



VNIVERSIDAD
D SALAMANCA

CAMPUS DE EXCELENCIA INTERNACIONAL



FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

A linguistic analysis of cant language in
Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of
Alsatia* (1688)

Paula Schintu Martínez

Fco. Javier Ruano García

Salamanca, 2014



VNIVERSIDAD
D SALAMANCA

CAMPUS DE EXCELENCIA INTERNACIONAL



FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

A linguistic analysis of cant language in
Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of*
Alsatia (1688)

This thesis is submitted for the degree of English Studies

Date: 23 June 2014

Tutor: Fco. Javier Ruano García

Vº Bº

Signature

Table of contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Early Modern England and the Underworld: Thomas Shadwell and <i>The Squire of Alsatia</i> (1688)	6
3. Cant Language and Thomas Shadwell's <i>The Squire of Alsatia</i> (1688).....	9
3.1. English and the Underworld in Early Modern England: A Definition of <i>Cant</i> .	9
3.2. Cant in <i>The Squire of Alsatia</i> (1688): Some Lexicographic and Semantic	
Notes.....	11
4. The Function of Cant Language in <i>The Squire of Alsatia</i> (1688): The Creation of an In-group	18
4.1. Internal Functioning of the In-group: Cant Language and Social Hierarchy ..	19
4.2. External Functioning of the In-group: A Closed Community	23
4.3. Outsiders' Perception of the In-group: A Reflection of Early Modern English Reality	24
5. Conclusions	26
6. Bibliography	27
7. Appendix: Glossary Entries.....	29

Abstract

This BA thesis focuses on the representation of cant language in Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688). The Early Modern English period was a fruitful time in the depiction of rogues and criminals' language and lifestyle, which led to the publication of literary works and glossaries on the subject. *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) contains an important number of cant terms which are first documented in this play that is a pivotal text in later studies of canting lexicography. Moreover, its use of the canting tongue allows us to gain insight both into the function that this variety had within the alternative society it created, and also into the functioning of this community. In addition, *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) proves to be a portrayal of the 17th century linguistic setting, in which the debate between Standard English and other varieties such as cant was the order of the day.

Key words: Thomas Shadwell, *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), Early Modern English, cant, canting lexicography.

Resumen

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado se centra en la representación del argot en la obra de Thomas Shadwell *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688). El Inglés Moderno Temprano fue un periodo muy fructífero en la representación del lenguaje y el estilo de vida de los vagabundos y criminales, lo que llevó a la publicación de obras literarias y glosarios sobre el tema. *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) contiene un gran número de ejemplos de argot que se documentan por primera vez en esta obra, lo que la convierte en un texto clave en posteriores estudios de lexicografía del argot. Además, su uso de esta variedad nos permite entender tanto la función que tenía dentro de la sociedad alternativa que creaba, como el funcionamiento de esta comunidad. Por otro lado, *The Squire of Alsatia*

demuestra ser un retrato del escenario lingüístico del siglo XVII, en el que el debate entre el inglés estándar y otras variedades como el argot estaba a la orden del día.

Palabras clave: Thomas Shadwell, *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), Inglés Moderno Temprano, argot, lexicografía del argot.

1. Introduction

The period from the 16th century onwards saw a sudden emergence of plays belonging to what is called roguish literature. These plays dealt with the life of beggars and lawbreakers whose activities were mainly robbery, trickery and deception. The element around which these communities were organized was their language, cant, which became a major concern for many writers of the period who attached glossaries to their works for the benefit of those who were not familiar with cant. One of these writers was Thomas Shadwell (1640-1692), who, in 1688, wrote a play called *The Squire of Alsatia*, which is the focus of this BA thesis. This play is a pivotal text in canting lexicography since it contains a great number of cant terms, (used in context in its dialogues), allowing us to see their actual usage and how the rogues' society was shaped around them.

The aim of this BA thesis is to explore the use cant language in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) from a linguistic, lexicographic and historical sociolinguistic point of view, in order to prove the relevance of the play in cant studies and its reliability as a historical portrait of the linguistic setting of 17th century England. To do so, in the first part, I will explain the socio-historical background concerning Early Modern England and the author of the play. Then, I will focus on the nature of cant language and I will examine the specific terms used in *The Squire of Alsatia* to make a linguistic study of the play. To do this, I have compiled a corpus of 63 cant words used in the play that I have organized thanks to the information provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and the database *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (*LEME*). I have divided the corpus into several sub-corpora in which the terms have been classified according to semantic criteria to comment on the most relevant examples from a semantic and lexicographic point of view (terms which are first documented in the play, for example).

