Changing roles: Gender Marking through Syntactic Distribution in the Jacobean Theatre

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ABSTRACT

It is by now widely acknowledged that the great majority of female characters on the Jacobean stage diverge considerably from the patriarchal role models of Elizabethan and Jacobean society, as articulated in much of the pamphleteering, homily writing, manuals or even royal communiqués of the time. Far from the subservient, silent and chaste stereotypes of these written genres, the Jacobean female character becomes rebellious and assertive, vocal when not either surprisingly eloquent or merely garrulous, and sexually active if not predatory.

The aim of this paper is to explore how this change in portrayals of women is marked in Jacobean drama by a series of syntactic devices that can only be applied to Shakespearean drama in isolated cases. I shall principally examine the different uses of sentence type by both male and female characters, the relative success or otherwise of this usage and how this can be linked to the changing gender rôles of the day as reflected in the drama. From this examination, a picture should emerge of a female character who questions and challenges the codes of behaviour imposed on her by her male counterparts, a character who, albeit more often unsuccessfully than not, seeks for and suggests alternative modes of relating to the opposite sex and society in general.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years or so, there has been considerable analysis of Renaissance drama by feminist critics (Belsey 1985, Callaghan 1989, Dusinberre 1975, Jardine 1983, Kahn 1987, McLuskie 1989, Rackin 1989, Williamson 1986,

or Woodbridge 1984). Added to this, there have been numerous historical studies of woman´s estate during the Early Modern period (Clark 1982, Fraser 1984, Keeble 1994, MacLean 1980, Plowden 1979, Prior 1985, or Wiesner 1993). From both types of study —the former often of necessity drawing very heavily on the latter— there emerges a social, political and cultural pattern of transition in all fields of human activity, from an older order of absolute monarchy and sharply defined social classes, to a society in which the bourgeoisie progressively acquires greater affluence and influence on the course of national events. Upward (and conversely, downward) mobility, either through successful trading or by *marriage into both the landed gentry and aristocracy, was a salient feature of* social change, at least in the by then large urban centres such as London. Within this context, women were also beginning to play a more active rôle in commercial, religious and social matters, despite a repressive legal system that banned them from signing contracts, taking legal action, obtaining loans, disposing of a husband´s property and so forth. The enterprising wives of London merchants and shopkeepers who ran their husband´s businesses for them resorted to the loophole of declaring themselves as single to all legal and commercial effects, in order to be able to carry out these necessary functions to the efficient running of a business. There are also many contemporary accounts of women´s changing social activity, too: in the first decade of the century, cross-dressing became fashionable and women paraded around London in doublet and hose, with small weapons at their waists; groups of women would go «gadding» together to *alehouses, where their capacity to imbibe alcohol by all accounts surpassed that* of their menfolk[1]; and a flourishing trade was carried on by the «watermen» who ferried parties of feisty ladies up the Thames to their encounters with «gallants». What emerges, therefore, is a female image that is in direct contradiction to the one so diligently and insistently propagated by institutional, and other, literature of the period of the ideal stereotype of woman as silent, chaste and obedient[2]. That so many of these publications should have proliferated at the time, together with the formal, rhetorical controversy that was being waged as a background[3], is just one indication of the tensions caused by these and other factors of change that both men and women were experiencing in their relationships to each other during the first decades of seventeenth-century urban England, and the resulting disparities between how officialdom would have women behave and what women actually *did*.

A corresponding misfit is to be observed between the female verbal ideal recommended by most of the publications mentioned in 2), that is, *silence* when verbal communication is not strictly necessary to the administering of creature comforts to the husband, and the linguistic behaviour of the female characters

portrayed on the Jacobean stage, who increasingly take over more and more of the dramatic space and time. On the other hand, there are few records of how women actualy spoke in real life at the time, for materials such as diaries[4] cannot be considered a reliable source for ascertaining what women´s speech patterns may have been; a diary is a *genre* of absolute privacy, in which the writer is freed from possible constraints or censorship from others; neither are sources such as court proceedings a faithful reflection of how a woman would speak in her everyday exchanges, for the type of highly structured, formalised —almost formulaic— exchanges of courtroom practice and other official contexts are in any case male-designed; it might therefore be safe to say that women´s actual verbal interactions with males were somewhat shorter than those of their dramatic counterparts. Why, then, this sheer volume of female speech on the Jacobean stage, and why, too, the foregrounding and focussing of what women say onstage, even in those cases in which the length of a female character´s intervention is relatively short? I shall attempt a tentative answer to these questions in the following sections of this paper, in the light of the type of sentences female characters are given to speak by (male) dramatists. There is not sufficient space in a paper of this length to link these syntactic distributions to the predominant dramatic modes of soliloquy, monologue or «aside», so that I shall center my discussion here on the syntactic patterns themselves.

