the miner’s house, and the tavern, the three most representative geographical spaces, are selected to explore the literary geographic genes, geographic memories, and geographic roots in this novel. Through analyzing the methods of geographic elements in setting themes, shaping characters, and promoting the plots in the novel, this paper explores the theme of industrial civilization’s damage and distortion to individuals, families, and communities.

*Keywords*: literary geography, D. H. Lawrence, mining space

D. H. Lawrence, regarded as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, was born on September 11, 1885, in the small mining town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, England. The geographical space in *Odour of Chrysanthemums* exactly stems from Lawrence's life scenarios. Lawrence’s childhood was spent in a town with a beautiful natural environment. In this environment, Lawrence grew up to be a nature-lover, nurtured by his parents’ love of nature. But then mines were developed and the quiet of the town was shattered by the rumbling of trains and the howling of mining machines. However, the mining led to serious pollution, which posed a great threat to the health of the surrounding residents. Lawrence himself suffered from lung disease at an early age, and dying of tuberculosis at the age of 45. It can be said that *Odour of Chrysanthemums* was written with the background of Lawrence’s familiar environment.

The mechanization brought about by the Industrial Revolution in England was the most prominent feature of the era in which Lawrence lived, and the mechanization generates the great destruction of the ecological environment. Although the Industrial Revolution brought material abundance, the more serious consequence was that nature was irretrievably trampled and destroyed by the sharp claws of the Industrial Revolution, which also led to people’s spiritual suffering and alienation—people were mechanized. Lawrence and many writers of his contemporaries realized this, and Eliot, in his famous work *The Waste Land*, depicted a picture of the “wasteland” in the Western world: the progress of civilization had thrown people into a boundless “wasteland” Lawrence recognizes this and presents this great transformation in the geographic space of the novel.

*Odour of Chrysanthemums* is Lawrence’s early short story. The story takes the chrysanthemum as a clue, tells the death of a miner. A miner’s wife could not hide her anxiety and anger when her husband did not return.
She told her daughter, she got married and had her first child when the chrysanthemums were in full bloom. She had her first child when her husband was drunk for the first time. Now that the chrysanthemums are in bloom again, her daughter is still in her infancy and sleeps in her arms. The room was also filled with the cold fragrance of chrysanthemums. It was already late, but there was no sign of her husband’s returning. Finally, he came back without voice. The husband, Walter, had died in a mine accident. In a panic, the men who carried the remains broke the vase filled with chrysanthemums. The chrysanthemums represent the good qualities of these loyal and kind people and symbolize people’s good intentions and tranquil environment to be ruthlessly crushed.

**Colliery-final Destination of Miners**

The colliery is the main geographic element in this novel. Under the vivid description of the novelist, the colliery not only destroys the natural environment but also does great harm to the residents here. At the beginning of the novel, Lawrence focuses on the destruction of the idyllic scenery of the English countryside by the coal-mining, the representative of industrial civilization.

The pit-bank loomed up beyond the pond, flames like red sores licking its ashy sides, in the afternoon’s stagnant light. Just beyond rose the tapering chimneys and the clumsy black head-stocks of Brinsley Colliery. (Lawrence, 1914, pp. 281-282)

The colliery under Lawrence’s description is like a huge monster that brings unprecedented destruction to the environment of Nottinghamshire. The black smoke from the chimney pollutes the fresh air and makes the fields dreary and forsaken. Pollution from coal-mining also destroys animal life: fowl-houses get tarred and lead to the destruction of habitats.

Rapid industrialization has led to a dramatic increase in the demand for coal, and the need for miners has also increased unprecedentedly. However, in the process of coal mining, the lives of miners tend to be overlooked. The miners are deeply hurt: the winding-engine which never stops working injures their ears and hearts. Walter chokes to death in the Colliery. Rigley, Walter’s colleague, is a big man, with very large bones, gets injured too.

His head looked particularly bony. Across his temple was a blue scar, caused by a wound got in the pit, a wound in which the coal-dust remained blue like tattooing. (Lawrence, 1914, p. 294)

Colliery not only hurts people’s bodies but takes a huge toll on their psyche as well. The two wheels were spinning fast up against the sky, and the winding-engine rapped out its little spasms. The miners were being turned up. Compared with the huge industrial equipment, people have become insignificant. Under the pressure of industrial civilization, Miners are described as shadows and grey somber groups. The miners are not specific persons but a small, shadow group of the unnamed.

From the perspective of literary geography, the plot of the story takes place in a specific geographical space, and these geographical spaces and natural scenery meet the needs of the scenario and can be skillfully combined with the plot, which is conducive to the expression of the psychological dynamics of the characters and achieve the role of setting the atmosphere and promoting the development of the plot. Through the detailed description of colliery and characters, Lawrence successfully creates the dark and negative atmosphere vividly. The darkness of the mining area not only means the color of the coal but also creates a horrible and deadly feeling, to show
that the mining areas invaded by industrial civilization are dark and ecologically deteriorated, which harm the whole natural environment.