I will then explore the use of cant language in the play to determine its role as an in-group marker, and how *The Squire of Alsatia*'s fictional world and its linguistic setting can provide extralinguistic information about the reality of Early Modern England. Finally, I have included an Appendix with 11 glossary entries for the most relevant cant terms of the corpus. I have relied on the *OED* and *LEME* for the etymological, morphological, semantic and lexicographic information of each of the glossary entries.

2. Early Modern England and the Underworld: Thomas Shadwell and *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)

In the 16th century, vagrancy and criminality increased in England and, although they existed before, it was around this period that rogues and pickpockets became numerous and threatening. This dramatic increase is reported in many documents of the time, showing that in 1569, for example, the number of rogues and unemployed men ascended to around 13000 people in England (Gotti 6). This sudden rise had to do with certain socio-economic reasons such as unemployment and its subsequent impoverishment which led to vagrancy and crime (But 3), or, as Gotti points out, the sudden growth of population, especially in London, which became a shelter 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. (11)

So, from the 16th century onwards, the English population was divided into the world of orderly workers and a secret and threatening underworld composed by numerous rogues, beggars and criminals (Staves 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 2). One of the first in doing it was Thomas Harman in his *Caveat or Warening for Commen Cursetors* (1567), who tried to reflect his contemporary situation as accurately

as possible (Gaby 403), and started recording the words that rogues used in order to warn the population about their dangers. However, many Early Modern English writers saw in this prevailing concern about the criminal underworld a source of personal profit since people also seemed to be fascinated and attracted by the unknown. The mysterious nature of criminal societies made this emergent underworld literature “an object of aristocratic pleasure” (Blank 58), and writers began to appropriate or even invent the underworld sociolects to prove their supposed mastery on alien languages and cultures and this way improve their sales (Blank 34, 38). Thus, as Coleman argues, the dangerously appealing rogues, their lifestyle and their language soon started to populate Early Modern English literature and the emerging cant and slang glossaries associated with it (19).

Among these Early Modern English writers who obtained great success through the use of roguish literature was Thomas Shadwell, born in Norfolk around 1640. He was one of the eleven children born in a well-positioned 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 an enormous success. He was appointed poet laureate in 1689 and died from an opium overdose in November 1692 (Bennett). One of the most interesting features of Shadwell's writing is his skill with language, which can be proved 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* we are able to observe not only the Standard variety of English used at the time, but also the Northern dialect

(through the character of Lolpoop) and, more interestingly, cant language, which will be the subject of this study. The source of his familiarity with this underworld variety is not very clear, but it may derive from his years of education. As Hand Browne explains (258-259), Shadwell was a Templar, that is, a law student in the Middle Temple. Templars had a close relationship with “the lawless crew that infested the adjoining purlieus of White Friars”. This area, which bordered on 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, including Shadwell, lived, and White Friars were separated only by a wall, and thus, a peculiar alliance was established 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. His knowledge of the English criminal life and his enthusiasm for, in his own words, “fools, knaves, strumpets or cowards, who are the people I deal most with in Comedies” (Hand Browne 262), make him a very interesting author as far as roguish literature is concerned. In fact, he wrote a play like *The Squire of Alsatia*, which allows us to gain insight into the linguistic features of cant language and into the functioning of the social communities constituted by rogues and lawbreakers in Early Modern England.

3. Cant Language and Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)

3.1. English and the Underworld in Early Modern England: A Definition of *Cant*

In 1567, Thomas Harman 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 seized the streets. In order to reveal their tricks, he provided his readers with a short glossary containing words of “the lewd, lousy language of these loitering lusks and lazy lorels” which would make him, inadvertently, the founder of canting lexicography. From Harman's list onwards, many glossaries and dictionaries devoted to cant have appeared which have received extensively scholarly attention (Coleman; Blank 33-68; Gotti).

But, what is meant by *cant*? According to Paula Blank, the canting language is “the dialect of a criminal underworld” (53). Julie Coleman offers a more thorough definition: cant is “the language used by beggars and criminals to hide their dishonest and illegal activities from potential victims” (4). Thus, cant is not only a distinct variety used by Early Modern rogues and criminals to communicate between them, but one chosen for very specific purposes: trickery and deception. Even though Early Modern rogues were, in most cases, proficient in Standard English, they consciously decided to use their secret language to their advantage.