2. TELLING SEQUENCES

It is by now widely accepted that the syntactic sequences of male and female speech have until very recently varied greatly. Work on gender-specific codes by linguists such as Hirschman (1973), Hymes (1972), Fishman (1978), Lakoff (1975), Maltz and Borker (1982), and more recently, Spender (1985), Coates (1986), Cameron (1985) Poynton (1989) or Graddol and Swann (1989), has brought to light a wealth of interesting data on how men and women handle their linguistic knowledge differently by adopting quite different strategies in same-sex communication to those deployed in female-male exchanges. These differences are directly linked to the gender-roles each sex is expected to play in social intercourse; for instance, according to Hymes (1972: 102-115), some of these differences are: women´s more frequent use of linguistic «props» or «hedges», or their wider use of intensifiers; women are also said to use tag-questions more frequently than men, perhaps out of a need to have their statements confirmed and approved by male interlocutors; women use more questions than men, according to Hymes to keep conversation flowing on account of their

«relative weakness in interactive situations»; women tend to avoid the bare imperative forms when they want somebody (particularly a male) to do something for them, preferring the more persuasory strategies of «Let´s...», «Why don´t we ...» «Could you possibly....» etc.; and of course, women are more «polite» than men in their linguistic interactions, and make sparser use of taboos and swearing. Most of the features listed by Hymes point to a linguistic medium for the powerless, as against the power medium of male speech. Hymes views male discourse as based on power with the result that in men-women exchanges, men tend to interrupt and assert themselves far more than women, and when talking to each other, men tend to either disagree with each other or totally ignore each others´ utterances, whereas conversation between women is based more on solidarity, support and an acknowledgement of each others´opinions. This is perhaps a somewhat rosy picture of female linguistic interaction; it would in any case be an over-statement to say that all female talk is cooperative in this way, and it certainly does not apply to much of the female discourse to be encountered in the Jacobean drama, with its malicious gossips, tell-tales, and acrid exchanges between female characters. It would also be very difficult to ascertain whether the same findings held for actual female speech of the period in question.

Apart from the male-constructed stereotypes of scold and garrulous gossip to be found in both drama and controversy-writing, the women of the period did not in general possess the male linguistic skills of rhetorical argumentation, despite a noteworthy handful of exceptions, of effective use of commands, or negotiation skills; all these linguistic modes, and others, were and still are, of course, the prestige modes of verbal communication, prestige being equated with male and hence with «seriousness», as against the «frivolity» of female communication.

Yet paradoxically, the female character of Jacobean drama is on the whole depicted as mastering (*mistressing*?) many of the male linguistic strategies very successfully, in fact in some cases, far more successfully than her male counterparts; for instance, Vittoria´s splendid self-defence in *The White Devil* III,ii, by resorting to the male mode of dialectic, the only means of being listened to by males. As stated above, these instances of portrayals of eloquent, outspoken women, are usually in direct contradiction to prescribed female speech habits found in homilies, manuals, laws, or etiquette-books of the time. In actual fact, the occasions on which women of the upper classes were allowed to speak outside their immediate family circle were very few, barred as they were from public speaking of all kinds, apart from the dubious privilege of scaffold farewells. In real life seventeenth-century England, this lack of a prestige mode of female

discourse is made manifest in the writings of the female participants in the *Hic Vir* and *Haec Mulier* controversies, who had to serve themselves —like Vittoria— of male judicial oratory and rhetorical argumentation, both modes then alien to female modes of thought. How, then, are the female characters of the drama to be interpreted in the light of these disparities between very real attempts to curb female speech, the myth of banal female loquaciousness, and the consummate eloquence to be witnessed in Vittoria, in the subtle Livia of *Women Beware Women*, in the Duchess of *The Duchess of Malfi*, or in both Penthea and Calantha of *The Broken Heart*; or the constant, effective commands to onstage actors by the Citizen´s Wife in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the streetwise negotiations of the women shopkeepers of *The Roaring Girl*, or Maquerelle´s shaping of alternative communities through her wry stream of communication in *The Malcontent*? All these women display mastery of male linguistic skills, that is of the power sequences of language, which depend very heavily on the complex, embedded syntactic structures of argumentation, on the effective use of the imperative, and on a series of other syntactic patterns that recur time and again in power discourses.