**House-alienated Epitome of Family**

The family is the smallest unit of connection between the individual and society. Through the geographical image of the family, Lawrence highlights the indifference and alienation of the family and inspires readers to imagine the house of the lower class in the industrial age. Under the invasion of industrial civilization, the warm family life has lost its original peace and silence. Marriage, life, and human nature in the alienated family are full of tragic factors. Lawrence also wrote many times about the darkness of Bates’ house.

Elizabeth chooses to live in the mining area where living conditions are harsh. However, their family is always enveloped in the black smoke and coldness of the mining area. The darkness of the colliery is not only a natural phenomenon, but also represents a variety of dangers. The darkness of the house means both poverty and alienation in the house. A few years later, under the erosion of living space in the mining area, the intimate lovers became disenchanted couples. The husband would rather drink in the pub than go home after work, while the wife was full of resentment, which often revealed her “disillusionment”.

The same alienation exists between mother and child. When the news of Walter’s death came, his mother, Mrs. Bates, hurried up to Elizabeth and cried:

> Ay - he was a good lad, Elizabeth, he was, in his way. I don’t know why he got to be such a trouble, I don’t. He was a happy lad at home, only full of spirits. But there’s no mistake he’s been a handful of trouble, he has! I hope the Lord’ll spare him to mend his ways. I hope so, I hope so. You’ve had a sight o’ trouble with him, Elizabeth, you have indeed. But he was a jolly enough lad wi’ me, he was, I can assure you. I don’t know how it is …” (Lawrence, 1914, pp. 298-299)

In Mrs. Bates’s whine, Walter has two different images, one is the “happy lad”, the other is now such” a troublemaker”. During the years since Walter worked in the coal mines, there seems to be no communication between mother and son. However, his mother did not realize the death of her son until when the bad news came. The estrangement and strangeness between mother and son in the alienated family could be seen.

Lawrence does not deliberately show the alienation of the family, but he cleverly depicts the darkness of the environment, and through the constant description of dim light, allows readers to naturally feel the harshness of the miners’ working environment and the family’s alienation. Such a depiction of the natural environment is not only a kind of realism, but also a symbol, reflecting Lawrence’s feelings of disgust at the harm to nature and sympathy to people injured by industrial civilization.

**Tavern-last Ground of Miners**

The miners’ failure not only disassociates themselves from their families but also is forgot by public spaces: they are the outcasts of society. The fatigue of the work had afflicted their bodies that they could only abandon themselves in the taverns. Drinking is partly to relax and partly to maintain close with the workers’ community. The tavern is a powerful social space for the miners to adhere to collective values and resist outside pressure.

When Walter first came to work in the coal mines, he dutifully paid his mother’s wages. After a few years of work, he turned into an alcoholic like the other miners and was often went home drunk. The week before the accident, Walter had given his wife only twenty shillings to support the family but had spent half a gold coin
inviting everyone in the pub to drink. The inhuman labor in the underground coal mine for a long time devoured his will and humanity. He was ashamed of his wife and children because he had nothing to improve the living environment. The British industrial worker worked about 14-16 hours a day and earned only 25-30 shillings a week on average at that time. At that time in Britain, few people were willing to work in miner unless had no choice. Because the miners’ social status is low, the labor time is long and fills with danger and accidents. Walter’s death represents the tragic fate of the workers’ community. The tavern used for indulgence is the last bastion of this community.

According to Professor Zhou Jianjun (Zhou, 2018) “If one is more familiar with the natural environment in which writers and artists live and grow up, it is easier to understand their works and the composition of their creative psychology and artistic elements.” Literary geography focuses on the construction of geographical space in literary works and the influence of different geographical environments on authors. Lawrence was born in a small town, and many of his stories, including *Odour of Chrysanthemums*, are set in the mining lot, which is based on his hometown, where the countryside, lakes, settlements, and mines of Eastwood have all appeared in his novels. The mining lot in his works is therefore universal. Throughout Lawrence’s novels, we can find that the mining lot in Lawrence’s novels appears a lot and changes constantly. This is because that the development of industrial civilization and the destruction of the natural environment, Lawrence’s perception and feelings about the mining lot also changed. In his early works, the descriptions of the mining were poetic, while in his middle and late novels, the word “ugly” was used many times in the overall descriptions of the mining. The environment of mining in its works is therefore universal. This literary geographical gene is inherent in literature and is reflected in its works. Lawrence’s geographical memory is reflected in the construction of spatial geography. The spatial construction reflects the author’s geographical roots, from which the author’s creation and aesthetic personality can be grasped, and the ideological value and aesthetic significance of the work can be further interpreted.

**Conclusion**

With the perspective of literary geography, this paper finds that Lawrence makes full use of the environmental atmosphere of different locations to set the mood of the main character, which helps to promote the plot. The environment becomes the ground for shaping the characters’ image, and readers can understand the author’s profound theme in his descriptions of the environment. Through the author’s description of the geographical space, one can see the living environment and circumstance of the mine. No matter it is the countryside or the colliery, the house, the tavern, all of which make people feel desperate, depressed, and suffocated. The characters shuttle in these three spaces and get hurt in different ways. These three geographic images also connect, together depict the picture of the industrial era at that time, and further reveal the destruction and distortion of industrial civilization on individuals, families, and communities.

**References**