

TESS GALLAGHER'S THE HUG: WHAT IS IT OUT THERE?

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Abstract

Tess Gallagher (TG)—born on July 21, 1943—is a great contemporary poet who likes playing with emotion, especially women's emotion in every conflict presented in her poem. This also applies to The Hug, a poem she wrote in 1984 which really reflects current discursive practices in the society. The main purpose of the study is to investigate how she manipulates words, contexts and imagination to create a discursive practice. In other words, the poem was analyzed employing the three register variables (field, tenor and mode) as theorized in Functional Grammar (FG). With respect to the discourse formation, Fairclough's theoretical framework was used. The findings show that Tess Gallagher is so talented and all-out to develop the discursive practice in a well-structured poem. So totally involved in the poem were the readers that they seemed to be drowned in a wave of poetic expression. The poet's rhetorical strategies were discussed bit by bit in FG approach to find out how field, tenor and mode were used to represent one discourse. It is recommended that great poems be analyzed employing the linguistic approach at discourse level.

Key Words: discursive practice, discourse formation, field, tenor, mode

The Hug is a poem Tess Gallagher (TG) wrote in 1984. So contemporarily famous is the poem that it has been analyzed in several academic premises, only to find out that scandals (in either family or out of the family) do exist as discursive practices in the society. A poem such as The Hug can well represent such a scandalous undertaking, crafted in an emotionally breath-taking choices of lexical items combined with a well-organized poetic structure.

Apart from being a poet, TG herself is an essayist, novelist and playwright—in short, such a talented literary figure. Commenting on her work, another poet Hayden Carruth (<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/tess-gallagher>) wrote “Gallagher's poems, beyond their delicacy of language, have a delicacy of perception, and the capacity to see oneself objectively as another person doing the things one really does, with clear affection and natural concern.”

The Hug has also been analyzed in a normal methodological perspective as a literary work. The poem goes as:

The Hug
Tess Gallagher

A woman is reading a poem on the street
 and another woman stops to listen. We stop too
 with our arms around each other.
 Suddenly a hug comes over me and I'm
 giving it to you, like a variable star shooting light
 off to make itself comfortable, then
 subsiding. I finish but keep on holding
 you. A man walks up to us and we know he hasn't
 come out of nowhere, but if he could, he
 would have. He looks homeless because of how
 he needs. "Can I have one of those?" he asks you,
 and I feel you nod. I'm surprised,
 surprised you don't tell him how
 it is – that I'm yours, only
 yours, etc., exclusive as a nose to
 its face. Love – that's what we're talking about, love
 that nabs you with "for me
 only" and holds on.
 So I walk over to him and put my
 arms around him and try to
 hug him like I mean it. He's got an overcoat on
 so thick I can't feel
 him past it. I'm starting the hug
 and thinking, "How big a hug is this supposed to be?
 How long shall I hold this hug?" Already
 we could be eternal, his arms falling over my
 shoulders, my hands not
 meeting behind his back, he is so big!
 I put my head into his chest and snuggle
 in. I lean into him. I lean my blood and my wishes
 into him. He stands for it. This is his
 and he's starting to give it back so well I know he's
 getting it. This hug. So truly, so tenderly
 we stop having arms and I don't know if
 my lover has walked away or what, or
 whether the woman is still reading the poem...
 Clearly, a little permission is a dangerous thing.
 But when you hug someone you want it
 to be a masterpiece of connection, the way the button
 on his coat will leave the imprint of

a planet in my cheek
when I walk away. When I try to find some place
to go back to.

Of several analyzes of *The Hug*, there is one that really tells what the poem is all about. With the title “the Sermon”, it invites a question to what it really refers. The analysis can easily be accessed at <https://goldenbridgeinmate39.wordpress.com/2012/05/20/the-hug-by-tess-gallagher/>

‘Sermon’ itself strikingly characterizes ‘The Hug’ as ‘Scandalous Hug’ in Tess Gallagher’s poem. Thus, it goes without saying that the poem talks about a scandal (of love, and nothing else at least in this context). Love scandal can occur at any level of the society which differs to some extent from one society level to another. A jet-set family love scandal may be depicted differently from man in the street, which is only flavored with humbly-presented love.