However, the definition of cant is not so clearly demarcated. As Coleman points out, there is no general agreement between Early Modern English lexicographers concerning the nature of cant (5). Many of them have argued through the years that cant is a separate language different from English, and not a register, as Coleman herself claims (5). She also acknowledges the possible reasons for that idea: on the one hand, Early Modern English lexicographers have given cant the status of a separate language

in order to improve the sales of what they called dictionaries (a more appealing name than glossaries or selection of words) of the canting tongue (more attractive and intimidating than a mere register of English). On the other hand, sometimes lexicographers did not draw a distinction between English rogues and Gypsies. Consequently, Gypsies' Romany, which is a language, and cant, a register, were confused, placing cant in a position in which it should not be (5). In addition, many authors even regarded English cant as an attempt to imitate the language of the Gypsies since both subcultures shared similar lifestyles and activities, making it easy to associate them in their contemporaries' minds (Blank 61). Moreover, cant has often been identified with another register of English: jargon. Authors like Robert Greene have suggested that cant should be considered a jargon due to their similarities (Blank 54). Jargon and cant were "developed by the same class of society and to serve the same purpose" (Webster 231). Both of them were used by specific subgroups of society to speak about their own issues, excluding outsiders, who were not able to understand their "secret language"; both can "display knowledge without sharing it" (Coleman 4). However, Julie Coleman makes a very clear distinction between jargon and cant: while jargon is used by professionals or people with similar interests, cant is used specifically by rogues, criminals, and its main function is deception and concealment (4).

Then, going back to Coleman's definition, 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 the people. 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 what is called an in-group, a social group to which its members feel emotionally attached. So, through cant, Early Modern England rogues created

alternative communities, subcultures, in-groups, which had their own rules, manners and lifestyles (Gaby 401).

3.2. Cant in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688): Some Lexicographic and Semantic Notes

When Thomas Shadwell wrote *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), he could not imagine that it would become such an important piece in later studies about cant. The short list of cant terms that Shadwell included with the only aim of enabling his readers to understand some of his characters has become an object of study for lexicographers, and one of the sources for many dictionaries on the subject. This 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* may exemplify this: ‘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 dialogues of Shadwell’s play. As I have previously stated, *The Squire of Alsatia* is a pivotal text in the study of canting lexicography, which may be explained on account of both the important number of cant words that it includes, and the fact that it provides the first documentation for many of them, or their first recorded use in English.

In this section I analyse the type of words used in *The Squire of Alsatia* and their lexicographic potential by comparing the results found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (*LEME*). In this manner, I will explore the reliability of the text as a portrayal of the Early Modern English canting tongue to gain an insight into Early Modern England cant, social groups, etc. Since “canting language was expressive of the disorderly conduct of its speakers” (Blank 54), all the

terms appearing in *The Squire of Alsatia* have to do with the rogues' fields of interest. Thus, I have arranged them in the following eight semantic fields: clothing, food and drink (or being drunk), insults, prostitutes, money, running away, trickery, and violence; which coincide with the glossary semantic fields.

3.2.1. Clothing:

This group of words refers both to clothing and jewellery. It includes six terms, five of which were listed by Shadwell in his glossary (*famble* 'a ring'; *rigging* 'an item of clothing; (more usually) clothing, dress'; *rumm nab*, defined in Shadwell's glossary as 'a good beaver'; *scout* 'used allusively for 'watch' = pocket timepiece'; and *tattler* 'a striking watch, a repeater; a watch in general'), and one which does not appear in his list but in his dialogues: *joseph* 'a long cloak, worn chiefly by women in the eighteenth century when riding, and on other occasions; it was buttoned all the way down the front and had a small cape'.¹ *The Squire of Alsatia* is quoted as the first documentation for *tattler* both in the *OED* and *LEME*. The word *rigging* is also worth commenting (see Appendix). Although the *OED* first cites it in 1664, before the publication of Shadwell's play, it does not label it as a cant or slang word. On the contrary, *LEME*'s first citation for *rigging* belongs to *The Squire of Alsatia*, where it is specifically listed as a cant word. Also, *LEME*'s second citation is from *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699), proving the cant nature of the term.

