

“The Mobile Shall Worship Thee”: Cant language in Thomas Shadwell’s *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)



“El populacho os adorará”: Lenguaje “cant” en *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), de Thomas Shadwell

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ABSTRACT

The dramatic increase in criminality in sixteenth-century England was behind the emergence of a new type of literary work known as “rogue literature,” which dealt with the life and activities of beggars and lawbreakers. These rogues’ language, cant, became a major concern for many authors, who attached glossaries to their works for the benefit of those who were not familiar with it, marking the beginning of canting lexicography. It is within this framework that Thomas Shadwell (1640–1692) wrote his famous *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), which is the focus of this study. This paper explores the use of cant language in this celebrated play from a linguistic and lexicographic point of view, arguing that its profuse employment of canting terminology, much of which is first documented in the play, made a significant contribution to studies in canting lexicography and proved its reliability as a historical portrait of seventeenth-century English cant.

KEYWORDS: canting lexicography, Thomas Shadwell, *The Squire of Alsatia*, cant language, seventeenth century.

RESUMEN

El drástico aumento de la criminalidad en la Inglaterra del siglo XVI causó la aparición de un nuevo tipo de obras literarias conocidas como literatura picaresca, que narra la vida y actividades de vagabundos y criminales. El lenguaje de estos pícaros, el cant, se convirtió en una cuestión de interés para muchos autores, que incluían glosarios en sus obras en beneficio de aquellos lectores que no estuvieran familiarizados con él, marcando así los inicios de la lexicografía cant. Es en este contexto cuando Thomas Shadwell (1640–1692) escribió su famosa *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), foco de este estudio. Este trabajo explora el uso del lenguaje cant en esta célebre obra desde un punto de vista lingüístico y lexicográfico, sosteniendo que su abundante uso de esta terminología, mucha de la cual se documenta por primera vez en la obra, constituye una importante contribución a los estudios de lexicografía cant y demuestra su fiabilidad como testimonio histórico del cant inglés en el siglo XVII.

PALABRAS CLAVE: lexicografía “canting”; Thomas Shadwell; *The Squire of Alsatia*; lenguaje “cant”; siglo XVII.

1. Cant Language or the Language of Thieves: Socio-historical Background

In 1567, Thomas Harman (*fl.* 1547–1567) published his *Caveat or Warening for Commen Cursetors* in an attempt to warn his contemporaries about the dangers of the growing number of rogues and criminals that threatened to take over English streets. In order to reveal their tricks, he provided his readers with a short glossary

containing words of “the leud, lousy language of these lewtering Luskes and lasy Lorrels” (qtd. in Gotti 1999, 117) which constituted the first record of this secret underworld speech in the history of the English language, and made him, inadvertently, the founder of canting lexicography. From Harman’s list onwards, many glossaries and dictionaries devoted to cant have appeared which have received extensive scholarly attention (Blank 1996, 33-68; Gotti 1999; Coleman 2004).

The term *cant*, most likely deriving from the Latin verb *cantare* ‘to sing’, was first employed in the sixteenth century to refer to the whining tones of English rogues and criminals’ speech. Thomas Harman’s work, as Gotti explains, constitutes the earliest written evidence of the word in this sense, being defined as “a unknowen tounge onely but to these bold, beastly, bawdy Beggars and vaine Vacabondes, being halfe myngled with Englyshe” (qtd. in Gotti 1999, 117).¹ Similarly, more modern definitions describe cant as “the dialect of a criminal underworld” (Blank 1996, 53), or “the language used by beggars and criminals to hide their dishonest and illegal activities from potential victims” (Coleman 2004, 4).