Reading the poem (*The Hug*), especially as of stanza 2, we realize that it is about a love scandal as seen in the psychological conflicts: (1) a man lets his spouse be hugged by a stranger; (2) ‘his spouse’ doubts why this happens—instead of saying ‘no’ symbolizing fidelity of love (marriage). In fact, following her husband’s ‘instruction’, the woman enjoys the scandal possibly due to better ‘hug’ performance, leading to her being at loss or drowned in the ‘new’ love affair—all only to find her husband’s ‘nowhere’ and difficulty to return to ‘normal’.

Researches on love scandals, especially with respect to the causes of divorces, have been conducted differently for different purposes.

Scandals in distance marriage was researched by Jannah (2013), exploring the types of scandals in distance marriage, and suggesting improvement of communication in distance marriage to avoid such scandals. More researches were recommended with a wider scope of subjects. Another study on love scandal was conducted by Harsanti (2012), exploring the motivation of women to ‘cheat’ her marriage (love scandal), only to find that routine boredom, physical attraction, biological needs are among others the factors that motivate women to fool around with other men.

This paper is not going to analyze *The Hug* from different literary perspectives. Instead, its stanza will be unfolded to reveal the linguistic features at the discourse level. It may sound strange, employing a linguistic approach to analyze a literary work.

In discourse perspective, stanza of a poem represents one turning point of the generic structure through which the poem can be understood as one unified whole. Fortunately, *The Hug* is conversational in nature (Jason, 2002) with only few

poetical devices. It therefore facilitates the analytical process. Furthermore, a text (of whatever nature) can be analyzed in terms of (1) field of the discourse, (2) tenor of the discourse, and (3) mode of the discourse (Eggins, 2004). This applies to The Hug, a poem which would be analyzed within its register variables (field, tenor and mode) of the discourse to investigate the message of the poem to see how it relates to contemporary issues of similar nature.

Besides, how discourse is formed or represented could also be identified (Fairclough, 1989) in each stanza of The Hub on which to relate the discourse to the real discursive practices in the society of the current time.

Thus, based on the background outlined above, the research questions of the current study can be formulated as follows:

- 1) What is the field of the discourse assigned in Gallagher's The Hug?
- 2) What is the tenor of the discourse assigned in Gallagher's The Hug?
- 3) What is the mode of the discourse assigned in Gallagher's The Hug?
- 4) As a discourse, what other discursive practices is Gallagher's The Hug related or relevant to?

The current study therefore attempts to find out:

- 1) the field of the discourse assigned in Gallagher's The Hug;
- 2) the tenor of the discourse assigned in Gallagher's The Hug;
- 3) the mode of the discourse assigned in Gallagher's The Hug;
- 4) the other discursive practices to which The Hug is related or relevant.

To arrive at the answers to those research questions in line with the aims of the study, it is necessary to review some of the theories relevant to discourse studies on which to draw a highlighted theoretical framework for the analysis of the current study.

In a critical study of language at discourse level, Systemic Functional Linguistics (EFL) has been claimed as the most relevant theory at work (Haig, 2012). It is argued that EFL views 'language' as meaning making (Eggins, 2005) in which any utterance simultaneously, sets forth three domains of meanings, namely (1) ideational / experiential meaning, (2) interpersonal meaning, and (3) textual meaning. Therefore, it is logical to assume that the theory (analytical framework) generated from SFL can be used to analyzed any text of any genre, implying the capability to deal with both literary and non-literary texts.

It is further theorized (Lukin et.al., 2011) that Halliday's concept of register as 'a variety of language, corresponding to a variety of situation (Halliday, 1985) is further conceptualized in a framework of 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode'. These are then termed as discourse or register variables. A text can be construed, as previously mentioned with respect to poetic expressions, in terms of (1) field of

the discourse as reflected in the ideational meaning or the transitivity systems; (2) tenor of the discourse as reflected in the interpersonal meaning or the mood system, and (3) mode of the discourse as reflected in the textual meaning or the thematic progression of the text (theme-rheme system).

Thus, Lukin et.al (2011) is true in concluding that the register variables are not separable from one another, implying that a text analysis has to analyze the three register variables (field, tenor and mode) to come up with a complete discourse analysis as one unified whole. Field of the discourse, for example, derives from the analysis of transitivity system or the verbal processes which are used in the clause, including the participants. The field of the discourse tells clearly what the text is all about with respect to the types of information.