3.2.2. Food and drink (or being drunk):

This group contains five words: one about food (*prog* 'food; esp. provisions for a journey or excursion; (also) a quantity of food, a meal'), two for drinks (*bumper* 'a cup or glass of wine, etc., filled to the brim, esp. when drunk as a toast', and *facer* 'a

¹ All definitions have been taken from the *OED* unless otherwise indicated.

large cup or tankard, esp. such a cup filled to the brim’, which are not listed in Shadwell’s glossary), and two for the state of being drunk: *bowsy* ‘showing the effects of boozing or intoxication; influenced or affected by much drinking’, and *clear* ‘very drunk’. The lexicographic importance of this play is likewise manifested when we consider some of these words. *LEME* gives the first citation for *bowsy* in *The Squire of Alsatia*; and both the *OED* and *LEME* first document the term *clear* in Shadwell’s play. *Bumper* has also some interesting aspects to remark (see Appendix). Something similar to the case of *rigging* (see above) applies to this term. While the *OED* does not mark *bumper* as a cant word, *LEME* quotes it for the first time in *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699), that labels it as a cant term.

3.2.3. Insults:

Shadwell includes eight insults in the vocabulary of his rogues: *bubble* ‘one who may be or is ‘bubbled’; a dupe, a gull’; *bully* ‘the ‘gallant’ or protector of a prostitute; one who lives by protecting prostitutes’; *caravan* ‘an object of plunder’; *cod* ‘a slang appellation applied to persons, with various forces’; *mobile* ‘the mob, the rabble; the common people, the populace’; *prig* ‘a dandy, a fop’; *prigster* ‘an excessively precise or particular person; (also more generally) an objectionable person’; and *put* ‘a stupid or foolish person, a blockhead’. *The Squire of Alsatia* gives the first documentation for three of these words: *caravan*, *prigster* (in both the *OED* and *LEME*), and *put* (in the *OED*). In addition, *bully* and *mobile* (see Appendix), which do not appear in Shadwell’s glossary, are specifically marked as cant in *LEME* since it cites them in *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699). As in previous cases, the *OED* does not mention the cant nature of these words. Moreover, the term *cod*, (see Appendix), is first documented in both the *OED* and *LEME* in *A New*

Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew (1699), while we already find it in 1688 in *The Squire of Alsatia*.

3.2.4. Prostitutes:

Blowing, buttock, convenient, natural, pure and *tackle* are the six words that Shadwell gives in his glossary for ‘several names for a mistress, or rather a whore’. There is one more cant word in the dialogues used with the same meaning: *peculiar*. The most remarkable words of this semantic field are *blowing, pure* and *tackle* that, again, are first attested in the play. This confirms the importance of *The Squire of Alsatia* in the studies of English cant.

3.2.5. Money:

This semantic field is the largest one; the terms concerning money are among the most used and repeated in the play. This shows the importance that rogues gave to money in the play, and, presumably, in 17th century society. We can find thirteen words, one of which (*rag* ‘a small or the smallest possible amount of money; (cant) a farthing’) is not included in the glossary that precedes the play. As in the previous cases, this semantic field contains terms which are recorded for the first time in *The Squire of Alsatia* by the *OED* and *LEME*: *decus* ‘a crown-piece’, *meggs* ‘a guinea’, and *rhinocerical* ‘wealthy, rich’. The remaining cant words (*cole* ‘money’, *darby* ‘ready money’, *equip* ‘to supply with the pecuniary resources needful for any undertaking. Formerly also in slang or jocular use, to present with a sum of money’, *george* ‘a coin, spec. a half-crown’, *hog* ‘a shilling’, *rag ready*, ‘ready money, cash’, *rhino* ‘money’, *sice* ‘sixpence’ and *smelts* ‘a half-guinea’) are first documented in previous works like Richard Head’s *Canting Academy* (1673) or T. Otway’s *Atheist* (1684).

3.2.6. Running away:

As criminals had to escape from justice very frequently, their vocabulary included words expressing it. *Rubb*, *scamper* and *scoure* are the words that Shadwell lists for ‘to run away’ in his glossary. While *rubb* and *scoure* are not very interesting from a lexicographic point of view, *scamper* is a term which is worth mentioning (see Appendix). Although its first citation in the *OED* is from 1687, one year before *The Squire of Alsatia* appeared, this word is not labeled as a cant term. Nevertheless, *LEME* shows that *scamper* was used in cant language by citing it in both *The Squire of Alsatia* and *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699).