From a historical perspective, however, the definition of *cant* has not always been clearly demarcated. As Julie Coleman explains, early modern dictionary compilers argued that cant was not a variety of English but a separate language since “*The Dictionary of the Canting Tongue* is a more compelling title than *A Selection of Words used by Thieves and Beggars*” (2004, 5). Furthermore, English rogues and Gypsies were often confused in the period: in John Shirley’s (*fl.* 1685–1688) words, “[Gypsies] are no others than English beggars, thieves and vagabonds, that discolour their faces, necks and hands with bacon-grease and soot in the Winter, and with green shells or husks of walnuts in the Summer” (qtd. in Coleman 2004, 6). Consequently, Gypsies’ language, Romany, and cant were confused, commentators treating cant as a distinct language instead of considering it a variety of English. Moreover, according to Blank (1996, 54), cant appears to have been identified with another register of English, jargon, given the fact that both of them were used by specific social groups to speak about their own issues, excluding

¹ Thomas Harman’s work provides the first documentation for the word *cant* in the *OED*. However, the term is recorded as a verb, *to cant*, with the meaning ‘to speak in the whining or singsong tone used by beggars; to beg’.

outsiders, who were not able to understand their “secret language.” However, Coleman makes a very clear distinction between jargon and cant: whilst jargon is used by professionals or people with similar interests to speak accurately about technical concerns, cant is used specifically by rogues and criminals, and its main function is deception and concealment (2004, 4).

Then, as reflected in Coleman’s definition (2004, 4), cant in early modern England was the variety chosen by beggars and criminals to perform their illegal activities and try to hide them from the rest of society. It is not a language different from English; it is a register, or rather a sociolect since it is used by a distinct social group. As a result, this sociolect creates and shapes what is called an in-group, a social group to which its members feel emotionally attached. Through cant, early modern English rogues created alternative communities, subcultures, in-groups, which had their own rules, manners and lifestyles (Gaby 1994, 401).

Cant language became noticeable in the sixteenth century as a result of the significant distress caused by the increase in vagrancy and criminality that took place in the period. As reported in many documents of the time, by the second half of the century, the number of rogues and unemployed men had reached around 13,000 people in the country (Gotti 1999, 6). This sudden rise was due to certain socio-economic and demographic factors, the most important of which was an outstanding growth of the population, which rose from three to four million inhabitants between 1500 and 1600. Together with the enclosure of agricultural land that affected around 35,000 rural English families between 1455 and 1637, this increase in population led to an influx of people towards the cities, especially to London, whose population grew six-fold, from 60,000 in 1550 to almost 400,000 in 1650 (Gotti 1999, 8–10). This led to unemployment, impoverishment and its most immediate consequence: vagrancy and crime (But 2011a, 3). London became a haven for criminals:

The very size of London and the heterogeneity of its population greatly helped the discreditable, who found a safe refuge there, particularly in some poor and densely-populated suburbs (especially in the district called ‘Alsatia’ and in the Southwark area), where the risk of being caught was low and social protection high. (Gotti 1999, 11)

Consequently, from the sixteenth century on, the population in England, especially in London, was divided into the ordinary working class and a menacing underworld composed of numerous rogues, beggars and criminals (Staves 1993, 692).

As a result of this increase in criminality, there was a growing feeling of anxiety among the population, who became obsessed with rogues and crime. Many writers reacted to this concern and started writing about the underworld and its practices (But 2011b, 3). One of the first to do so, as previously noted, was Thomas Harman in his *Caveat or Warening for Commen Cursetors* (1567), who tried to reflect his contemporary situation as accurately as possible (Gaby 1994, 403), and started recording the words that rogues used in order to warn the population about their dangers. Interestingly, many early modern English writers saw in this prevailing concern about the criminal underworld and its language a source of personal profit since people also seemed to be fascinated by and attracted to the dangerous unknown. Authors took advantage of the “fictional possibilities and the extraordinary popularity of the material” (Noyes 1941, 469), and booksellers exploited the appealing market opportunities of the growing concern with crime (Coleman 2004, 185). As a consequence, the dangerously appealing rogues, their lifestyle and their language soon started to populate early modern writing and the emerging cant and slang glossaries associated with it (Coleman 2004, 19).