2.1. **Giving orders**

Imperative structures are more often than not a gauge of how much power a dramatic character is depicted as wielding. Imperatives in Shakespearean drama, except for the «virago» types such as Lady Macbeth or Volumnia, tend to be assigned to male characters, whether these occupy a relevant position on the social hierarchy or not; to this end, one has only to look at the sheer number of imperatives uttered by Iago. Contrarily, in what we call the «Jacobean» drama, imperatives are used increasingly by female characters, whereas those uttered by many male characters often fail to achieve the desired results. Not only is their use by women more widespread, but their effectiveness is also greater.

Functionally, the imperative is a closed, self-contained mode of discourse that precludes the dialogically communicative bonds of, say, the question-answer sequence. It obviously entails the imposition of the speaker´s will on the listener´s behaviour, either directly or indirectly. Felicitous usage of the structure will, then, mean the corresponding modification of behaviour, the imperative as a result being the most important linguistic propagator of hierarchical relationships and power. It therefore follows that the success or failure of the imperative to do just this will be an important clue to how far plays reflect a crisis in authority or a disintegration of hierarchical structures. At a more individual level, it will

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also be a gauge of the forcefulness of a character, or her/his assertiveness or will-power. As illustrations of how this syntactic structure works in drama to perform these functions, I shall base my discussion mainly on Webster's two tragedies, *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*.

One of the most striking structural features of both these plays is their ritual or ceremonial patterning: formal trials, divorces, pairing of characters in the functions of authorities, murderers, physicians, etc., formal death-scenes, appointments to office, all of which are staged as agencies of social cohesion, the public means whereby authority asserts itself. Practically all spheres of authority are depicted in these rituals: the state, the church, the family, even the arts and sciences, each progressively revealing itself to be either corrupt or ineffectual. Imperative usage will thus signal the effectiveness or otherwise of each of the institutions or authorities, so that authority and the imperative interact as metaphors of each other to project the hierarchical relationships of the plays.

Gasparo and Antonio are peers of Lodovico's, so that their disguised imperatives to him in I.i. of *The White Devil*, or their exhortations to him to mend his ways, are formulated through exemplification of his misdemeanours. Yet, like most enjoinders in this play, they are ineffectual and result in Lodovocio's «Leave your painted comforts .....» (I.i.51-53).

Similar ineffectuality is next echoed at the top of the hierarchical scale through the image of family breakdown in II.i., in which Francisco and Monticelso endeavour to modify their brother-in-law, Brachiano's, behaviour. Once more the attempt is futile and degenerates into open abuse between Francisco and Brachiano.

From the family, we next move to the ineffectuality of the Law, as the imperatives it issues are called into question. Once more, the receptor of these orders refuses to accept this authority, as Lodovico and Brachiano have done before, and moreover displays blatant defiance of it. Vittoria's

> Die with these pills in your most cursed maws,
> Should bring you health or while you sit o'the bench
> Let your spittle choke you! (III, ii, 274-276)

is a far cry indeed from the «reforms» or modified behaviour the imperatives of the Cardinal and Francisco had been intended for. In fact, it is usually the interlocutor who responds, not by accordingly modifying her/his behaviour, as might be expected, but by returning imperative for imperative in defiance of authority. Ironically, the roles of authority-subordinate are reversed at the end of the play when Lodovico and Gaspar arraign «authority» in the person of the dying Brachiano, or in the case of Vittoria and Zanche's attack on Flamineo.

