SUBJECTIVITY, IDEOLOGY AND THE FEMININE IN JOHN DONNE'S POETRY

TERRY THREADGOLD

This paper will explore some of the directions that a semiotically based theory of ideology might need to pursue. The theory in the paper comes from many sources, but is based primarily on the notion of language as social semiotic (Halliday 1978), seeing language as actively symbolising the social system, its pattern of variation representing metaphorically the variation that characterises human cultures.

A systemic-functional analysis of the lexico-grammar of a group of poems on apparently diverse themes from John Donne's poetry reveals that a remarkably narrow set of choices in meaning is actually made. There are certain regularities in the situation types (the semiotic construct of context) which the poems enact/encode and these seem to impose limitations on the register or kinds of choices in meaning that *can* be made. Intertextually, the choices tend to be recurrent, both in grammar, and across the semantic fields spanned by the lexis.

I will argue that poetry is always a specific instance of ideological practice which is at once autonomous (conforming to its own internally coherent laws) and part of a social formation defined historically. The question of meaning potential - the kinds of meanings that can be made or are not made (Halliday 1978, Foucault 1973) - must be referred to both these aspects of poetry as social discourse.

Ideology is encoded both in the lexico-grammar itself and through the subjectivity of discourse, in what Halliday (1980) has called the

'metagrammatical' interpretation of recurrent choices in meaning in terms of a higher order social semiotic of discursive formations. In the first case, what can be meant is limited by the systemic structure of the discourse itself as text (its structure as *énoncé*, its closure). In the second, the 'metagrammatical' interpretation of ideological meaning is circumscribed by the position of the discourse in history, and by the way the discourse 'produces the reader who produces it in the present' (Eco 1981, Easthope 1983) that is, its strucure as *énonciation* of the other, the choices not made, the impossibility of closure.

Historically, these poems were produced in the period when the contemporary discourses of subjectivity and the feminine were taking shape, emerging from other discourses. I will interpret the lexicogrammatical structure of Donne's poetic discourse in terms of the higher order social semiotic of discursive formations which constrains this development, arguing that Donne's discourse is ideologically transitional, encoding through presence and absence the changing epistemology of language, subjectivity and femininity which accompanied the emergence of a post-Renaissance social formation.

Subjectivity, other voices, and the process of enunciation in the present

I will begin with a quotation from Anthony Easthope's book *Poetry as Discourse* (1983):

> 'The two forms — ballad and the Renaissance courtly poem — exemplify opposed kinds of discourse: one collective, popular, intersubjective, accepting the text as a poem to be performed; the other individualist, elitist, privatised, offering the text as representation of a voice speaking.'

In the book Easthope looks at a ballad, a Shakespearean Sonnet (1609) and a passage from Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. He classes the Shakespearean sonnet as a representative of 'the founding moment' of the bourgeois subject in literature and of the beginnings of the 'transparency' of the bourgeois text which he sees as not finally accomplished until after 1660. He therefore sees Shakespeare as a 'transitional' case, transitional between the two kinds of discourse singled out in my first quote — the collectivity of the ballad and representation of the voice speaking which is the bourgeois text.

Donne's verse is situated historically within this 'founding moment' of the bourgeois conception of the subject as autonomous, self-present, self originating, patriarchal and phallocentric: and yet there are already indications that the subject in Donne's text is not quite like this (Aers & Kress 1981)

That Donne's poetry is already different from the 'Renaissance courtly poem' is of course indicated by the now traditional labels 'metaphysical' and 'metaphysical conceit' which describe it, and which have for some time naturalised its inordinate linguistic difficulty. This difficulty and difference is also attested to by the varied reception the poetry has had from 'the subjects who have read it in the present' (Eco 1981), in what Benveniste has called 'the unceasing present of enunciation' (1974:84), from Pope (1924:313,317) to T.S. Eliot (1921) up to the present day. This raises the question of the constitution of subjectivity in relation to discourse and the need for a linguistic account of *énonciation/énoncé* which will allow us to see the subject (reader or author, read or written) as the effect and not the originary point of a poetic discourse. As Barthes said, 'it is language which speaks not the author.' (1977:143)

The theory of subjectivity which I am using in this paper is derived from the work of Lacan (1959:123, 1977 (a):153-5, 1977 (b):131) and Kristeva (1974:27-80, 1980). The theory of the enunciation and the enounced was developed in linguistics in the work of Jakobson (1957), Beneveniste (1974), and is usefully supplemented by Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) and Michael Halliday's (1978, 1982) accounts of the constitution of the subject in and through language. Central to the theory is the concept of the subject as always split, between the unity of the syntagm and the incoherence of the paradigm (the other, the choices not made), between a position in language as sayer, the subject who speaks, and the position as subject of what is said, spoken, written. The 'I' who speaks and the 'I' who is spoken about can never be the same. Thus subjectivity is always both centred, present to itself, and decentred, a temporary point in the process of the other. Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic, Kristeva's Semiotic and Symbolic, Bakhtin's monologic and dialogic moments, and Halliday's ideational, interpersonal and textual, are all necessary to the description of the constitution of subjectivity in discourse. Only this kind of understanding of subjectivity will allow us to explain the variant readings of Donne's poetic discourse.

I am particularly interested in a number of very recent attempts by subjects of the enunciation in the present to read Donne's poetry. Aers and Kress describe Donne as a poet 'who wrote out of an acute sense of ideological dislocation' (1981, Introd. vii-viii). Catherine Belsey (1982) speaks of Donne's poetry as an interrogative text in Althusser's sense (1971:204) with a split subject and constructed of contrary discourses.

Jonathon Culler (1983) uses *The Canonisation* as an example of an 'open' text which defies its own logical closure by carrying on speaking in the present. Bernard Sharrat (1983) uses Donne's verse to illustrate, in the Lacanian terms of *suture*, what he calls 'the ecstasie of reading'

which he identifies with a 'dominant contemporary notion of literary value' which developed between 1600-1800.

What I would like to ask is where the tortured, alienated Donne, the pre-bourgeois split subject, described by Aers, Kress and Belsey, has been since the twentieth century rediscovered and re-evaluated him? Why does he only begin to emerge from his texts in the early seventies and then again in the early eighties?