2. Thomas Shadwell and *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)

Among the early modern English writers who obtained great success through the use of rogue literature was Thomas Shadwell, born in Norfolk around 1640. Shadwell was one of eleven children born in a well-to-do family, so he received a good education. He started writing at an early age, and, in 1668, his first play, *The Sullen Lovers*, was premiered. In 1681, he was involved in a controversy sparked by *The Lancashire Witches and Teague O'Divelly, the Irish Priest*, which was an anti-Catholic satire. The text had been censored, but Shadwell decided to print it uncut, leading to his silencing as a playwright until 1688, when he presented *The Squire of Alsatia* with enormous success (Bennet). One of the most interesting features of Shadwell's writing is his skill with depicting different linguistic

varieties, which can be demonstrated in the pages of some of his plays, such as *The Lancashire Witches* (1682), in which he depicts the Lancashire dialect and Irish English. Similarly, in *The Squire of Alsatia* it is possible to observe not only the standard variety of English used at the time, but also the northern dialect and, most interestingly, cant language.

The source of his familiarity with this underworld variety is not very clear, but it may derive from his years of education. As William Hand Browne explains (1913, 258–59), Shadwell was a Templar, that is, a law student in the Middle Temple in London. Templars had a close relationship with “the lawless crew that infested the adjoining purlieu of White Friars.” This area, which bordered the Thames, was nicknamed ‘Alsatia’, after Alsace, a district between France and Germany with unstable law jurisdiction that served as a shelter for rogues and criminals. The Temple, where law students like Shadwell lived, was separated from White Friars only by a wall, which established a peculiar alliance between the students and the lawbreakers, who used to help each other when needed. In addition, he lived in London for a long time and was aware of the criminal environment of the period. It is probable that Shadwell used both his experiences and the knowledge of the underworld he gained during his studies at the Temple and his stay in London to write *The Squire of Alsatia*, which depicts the early modern English criminal underworld and its canting speech.

3. Canting language in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688): Lexicographic Notes

Due to the need to facilitate intelligibility to an audience that was not usually familiar with the register,² *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) was first published with a short glossary annexed in which the author included the cant terms used in it. This short list has become an object of study for lexicographers, and one of the sources for many

² As noted by Coleman (2004, 185), it is generally accepted that the main audience of roguish works such as Shadwell’s play ranged from the highest social classes, (as the epistles to the reader found in many of them suggest), to the middle class, including tradesmen and other lower rank professionals who were not familiar with cant and went to the theatre in search for entertainment or a general understanding of this secret language and its speakers.

dictionaries on the subject. The glossary is arranged by semantic fields and it includes forty-eight entries that are not arranged alphabetically. The entries consist of the cant term used by the rogue characters in the play followed by a simple definition that attempts to provide an equivalent in Standard English. The entry for *sealer*, for example, reads: ‘one that gives bonds and judgments for goods and money’. However, these forty-eight cant words are not the only ones that appear in *The Squire of Alsatia*; there are words which are not listed in the glossary but are used in the dialogue of the play. To undertake this study, a corpus of sixty-three cant terms used in the play has been compiled so as to analyse the type of words used and their lexicographic potential assessed by comparing the results found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth *OED*) and the *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (henceforth *LEME*) database. In this manner, I explore the reliability of the text as a portrayal of the early modern English canting tongue. The corpus has been divided into several categories in which the terms have been classified according to semantic criteria to comment on the most relevant examples from a lexicographic point of view (terms which are first documented in the play, for example). Since “canting language was expressive of the disorderly conduct of its speakers” (Blank 1996, 54), all the terms appearing in *The Squire of Alsatia* are concerned with the rogues’ interests: clothing, food and drink (or the state of being drunk), insults, prostitutes, money, running away, trickery, and violence; which coincide with the glossary semantic fields.

