

VERBALISING DISGUST AND DISILLUSIONMENT: A PRAGMA-STYLISTIC STUDY OF EMOTIVE UNITS IN LESSING'S THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

Normakhmatova Feruza Ruziboevna

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20600372>

Abstract: This pragma-stylistic study analyses how emotive units verbalise disgust and disillusionment in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962). Drawing on emotivity theory (Shakhovsky, 2008), Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), the functional semantics of evaluation (Wolf, 1985), speech-act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976), the strategy model of communication (Issers, 2011; Safarov & Toirova, 2007), and the stylistics of thought presentation (Leech & Short, 2007), it shows that disgust is realised as affect—somatic, intensified, and self-directed—while disillusionment is realised as negative judgement of people and institutions and negative appreciation of art and society. In dialogue, disclosing such emotion builds solidarity and a restored “safe tone” performs facework; in the notebooks, fragmented syntax enacts a fragmented consciousness. Negative emotion proves as purpose-driven as positive emotion.

Keywords: emotive units, disgust, disillusionment, appraisal, pragma-stylistics, mind style

Introduction

Emotion is a dimension of linguistic meaning, not an addition to it: emotivity pervades lexis, grammar, and discourse (Shakhovsky, 2008). Research has tended to favour positive affect, leaving the darker emotions of modern fiction less systematically described. This study analyses two such states—disgust and disillusionment—in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), whose protagonist, the blocked writer Anna Wulf, records a consciousness at once repelled and disenchanted. Disgust is a visceral, moral-social emotion that marks persons and acts as contaminating (Miller, 1997); disillusionment is the collapse of belief—here political (communism after 1956), artistic (doubt about writing), and existential. The two interlock: faith decays into revulsion, and revulsion confirms the decay.

A pragma-stylistic approach captures their verbalisation. From pragmatics it takes the premise that utterances are acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976) chosen to realise a communicative purpose, or *maqsad* (Safarov & Toirova, 2007), through strategy and tactics (Issers, 2011). From the semantics of evaluation it takes Wolf's (1985) claim that emotive utterances both express and arouse feeling, and Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework, which sorts evaluation into affect, judgement, and appreciation. From stylistics it takes the analysis of thought presentation and mind style (Leech & Short, 2007; Plekhanova, 2011). The study asks how disgust and disillusionment are verbalised, what interpersonal work their expression performs, and how their formal patterns relate to the novel's theme of fragmentation.

Method

The corpus comprises dialogue and notebook passages from the novel. Two registers are distinguished: interactional talk among Anna, Molly, and Tommy, analysed for speech acts, strategy, and facework; and introspective notebook entries, analysed as free direct and indirect thought (Leech & Short, 2007). The unit of analysis is the emotive unit as a communication unit (Safarov & Toirova, 2007), coded for Appraisal type (Martin & White, 2005), emotive modality and intensity (Shakhovsky, 2008), position on Wolf's (1985) self- versus hearer-oriented axis, and

strategic function (Issers, 2011). The analysis is qualitative; quotation is restricted to the short units examined, with surrounding context paraphrased and the units italicised.

Results

The affect of disgust: somatic, intensified, self-directed

Disgust enters first as bodily affect. Its most direct form is the somatic *I feel sick* (Lessing, 1962, p. 52), inscribed affect of the strongest, most physical kind (Martin & White, 2005); it is also named outright and fused with cognate states, as in *an awful feeling of disgust, of futility* (p. 34). Two features intensify it. The first is self-direction: Anna calls a recurring impulse *the laughter of disgust* and glosses it as helpless self-punishment (p. 48), and rereading her own successful novel she feels a disgust more powerful than usual, judging the book *immoral* for the *lying nostalgia* that colours every sentence (p. 53)—disgust at one's own past work being among the emotion's most corrosive forms. The second is the conscription of language itself as object: she recoils from *the poison of the word "artist"* (p. 52), a metaphor of contamination attached to a single lexical item.

Disillusionment as negative judgement and appreciation

Where disgust is affect, disillusionment is judgement and appreciation. The political strand judges people and institutions through metaphor: a functionary wears a *mask of corruption* (p. 50); loyalists are *complacent swine* (p. 39); Party discipline after 1956 becomes an extended coercion metaphor—*the whip had been cracked* and the waverers *jumped to heel* (p. 43). At its severest the judgement indicts a whole order, as when a war proclaimed against Hitler's racial doctrine is found to rest on the same assumption (p. 53). The artistic strand uses negative appreciation: her novel is *immoral*, and she resolves, *I have decided never to write another novel* (p. 51), a flat declarative that enacts the block it names. A third strand is ironic appreciation of social life—the English are *so decent and so bloody dull* (p. 40)—and its endpoint is ennui: Molly is *so bored* (p. 38) and finally does not care any more (p. 43), affect of dissatisfaction shading into a loss of inclination altogether.