Donne as 'dispersed ego' (Easthope 1983) is surely glimpsed by T.S. Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) and 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921): but this Donne is subsequently lost in a critical tradition which has identified with 'the rhythms of the speaking voice' (the process Sharratt describes), has recognised a unified speaking subject (the realism of the dramatic monologue) and has believed in the 'reality' of his poems (exactly what Belsey describes — being made by the text to believe in what is unbelievable). Thus we find Roston (1974) describing the way Donne was seen in the twenties and after as symbolising 'a unification of experience', reconciling science and humanism in a post-Renaissance world in a way that was also seen as sorely needed in the divided world of the twenties and thirties. Roston's own reading of Donne which he calls a 're-adjustment' of the earlier view, is a typical example of Sharratt's 'ecstatic' reading. Donne's art, Roston says, is not the amalgamation of disparate experience but rather 'the transmutation of the actual'. (Roston 1974:13ff.)

Again, I would like to ask some questions. Why is the concern with unifying humanism and science not mentioned by Culler, Aers and Kress, Belsey or Sharratt? Where in Eliot/Roston *et al.* is the yearning for incorporation into the social world which Aers and Kress (1981) emphasise? What are we to make of Belsey's 'unstable configurations of discourse' (1982) which cannot be resolved within the specific discourse (poem) which is the reason for their existence? Can she, and Aers and Kress and Sharratt be describing the same text that T.S. Eliot identified as existing in a historical moment before 'the dissociation of sensibility'? And what of one more discordant voice, the voice of the Bakhtin's other, the claim that Donne's poems become increasingly 'feminine' in the sense in which Kristeva and Irigaray have used this term? (Berg and Berry, Essex, 1981).

It seems clear that the particular meanings that have been perceived in Donne's poetry most recently have to do with 'post-modern' (to distinguish them from Eliot's modernism) concerns, with the current critique of representation and with the issues of subjectivity and femininity. It is apparent that Donne's poems have been read *both* as evidence of the presence of a unified bourgeois subject *and* as evidence of a pre-/perhaps post-capitalist split subject; that the poems are read *both*

as classical wholes, resolving all differences *and* as full of ideological contradiction. Presumably the texts cannot be read in both these ways unless they are written both ways, that is, unless the semantic structure of the texts in some way allows both readings. The concept of subjectivity outlined above, along with Halliday's (1978) and Bakhtin's (1981) theories of polyphony will allow me to explore this idea. The two theories of polyphony are similar, although not the same, and together, they provide a way of teasing out some of the semantic strands and some of the many voices which are 'orchestrated', to use Bakhtin's metaphor, in Donne's texts.

The central part of this paper will involve the discussion of a detailed systemic-functional analysis of two of Donne's poem's in order to see what textual evidence there is for adducing such a structure for the poems. I will concentrate on the early *Elegy 7* (mid-1590's) and *The Legacy* from the *Songs and Sonnets*.

If it can be shown that the texts are written in both these ways, that the structure of the texts allows both kinds of reading, then we might be in a position to situate Donne's texts historically where Easthope has put Shakespeare — *at* the founding moment of the bourgeois subject, but as transitional between an older discourse and the discourse of transparency which elides and positions in the elision the dominant subject of classical realism.

2. The Polyphony of Discourses in the texts

I shall now give a brief account of the discourses which are recognisable in the lexico-grammar of Donne's poetry. These discourses are identified in the poems as projections of literary overcodings (part of a higher order literary or social semiotic or discursive formation). The reading here will be a metagrammatical one, based on an interpretation of the choices actually made from the total meaning potential available within the system. It will thus be socio-semantic rather than sociological.

What is most obvious about the language of *Elegy 7* and *The Legacy*, and of Donne's poems in general, is the remarkably narrow set of choices in meaning which is actually present. This is true of the elegies, the epistles, the songs and sonnets, and the holy poems. Despite the apparently different literary genre labels involved, the actual register of the poems is remarkably uniform. The difference in mode and textual function is hard to isolate. The field/ideational pattern shows differences in dominance rather than kind. Thus in the patron/patroness poems the court discourse is generally more prominent than in the love poems. In the holy poems there is a specifically New Testament doctrinal discourse that is not part of the religious discourse elsewhere: but, in general, the same discourses are involved.

The only real variation is in tenor and the interpersonal and here it is outside the text. The addressee of the poems, the absent other, varies. It is a mistress/lover, a patron/patroness or God. It is variously the reader, other texts, or the self, bringing a whole polyphony of extra-textual voices into play. This changes the first-order social roles within the tenor and ought to change the second-order roles and the choices in the interpersonal function, (Halliday 1978:144). The social role of the 'I' who speaks ought to be variable here. That it is not consistently different or rather that it is consistently ambiguous, is one of the signs of the problematic of the discursive formation involved. A simple example will illustrate this.

The following mood choices (imperatives) occur in *The Indifferent* (1) and *Meditation* (2,3, and 4):

(1) Rob me
Bind me not
O let me go

(2) Divorce me
Untie } that knot again
break

(3) force me
break me

(4) take me to you
enthral me
emprison me
ravish me

The imperatives in (1) are addressed to a mistress and those in (2) and (3) and (4) are addressed to God. The examples in (4) in part reverse the role structure of 1, 2 and 3, (e.g. *let me go* but *take me to you*) and hover ambiguously between masculine and feminine agency and the Petrarchan/Religious and patriarchal discourses, (e.g. is it a male or female subject who normally *takes, enthrals, imprisons, ravishes*). In every relationship in which it stands to another, the 'I' in these poems is inferior — to woman/lover, to patron/patroness, to God. That role is prominent in the tenor (and reflected in the mood choices, where *me* is always 'goal' as illustrated above): but the discourses of neo-platonism and Christian dualism (which promote respectively unity in difference and equality of roles, or separation of roles and the opposition superiority/inferiority) and of patriarchal dominance (which promotes superiority) interfere ideationally. The problem becomes that of the reconciliation of at least three conflicting roles. The social value and position of the subject 'I' is therefore always ambiguous.

I shall now try to characterise in terms of lexical sets and transitivity patterns the discourses involved.