3.1. Clothing

| Cant term | Definition ³ | <i>OED</i> ⁴ | <i>LEME</i> |
|----------------|---|-------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Famble</i> | ‘A ring’ | 1688 | 1673 |
| <i>Joseph</i> | ‘A long cloak’ | 1659 | 1699 |
| <i>Rigging</i> | ‘An item of clothing; (more usually) clothing, dress’ | 1664 | 1688 |

³ In what follows, all definitions have been taken from the *OED* unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Detailed information about the exact *OED* and *LEME* references for the terms can be found in the appendix below.

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|------|------|
| <i>Rumm Nab</i> | 'A good beaver' ⁵ | – | 1688 |
| <i>Scout</i> | 'Used allusively for 'watch'= pocket timepiece' | 1688 | 1673 |
| <i>Tattler</i> | 'A striking watch, a repeater; a watch in general' | 1688 | 1688 |

Table 1: Cant terms related to clothing in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Table 1 shows the cant terms for both clothing and jewelry. It includes six terms for which *The Squire of Alsatia* is quoted as the first documentation or first recorded use in English for *tattler* both in the *OED* and *LEME*. The words *rigging* and *rumm nab* are also interesting from a lexicographic point of view: although the *OED* first cites *rigging* in 1664, before the publication of Shadwell's play, it does not label it as a cant or slang word. In addition, it does not include *rumm nab* on its records. By contrast, *LEME* does include the two words, and the first citation for both of them belongs to *The Squire of Alsatia*, where they are specifically listed as a cant word.

3.2. Food and Drink (or the state of being drunk)

| Cant term | Definition | <i>OED</i> | <i>LEME</i> |
|---------------|--|------------|-------------|
| <i>Bowsy</i> | 'Showing the effects of boozing or intoxication, influenced or affected by much drinking' | 1529 | 1688 |
| <i>Bumper</i> | 'A cup or glass of wine etc., filled to the brim, esp. when drunk as a toast' | 1677 | 1699 |
| <i>Clear</i> | 'Very drunk' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Facer</i> | 'A large cup or tankard esp. such a cup filled to the brim' | 1527 | 1699 |
| <i>Prog</i> | 'Food; esp. provisions for a journey, (also) a quantity of food, a meal' | 1655 | 1688 |

Table 2: Cant terms related to food, drink, or the state of being drunk in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

⁵ The definition for *rumm nab* has been extracted from the glossary in *The Squire of Alsatia*.

The lexicographic importance of *The Squire of Alsatia* is likewise manifested when we consider some of the words in Table 2. *Bowsy*, which is not considered cant in the *OED*, and *clear* are first documented as part of this specific variety in the play; and *bumper* has also some interesting aspects worth remarking. Whilst the *OED* does not mark this term as a cant word, neither through labelling nor by relating it to any canting work, *LEME* quotes it for the first time in *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699), attesting to its belonging to the underworld variety. This suggests that the play antedates the records found for this word as characteristically cant in the *OED* since *The Squire of Alsatia* constitutes its first recorded use as part of the canting tongue, thus contributing to the studies on canting lexicography.

3.3. Insults

| Cant term | Definition | <i>OED</i> | <i>LEME</i> |
|-----------------|--|------------|-------------|
| <i>Bubble</i> | 'One who may be or is 'bubbled'; dupe, a gull' | 1668 | 1688 |
| <i>Bully</i> | 'The 'gallant' or protector of a prostitute; one who lives by protecting prostitutes' | 1706 | 1699 |
| <i>Caravan</i> | 'An object of plunder' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Cod</i> | 'A slang appellation applied to persons, with various forces' | 1699 | 1699 |
| <i>Mobile</i> | 'The mob, the rabble; the common people, the populace' | 1676 | 1699 |
| <i>Prig</i> | 'A dandy, a fop' | 1676 | 1673 |
| <i>Prigster</i> | 'An excessively precise or particular person; (also more generally) an objectionable person' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Put</i> | 'A stupid or foolish person, a blockhead' | 1688 | 1699 |

Table 3: Cant terms related to insults in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

The Squire of Alsatia gives the first documentation for three of the words in Table 3: *caravan*, *prigster* and *put*. Moreover, although the OED does not label *bully*⁶ and *mobile* as cant, LEME cites them in *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699), acknowledging its canting nature. Besides, the term *cod* is also first documented in both the OED and LEME in *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699). As a result, these three words, just like *bumper* in the previous group, antedate the records of these two dictionaries since the terms could be observed already in 1688 in *The Squire of Alsatia*.