This abortive use of the imperative appears in similar situations in *The*

Duchess of Malfi; in the first act of this tragedy, two male characters, the sinister Cardinal and his paranoid brother, the Duchess´s twin Ferdinand, work as a team to give utterance to a series of constraints on female behaviour in the form of a catalogue of imperatives. In numerous cases, these imperatives are shared between the two brothers in a Kafkian duo, as for instance:

> Ferd.: Let not youth, high promotion, eloquence -
> Card.: No,
>   Nor anything with the addition, honour,
>   Sway your high blood. (I.i. 312-315)

as if they had learned their parts off by rote beforehand. However, the only effect these admonitions have on their sister is to make her more determined to pursue the course she has marked out for herself:

> Duch: Shall this move me? If all my royal kindred
>   Lay in my way unto this marriage,
>   I´d make them my low footsteps.... (I.i.370 ff)

And then immediately offers the spectator a sample of how she herself can handle imperatives by ordering her maid, Cariola, to leave her, hide behind the arras and listen to what is about to be said, all of which Cariola promptly does. It may be argued that Cariola, as her subordinate, would in any case have to obey her mistress, but in terms of Jacobean concepts of «authority», the two brothers would have the right to issue orders to their sister as her «guardians». Moreover, the Duchess virtually «orders» Antonio to marry her.

To this end, it is significant that of the twins, Ferdinand has such difficulty in getting his orders at least heeded, if not obeyed, whereas his sister is willingly obeyed by those she addresses. What Webster offers us here, then, are two converse images: one, in which male characters «in authority» ineffectually use the imperative, their commands in fact being openly defied by the «subordinate» female in question; and a second one in which this very same «subordinate» is seen as being far more capable than they are of using imperative structures. Ferdinand is also fond of issuing imperatives to his male subordinates, but more often than not, his orders are not complied with unless he adds the persuasory means of payment, too. He is constantly being challenged by Bosola in I.i., who holds up to doubt each and every one of Ferdinand´s commands:

> Ferd: I would not have her marry again.
> Bos.: No, sir?
> Ferd: Do not you ask the reason; but be satisfied
>   I say I would not.
> Bos: It seems you would create me
>   One of your familiars. (I.i.263-268)

The same type of unfruitful exchange is repeated several times throughout the play,until in V.ii., the now insane Ferdinand issues a series of orders to Malatesti to which nobody pays any attention. Similarly, the Cardinal's orders to Ferdinand are ignored, as are the Doctor's to him, too. Imperatives given by males, then, in these two tragedies more often than not go disregarded and are hence an indication of how far the system of authority has degenerated, and of the extent of male ineffectuality.

Other plays of the period displays similar use of syntax to map out gender relationships. Livia of *Women Beware Women* consistently uses a variety of disguised imperatives and persuasory strategies when she wishes to get other women to do things for her or to behave in the way she wants them to. «I hope 'tis at your choice/To take or refuse, Niece» she wilily remarks at the unsuspecting Isabella's dismay at the prospect of marrying the inane Ward (II.I. 82-83), thus appealing to Isabella's (very limited) free will, instead of directly suggesting that her niece should reject the offer. However, she becomes more openly commanding when she addresses males. In the following scene, she issues orders to the Ward's uncle, Guardiano, to have Leontio's mother brought to her, which he promptly obeys as if he were her social inferior, whereas they both belong to more or less the same stratum of society; later on in the same scene, she once more deploys her persuasory skills to make Leontio's mother, who belongs to a less affluent class, stay for supper. Levidulcia of *The Atheist's Tragedy*, briskly goes about seducing the young servant Fresco at the beginning of II.v, by asserting over him the authority both her age and her superior social status give her over him: «Clasp my waist and try» (II.v.41). What are we to make then of these portraits of women getting orders carried out and men being ignored when they give them? Are we to interpret these uses of the imperative - and not merely the bare, grammatical imperative, but the whole series of structures in the English language that can perform the imperative function - as signalling a world turned upside-down, a world in which values have been inverted, one in which in fact «the times are out of joint»?

Or are we witnessing a dramatic statement of women's greater assertiveness, of women portrayed as just as capable as men of organising their lives, of using language effectively, women in fact as full human beings rather than the sub-species official or institutional discourses would have them be? It is certainly tempting to think that these seventeenth-century male dramatists were deliberately offering plausible images of how real women's speech differed from the theoretical models of «silent» or at least unobtrusive women being issued by institutions and authorities from King James I himself down to the parish priest.