A. Experiential - Ideational Function

There are four discourses operating within the Experiential function. They are most clearly illustrated in the transitivity choices and lexical sets from *Elegy 7* which is an early poem where the discourses are still relatively distinct. (see 4(i) below). The same discourses are present in the transitivity patterns and lexical sets from *The Legacy*. (see 4(ii) below). The following descriptions are based on all the poems in the *Songs and Sonnets*, several elegies and verse epistles, and the *Divine Poems*.

(1) When the social world is represented ideationally in these poems it is there as a discourse of patriarchal, male dominance. The institutions of male power represented are religion, the law, government, the Royal court, the arts and science. Common to all of these, and deriving from the discourse of religion, is the power of speech, the Logos, the word of the Father. All of these institutions exclude the being and speech of women and, in a number of interesting ways, the being and speech of 'poetry' or the poet. In this discourse the transitivity patterns are always:

male	process	female
actor/agent	material	Goal
possessor	relational	possessed
senser/sayer	mental/verbal	phenomenon/saying

(If the feminine subject speaks or thinks, the process is always negated).

In the poems the 'I' of the enunciation presents the 'I' of the enounced in isolation from the social world of the patriarchal discourse and in union with, or in the absence of the feminine (or God). This is represented lexically and in transitivity by way of the patriarchal and the three remaining ideational discourses.

(2) The Petrarchan — the disourse of courtly love — where the transitivity patterns reverse the roles of discourse (1):

female	process	male
actor/agent	material	goal
possessor	relational	possessed
e.g. deceiver		deceived
deity		subject
killer		killed

Lexically, representation of the feminine within this discourse represents a fragmentation. The feminine is parts of a body, a heart, eyes, a voice. Union for the male poet with the feminine produces this scattering of the feminine through the text. It is perhaps a way for the poet to avoid dismemberment himself (Feral, 1978) although in Donne this rarely works. In *The Legacy* both the poet and the feminine other are reduced to a text or a heart.

Love is almost always represented as male (cupid), and associated with murder, warfare, alchemy (this is like the patriarchal social discourse) and duplicity and death (like the feminine in the Petrarchan). Love brings destruction to the male lover who is fractured, dispersed through the text as a result (operating like the Petrarchan feminine). So we have the following partly reversible pattern of metonymy in the texts:

female = scattered parts or whole (actor)
male = whole (speaking subject) or scattered parts

(3) The religious discourse of Genesis/The Garden (related to the courtly). Here as in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 the roles of male and female are quite ambiguous:

Male	Process	Female
goal (deceived)	material	agent (deceiver)
agent (creator)	material	goal (created)
possessor	rational	possessed
(whole)	metonymy	(part/Adam's rib)

(4) This is another religious discourse embodying Neo-Platonic and Christian dualist elements. It is characterised by relational transitivity patterns and the union of lexical opposites - soul and body, male and female, x *is* y, x *has* y. The relativism of the discourse produces constant pun and paradox and is anti-logical.

To compound the ambiguities in social roles explicit in these four discourses, the absent feminine is re-inscribed in the texts as the Muse (poetry) and Religion (the church) and thus respectively as falsehood, truth and law. Add to this the common religious metaphors of God and his church:

God	Church
head	body
husband	spouse
rational	irrational

the metaphors of the female as part of the male, the male Christian as part of the female body of the church, and the male imprisoned in the virgin's womb, and we have all the ingredients which make problematic in the extreme the representation in these poems of the male poet and of the feminine other to whom he addresses himself.

The mutual intelligibility of such discourses is impossible. What makes them the more contradictory is the foregrounding in the text of a relativism in the form of a relational syntax, not only in the transitivity patterns, but also in the relational processes inherent in pun, paradox and metaphor (Halliday 1985) which produce semantic categories which are unstable and ineffable. Indeed they are very close to the categories of meaning which characterise the *Song of Solomon* or the New Testament *Epistles*. This is why I would suggest that the religious discourse (including the Neo-Platonic) is actually the master-code or discourse, mediating all the others in what Foucault (1973) has called a textual world of correspondence, sympathy and analogy.

B. The interpersonal Function

In the poems I am looking at here there is always an 'I' addressing an absent other. Because this 'I' continually speaks in rhythms which efface the signifier 'verse', running on over the line ends, breaking in the middle of lines, and indulging in the syncopations and abbreviations of colloquial speech, and because this 'I' maintains an apparently dominant presence — 'I am', 'I speak', 'This is *my* monologue/dialogue', there often appears to be a centred (male) subject of *discours* (for this is not *histoire*). The mood choices, the imperatives, questions and assertions of this speaking voice dominate the text. They invite the subject of the enunciation in the present to identify with the speaking voice of the 'I' who is written. (see 4(i), 2).

At the same time the power of the voice of the *feminine* other, who is addressed in *Elegy 7* and *The Legacy*, to disrupt, to re-direct and to govern the direction of the discourse from the point of absence, the silences, between the lines and stanzas is very clear in the structure of the poems. This is what forces the questions at the end of the elegy —'must I ..?' etc, and the disruptive asides like 'that is you, not I' in *The Legacy*.

What discourse then is this? It seems to be most easily identifiable with the emerging voice of Easthope's (1983) (and Barthes' before him

(1953,1973)) Bourgeois subject, the centred voice which would dominate the hierarchy of discourse for most of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth Centuries: but the voice is still struggling to emerge in these poems and its discourse conflicts with the ideational discourses and with those of the logical structure and textual functions.

C. Logical structure (Ideational Function).

Logically the text preserves the law of the code. The literary and aristocratic/educational overcoding of the discourse of logic and rhetoric, as a higher order semiotic, asserts itself constantly in the text. The syntax of logical connection and relation - *and* - *but* - *therefore* - is everywhere apparent. Many of the texts are explicitly syllogistic in structure.

The Legacy works in this way:

> I thought I'd send you a legacy when I died
> But I can't find the legacy
> I can find something else
> But I can't send that because it's already yours

This means that the order of the syntagmatic chain is always carefully sustained in an apparently logical discourse which encloses the signifier and produces systemic closure, resolution, unified meaning, coherence: all of those features which would emerge later (post-1600) as part of a specifically bourgeois discourse.

At the same time the assertive logical discourse emphasises the nature of this sign as artificial, as not 'natural' in the later bourgeois sense.