3.4. Prostitutes

| Cant term | Definition | OED | LEME |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------|------|
| <i>Blowing</i> | 'A wench, trull' | 1819 | 1688 |
| <i>Buttock</i> | 'A common strumpet' | 1673 | 1688 |
| <i>Convenient</i> | 'A mistress, concubine' | 1676 | 1688 |
| <i>Natural</i> | 'A mistress' | 1674 | 1688 |
| <i>Peculiar</i> | 'A man's wife or mistress' | 1615 | 1699 |
| <i>Pure</i> | 'A kept mistress' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Tackle</i> | 'A mistress' | 1688 | 1699 |

Table 4: Cant terms for 'prostitute' in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

The most remarkable words in Table 4, which includes the terms used for 'prostitute' in the play, are *blowing*, *convenient*, *natural*, *pure* and *tackle*, words that, again, are first attested in *The Squire of Alsatia*,

⁶ Although the term *bully* ('the 'gallant' or protector of a prostitute; one who lives by protecting prostitutes') is first documented in the OED in Defoe's *Jure Divino* (1706), the word had semantic nuances in different contexts, and thus, it is also reflected in a different entry which quotes it in Shadwell's *The Bury Fair* (1688) with the meaning 'a blustering 'gallant'; a bravo, hector, or swash-buckler'.

since *convenient* and *natural* are not labeled as cant or slang in the *OED*.

3.5. Money

| Cant term | Definition | <i>OED</i> | <i>LEME</i> |
|--------------------|---|------------|-------------|
| <i>Cole</i> | 'Money' | 1673 | 1673 |
| <i>Darby</i> | 'Ready money' | 1682 | 1688 |
| <i>Decus</i> | 'A crown-piece' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Equip</i> | 'In slang or jocular use, o present with a sum of money'' | 1699 | 1688 |
| <i>George</i> | 'A coin, spec. a half-crown' | 1660 | 1688 |
| <i>Hog</i> | 'A shilling' | 1673 | 1673 |
| <i>Meggs</i> | 'A guinea' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Rag</i> | 'A small or the smallest possible amount of money; (cant) a farthing' | 1592 | 1699 |
| <i>Ready</i> | 'Ready money, cash' | 1684 | 1688 |
| <i>Rhino</i> | 'Money' | 1628 | 1688 |
| <i>Rhinocercal</i> | 'Wealthy, rich' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Sice</i> | 'Sixpence' | 1660 | 1688 |
| <i>Smelts</i> | 'A half-guinea' | 1635 | 1688 |

Table 5: Cant terms related to money in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

The semantic field shown in Table 5 is the largest one; the terms concerning money are among the most used and repeated in Shadwell's work. This shows the importance that rogues gave to money in the play, and, presumably, in seventeenth-century England. Similar to previous cases, this group also contains terms which are recorded for the first time in *The Squire of Alsatia* by the *OED* and *LEME*: *decus*, *equip*, *meggs*, and *rhinocercal*.

3.6. Running away

| Cant term | Definition | OED | LEME |
|----------------|----------------------------|------|------|
| <i>Rubb</i> | 'To run away' ⁷ | 1673 | 1688 |
| <i>Scamper</i> | 'To run away' | 1687 | 1688 |
| <i>Scoure</i> | 'To run away' | 1592 | 1673 |

Table 6: Cant terms related to running away in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Table 6 contains the terms that Shadwell's rogues use as a synonym for 'run away'. Whilst the use of *rubb* and *scoure* in this play does not make a significant contribution to the study of canting lexicography since they appear attested as part of this variety in previous works, the word *scamper* deserves attention. Although its first citation in the OED dates from 1687, one year before *The Squire of Alsatia* appeared, this term is not labelled as a cant word. Nevertheless, LEME shows that *scamper* was used in cant language by citing it in *The Squire of Alsatia*, so its first documentation as a cant word is actually Shadwell's play.

