



A Feminist Stylistic and Affective Analysis of Melancholy and Memory in Lang Leav's Revelation

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic construction of melancholy and memory in Lang Leav's poem "Revelation" from *Memories* (2015) through an integrated framework of feminist stylistics and affect theory. While contemporary feminist scholarship has increasingly engaged with affect, limited attention has been given to how linguistic form in minimalist poetry structures emotional knowledge. Addressing this gap, the study adopts a qualitative interpretive-analytical approach, combining close stylistic analysis with affective interpretation. Drawing on feminist stylistics (Mills, 1995; Montoro, 2023) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2014; Hemmings, 2024), the analysis focuses on lexical choice, grammatical patterns, and figurative language to examine how emotion operates as a mode of knowing. The findings demonstrate that Leav's minimalist diction and syntactic restraint construct melancholy not as emotional passivity but as an epistemic process of self-recognition. Memory functions as an affective medium through which feminine subjectivity negotiates identity and emotional continuity. The study conceptualizes this strategy as affective minimalism: a poetic mode in which linguistic economy intensifies emotional cognition rather than diminishing it. This challenges traditional binaries between emotion and reason; positioning affects as a legitimate epistemological resource. Theoretically, the study extends feminist stylistics toward affective epistemology and contributes to contemporary feminist poetics by showing how minimalist poetic language can articulate emotional agency and feminist self-representation in the digital age.

Keywords: *affect theory, affective minimalism, emotional discourse, feminist stylistics, Lang Leav, melancholy, memory*

Introduction

Contemporary poetry has increasingly foregrounded emotion, intimacy, and self-reflection as central modes of meaning-making, particularly within minimalist and digitally mediated forms. Poets such as Lang Leav, Rupi Kaur, and Atticus employ linguistic simplicity and emotional directness to articulate experiences of love, loss, and identity in ways that resonate with contemporary readers (Hemmings, 2024); (Papacharissi, 2023) Within this context, Lang Leav's poetry occupies a distinctive position, combining lyrical restraint with affective intensity to explore feminine subjectivity through memory and emotional reflection.

Despite the popularity of Leav's work, scholarly engagement with her poetry remains limited, particularly at the level of linguistic analysis. Feminist literary studies have long examined women's emotional expression, yet much of this work prioritizes thematic interpretation over stylistic examination (Mills, 1995) (Alonso, 2021). Recent developments in feminist stylistics and affect theory emphasize the importance of examining how language itself constructs emotional experience (Montoro, 2023) (Hemmings, 2024). However, poetry especially minimalist poetry has received comparatively little attention within this analytical convergence.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing Lang Leav's poem "*Revelation*" through an integrated feminist stylistic and affect-theoretical framework. It focuses on how linguistic choices lexical simplicity, syntactic structure, and figurative patterns construct melancholy and memory as interconnected affective states. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Leav's linguistic style construct melancholy and memory in "*Revelation*"?
2. How do these stylistic constructions articulate a feminist affective consciousness?

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which extends feminist stylistics toward affective epistemology by conceptualizing emotion as a form of knowledge rather than a purely expressive state. By doing so, the study contributes to contemporary feminist poetics and stylistics, demonstrating how minimalist poetic language can function as a mode of emotional agency and feminist self-representation in the digital literary landscape.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in the intersection of Feminist Stylistics and Affect Theory, two complementary frameworks that together illuminate how language embodies and mediates emotional and gendered meaning in poetry. The choice of this dual framework responds to the need for a multidimensional approach to literary analysis that captures both the linguistic mechanisms and the affective dynamics of textual expression.

Feminist Stylistics

Feminist Stylistics, as articulated by Sara (Mills, 1995), provides the primary analytical foundation of this study. Rooted in both stylistics and feminist literary criticism, the framework examines how linguistic features construct gendered identities, ideologies, and power relations within texts. Rather than treating language as a neutral vehicle of meaning, feminist stylistics investigates how word choice, syntax, and figurative language reflect or resist patriarchal norms (Mills, 1995); (Montoro, 2023). This approach moves beyond thematic interpretation to scrutinize the microstructures of language metaphors, collocations, pronouns, and transitivity patterns that encode social positioning and gendered experiences (Koivunen, 2023).

In the context of poetry, this approach enables a close reading of how lexical economy and metaphorical compression contribute to the formation of a feminine voice. Lang Leav's "Revelation" employs linguistic simplicity and repetition to articulate emotional depth. This strategy aligns with the feminist stylistic notion of reclaiming everyday language as a space of resistance (LeBlanc, 2023). By tracing stylistic patterns that foreground melancholy and self-realization, the analysis reveals how Leav's language negotiates affective vulnerability as a mode of empowerment rather than subjugation.