D. Textual Function

Many of the mode/textual choices which derive from the same discourse of logic and rhetoric contribute to this emphasis on the poem as text, as artifact. I am thinking of the genre choices (elegy, epistle, songs and sonnets, holy poems) the regular rhythms and stanza forms, the predominance of the figures of pun and paradox and metaphor and the self-conscious iconicity of many of the poems. *The Canonisation, The Legacy, The Paradox, The Nocturnal, The Valediction of the Book* are for example, all poems where the text *is* what it calls itself, a legacy, a paradox and so on.

There is also the self-consciously cohesive discourse produced by the relational syntax of the ideational function. Where relational processes make every lexical set equivalent in some way to every other the textual patterns become self-referential. And the text constructs itself as a

self-regulating, autonomous whole. Yet some of these choices actively undermine the textual structure of which they are part, producing a logic which is a paradox, which cannot be read in any realistic or holistic way, and a cohesiveness which is shattering in its ideological dislocation. How can male=female, self=other, presence=absence?

The identifications are vertiginous and cut across the discourses out of which the poems are constructed. What are we to make of a text which says it is an icon and then goes on speaking, asserting that it is the speech of a dead man, telling us that it lies, and then self-destructing by insisting that such speech acts are impossible (*The Paradox*)?

I would argue that the foregrounding of the 'I', the foregrounding of the logical structure and coherence, and of the socially ratified discourses of power, is actually the foregrounding of an absence: an absence which is present in the material signifier of the text. I speak of the absence of the subject of male dominance present in the impotence of the male speaking subject, a decentred, de-unified ego, a poet/ an individual without a social role; a subject which self-consciously and self-reflexively constructs itself in language, focussing on the process of construction, insisting on its own textuality. I speak of the absence of the voice of power in the absence of logic and the presence of paradox. There is also the absence of the feminine, the absent other, the addressee of an impossible discourse in which the present—absent subject of dominance represents her, whom he desires to incorporate and with whom he desires incorporation. What is extraordinary in Donne's text is the power of the feminine to disrupt the code, to disorient the discursive formation. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the *Songs and Sonnets* and the *Holy Sonnets* where the increasing relativism of male and female roles leaves us with a male poet who is a text (a poem, a will, an epitaph) or a *nothing, dead, gone,* who is *imprisoned in the womb, raped, ravished, divorced, tortured, murdered, conquered* and *possessed* by God or the feminine or love and whose ultimate impotence as the object of *rape* by God makes the signifying centre of the text explicitly feminine.

These are large claims and I shall now try to elucidate them through a detailed analysis of *Elegy 7* and *The Legacy*.

3. The Texts and the systemic - Functional Analysis

The annotated systemic-functional analysis of Donne's *Elegy 7* and *The Legacy* which are included in this section are according to Halliday's *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985). Both analyses should be read as intertexts/co-texts to the reading of the poems which follows them.

(i) Elegy 7 — 'Nature's Lay Idiot ... '

Nature's lay idiot, I taught thee to love,
And in that sophistry, oh, thou dost prove
Too subtle: Fool, thou didst not understand
The mystic language of the eye nor hand:
Nor couldst thou judge the difference of the air
Of sighs, and say, this lies, this sounds despair:
Nor by the eye's water call a malady
Desperately hot, or changing feverously.
I had not taught thee then, the alphabet
Of flowers, how they devisefully being set
And bound up, might with speechless secrecy
Deliver errands mutely, and mutually.
Remember since all thy words used to be
To every suitor, *Ay, if my friends agree;*
Since, household charms, thy husband's name to teach,
Were all the love-tricks, that thy wit could reach;
And since, an hour's discourse could scarce have made
One answer in thee, and that ill arrayed
In broken proverbs, and torn sentences.
Thou art not by so many duties his,
That from the world's common having severed thee,
Inlaid thee, neither to be seen, nor see,
As mine: who have with amorous delicacies
Refined thee into a blissful paradise.
Thy graces and good words my creatures be;
I planted knowledge and life's tree in thee,
Which oh, shall strangers taste? Must I alas
Frame and enamel plate, and drink in glass?
Chafe wax for others' seals? break a colt's force
And leave him then, being made a ready horse?

The Analysis

1. Ideational - transitivity

(a)	Actor (male)	Material Process	Goal/affected/recipient/location (female)
	I	taught	thee (to love)
	(his) that	severed	thee
		inlaid	thee
	(mine) who	refined	thee (into a blissful Paradise)
	I	planted	in thee (knowledge & life's tree)

The following examples maintain the participant structure of (a) but are all metaphors in which the goal/affected participant *is* metaphorically the female.

Actor male	Material Process	Goal/affected female
strangers	shall taste	which (= knowledge & life's tree in thee)
I	must frame	plate
	(must) enamel	wax (for other's seals)
(I)	(must) chafe	a colt's force
(I)	(must) break	him (= colt)
(I)	(must) leave	

(b) senser	mental process (negated)	phenomenon
(female) thou	couldst (not) judge	the mystic language
thou	didst not understand	the difference
thou	couldst (not) call	a malady (desperately hot) (changing feverously)
thy wit	could reach	(only) household charms

(Note: I am interpreting this as a metaphor of mental process)

Sayer female	verbal process	saying
thou	(couldst not) say	this lies
		this sounds despair

(c) carrier/identified female/feminine	relational process	attribute/identifier
all thy words	used to be	ay, if my friends agree
one answer (in thee)	(was)	ill-arrayed
		broken proverbs
		torn sentences
thy graces & good words	be	my creatures
*household charms (thy husband's name to teach)	were	all the love tricks (that thy wit could reach)

identified/circumstance		identifier/phenomenon
*An hour's discourse	could scarce have made	one answer in thee

possessed (female)		possessor (male)
thou	art not	his
(thou)	(art)	mine

The intellectual ability of the female senser/subject of the mental processes and the verbal ability of the subject of the verb of saying in (b) is constantly questioned by the semantics of negation (*not, only*) and

potentiality (could). The two examples asterisked in (c) share these features (*all, could scarce...one*). The Noun Group epithets in (c) maintain this undermining pattern (e.g. *broken, torn, ill-arrayed*).

There is one example that belongs under (c) which is ambiguous between a male-female reading because of the ambiguity of the vocatives 'Nature's lay idiot', and 'fool'. Is the 'I' addressing another, 'thee', or himself? Has the poet outwitted himself or has she outwitted him:

Carrier	Relation Process	Attribute
thou	dost prove	too subtle

The metaphorical example in the final line of the poem repeats this pattern and its ambiguity.