3.7. Trickery

| Cant term | Definition | OED | LEME |
|-------------------|---|------|------|
| <i>Banter</i> | 'A pleasant way of prating, which seems in earnest, but is in jest, a sort of ridicule' ⁸ | 1688 | 1699 |
| <i>Cut a Sham</i> | 'To play a Rogue's trick' | 1700 | 1673 |
| <i>Doctor</i> | 'A false or loaded dice' | 1697 | 1688 |
| <i>Sealer</i> | 'One that gives bonds and judgments for goods and money' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Sharper</i> | 'A cheat, swindler, rogue; one who lives by his wits and by taking advantage of the simplicity of others; | 1681 | 1688 |

⁷ The definitions for *rubb*, *scamper* and *scoure* are taken from the glossary in *The Squire of Alsatia*.

⁸ The definitions for *banter* and *to cut a sham* are taken from *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699). The definition for *sealer* has been extracted from the glossary in *The Squire of Alsatia*.

| | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| | esp. a fraudulent gamester' | | |
| <i>Tatt</i> | 'Dice; esp. false or loaded dice' | 1688 | 1699 |
| <i>Tatmonger</i> | 'Sharper who uses false dice' | 1688 | 1688 |

Table 7: Cant terms related to trickery in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

The Squire of Alsatia provides the first citation for five of the words in Table 7: *banter*, *doctor*, *sealer*, *tatt*, and *tatmonger*. As in previous cases, although *sharper* first appears in 1681 in the *OED*, it is not considered a cant term, so its first documentation as such is, again, provided by Shadwell's play in *LEME*.

3.8. Violence

| Cant term | Definition | <i>OED</i> | <i>LEME</i> |
|-----------------|--|------------|-------------|
| <i>Lugg out</i> | 'To pull, give a pull to give, to pull by (the ear, hair, etc.)' | 1684 | 1688 |
| <i>Porker</i> | 'A sword' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Sock</i> | 'A blow; a beating' | 1699 | 1699 |
| <i>Tilter</i> | 'A rapier or sword' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Whip</i> | 'To pierce with a sword-thrust, to run through' | 1699 | – |

Table 8: Cant terms related to violence in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Table 8 includes terms for violent actions and the objects used to undertake them —swords. Here, both *porker* and *tilter* are first quoted from the play both in the *OED* and *LEME*, thus acknowledging the relevance of *The Squire of Alsatia* in cant studies. In addition, two of these terms are first documented in *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699): *sock* and *whip*. However, these words were already used by Shadwell in *The Squire of Alsatia* in 1688, thus again, antedating the findings of both *OED* and *LEME*.

3.9. Others

| Cant term | Definition | OED | LEME |
|---------------------------------|---|------|------|
| <i>A Bolter of White-Fryers</i> | 'One that does but peep out of White-Fryers, and retire again like a rabbit out of his hole' ⁹ | 1699 | 1688 |
| <i>Alsatia</i> | 'The precinct of Whitefriars in London, where debtors and criminals were immune from arrest' | 1676 | 1688 |
| <i>Crump</i> | 'One that helps Sollicitors to Affidavit-men' | 1699 | 1699 |
| <i>Ogling</i> | 'The action of ogle v.; the giving of admiring, amorous, flirtatious, or lecherous looks' | 1682 | 1699 |
| <i>Sharp</i> | 'Subtle' | – | 1688 |
| <i>Smoaky</i> | 'Quick to suspect or take note; shrewd, sharp, suspicious' | 1688 | 1688 |
| <i>Trout</i> | 'A confidential friend or servant' | 1661 | 1699 |

Table 9: Other cant terms in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)

Finally, Table 9 includes seven terms which do not fit in any of the previous semantic fields. The expression *a bolter of White-fryers* and the words *sharp* and *smoaky* are documented for the first time in *The Squire of Alsatia*. In addition, *crump* and *ogling* antedate the records in the OED and LEME; both of them appear documented as cant terms in 1699, (since the OED does not label *ogling* as cant), when Shadwell had already used them in his rogue play.