3.2.7. Trickery:

This group consists of seven terms. Five of them are included in the author’s glossary: *doctor* ‘a false or loaded die’, *sealer* ‘one that gives bonds and judgments for goods and money’ (Shadwell S.V.), *sharper* ‘a cheat, swindler, rogue; one who lives by his wits and by taking advantage of the simplicity of others; esp. a fraudulent gamester’, *tatt* ‘dice; esp. false or loaded dice’ and *tatmonger* ‘a sharper who uses false dice’; and two which are not included in Shadwell’s list: *banter* ‘a pleasant way of prating, which seems in earnest, but is in jest, a sort of ridicule’ and the expression *to cut a sham* ‘to play a Rogue’s trick’². Shadwell’s play provides the first citation for five of these words: *banter*, *tatt* (*OED*), *doctor* (*LEME*), *sealer* and *tatmonger* (*OED* and *LEME*). *Sharper* (see Appendix) is recorded as a cant term by *LEME*, which first cites it in *The Squire of Alsatia*, but not by the *OED*.

² The definitions for *banter*, *to cut a sham* and *crump* (later in page 16) have been taken from *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699).

3.2.8. Violence:

This group includes terms for violent actions (*lugg out* ‘to pull, give a pull to, to pull by (the ear, hair, etc.); to tease, worry, bait (a bear, bull, etc.)’, *sock* ‘a blow; a beating’ and *whip* ‘to pierce with a sword-thrust; to run through’), and for objects to carry out these violent actions: *porker* ‘a sword’ and *tilter* ‘a rapier or sword’. The latter two are first quoted from the play both in the *OED* and *LEME*, showing again 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* in both the *OED* and *LEME*, and *whip* in the *OED* (see Appendix). However, these words were already used by Shadwell in his play *The Squire of Alsatia* in 1688.

3.2.9. Others:

There are four terms which do not fit in any of the previous semantic fields, and all of them are glossed by Shadwell: *Alsatia* ‘the precinct of Whitefriars in London, where debtors and criminals were immune from arrest’, *a bolter of White-fryers*, *sharp* ‘subtle’ (Shadwell S.V.) and *smoaky* ‘quick to suspect or take note; shrewd, sharp, suspicious’. The expression *a bolter of White-fryers*, defined by Shadwell himself as ‘one that does but peep out of White-Fryers, and retire again like a rabbit out of his hole’, and the word *sharp*, are first cited in the play by *LEME*. *Smoaky* is also documented for the first time in *The Squire of Alsatia*, in this case both in the *OED* and *LEME*. In addition, there are three more terms which do not appear in the glossary and cannot be included in any semantic field: *trout* ‘a confidential friend or servant’, *crump* ‘one that helps Sollicitors to Affidavit-men, and Swearers, and Bail, who for a small Sum will be Bound or Swear for any Body; on that occasion, putting on good Cloaths to

make a good appearance, that Bail may be accepted’, and *ogling* ‘the action of ogle v.; the giving of admiring, amorous, flirtatious, or lecherous looks; an instance of this’. The latter two (see Appendix) appear as cant terms in *LEME*, but, as in previous cases, the *OED* does not label them as cant.

The lexicographic relevance of *The Squire of Alsatia* lies in the number of cant terms that it contains and in the important number of first lexicographic documentations that the play provides for many of them. It is worth noting, as Julie Coleman points out (149), that all the words that Shadwell used in his play appear documented in other works, either in previous or later citations. That demonstrates the reliability of the play as a representation of Early Modern English cant and reinforces its importance and validity in cant studies. Through *The Squire of Alsatia* we can gain insight into the actual usage of cant in the 17th century, and thus, we will be able to understand the functioning of these criminal communities, these in-groups, and how their members related to each other and to outsiders by means of their characteristic language.

4. The Function of Cant Language in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688): The Creation of an In-group

Canting language is hugely used in the dialogues of *The Squire of Alsatia*. However, not all the characters in the play employ this variety, only a minority of them does: the rogues. By speaking cant, these rogues communicate between them, but, in fact, they are doing much more than this; they are creating an in-group. As previously explained, an in-group is a speech community to which its members feel psychologically attached. They define themselves in terms of the community, and their lives function according to its rules. Language is the tool that in-group members in *The Squire of Alsatia* have to construct their alternative community and function within it.