2.2. **Asking questions**

The interrogative sequence also offers interesting possibilities for gender-marking in the drama of the period. Communicatively, a question is a conversation initiator, a means whereby community can be established between both strangers and acquaintances; functionally, a question, with its basic request for fresh information, is a means of recruiting cooperation from the interlocutor, an appeal to enter into dialogue, to encounter the other on a common ground of discourse, either by supplying new information or by confirming or rejecting information given at some prior stage; it also assumes the superior knowledge of the interlocutor on the matter to hand, and signals the speaker´s ignorance. As no other syntactic structure, interrogatives create paths of communication in that *they are open-ended and demand response in the form of some kind of* knowledge. If knowledge is power, then the powerless will be deprived of it; their means to try to attain it (and hence power) will be through the syntactic sequence of question and answer.

However, what we more often than not find in the only too frequent question-answer sequences in the drama of the period is that this essentially dialogic function of interrogation is more often than not unaccomplished; characters constantly question each other about themselves and their relationships, yet they consistently fail to give or receive satisfactory answers. Bosola does not even bother to answer Antonio´s question «He hath denied thee some suit?» (*The Duchess of Malfi*, I.i.47), but plunges instead into diatribe against the «Arragonian brothers». A similarly evasive reply is given to Brachiano´s «Do you face me?» in Flamineo´s «O sir, I would not go before a politic enemy with my back towards him, though there were behind me a whirlpool.» (*The White Devil*, IV,ii.66-68); this insatisfactory piece of information, which fails to comply with Brachiano´s demand, significantly comes after a long exchange between the two in which Flamineo gives back question to Brachiano´s question.

There are, however, notable exceptions to this pattern. One is when questions of identity are posed, for example in the exchange between the Duchess and Bosola in IV, ii of *The Duchess of Malfi*. In such cases, the answer, despite the fact that it is not what the inquirer would have wished for, is nevertheless the «truth» within the truth-system of the plays. The other exception is that of question and answer sequences between characters who are, as it were «in harmony» - a rare phenomenon in the dissonant world of Jacobean drama - as compared to the more frequent unanswered series between openly conflicting characters. Character affinity is thus marked by the success of the question-answer sequence. *In this sense, Vittoria and Flamineo are «in harmony» with each other when they*

both consciously act out Flamineo´s death, the whole sequence, although a fake, being thus communicatively felicitous. Delio and Antonio are likewise able to question and answer each other in *The Duchess of Malfi* within the bonds of their friendship. Longer interrogative sequences in the two plays mentioned here enact or symbolise these aspects. The arraignment scene of *The White Devil* (III,ii.) is really an expanded metaphor of the question-answer structure; the Duchess´s death scene is basically one long question-answer exchange with Bosola on the subject of identity. However, the most coherent answers are only supplied when the speaker is both inquirer and answerer at once, that is, when it is a case of self-questioning, as for example, in Bosola´s «What thing is in this outward form of man/To be beloved?» (II.i.52), or Flamineo´s «This night I´ll know the utmost of my fate... (V.v.116). or the Duchess´s answering her own search for identity «I am Duchess of Malfi still».

Question-answer structures figure very prominently in many other plays of the period, particularly in Marston´s *The Malcontent*, in which for most of I.iii. Pietro and Malevole question each other; throughout this exchange, Malevole adopts a similar «antic disposition» to Hamlet as he is acting the part of official Malcontent, a character that borders on the type of the Shakespearean fool in his total licence to utter whatever he thinks fit without being taken seriously, and as I said above, is hence the personification of free speech. Significantly, the «answers» Malevole supplies to Pietro´s zany questions are really very subversive comments on contemporary issues that may not have escaped the censor had they been presented in any other form. The accumulation of such risky pieces of information supplied in Malevole´s answers results in a parodic portrayal of Jacobean court society:

> Pietro: Dream! What dreamest?
> Mal.: Why, methinks I see that signior pawn his footcloth,
>
>> that metreza her plate; this madam takes physic, that
>> t´other monsieur may minister to her; here is a
>> pander jewelled; there is a fellow in shift of satin
>> this day, that could not shift t´other night. Here a
>> Paris supports that Helen; there´s a Lady Guinever bears
>> up that Sir Lancelot - dreams, dreams, visions, fantasies,
>> chimeras, imaginations, tricks, conceits! (I.iii. 48-56)