Tenor of the discourse identifies how interpersonal meanings are expressed in the use of language. The mood structure (tenor) consists of the ‘finite verb’ as the mood plus residue (the rest of the clause). This is where rhetorical strategies of an individual applies in accordance with the needs to convey meaningful utterances—being polite, rude, tactful, friendly or whatever.

Mode of the discourse, furthermore, illustrate how the text is developed in terms of theme-rheme structure. In a clause, theme is the point of departure or psychological subject while rheme is what the theme does or is about.

The three domains of meaning, for better understanding, can be further illustrated through a simple analysis of the following utterances, which are responses to a request “Would you like to go to movies with me, tonight?”

(1) No, I can’t. A lot of assignments!

(2) Well, I’d love to, but I have a lot of assignments to complete. Some other times, maybe.

(3) I wish I could. I would be busy doing my assignments

At a glance, according to systemic functionalists, the three utterances have the same field of the discourse. The finite verbs used are modals (modality). What is **the field of the discourse**? It is a refusal to go to movies. However, what is the tenor of the discourse? They really have different tenors of the discourse. Utterance (1) for example employs a negative way of interpersonal communication. Such an utterance can be put in the following dialogue to form a particular discursive practice.

A : Would you like to go to movies with me, tonight?.

B : No, I can’t. A lot of assignments.

Although the goal of the discursive practice (refusing to go to movies) is achieved, the two speakers have developed a very bad rapport or interpersonal relation—and may lead to a fight or break of relationship.

The thematic progression (mode) of Utterance (1) is static. The theme “(No I) is reinforced in the rheme “can’t”. This indicates that the utterance is of spoken

form by an emotional individual. Besides, the phrase ‘a lot of assignments’ may offer a ‘fake’ reason—a tradition in an academic atmosphere.

Utterance (2) present a really different interpersonal meaning from Utterance (1). The discursive practice may go as follows:

A : Would you like to go to movies with me, tonight?m.

B : Well, I’d love to, but I have a lot of assignments to complete. Some other time, maybe.

It is clear that Utterance (2) has a naturally polite interpersonal relation between the two speakers. They managed to develop a positive rapport through the use of language with a carefully structured interpersonal meaning. The use of “Well,” as interpersonal mood, to give a positive flavor of the offer, followed by “I’d love to” which seems like an acceptance. However, the conjunction ‘but’ serves to negate everything—refusing the request politely by a reason ‘I have a lot of assignments to complete.’ Better still, open possibilities for future acceptance are offered, ‘Some other times—although they are weakened by the phrase ‘maybe’. In this case, off-record politeness strategy is created (Purwanto and Soepriatmadji, 2013) to avoid Face Threatening Acts (FTA) as stated in Brown and Levinson (1987).

METHOD

The current study is actually a discourse approach to text analysis applied in the analysis of a poem (The Hug by Tess Gallagher). The analytical framework from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) favored by Eggins (2004) originated from Halliday (1985) was used to analyze the poem in terms of the three domains of meanings: ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings in order to arrive at the field, tenor and mode of the discourse. From the analysis of the register variables (field, tenor and mode), the poem can be interpreted to reflect the current discursive practices to give evidence that, unlike fashions, a poem in particular and literary works in general do not die by time. This is because history repeats over time.

In the analysis, however, clause parsing was not performed due to space efficiency. Instead, the poem was directly interpreted in accordance with EFL analytical framework. The main aim of the analysis is to describe how the poem is related to the current discursive practices by identifying the discourse formation, adopting Fairclough’s theoretical framework (2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The poem entitled The Hug starts with a stanza:

*A woman is reading a poem on the street
and another woman stops to listen. We stop too
with our arms around each other*

Gallagher, the poet, provides a setting as a starting point of an event. The field of the discourse is a poetry reading show, naturally described as the tenor of the discourse. It can be seen from the sentence “*and another woman stops to listen.*” In interpersonal sense, it gives an impression that the audience of the show may come and go. This applies to the poet, described as ‘*We*’ meaning that the poet is with someone else. The phrase “*with our arms around each other*” gives an attribute that the poet is with her lover. It is not hard to identify that the poet is a female since it is known that Gallagher is a female. She is in love with her man, justified by the phrase “*with our arms around each other*”. They are close and romantic toward one another like a two-headed snake.