The first thing worth noting is that criminals in Thomas Shadwell's play consciously choose to use cant. In spite of being proficient in Standard English, they tend to use their characteristic variety, and this is not casual. The rogues' deliberate linguistic obscurity has a twofold purpose: social distinction and the creation of an identity. The use of cant is a way of claiming their membership to their particular in-group and of distinguishing from the rest of the characters in the play who cannot understand their secret language and are, thus, outsiders. In addition, through this social distinction, the rogues in the play also create and shape their own identities. In-group members assume the characteristics of the community they want to be identified with and express their loyalty by means of language. So, the use of canting language in the play entails not only the creation of an in-group whose aim is social distinction, but also the creation of its members' identities.

4.1. Internal Functioning of the In-group: Cant Language and Social Hierarchy

The rogues that constitute the in-group in *The Squire of Alsatia* are Cheatly, Shamwell and Captain Hackum. Belfond Senior is introduced in their community during the play and, although the reason why the criminals accept him is their desire to defraud him, we could include him in this in-group. Canting language is the element around which this criminal society is organized, and by the use each character makes of this variety, we can learn about the rules and hierarchy that govern it. The power structure in this in-group is very clear, and it goes from Cheatly down to Belfond Senior.

4.1.1. Cheatly:

This character is the most powerful rogue in the community, and we know it due to his use of language. He is easily identifiable with what Paula Blank calls “the braggart-linguist”, a recurrent figure in Early Modern English roguish comedies (48). Cheatly, as a braggart-linguist, uses a great number of cant terms to distinguish from the other rogues, and usually translates his obscure language to those on the lowest ranks of his community (48). This could be exemplified in some of his dialogues with Belfond Senior:

Belf. Sen. *Cole?* Why 'tis Summer, I need no firing now. Besides I intend to burn Billets.

Cheat. My lusty Rustick, learn and be instructed. *Cole* is in the language of the Witty, Money. The *Ready*, the *Rhino*; thou shalt be *Rhinocercical*, my Lad, thou shalt. (Shadwell 2-3)

Here, Cheatly positions himself as a linguistic authority, as the head of the society of, in his own words, “the witty”, the wisest figure of the in-group. In addition, as a braggart-linguist, he “prefers several words where one will serve” (Blank 48), and thus, he uses many synonyms instead of using only one word: *cole*, *ready*, *rhino*. Cheatly is also regarded by the rest of his community as the highest authority in language and wits, and they accept his superiority and try to learn from him: “Sham. But Cheatly is a rare fellow: I'll speak a bold word, He shall *Cut a Sham or Banter* with the best Wit or Poet of'em all”; “Belf. Sen. But Mr. Cheatly 's a prodigy that's certain.” (Shadwell 2). John Awdeley describes this type of character as the “Jack Man”, a rogue who is able to read, write, and sometimes speak Latin and other foreign languages (Blank 55, 62). We are not certain whether Cheatly is literate or not; there is nothing in the play which indicates that, yet we know that he is familiar with some Latin expressions, and uses them to suit his purposes. On the one hand, this “Jack Man” uses Latin against Lolpoop, who is Belfond Senior’s servant:

Lolp. Hah, what sen you? yeow mistaken me: I am not Book-learn'd: I understand a not.

Cheat. No, 'tis the strangest thing! Why, put the Case you are indebted to me 20 l. upon a *Scire facias*: I extend this up to an Outlawry, upon Affidavit upon the *Nisi prius*: I plead to all this matter *Non est inventus* upon the Pannel; what is there to be done more in this Case, as it lies before the Bench, but to award out Execution upon the *Posse Comitatus*, who are presently to issue out a *Certiorari*. (Shadwell 5)

On the other hand, Cheatly includes Latin in his speech when talking to Sir William Belfond: “Your question consists of two terms: the one *ubi*, where” (Shadwell 32). Both

Lolpoop and Sir William are considered inferior since they come from the stereotyped North, from the country, whose speakers in Early Modern English literature were often imaged as barbarous and caricatured. Consequently, Cheatly employs Latin to boast and ridicule them, trying to mark his linguistic superiority off from those two characters. Cheatly's linguistic skills go beyond Standard English, cant and Latin; he also uses French expressions —“We'll swinge these Rogues with Indictments for a Riot, and with Actions *Sans Nombre*” (Shadwell 60) —, and is careful not to use cant when talking to people outside the in-group to whom he wants to appear like a gentleman: “Madam [to Mrs. Termagant], your most humble Servant: You see I am punctual to my Word” (Shadwell 43). Through language, Cheatly is clearly presented as the head of the in-group, the braggart-linguist, the “Jack Man”, but, most of all, as the example to be imitated by the other rogues.