Affect Theory

While feminist stylistics provides the linguistic lens, Affect Theory supplies the emotional and philosophical dimension of interpretation (Lazar, 2019). Emerging from cultural and feminist theory, affect studies emphasize how feelings circulate within and through texts, shaping collective and individual experiences (Ahmed, 2014); (Hemmings, 2024). Affect Theory shifts attention from emotion as a psychological state to affect as a social force, highlighting how literature performs emotional work that transcends the individual self (Papacharissi, 2023).

In feminist literary analysis, affect is reimaged as a site of epistemic and political potential a way of knowing and feeling that challenges patriarchal rationality (Shorter, 2025). When applied to poetry, affect theory uncovers how rhythm, tone, and metaphor not only convey but also produce emotion. In Leav's "Revelation," melancholy operates as a relational affect: it recalls memory, loss, and

transformation, inviting readers into an affective space where vulnerability becomes knowledge. This process of transformation challenges the typical notion of melancholy as a passive emotional state, instead framing it as an active, agentive force that reconfigures feminine subjectivity.

Integrative Framework

The integration of Feminist Stylistics and Affect Theory in this study establishes a linguistic-affective model of poetic analysis. Feminist stylistics enables the identification of gendered linguistic patterns, while affect theory contextualizes how these patterns generate and circulate emotion. This integration allows for a dual reading both textual and embodied of Lang Leav's poem, situating its melancholic discourse within broader feminist and cultural contexts. Such a framework not only bridges linguistic and emotional dimensions of literary meaning but also contributes to evolving discussions of feminist poetics in the digital age, where affective minimalism and stylistic restraint redefine how gender and emotion are written and read (Taylor & Francis, 2025).

Method

This study employs a qualitative interpretive-analytical design grounded in feminist stylistics and affect theory. The approach is suited to examining how linguistic form constructs emotional and gendered meaning within poetic discourse (Mills, 1995) (Montoro, 2023). Affect theory complements this framework by enabling analysis of how emotion functions as an epistemic and relational force in the text (Ahmed, 2014) (Hemmings, 2024).

Data Source

The primary data consist of Lang Leav's poem "*Revelation*" from the collection *Memories* (2015). The poem was selected purposively due to its thematic focus on melancholy, memory, and self-reflection, as well as its representative minimalist style. Secondary sources include recent scholarly literature on feminist stylistics, affect theory, and contemporary poetry published between 2014 and 2025.

Analytical Procedure

The poem was read and coded iteratively through three analytical stages to ensure interpretive consistency. Manual annotation involved systematic marking of linguistic features using color-coded categories and analytic memos.

1. Linguistic Identification

The first stage involved identifying lexical choices, grammatical patterns (pronouns, transitivity), figurative language, and syntactic simplicity relevant to feminist stylistic analysis.

2. Affective Analysis

The second stage examined how these linguistic features construct affective meanings, focusing on melancholy and memory as epistemic emotional processes.

3. Integrative Interpretation

The final stage synthesized linguistic and affective findings to interpret how minimalist language articulates feminist subjectivity and emotional agency.

Trustworthiness and Analytical Rigor

Interpretive credibility was enhanced through theoretical triangulation and systematic textual grounding. While the study's focus on a single poem allows for depth, it also limits generalizability. This limitation is acknowledged as an opportunity for future comparative research.

Results

1. Linguistic Features Constructing Melancholy

The analysis of "*Revelation*" shows that Lang Leav constructs melancholy through minimalist diction, direct syntax, and a rhythmic pattern that foregrounds emotional introspection. The repeated use of first-person pronouns ("I do not know why / I am suddenly sad again") reveals a self-reflexive stance that positions melancholy as an internal cognitive event rather than an uncontrolled emotional outburst.

The lexical simplicity found throughout the poem functions as a deliberate stylistic choice. Words related to cognition *know*, *think*, *remember* appear consistently and frame sadness as a process of reflection. These stylistic patterns demonstrate that melancholy in the poem is linguistically shaped as an epistemic moment: emotion becomes a pathway to understanding personal history and identity.

2. Thematic Link Between Melancholy and Memory

Melancholy in the poem is repeatedly tied to the resurgence of memory. Metaphors such as "*waves*" and "*pulled under*" portray memory as a force that resurfaces cyclically and exerts influence over the speaker. This imagery suggests that emotional experiences are not linear but recurrent, echoing affect theory's view that feelings "stick" to the body and reappear through triggers.

The grammatical structure reinforces this theme. Passive constructions such as "*I am pulled under*" illustrate how memory acts upon the speaker. Yet rather than signaling helplessness, the poem conveys a conscious willingness to revisit emotional history, positioning memory as a medium for self-revelation.

3. Construction of a Feminine Voice and Emotional Agency

The poem's use of intimate, confessional tone contributes to the formation of a distinctly feminine voice. The absence of ornate metaphor and the preference for sparse phrasing reflect a stylistic resistance to patriarchal expectations that often

romanticize or embellish women's emotional expression.

Through controlled rhythm, measured tone, and purposeful linguistic restraint, the speaker asserts emotional agency. This demonstrates what feminist stylistic Ans describe as linguistic negotiation: the strategic shaping of voice to balance vulnerability with authority.