The interpersonal pragmatics of negative emotion

In dialogue, expressing negative emotion is strategic. Molly confides a near-affair in a voice marked *humorous, light, plaintive* (p. 37), an emotive layering that softens the disclosure while soliciting sympathy; such shared disenchantment bonds the friends as surely as shared pleasure would (Wolf, 1985). Emotion is also regulated: after an exposing confession Anna *forced the safe tone back* (p. 46), an act of facework that protects both speakers' composure. Intensity is built by repetition—Molly's threefold *I'm angry* (p. 36)—and feeling is carried by the body, as when Molly's hands seem to reproach Anna (pp. 36, 41). Conflict reverses the direction: Tommy's charge that the women make him feel *judged* (p. 32), and that Anna fears to *expose* herself in writing (p. 34), are face-threatening acts that turn the novel's pervasive judging back on the judges.

Mind style: fragmented syntax for a fragmented consciousness

In the notebooks the emotive language constructs a mind style (Leech & Short, 2007). At the height of fear, syntax fragments into the verbless *Terror. The terror of this city* (p. 47); the missing finite clauses enact the dissolution of ordered thought the passage describes, and Anna's reflection that the novel has become a function of a fragmented consciousness (p. 51) is thus performed, not merely stated. Because her disgust is so largely disgust at language and her disillusionment so largely disillusionment with the novel, the emotive units are literary language registering its own crisis—a reflexive loop that is the text's deepest effect.

Table 1*Emotive units of disgust and disillusionment by Appraisal category*

Target of emotion	Appraisal category	Typical realization	Illustrative unit
Self / lived experience	Affect: insecurity (fear)	verbless fragments, repetition	"Terror. The terror of this city"
Activism, public life	Affect: dissatisfaction (ennui)	lexical repetition	"so bored"; "I don't care any more"
The self's own work	Affect: disgust (somatic)	body-state verb	"I feel sick"
Political actors	Judgement: propriety (-)	metaphor, epithet	"mask of corruption"; "swine"
Party discipline	Judgement: normality (-)	coercion metaphor	"the whip had been cracked"
Her own novel	Appreciation: reaction (-)	evaluative adjectives	"immoral"; "lying nostalgia"
England, social life	Appreciation + affect (irony)	ironic coordination	"so decent and so bloody dull"

Note. Categories follow Martin and White (2005); (-) marks negative polarity. Examples are illustrative.

Discussion

Disgust and disillusionment form one affective complex across the three Appraisal systems: disgust as affect (somatic, intensified, self-directed), disillusionment as judgement of people and appreciation of art and society, the two merging where an aesthetic verdict such as *immoral* is also moral. The central finding is that negative emotion is organised around purpose no less than positive emotion: disclosure becomes a bid for solidarity, and the restored safe tone is facework, so the pragmatic value of an emotive unit is set by its deployment, not its valence (Issers, 2011; Wolf, 1985). On Wolf's axis the dialogue weights hearer-effect while the notebooks weight self-construction, though neither is absolute.

The most literary result is the loop between style and theme: fragmented emotive syntax enacts the fragmented consciousness it names (Leech & Short, 2007), and because Anna's revulsion is largely revulsion at language, the text's emotive style turns on its own medium. Read against the "free women" frame, the friends' intimacy is sustained partly through shared disenchantment—an interpretive horizon grounded in concrete evaluative choices rather than asserted as a social generalisation. The study's limits are those of a single, stylised literary text without prosody and coded by one analyst; future work could test the patterns on spoken and cross-linguistic data, where disgust's somatic and moral components are expressed by different means (Miller, 1997).

Conclusion

In *The Golden Notebook*, disgust and disillusionment are verbalised through a patterned repertoire of emotive units that a pragma-stylistic analysis describes precisely: disgust as somatic, intensified, self-directed affect; disillusionment as negative judgement and appreciation, often through metaphor and irony. In dialogue these units build solidarity and manage face; in the notebooks, fragmented syntax enacts a fragmented mind, and the novel's emotive style turns reflexively on language itself. Negative emotion, like positive emotion, is organised around the speaker's communicative purpose.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
- Issers, O. S. (Ed.). (2011). *Sovremennaya rechevaya kommunikatsiya: novye diskursivnye praktiki* [Modern speech communication: New discursive practices]. Omsk State University Press.
- Leech, G. N., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Lessing, D. (1962). *The golden notebook*. Michael Joseph.
- Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Miller, W. I. (1997). *The anatomy of disgust*. Harvard University Press.
- Plekhanova, T. F. (2011). *Diskurs-analiz teksta* [Discourse analysis of text]. TetraSistems.
- Safarov, Sh., & Toirova, G. (2007). *Nutqning etnosotsiopragsmatik tahlili asoslari* [Foundations of the ethnosociopragmatic analysis of speech]. Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, 5(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500006837>
- Shakhovsky, V. I. (2008). *Lingvisticheskaya teoriya emotsiy* [A linguistic theory of emotions]. Gnozis.
- Wolf, E. M. (1985). *Funktsional'naya semantika otsenki* [The functional semantics of evaluation]. Nauka.