5. Conclusions

In this study, I have proposed a linguistic and lexicographic approach to cant language in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688). By means of the analysis of the canting lexical repertoire used in this play, it has been possible to gain valuable insight into seventeenth-century

⁹ The definition for *a bolter of White-Fryers* has been taken from the glossary in *The Squire of Alsatia*, whilst the one for *crump* has been extracted from *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699).

canting tongue in England, as well as acknowledging the importance of Shadwell's play in studies on canting lexicography. The survey of the data has shown that the relevance of *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) lies not only in the amount of cant terms that it contains, but also in the important number of earliest lexicographic documentations that the play provides for many of them. Of a total of sixty-three, up to thirty-seven terms such as *tattler*, *clear*, *caravan*, *blowing*, etc., are first attested in the play: 58.7% of the total number of cant words used by Shadwell. Furthermore, of these first documented terms, eight of them —*bully*, *bumper*, *cod*, *crump*, *mobile*, *ogling*, *sock* and *whip*—antedate the records found in the *OED* and *LEME*, shedding further light on the historical conception of this underworld variety. Remarkably, all the words employed in the play appear documented in other works, either in previous or later citations, such as Richard Head's *The Canting Academy* (1673) and B.E.'s *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699). That, together with the author's knowledge of the register, undoubtedly demonstrates the reliability of the play as a representation of early modern English cant and reinforces its importance and validity in cant studies. Taken together, these facts show the relevance of *The Squire of Alsatia* to canting lexicography and, more importantly, make a significant contribution to the study of cant language in early modern England, filling some existing gaps that may allow us to undertake more comprehensive studies in the field.

6. Appendix

Clothing

| Cant term | <i>OED</i> | <i>LEME</i> ¹⁰ |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Famble</i> | sv. <i>famble</i> n ¹ . 2 | <i>TCA</i> |
| <i>Joseph</i> | sv. <i>joseph</i> n. 2 | <i>DTCC</i> |
| <i>Rigging</i> | sv. <i>rigging</i> n ² . 3 | <i>TSA</i> |
| <i>Rumm Nab</i> | – | <i>TSA</i> |

¹⁰ In what follows, the acronyms *TCA*, *TSA*, and *DTCC* will be used for Richard Head's *The Canting Academy* (1673), Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), and B.E. *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699), respectively.

| | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Scout</i> | sv. scout n ⁴ . 4.b | TCA |
| <i>Tattler</i> | sv. tattler n. 2 | TSA |

Table 10: Cant terms related to clothing in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Food and Drink (or the State of Being Drunk)

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|---------------|--------------------------------|------|
| <i>Bowsy</i> | sv. boozy adj ¹ . 1 | TSA |
| <i>Bumper</i> | sv. bumper n ¹ . 1 | DTCC |
| <i>Clear</i> | sv. clear adj. A. V. 24 | TSA |
| <i>Facer</i> | sv. facer n. 2 | DTCC |
| <i>Prog</i> | sv. prog n ² . 2.a | TSA |

Table 11: Cant terms related to food, drink, or the state of being drunk in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Insults

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|------|
| <i>Bubble</i> | sv. bubble n. 5 | TSA |
| <i>Bully</i> | sv. bully n ¹ . II. 4. | DTCC |
| <i>Caravan</i> | sv. caravan n. 1.b | TSA |
| <i>Cod</i> | sv. cod n ⁵ . 1 | DTCC |
| <i>Mobile</i> | sv. mobile n ² . | DTCC |
| <i>Prig</i> | sv. prig n ³ . A. II. 3 | TCA |
| <i>Prigster</i> | sv. prigster n. 2 | TSA |
| <i>Put</i> | sv. put n ³ . | DCTT |