The second stanza goes as:

Suddenly a hug comes over me and I’m
giving it to you, like a variable star shooting light
off to make itself comfortable, then
subsiding. I finish but keep on holding
you. A man walks up to us and we know he hasn’t
come out of nowhere, but if he could, he
would have. He looks homeless because of how
he needs. “Can I have one of those?” he asks you,
and I feel you nod. I’m surprised,
surprised you don’t tell him how
it is – that I’m yours, only
yours, etc., exclusive as a nose to
its face. Love – that’s what we’re talking about, love
that nabs you with “for me
only” and holds on.

The stanza starts with somehow a difficult sentence, “*Suddenly a hug comes over me and I’m giving it to you*”; it is not easy to understand this part of a sentence. It can be interpreted by creating an imagination as commonly practiced in understanding a poem.

Let us start with the word ‘suddenly’ in SFL functioning as the *theme* or the point of departure of the talk (narrative). The question is ‘why does a hug come over the poet suddenly?’ It may be due to the poem the woman is reading. The poem, though not explicitly stated is so romantically read that everyone around is

turned on, including the poet (narrator). She is dying for a hug “*a hug comes over me*”. Nothing else she can do except hugging her lover “*and I’m giving it to you*”.

How does she hug her lover? It is described in a long phrase “like a variable star shooting light off to make itself comfortable, then subsiding”. In this case, the narrator (poet) describes the hug as a wild, yet romantic hug, its wildness stops when both participants feel relieved. Even though she feels satisfied (finish), she does not let the hug drop. This has made a man nearby turned on and wants to hug and be hugged. He cannot bear feeling that way as revealed in the next sentence of the stanza, “*A man walks up to us*”, What kind of man? [he] “*hasn’t come out of nowhere, but if he could, he would have. He looks homeless because of how he needs.*” The stranger finally requests “*Can I have one of those?*”

He requests it from you, the poet’s lover—*he asks you*. The poet is totally confused as she feels that her lover agrees “*and I feel you nod*” It is surprising; the poet is questioning in silence. The poet’s lover so easily agrees to the request that his lover be hugged by someone else. He did not even realize that love is just for both and not shared, as exposed in the next line, *that I’m yours, only yours, etc., exclusive as a nose to its face. Love – that’s what we’re talking about, love that nabs you with “for me only” and holds on.*

In her bewilderment, but with her lover’s permission, the poet has a second thought—why not try a scandal—as revealed in the next stanza.

So I walk over to him and put my
arms around him and try to
hug him like I mean it. He’s got an overcoat on
so thick I can’t feel
him past it. I’m starting the hug
and thinking, “How big a hug is this supposed to be?
How long shall I hold this hug?” Already
we could be eternal, his arms falling over my
shoulders, my hands not
meeting behind his back, he is so big!

So confidently does the poet approaches ‘the stranger’ and hugs him that things go naturally as lovers should.

As normal woman, questions hang out— *How big a hug is this supposed to be?*

How long shall I hold this hug?” Such questions go out as they are eternal, one skin on the other—skin to skin. They have joined the heaven of love as revealed in *his arms falling over my shoulders, my hands not meeting behind his back, he is so big!*

More and more they want just to feel the warmth of a scandal as revealed in the next stanza:

I put my head into his chest and snuggle
in. I lean into him. I lean my blood and my wishes
into him. He stands for it. This is his
and he's starting to give it back so well I know he's
getting it. This hug. So truly, so tenderly
we stop having arms and I don't know if
my lover has walked away or what, or
whether the woman is still reading the poem...

So madly in love is the poet that she gives everything to the "stranger". Through a simple hug, permitted by her lover, she really enjoys the real hug, possibly more than just a hug, as revealed "*I lean my blood and wishes into him*". She adores the romantic experience—*This hug. So truly, so tenderly*. It seems that this is what she really wants but did not have it from her lover. This is the mystery of a scandal.