(him) (= she metaphorically)	being made	a ready horse (i.e. having been taught →subtle, cunning etc).

and both can be compared with the following:

Actor feminine	Material Process	Goal	circumstance
The alphabet of flowers	might deliver	errands	with speechless secrecy mutely mutually

This is the only example in the poem where a feminine subject acts, or metaphorically, speaks. Yet the subject is only feminine by metonymy (an alphabet, a message). The message is delivered in the manner of subtlety/sophistry/falsehood and silence (*devisefully, with speechless secrecy, mutely*) and yet apparently it is falsehood and silence which produce a successful feminine act of communication (*Mutually*).

2. Interpersonal

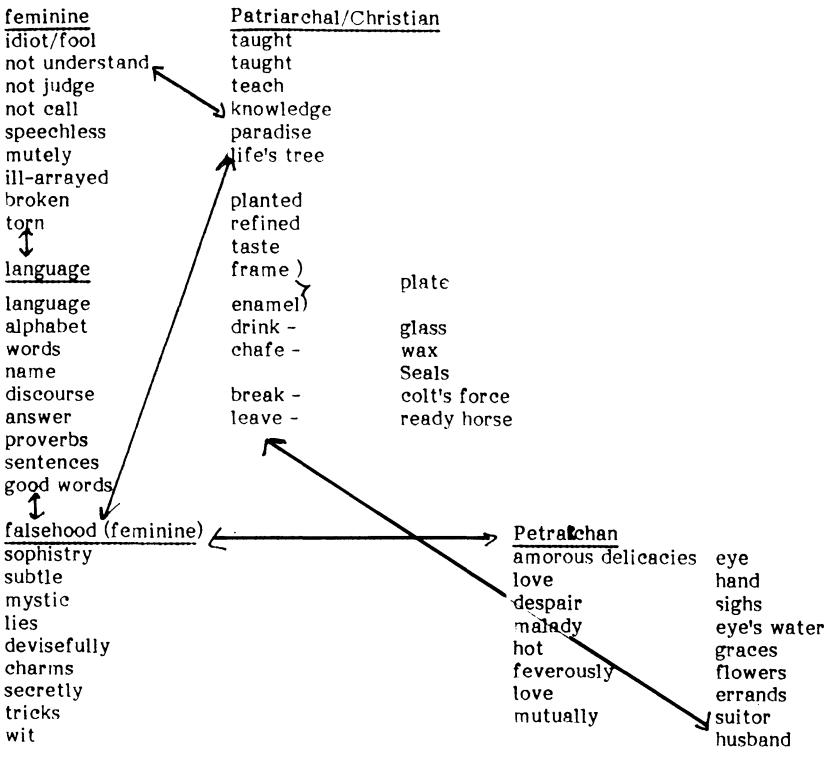
(a) 'I' - who speaks to *thee*
narrates the past - e.g. 'I had not taught thee then...'
bids *thee* 'remember since'...in the present.
narrates the present - 'thou art mine...'
asks a series of question - 'Must I...?'
(b) 'I - who addresses *lay idiot/fool.* (vocatives)

The series of questions with which the poem ends are ambiguous as speech acts between offers/questions and statements. Thus the *must* modal auxiliary varies between meanings of probability: modality and obligation: modulation (Halliday 1985).

Are these questions addressed to 'thee' or are they purely rhetorical? If the latter, do they constitute statements ('It is likely that this is the

role I have to play') or offers (I'll have to go on creating women for others' pleasure'). Whatever their ultimate illocutionary force the questions do two things. Phonologically the repeated rhythm and stress pattern of *must I/must I* allows a strong male voice to reassert itself at the end of the poem. Semantically, and interpersonally, their ambiguity as speech acts undercuts this dominance and questions it. This is reinforced by the fact that all the male activity in the ideational meanings of the questions is misdirected and benefits others, instead of the acting 'I' e.g. *Shall strangers taste, must I drink in glass, ... for other's seals, leave him...a ready horse* (for another).

3. Textual — lexical sets and links



As taxonomies and collocations within the syntagm these lexical sets are also ideational in function.

The graphic circularity of the arrows indicating cohesive links between sets is a mark of the relativism of the sets, which are never really discrete. The Christian/partriarchal set contains falsehood, so do the Petrarchan, the language and the feminine sets. The paradigmatic separateness of the sets is thus constantly questioned by the syntagmatic axis.

The Metagrammatical reading

Nature's lay idiot, is an elegy which appears to present a dominant, centred, male 'I' and a subservient, if absent, feminine counterpart. The dominance of the 'I' as creator, as alchemist, who 'refines' his mistress into a 'blissful Paradise', who creates and possesses her words, seems obvious. But even in this early poem there are some paradoxical, contradictory elements.

The ambiguity of the opening lines is the first of these. Who is 'the idiot', 'the fool'? Is the 'I' addressing himself or his mistress? At first it seems it must be her, excluded from society as she is by her silence, her lack of speech. And yet once he teaches her the language of love she communicates with 'speechless secrecy', 'mutely' and this silent language, the words which are his creatures, not only exclude her from society again but also exclude him who created her. She is *inlaid* by another. And this makes a fool of him, for his creation is now a ready horse for others' tasting, others pleasure. She is both goal and actor here, deceiver. The Paradox of Eden is replayed. Here are all the impossible ambiguities of God the father, the male and the *logos*, Eve the subservient, the irrational, the speechless, the deceiver, and all the possibilities inherent in speech and silence. None of these is resolved in the text (the re-assertion of the discourse of dominance in the final rhetorical questions also questions the discourse) but the dangers to male supremacy of giving women speech, of allowing feminine discourse to erupt into the social world seem embodied in that ambiguity. The lexico-grammatical choices in the poem stage a metagrammatical argument about the possession of meaning, the possession of the *logos*, and the possession of power.