Maquerelle, the ageing procuress in the same play, is the female counterpart to Malevole in free-speaking and information-supplying. As was suggested above, she is principally responsible for creating an alternative, female world through her constant informative interventions; these worlds may be constructed around supposedly «trivial» matters such as fashion, make-up or astrology, but

they are nevertheless sharply contrasted to the male world of corruption, insolidarity and violence as exemplified in Malevole´s answer given above. As the supplier of information, her questions take formally grammatical interrogative structures although functionally they are really offers of help and advice: «And, by my troth, beauties, why do you not put you into the fashion?» (V.vi.13-14); «Upon my honour. Will ye sit and eat?» (II.iv.5). Despite Maquerelle´s «profession», despite her mercenary attitude to the services she offers and all the misogynistic diatribes in *The Malcontent*, Maquerelle´s alternative world is one in which human beings are free to speak and behave as they think fit, one in which patriarchal constraints are put aside, one in which women in fact make their own choices in accordance with their own best interests.

Interrogatives, therefore, often become a structural device which on the one hand symbolises characters´ basic lack of self-knowledge, their moral confusions, and their search for an understanding of the incomprehensible world around them; on the other, they exemplify supposedly female attitudes of cooperation and assistance, which seem to match some of the speech patterns listed as idiosyncratic of female communication by many of the linguists mentioned at the beginning of this section. And it is left to a female character to supply the answer to the ultimate question within this search: «...all our wit /And reading brings us to a truer sense/Of sorrow» (*The Duchess of Malfi*, III,v, 83-85).

2.3. Rejecting reality

The third syntactic sequence that needs to be examined in the light of gender relationships in the Jacobean drama is that most important one of negation. In the English language, negation is not merely restricted to the verb-negating element «not», but includes a whole series of semantically negative pronoun forms, adverbs, intensifiers, negatively oriented prepositions, apart from lexical items with a high negative semantic content - verbs, nouns, adjectives, and so forth. None of these elements should therefore be ignored in an examination of how negation and negativity are working in a given text. In works of literature, negation may also be created through larger units than the phrase or sentence, and particularly in drama texts, linguistic negativity can work together with negative plot structures to this end. Different degrees of negation may progressively be mapped out throughout a play by using certain lexical items or intensifiers, or by a preference for negatively oriented sentence structure or conditional forms.

Webster and Marston are two of the most outstanding creators of negativity within the Jacobean drama, so that it will be their work that will illustrate this section, although much of what is said about them here could also be applied to other dramatists such as Middleton or Massinger.

In the case of Webster, attention must be given to the way in which different degrees of negativity are progressively intensified by skilful usage of the linguistic elements mentioned above. In both *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, Webster begins with a model to be either emulated or rejected by characters. In *The White Devil*, this model is stated in Lodovico´s «O Democritus, thy gods/That govern the whole world», and in *The Duchess of Malfi*, it is Antonio´s account of the excellencies of government at the French court in the very first scene. Distancing from these respective models, given as «informational» or affirmative structures, will be measured through the intermediate stages of conditions and less direct modes of negation to the formal negatives of the final scenes and so to the ultimate negativity of death.

Perhaps these intermediate stages are the most interesting, for they best illustrate the accumulative effects of negation in the two tragedies and underline the characters´ ironically unwitting confusion of values and ethical insecurity. Hence the frequency in the earlier stages of both plays of conditional sentences. Now, in pragmatic terms, conditionals are generally used to express unfulfilled wishes, to speculate, to compare «what is» with «what could or might be», one of the basic preoccupations of Jacobean drama.

To this respect, examination shows that conditionals are consistently used by those characters who are unsure of their position or their relationship to their environment or to each other. The Duchess and Antonio hedge round each other with conditionals in their courtship scene: «If I had a husband now, this care were quit», or Antonio´s «Were there nor heaven nor hell I should be honest». Neither is perfectly sure of her or his ground as they transgress the norms of social stratification. Similarly, conditionals also characterise Vittoria´s speech as she cunningly equivocates with Monticelso in the arraignment scene of III.ii of *The White Devil*, whereas when she is faced with more imminent physical danger, she typically challenges that danger through syntactically negative forms, as is the case at the end of the trial scene and in her death scene.