4. Affective Minimalism as Stylistic Strategy

A wider stylistic pattern emerges in Leav's work: affective minimalism. Short lines, concise expressions, and deliberate lexical economy intensify the emotional resonance of each phrase. This minimalism creates semantic density, allowing brief statements to carry multilayered emotional meanings.

In "Revelation," affective minimalism amplifies the cognitive dimension of emotion. The sparseness of language allows melancholy and memory to be experienced with clarity and immediacy, aligning with digital-age poetic trends that privilege brevity without sacrificing depth.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that "*Revelation*" constructs melancholy as an epistemic process rather than a passive emotional condition. The repeated use of cognitive verbs and restrained syntax aligns with feminist affect theory's view of emotion as a form of knowing (Ahmed, 2014; Hemmings, 2024). Through linguistic minimalism, the poem reframes sadness as reflective self-awareness.

Memory operates as an affective medium that sustains feminine subjectivity across time. The metaphorical and grammatical patterns identified in the results show that memory is neither nostalgic nor disabling, but transformative. This challenges patriarchal narratives that associate women's memory with emotional excess.

The poem's linguistic restraint is central to its feminist voice. Rather than expressive overflow, emotional authority is achieved through control and precision. This supports Montoro's (2023) claim that stylistic economy can function as ideological agency.

Conceptualizing this strategy as *affective minimalism* allows the study to situate Leav's poetry within broader digital-era feminist poetics. Unlike more overtly confessional poets such as Rupi Kaur, Leav's minimalism privileges introspection over declaration, suggesting an alternative model of feminist affective expression.

While this study focuses on a single poem, it demonstrates how minimalist poetic language can function as a site of feminist epistemology. Future research may extend this framework through comparative or corpus-based approaches.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Lang Leav's *"Revelation"* (from *Memories*, 2015) constructs melancholy and memory as intertwined linguistic and affective structures that reframe emotion as a site of feminist epistemology. Through feminist stylistic analysis, it was found that Leav's minimalist diction, repetitive syntax, and metaphorical framing of memory are not mere stylistic choices but discursive strategies that transform vulnerability into intellectual awareness. Emotion in this poem is not portrayed as weakness or passivity; rather, it operates as an epistemic act a process through which the female subject comes to know herself and articulate meaning. Ultimately, this research reinforces the theoretical convergence between affect theory and feminist poetics, positioning emotion as both a linguistic and epistemic resource that shapes feminist literary understanding in contemporary poetry.

The scientific finding derived from this analysis is that melancholy functions as an epistemic mechanism and memory as its affective medium, allowing Leav to reconfigure the emotional discourse of femininity from dependency toward agency. The linguistic containment and emotional clarity evident in the poem reveal that affect can serve both as a stylistic device and as a cognitive process of knowledge-making. This reinforces the feminist assertion that emotion is not the opposite of reason but a legitimate mode of understanding.

Theoretically, this research contributes to feminist stylistics by extending its scope into the domain of affective epistemology demonstrating how language structures emotion to articulate feminist consciousness. The study's novelty lies in its identification of affective minimalism as a distinct stylistic strategy in contemporary digital-age feminist poetry, where brevity and intimacy become instruments of empowerment. This approach situates Lang Leav's work within the evolving discourse of emotional literacy and feminist knowledge production, emphasizing that in the 21st century, language, emotion, and cognition are no longer separate but mutually constitutive forms of meaning.

Recommendation

The findings of this study carry several important implications for both literary theory and pedagogical practice. Theoretically, the study advances the field of feminist stylistics by integrating affect theory into the analysis of poetic discourse. This interdisciplinary synthesis demonstrates that linguistic minimalism and emotional precision can be read as forms of feminist resistance reshaping how contemporary women poets articulate agency, intimacy, and affective knowledge. It also enriches the existing scholarship on affective epistemology, highlighting emotion not as a passive state but as a dynamic process of meaning-making within

gendered discourse.

From a practical standpoint, this research can inform the teaching of contemporary poetry and feminist criticism, especially in courses involving language, gender, and literature. By foregrounding how emotion operates through linguistic form, educators can encourage students to recognize the epistemic value of feeling and personal voice within poetic expression. This perspective promotes critical literacy and empathy in literary interpretation, key competencies in today's digital and affect-driven culture.

In terms of further research, future studies could extend this analysis by exploring cross-cultural affective patterns in digital poetry communities, comparing how different female poets employ linguistic affect to navigate identity and belonging. Additionally, corpus-based stylistic approaches could provide quantitative support for affective tendencies in feminist poetry, deepening our understanding of how emotion circulates across genres and media.

Ultimately, this study underscores the need for continued exploration of emotion as feminist discourse reaffirming that in the digital age, poetic language remains a powerful medium through which gendered subjectivity, memory, and affective knowledge are both articulated and transformed.

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