This argument continues in an intertext, the *Epistle to the Countess of Bedford* analysed by Aers & Kress (1981). This text presents a considerable ideological dislocation of the masculine feminine roles of the discourses in the elegy. Addressed to a patroness by the poet, it begins *'you* (actor) have refined *me* (goal).' The feminine other is the deity, the alchemist, the Creator in this poem. As patroness she creates poets and thus creates the speaking 'I' - *'we* (possessed) *your new creatures be'*. These patterns provide an exact reversal of the elegy's 'I refined you', 'your words my creatures be' and so on. But, as the

argument about speech, discourse and power continues, the conflict of roles increases. 'I' becomes in turn creator, the exegete of she who is 'a dark text'. His discourse, his poetry, 'rhyme' will create/construe her virtue, her social value for the court. The power of language, the social voice remains his, restoring the control of the *logos* to masculine dominance. The issue is grammatically and semantically that of social power, social value (Aers & Kress 1981) and this is intricately bound up in this poem, as in the elegy, with textuality and speech, and with the ambiguity of the roles of the subject 'I' and the feminine other. This male subject has no social role or value, except in language and in text, and this textuality of the subject involves a union with, a discourse of, and a discourse to, the feminine other, which is semantically a fragmentation of self in a multiplicity of ambiguous roles.

4 (ii)The Legacy

The Legacy

When I died last, and, dear, I die
As often as from thee I go,
Though it be an hour ago,
And Lovers' hours be full eternity,
I can remember yet, that I
Something did say, and something did bestow;
Though I be dead, which sent me, I should be
Mine own executor and legacy.
I heard me say, 'Tell her anon,
That myself, that is you, not I,
'Did kill me,' and when I felt me die,
I bid me sent my heart, when I was gone;
But I alas could there find none,
When I had ripped me, and searched where
hearts should lie;
It killed me again, that I who still was true,
In life, in my last will should cozen you.
Yet I found something like a heart,
But colours it, and corners had,
It was not good, it was not bad,
It was entire to none, and few had part.
As good as could be made by art
It seemed; and therefore for our losses sad,
I meant to send this heart instead of mine,
But oh, no man could hold it, for 'twas thine.

The Paradox

No lover saith, I love, nor any other
Can judge a perfect lover;
He thinks that else none can, nor will agree
That any loves but he:
I cannot say I loved, *for who can say*
He was killed yesterday?
Love with excess of heat, more young than old,
Death kills with too much cold;
We die but once, and who loved last did die,
He that saith twice, doth lie:
For though he seem to move, and stir a while,
It doth the sense beguile.
Such life is like the light which bideth yet
When the light's life is set,
Or like the heat, which first in solid matter
Leaves behind, two hours after.
Once I loved and died; and am now become
Mine epitaph and tomb.
Here dead men speak their last, and so do I;
Love-slain, lo, here *I lie.*

The Legacy is explicitly declared to be an impossible speech act by its intertext *The Paradox*. The 'I' of *The Legacy* is a dead man, *no man, not I* (and thus other/absent/feminine). *The Paradox* begins 'no *man* saith I love ...' and continues:

I cannot say I loved, for who can say
He was killed yesterday?

It thus speaks of the impossibility of *The Legacy*'s 'when I died last ..' and addresses explicitly the question of what is speakable in the other poem.

The Legacy is addressed to a mistress, to the self and to the reader. It speaks in many voices, *of* many voices and *to* many others. The discourses involved are the same as those in *The Elegy* (see 4 (i) above). The lexical choices are more limited (note the repetition of *die/kill* and *heart*) and there is an increase in relational syntax (The Neo-Platonic/

Christian discourse) and the pun and paradox that goes with this. The result is that all semantic choices are equated so that the distinction between self and other, presence and absence, life and death, masculine and feminine is no longer possible. The power of the feminine other to disrupt the code from the point of absence is very pronounced. Union with the feminine through the dissolution of lexical opposition produces total semantic and ideological dislocation: and there is no centred male subject who is the source of meaning.

I shall explain what I mean by this in the analysis and the conclusions which follow it.

The Analysis

1. Ideational Function - Experiential

		Process	
A.	Actor/goal/behaver/Carrier	material/behavioural/relational	goal
	male		male
	I	died (pun)	
	I	die (pun)	
	I	go	
	myself (= you)	did kill	me
	me	die (pun)	
	I	had ripped	me
*	It (that I should cozen you)	killed (metaphor)	me

B. (Subject of the Enunciation) (Subject of the Enounced)

Senser	Mental Process	Phenomenon
male		(metalinguistic - meanings/ embedded acts etc.)
I	can remember	that I something did say and something did bestow
I	heard	me say, "Tell her anon that my self did kill me."
I	felt	me die.

Sayer	verbal process	receiver	saying
I	bid	me	me send my heart
me	say	(To me)	"Tell her anon that myself did kill me."
(you) = me	tell	her	my self did kill me.

C.	Agent	Material Process	Goal/Place/Range
	male/female		male/ female
	I	did bestow	something
	I	did say (verbal)	something
	which	sent	me
	me	send	my heart
	I	could find	none
	I	searched	where hearts should be
	I	found	something like a heart
	I	meant to send	this heart
	no man	could hold	it
	(= you = feminine)		(it = thine/feminine)

D.	Identified	Relational Process	Identifier
	it	be	an hour ago
	lover's hours	be	full eternity
	male/female		male/female
	I	should be	mine own executor and legacy
	myself	is	you
	myself	is	not I

	Carrier	Relational Process	Attribute
	Possessor		Possession
	(i) feminine (heart)		feminine qualities
	it	had	colours
	it	had	corners
	* few (male)	had	part
	(ii) male		
	I	be	dead
	I	was	gone
	I	was	true
	(iii) heart		feminine qualities
	it	was	not good
	it	was	not bad
	* it	was	entire to none (male recipient)
	it	seemed	as good as any made by art
	it	was	thine.

2. Interpersonal Function

1. Mood Choices

Almost the entire poem is coded as narrated propositions (statements) - enounced, and addressed (enunciated) by *I* to *thee/you, her, the reader,* or to *I.*

There is one vocative in Stanza 1, 1.1. and an exclamation in Stanza 1, 1.5 and Stanza 3, 1.8.

There are two imperatives in Stanza 2: 'tell her anon' and 'I bid me send me.'

2. Modality

Stanza 1.