The speech of her brother, Flamineo, has its own means of marking negativity: a reiterated coupling of a usually unexpected intensifying element with ajectives and adverbs, one of the two terms is usually negative in semantic content, the other positive, which gives rise to such strange combinations as the following:

> wondrous discontented, unwisely amorous, wondrous proud,
> monstrous steady, frail reward, etc.

It is the very disparity of collocation in these structures that «contaminates» the positive elements with the negativity of the other, so that in context many other apparently positive elements thus absorb negative connotations, as may be seen from the semantic metamorphoses undergone by many of the play´s metaphors. It is also significant that Flamineo uses these positive-negative combinations when he is being cynical, whereas when he speaks in earnest, he reverts to formally negative structures. The picture thus created through the negative usages of brother and sister, then, is that of the female signalling dissatisfaction with the world she has to live in through her usage of conditionals (or «wishful-thinking» sequences), and her final denials of the values of this world in formal negative structures, whereas the male can ironise about the incoherences and iniquities of that same world by yoking together the disparities he perceives in it. Neither should one forget the numerous «were I a man!» exclamations by female characters: Beatrice of *Mucho Ado*, Vittoria herself, Beatrice-Joanna of *The Changeling*, Annabella of *'Tis Pity*, and of course, none less than Lady Macbeth. Can men therefore better internalise or comply with social injustice, corruption and evil than women? Webster´s different gender-marking of negativity seems to point in this direction.

Lexical or connotative negativity is also carefully graded, and is normally assigned to male characters, taking the form of one character´s account of another, this account being more often than not derogatory. Formally, these accounts are constructed as accumulative catalogues, as in Flamineo´s thumbnail sketches of the ambassadors, which are merely humorously ironic previews to Monticelso´s diatribe against «whores»(III.ii.), or in Antonio´s accounts to Delio of the Cardinal and Ferdinand, which presage the brothers´ haranguing of the Duchess on the conduct of widows (I.i.). Malevole, the title character of *The Malcontent*, the «alter ego» of Altofronto, is given two distinct idiolects in the play: one as Malevole, and the other as his «true» self Altofronto (although it is never perfectly clear which is the «real» man). The stage direction in I.iv.43 marks this: BILIOSO *entering, Malevole shifteth his speech*. As Malevole, the Malcontent, his speech is characterised by lexico-semantic negativity, catalogues of negative items asnd concepts, as well as a highly alliterative medium with exclamations and expletives also very generously peppering his interventions. In this rôle, he is free to reject the values of the society that has usurped his rightful position of Duke, that has estranged him from his wife Maria, and in which advancement goes hand-in-hand with sexual favours. As Malevole, he is at liberty to give vent to all the disgust he feels for such an environment (read that of Jacobean London?), so that he even gets away with direct insult:

> Mal.: Mendoza, hark ye, hark ye. You are a treacherous villain:
> God b´wi´ye!
> Men.: Out, you base-born rascal!
> Mal.: We are all the sons of heaven, though a tripe-wife were
> our mother. Ah, you whoreson, hot-reined he-marmoset!
> Egistus» didst ever hear of one Egistus?
> Men.: Gistus?
> Mal.: Ay, Egistus; he was a filthy incontinent fleshmonger,
> such a one as thou art. (I.vi.3 ff.)

However, when alone as «himself», or Altofronto, this same disgust and rejection of society is articulated in formally negative syntactic patterns, as at the beginning of III.ii.:

> Mal.: I cannot sleep; my eyes´s ill-neighbouring lids
> Will hold no fellowship. O thou pale sober night,
> Thou that in sluggish fumes all sense dost steep...

which immediately switches to his more lexically negative mode the minute Bilioso enters: «Elder of Israel, thou honest defect of wicked nature and obstinate ignorance...». By contrast, Maquerelle´s speech displays a predominance of very positively oriented lexical items; the world she constructs with ribbons, make-up, potions, is articulated in positive catalogues, as against Malevole´s negative ones:

> Maq.: ... it purifieth the blood, smootheth the skin,
> enliveneth the eye, strengtheneth the veins, mundifieth
> the teeth, comforteth the stomach, fortifieth the back,
> and quickeneth the wit... (II.iv.19-22)

It is only when Maquerelle comments on male values or explicitly discusses male behaviour that her speech becomes both lexically and syntactically negative:

> *Maq.:* «On his troth, la» believe him not;... Promise of
> matrimony by a young gallant, to bring a virgin lady
> into a fool´s paradise, make her a great woman, and then
> cast her off - ´tis as common as natural to a courtier,
> as jealousy to a citizen, gluttony to a puritan, wisdom to
> an alderman, pride to a tailor, or an empty hand-basket
> to one of these sixpenny damnations. «Of his troth, la»!
> Believe him not; traps to catch pole-cats! (V.vi.95 ff.)