When they have both reached the peak of a romantic experience, things are all forgotten or lost. She does not know her lover's where about, neither does she care whether the woman is still reading the poem. She is like being reborn in a new world. She finally realizes:

Clearly, a little permission is a dangerous thing.
But when you hug someone you want it
to be a masterpiece of connection, the way the button
on his coat will leave the imprint of
a planet in my cheek
when I walk away. When I try to find some place
to go back to.

She realizes that a scandal is a scandal, which is not good to happen—*Clearly a little permission is a dangerous thing*. The poet starts her sermon-- *But when you hug someone you want it to be masterpiece of connection, the way the button on his coat will leave the imprint of a planet in my cheek when I walk away. When I try to find some place to go back to*.

The sermon can be summarized or interpreted as "When you have a scandal of love, be careful, you will never get away from it. There is always a sign whatever it is that you 'had' a scandal. The trade mark never leaves you, whether you want to go your own adventure or you want to return to your 'past' lover.

A scandal, though it sounds both terrifying and disgusting, is actually encouraging, it is explicitly stated in the poem:

So I walk over to him and put my
arms around him and try to
hug him like I mean it. He's got an overcoat on
so thick I can't feel
him past it. I'm starting the hug
and thinking, "How big a hug is this supposed to be?
How long shall I hold this hug?" Already
we could be eternal, his arms falling over my
shoulders, my hands not
meeting behind his back, he is so big!

It is clear that the poet (woman) finally enjoys the scandal. So drowned is she that she confesses 'Already we could be eternal, his arms falling over my shoulders...'

Yet one shall not be encouraged to have it. It is destructive to your life as it may terminate your marriage in a saddening divorce, simply to tear your children's future. Or it ends up your relationship if you are dating with someone.

A scandal is like a satanic creature. So tenderly does it enter your life that you do not realize the impact it has on your entire being. Once you get in touch with it, you cannot get away from it and everything seems all right.

"Well, it is just a simple chat on the Facebook, and won't therefore do any harm to my family," thought, for example, a woman who has just had a new man through the social medium (Facebook). She does not realize that she has started a scandal. She keeps forgiving herself for doing "that simple chat" which at the end turns out to be a great destructor.

fooling around with a neighbor is another case. At the very beginning, you (a man) keep thinking "Well, it is OK to be kind of friendly to a neighbor." Then, very often you have a simple talk with her over the fence when her husband is away and so is your wife. You can never realize how risky it is when 'simple talks' may, at one time or another, end up in bed.

It has been explicitly stated in the poem "Clearly a little permission is a dangerous thing." It implies that a simple talk can be dangerous as it may start a huge scandal. In other words, 'things that you think are just fine, may come up at the end to be dangerous things.

With respect to *the field of the discourse* of the poem 'the Hug', it can be implied that it is concerned with the presence of a scandal of love. It is not clear whether or not it happens in a marriage but clearly enough that there is a third

person upon a little permission by the woman (poet)'s partner. The actions are very explicit as most of the verbs used are material processes to indicate tangible actions of the participants

A marital (love) scandal can be assumed to occur in everyday discursive practices but with the man allowing another man to touch his wife, it is sort of peculiar difference. Normally, a man will get mad or jealous if another man tries to touch his partner. Presumably, without his partner's notice, the man and this "another" man have known each other and agreed to let such a scandal to happen. This can be seen from the fact the man gives a little permission to another man to touch his partner with only a simple request, "*Can I have one of those?*" It is easily inferred that 'those' refers to 'kisses' the couple have just performed.

Despite being confused at first as to why her partner agrees to such a request, the woman agrees to be hugged by another man upon being permitted by her partner. A good woman always obeys her partner's wish intention. But, what kind of wish should be obeyed is another question. The woman may have thought "Well, it is only a hug... 'simple' hug, I can soon get back to my lover". But can she? Soon she is drowned in a romantic hug of this 'new' lover.

The tenor of the discourse represented in the poem 'the Hug' is that the characters involved are closely related; even in request the stranger uses simple request "*Can I have one of those?*" without any formal modality such as '*Could I have one of those?*'

The poet herself is involved in the poem by using the first person singular "I" and the first person plural "we" to represent the poet and her lover Therefore she positions herself as a narrator, that is to say that the readers are supposed to be the audience, watching a dramatic event, a permitted scandal of love—a particular discursive practice is being formed (Fairclough 2003). The poem has been so tactfully dramatized that the readers seem to really watch a play on the stage.