1.5 I can remember - modality, potential, positive
1.7 Though I be dead - modality, probability, subjunctive
1.8 I should be mine own executor and legacy.
- offer/command, modulated, inclination/obligation
or - proposition, modality, probability

Stanza 2

1.5 *I could find there none* - modality, potential, negative.
1.7-8 That I, who still was true, in life, in my last will should cozen you.
proposition - modality, potential, probability, frequency.
proposal - modulation, obligation, inclination.

Stanza 3

1.8 No man could hold it - modality, potential, negative.

The interpersonal choice modality, potential, positive of stanza 1, 1.5 is negated in stanza 2, 1.5 as modality, potential, negative, foregrounding masculine impotence in the middle line of the middle stanza. The choice in stanza 2 is repeated in stanza 3, 1.8, where, in the last line of the poem, it contributes to foregrounding masculine impotence/feminine power and the ineffability of the categories masculine/feminine within the systemic structure of this poem.

Lines 7-8 in stanza 1 and lines 7-8 in stanza 2 are semantically parallel in their interpersonal polysemy. What this polysemy foregrounds is the absence of any clear-cut social role for the masculine speaking subject. Lines 7-8 in stanza 3 (*that I should cozen you* is coded as an embedded act or fact) also make explicit, in their function as ideational metaphor, the devastating consequences of this lack of social value.

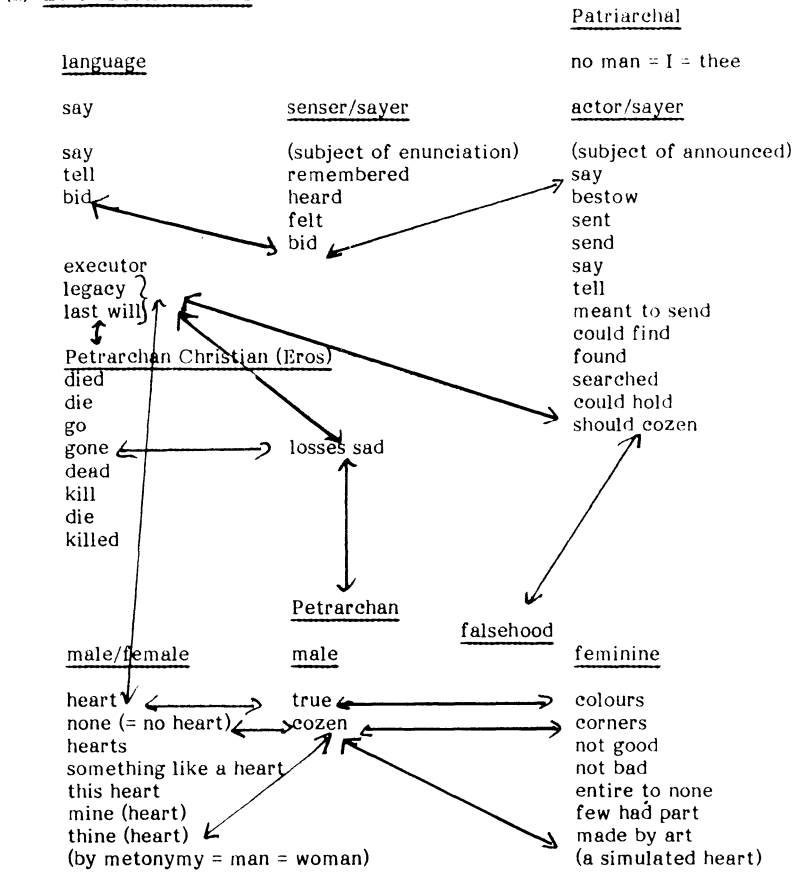
The metalinguistic irony is that for this subject, in this poem, this plethora of social roles within the grammar of interaction (power, obligation, will and ability), roles which centre around the *I/you, masculine/feminine* relationship of speech and falsehood in this single clause, are already symbolically effaced, coded as 'thing' and embedded in the nominalisation whose ideational participant role is that of the metaphorical actor which *kills* the masculine subject in stanza 2, line 7. It is the foregrounded absence of social value present grammatically as noun and thing which *kills again* in stanza 2.

I would like to stress the paradox of this very considerable foregrounding of the semantics of modality in the poem. Its very presence is significant of an absence, the absence of any social role, social value for

the subject of the poem. Where there is no doubt one does not choose meanings from the modality system.

3. Textual Function

(a) Lexical sets and links



The graphic circularity of the cohesive links, indicated above by the arrows, is produced by the relativism of the poem's ideational semantics as indicated above.

(b) Recurrent Choices in Modality

See Interpersonal Function

The Metagrammatical Reading

The details of the analysis above can be summarised as follows.

The subject of the enunciation and the enounced are irrevocably split. The 'I' of the enunciation remembers that the 'I' of the enounced spoke and acted, that the 'I' *sent me* (as a legacy). The first 'I' hears the second 'I' speak, feels that other 'I' die, reports that *myself killed me* and then confounds this already vertiginous pattern with the aside (addressed to the feminine other this time) that *myself is you, not I.*

This means that the 'I' of the enounced is now not another 'I' but the feminine other. 'I' *is* the absent feminine. There is no stable male identity here.

This pattern is continued in the transitivity patterns where neither 'I' has any single stable ideational social role. Take, for example, the processes *die/kill* and *ripped* - where the subject takes on the roles of carrier/actor and goal, often of the same process: *I ripped me, myself did kill me.* The fact that *die* is a pun and used here with at least three senses - make love/orgasm, absence (go away), cease to be alive - means that each time the verb occurs (and it is repeated often) the subject is both actor and goal. The verb's intransitivity, plus this pattern of subject as actor and goal of its own actions, along with the lexical force of *death/killing, leaving/absence* and *ripping* (violence) contribute to the lexico-grammatical representation of impotence: a subject whose actions never extend beyond itself and are therefore without affective power and are always also self-destructive. This impotence and self-destruction, the fragmentation of the 'I' of the enounced, its separation from the 'I' of the enunciation, is expressed in a number of other ways.

For example is the subject of the enounced *me* or *you (not I)?* In the grammar the absent other *is* the self as we have seen. Thus the subject of the verbs *kill* and *rip* becomes the feminine other (and we are back in the Petrarchan discourse) - *when I had ripped me/my self did kill me* - the dismembered male, his heart absent from his breast, assumes the suffering (*courtly*) role at her hands. Here is the contradictory conjuction of the neo-Platonic and the Petrarchan — a union which fragments her (she is only *a heart*) and dismembers and kills him — and in which all roles, because of the polysemy of 'I' and 'myself' are ultimately reversible.