The polarising of negativity in this way gives rise to several questions. Firstly, is the spectator to interpret Maquerelle´s world as a valid alternative to the intrigue, corruption and violence of the male one in the play? Certainly her cheerful delight in both human relationships (we should not forget that this is her job) and pretty things makes her a far more sympathetic character than most of the others. Within her circle, women are protected from men, instructed as to

how to preserve their inner selves from male dominance, and how to survive the hostile environment in which they have to live. Secondly, of course, does it follow that it is the males alone who are responsible for creating all things negative in the world? It should not be forgotten that *The Malcontent* opens with a «negation» of music («the vilest out-of-tune music»), traditionally a symbol of universal harmony in western culture, emanating from Malevole´s chamber. And thirdly, which world is to be viewed as the more desirable one: Malevole/Altofronto´s negatively construed one with its neurotic repressions of pleasure, or Maquerelle´s amiable, «sinfully» positive one that delights all the senses? Marston offers no answers to these questions, but merely holds up the mirror for the spectator to make her/his own choice.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing pages to some extent illustrate the changes in women´s behaviour and perhaps in their speech habits, too. Obviously, there has not been space to examine each and every one of the textural and discursive devices the dramatists of the period used to this end; other elements, such as the assignment to female characters of the «prestige» or privileged modes of dramatic soliloquy or the «aside», will be discussed in a separate paper. As far as syntactic distribution is concerned, however, it may be said that the syntactic sequences examined in this paper are carefully designed to function differently according to the gender of the dramatic character, male and female characters using their different forms of imperative, interrogative and negative to create very different scales of values for each gender; in the case of male usage of these forms, it is more often than not a case of signalling the male´s desperate endeavours to cling on to some older, obsolete and crumbling order (Ferdinand, Altofronto, Francisco, Antonio of *The Witch,* Vindice, D´Amville of *The Atheist´s Tragedy,* or the several «Dukes» and heavy fathers to be found in Jacobean drama), usually by unsuccessful attempts to control this mutant world through imperatives, to try to understand —again unsuccessfully— the causes for this change through interrogatives, or to demonise the ever more burgeoning demands of the female characters through negation; on the other hand, female usage of the structures examined here points to a greater self-confidence in the (very often successful) use of the imperative, a desire to either attain power through knowledge or establish fluid relationships with others by frequently making use of the question-answer sequence, or to reject the inoperative values of the male world through negation and propose newer, more coherent alternatives for human society. As

a result, it is women and not men who emerge as the agents of change, the men being shown as very much behind the times through their communicative deficiency. The sample offered here illustrates an increase in the protagonism assigned to female characters and perhaps gives some indication of a more sympathetic attitude to women´s problems and dilemmas on the part of the male dramatists who portray them. However, I think that it would be stretching a point a little too far to assert that this was evidence of a nascent feminism on the part of either male dramatists or real-life women of the time.

NOTES

[1] Cf. for example, potrayals of such outings in Middleton´s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, or in the earlier satire by Skelton *The Tunnyng of Elynour Rumminge*, in both of which mature matrons are depicted in alcoholic debauch.

[2] For example, Sir Thomas Overbury´s *A Wife* (1614), Henry Smith´s *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591), William Whately´s *A Bride Bush* (1617), William Gouge´s *Domesticall Duties* (1622), or James I´s own contribution to the question, the *Basilikon Doron* (1599).

[3] Cf. Woodbridge 1984: 49 ff.

[4] Cf. Patricia Crawford: Women´s published writings 1600-1700 in Prior 1985: 211-265. and Sarah Heller Mendelson: Stuart women´s diaries and occasional memoirs, id. 181-210.

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