Table 12: Cant terms related to insults in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Prostitutes

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------|
| <i>Blowing</i> | sv. blowen n. | TSA |
| <i>Buttock</i> | sv. buttock n. 5 | TSA |
| <i>Convenient</i> | sv. convenient n. B. 3 | TSA |
| <i>Natural</i> | sv. natural n ¹ . II. 8.b | TSA |
| <i>Peculiar</i> | sv. peculiar n. B. 3.d | DTCC |
| <i>Pure</i> | sv. pure n. C. 4 | TSA |
| <i>Tackle</i> | sv. tackle n. 7 | DTCC |

Table 13: Cant terms for 'prostitute' in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).**Money**

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|------|
| <i>Cole</i> | sv. cole n ³ . | TCA |
| <i>Darby</i> | sv. darby n. 3 | TSA |
| <i>Decus</i> | sv. decus n. | TSA |
| <i>Equip</i> | sv. equip v. 2.b | TSA |
| <i>George</i> | sv. george n. 2.a | TSA |
| <i>Hog</i> | sv. hog n ¹ . IV. 11.a | TCA |
| <i>Meggs</i> | sv. meg n ² . 1 | TSA |
| <i>Rag</i> | sv. rag n ² . II. 6.c | DTCC |
| <i>Ready</i> | sv. ready n. D. 1 | TSA |
| <i>Rhino</i> | sv. rhino n ¹ . | TSA |
| <i>Rhinocercal</i> | sv. rhinocercal adj. 1 | TSA |
| <i>Sice</i> | sv. sice n. 3 | TSA |
| <i>Smelts</i> | sv. smelt n ² . | TSA |

Table 14: Cant terms related to money in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Running away

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|----------------|--------------------------------|------|
| <i>Rubb</i> | sv. rub n ³ . | TSA |
| <i>Scamper</i> | sv. scamper v. 1 | TSA |
| <i>Scoure</i> | sv. scour v ¹ . 1.c | TCA |

Table 15: Cant terms related to running away in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Trickery

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|------|
| <i>Banter</i> | sv. banter v. 5 | DTCC |
| <i>Cut a Sham</i> | sv. sham n ¹ . A. 1.a | TCA |
| <i>Doctor</i> | sv. doctor n. 12 | TSA |
| <i>Sealer</i> | sv. sealer n ¹ . 4 | TSA |
| <i>Sharper</i> | sv. sharper n ¹ . 2 | TSA |
| <i>Tatt</i> | sv. tat n ¹ . 1 | DTCC |
| <i>Tatmonger</i> | sv. tat-monger n. | TSA |

Table 16: Cant terms related to trickery in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Violence

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|------|
| <i>Lugg out</i> | sv. lug v. 5.b | TSA |
| <i>Porker</i> | sv. porker n. 2 | TSA |
| <i>Sock</i> | sv. sock n ⁴ . 1 | DTCC |
| <i>Tilter</i> | sv. tilter n ¹ . 1.b | TSA |
| <i>Whip</i> | sv. whip v. I. 3 | – |

Table 17: Cant terms related to violence in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Others

| Cant term | OED | LEME |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|
| <i>A Bolter of White-Fryers</i> | sv. bolter n ² . 1.b | TSA |
| <i>Alsatia</i> | sv. alsatia n. 1 | TSA |
| <i>Crump</i> | sv. crump n ³ . | DTCC |
| <i>Ogling</i> | sv. ogling n. | DTCC |
| <i>Sharp</i> | – | TSA |
| <i>Smoaky</i> | sv smoky adj. A. 10 | TSA |
| <i>Trout</i> | sv. trout n ¹ . 4.a | DTCC |

Table 18: Other cant terms in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)

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How to cite this note:

Schintu, Paula. "'The Mobile Shall Worship Thee': Cant language in Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)." *SEDERI* 26 (2016): 175–93.

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Submission: 29/11/2015

Acceptance: 30/03/2016