The *thematic* structure is, of course as it is a poem, of literary form. The first stanza which says "*A woman is reading a poem on the street and another woman stops to listen. We stop too with our arms around each other*" functions as an orientation. It opens up with a live show, "a woman is reading a poem on the street." It is presumably performed by a students as part of course completion.

The stanza continues "*and another woman stops to listen.*" This indicates that the audience are not fixed, implying that they come and go. The first stanza ends completely in a sentence "*We stop too with our arms around each other.*" It can be imagined that a couple is watching a woman reading a romantic poem. This triggers the emergence of the second stanza, "*Suddenly a hug comes over me and I'm*

giving it to you, like a variable star shooting light off to make itself comfortable,

then

subsiding,” functioning as a rising action.

The woman is presumably so sexually aroused due to the poem, a romantic poem that she wants to hug and be hugged by her partner. They hugged each other, reciprocally like shooting stars, from the west to the east and from the east to the west. They are deeply in love.

Then, a catastrophe comes around when another man of nowhere appears and asks for one of the hugs as revealed, *Can I have one of those?*” Surprisingly, her lover nodded to agree. There comes a permitted scandal with a possible justification—only one hug. We have done many.

However things turn otherwise. The woman seems to enjoy the ‘hug’—*and try to hug him like I mean it. And, finally Already we could be eternal, his arms falling over my shoulders*—the scandal is fitted and fixed.

In everyday social encounters, love scandals are actually everywhere—among colleagues, classmates, neighbors, or even within an extended families (sisters’ husbands or brothers’ wives). It all starts with a justification of a little permission.

Below is an illustration of a very neatly engineered scandal which may happen around us in the society. It is hard to assume how angry and jealous the man is, if he knows that his brother is in love with his wife:



Courtesy of <http://www.kunyadu.com/2015/08/faktor-penyebab-perselingkuhan-dalam.html>

This is quite similar to the scandal in the poem under study. It is possible that the woman’s partner is not in a good with his partner so when there is another man asking for a hug, he simply gives it to him, without any consideration of the woman’s hurt feeling *that I’m yours, only yours, etc., exclusive as a nose to its face. Love – that’s what we’re talking about, love that nabs you with “for me only” and holds on.*

But, a scandal is satanically poisoning. It can be justified that at the end, the woman enjoys the ‘hug’ which not only refers denotatively to a real hug, but also

connotatively to 'sex' as the ultimate goal of a love scandal as implicitly expressed, "*Already we could be eternal, his arms falling over my shoulders.*"

When she realizes what has been going on, it is not easy to return to be a 'normal' woman. She has lost everything. She feels dirty as symbolized in "*But when you hug someone you want it to be a masterpiece of connection, the way the button on his coat will leave the imprint of a planet in my cheek when I walk away.*"

Thus, she will be in a difficult situation. The imprint on her cheek cannot be written off when she tries to return to the right path.

It is argued (<http://www.kunyadu.com/2015/08/faktor-penyebab-perselingkuhan-dalam.html>) that a love scandal (infidelity) is mostly caused by the inability to avoid 'lusts' toward other individuals. The direct impact of love scandal on marriage is that spouses feel have no more mutual love and values. It is further outlined that there are eight causes of love scandal, namely (1) boredom, (2) temptation of infidelity (3) desire of polygamy (4) separated by work (5) no love attention for either the wife or the husband (6) the idea that he / she is more handsome/ beautiful /richer, etc. (7) either wife or husband suffering from a disease, and (8) blurred feeling of love. However, back to the central theme of the poem 'the Hug' a scandal starts with a little justified permission either from his / her partner (as in 'the Hug') or from one's self, which is much stronger.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The poem 'the Hug' is a representation of today's social discursive practices. It depicts how easy it is to establish a love scandal. The poem discloses that a little permission can cause a scandal to occur. Once it occurs, you cannot get back safely. There is always a mark of infidelity you cannot get away from when you want to return to the correct path.

Therefore, it is recommended that fidelity be maintained. Once the urge to fool around with another man / woman comes up, it is good to recall the positive romanticism that you and our spouse have so far got.

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