In this poem the normally patriarchal discourse (agent/material/process/goal) is undermined or negated constantly by a pattern of negatives and indefinites.

I did bestow something)
I could find none) Goal frustrated

I found something like a heart)
I meant to send) process thwarted

This representation of impotence derives from the superimposition of the courtly and patriarchal discourses.

The already split subject of *I bid me send me* is then identified, in a pattern of cohesion which runs through the poem, with a further series of negatives and indefinites and finally again with the feminine other. Thus the Petrarchan fragmentation of the feminine - who is here only a false heart - becomes impossible to distinguish from the dismemberment of the masculine subject - who also cheats (*cozens*) and also *is* a heart by metonymy. The pattern goes like this:

> something=me=my heart=*none*=something like a heart=this heart instead of mine=thine.
> I=no man=(woman) not I.
> heart=man=woman=me=thee.

The categories of meaning and of grammar become totally unstable. Nouns/pronouns, definites/indefinites, masculines/feminines, positive/negatives, are all equated. Once again the stable, centred male subject is absent/other/feminine/none.

Within the interpersonal function the ambiguity and polysemy in mood and modality are a further illustration of the instability of grammatical and semantic categories. This semantic dislocation in the text, represents metagrammatically both the absence of social value - what role is there for a male speaking subject who is a poet, a *no man*? - and the power of that absence to destroy the subject. If one is only constituted as a subject in language, in and through discourse, then the absence of any clear-cut role structure within the interpersonal function is tantamount to non-existence. This of course explains the ideational lexis and relativism *I die, I am gone, I am a legacy*, but it also explains the identification with the feminine. Who else in this discursive formation is as powerless, who else's speech is as ineffectual, who else's being as fragmented as excluded, as that of the feminine other (Patriarchal, Christian and Petrarchan discourses)? These aspects of the representation of the feminine of course conflict with other aspects of the feminine problematic (the power of the feminine as patroness, as mistress lover, the disruptive and insistent nature of feminine speech and silence and so on) but they do explain why the social roles of feminine other and male poet might become conflated here.

This instability of grammatical and semantic categories also characterise the conscious textuality, the iconism of the poem. The poem begins 'when I died last' and identifies the poet who is thus *no man* as *the legacy* of the title. He is therefore also the poem which is thus an icon. It *is* the *only* legacy. In various ways then the 'I' who speaks insists on its own textuality, on itself as nothing (I am *dead, gone - myself is not*

I) if not a construction in language (*I should be mine own executioner and legacy - I am an epitaph*) and that construction is lexically *inevitably* associated with death and absence. Here the representation of 'I' as text/discourse parallels the meanings of the interpersonal function and becomes the ultimate impotence. The role of the poet, the role of the sayer, the role of the exegete, is no role. It has no social value. This conscious play of language is already evident in the split between the 'I' of enunciation and announced. It is continued in the 'I's' discussion of the 'cozening' that goes on in the poem. The cozening is also an effect of language. The logical argument proves in a manner which has nothing to do with logic that there is no legacy, that the legacy is a fraud. The 'I' *cannot* send the legacy. It doesn't exist. It doesn't exist because it is him and he is *dead, gone, no man.* It doesn't exist because she already possesses it. *It is thine=the legacy=the poem=me=my heart=none* (an absence)=*something like a heart=thine.* If we followed this through to its logical conclusion we would have to decide with the *Paradox* that the poem doesn't exist, cannot exist ... cannot be spoken and yet it clearly continues to speak.

Thus the apparent resolution in surface logic of the ambiguity of the social roles of subject and feminine, the prevailing relativism which resolves differences and contradictions by dissolving them into sets of ineffable linguistic categories, produces a systemic closure within the poems: but the poems are also open, they continue to speak precisely because of the contradictory discourses which are the reason for their existence and which they cannot ultimately contain. Their own self-conscious textuality - pun/paradox/iconicity - insists on this openness and on the problematic of the discursive formation involved.

These poems have no stable male subject as the centre of their signification. They are extraordinarily evocative of masculine impotence in the face of the 'dark text' of feminity, and the lack for the male poet of any stable social role. The categories of masculine and feminine are in any case quite unstable - and these factors erupt into the socially ratified elements of the code, de-centring them, questioning identities and identifications, categories and categorisations in ways that speak explicitly of the contradictions inherent in the discourses which were speakable in Donne's poetry.

Conclusions

It seems then that we can argue that Donne's text is transitional in Easthope's (1983) sense. Subjectivity in Donne's poetry is linguistically of a very different order to that which characterises literary texts written after 1660, although the beginnings of a new kind of subjectivity are present in the text. I am referring to the beginnings of the centred 'I' of

the narrative hierarchy and the beginnings of a binary opposition between masculine and feminine, male and female. Those beginnings are everywhere denied by the lexico-grammar and the semantics of the poetry. This produces a textual polyphony which makes it possible for the various, very different readings of that text by subjects of the enunciation in different presents to all derive from the *same* material text and from linguistic evidence (whether objectively or *intuitively* recognised) which is *there* in the text.

To take just one example, the relativism which is foregrounded everywhere as a lexico-grammatical feature is interpreted variously and from different historical positions as 'a unification of experience' (T.S. Eliot 1921), 'a transmutation of the actual' (Roston 1974) or as in this paper a quite extradordinary dislocation of grammatical and semantic and therefore of ideological categories.

Just as the ideological positioning of the subject of the text who produces it leads to absences/gaps in the semantic system of that text, (in what is speakable), so the ideological positioning of the reading subject (who produces the text in the present) leads to gaps/absences in the reading. Either part of the polyphony is suppressed, is not perceptible at a given point in time, or what is perceived is related to a different social semiotic of discursive formations. Thus the questions of subjectivity and feminity in relation to Donne's text have not been raised until very recently when these discourses, which Donne's texts (and those of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in general) would argue were problematic in the late Renaissance world, have again become a part of a similarly disrupted social formation and a similarly oriented discursive formation in the present.

This, I would argue, explains the current sympathy for Donne's texts and has much to tell us about the issues which a semiotics of text and context, and of language and ideology will need to account for.

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