4.1.2. Shamwell and Captain Hackum:

These characters follow Cheatly in the in-group power structure. They are proficient both in Standard English and in cant language, and their function in the play is basically to win the confidence of Belfond Senior and help Cheatly to deceive him. In order to do that, they make use of cant language and they teach Belfond Senior some terms: “Belf. Sen. Tatts, and Doctor! what's that? / Sham. The Tools of Sharpers, false Dice” (Shadwell 4).

4.1.3. Belfond Senior:

Belfond Senior is the lowest character in the in-group hierarchy. The three rogues want to take advantage of him, and thus, they introduce him in their society. Since he is not familiar with cant language, they teach him some words and lead him according to their lifestyle. Just like Lolpoop and Sir William Belfond, Belfond Senior

comes from the North of England, and therefore, Thomas Shadwell portrays him as an ignorant, manipulable character. For him, the three criminals are gentlemen; their language is understood as the finest variety, and when they teach him new terms, he is astonished by “the abundance of the prettiest witty words” (Shadwell 2). He soon begins to admire these undercover rogues and their language, especially the head of the in-group, Cheatly:

Belf. Sen. Well: adad, you are pleasant men: And have the neatest sayings with you: Ready, and Spruce Prigg, and abundance of the prettiest witty words.---But sure that Mr. Cheatly is as fine a Gentleman as any wears a Head: And as ingenious; ne'r stir I believe he would run down the best Scholar in Oxford, and put 'em in a Mouse-hole with his Wit. (Shadwell 2)

During the whole play, Belfond Senior is constantly trying to accommodate to his new in-group by using their variety, especially when talking to outsiders:

Belf. Sen. [to Sir William Belfond] No like a Grasier or a Butcher; if I had staid in the Country, I had never seen such a *Nab*, a *rum Nab*, such a Modish *Porker*, such spruce and neat Accoutrements; here is a *Tattle?* here's a *Famble*, and here's the *Cole*, the *Ready*, the *Rhino*, the *Darby*; I have a lusty *Cod Old Prigg*, I'd have thee know, and am very *Rhinocercical*, here are *Meggs* and *Smelts* good store, *Decuses* and *Georges*, the Land is Entail'd, and I will have my Snack of it while I am young, adad, I will. Hah! (Shadwell 56)

Belfond Senior uses a great number of canting terms in order to position himself within the in-group, sometimes, like in the previous quotation, employing excessive cant vocabulary, which creates a comic image of him. In addition, he tries to reaffirm his

membership to the community by mocking the characters that are not able to use cant, as is the case with his servant Lolpoop:

Belf. Sen. Look Sirrah, here's a show you Rogue: Here's a sight of *Cole*, *Darby*, the *Ready*, and the *Rhino*, you Rascal, you understand me not; you Loggerhead, you silly *Put*, you understand me not: Here are *Meggs* and *Smelts*: I ne're had such a sight of my own in my life. Here are more *Meggs* and *Smelts*, you Rogue; you understand me not.

Lolp. By'r Lady not I: I understand not this South-Country speech not I.
(Shadwell 23)

However, it is not Lolpoop who is being mocked here by the author, but Belfond Senior; he is becoming a comic character “who cannot command the “new” English, and is ridiculed for trying” (Blank 42).

This in-group internal functioning revolves around cant language, which is presented as a tool for social ascendancy within the community. The rogues in *The Squire of Alsatia* depend on language to create and maintain their identities, social position and bonds, and their use of cant marks their degree of involvement and loyalty to the group.

4.2. External Functioning of the In-group: A Closed Community

Since an in-group is an alternative community within a bigger context, it has to relate to society in some way. In-groups have different degrees of openness or closeness depending on how its members behave towards outsiders, so the rogues' attitudes will determine the nature of this particular subculture. Except from the cases in which these criminals have social or economic interests and avoid cant or explain how to use it (as

they do with Belfond Senior), they tend to stress the exclusivity of their society and separate from the general public through their language (But 9). As such, when Lolpoop, for example, tries to understand what they say, they increase the number of cant terms in their vocabulary in order to exclude him from the group. Similarly, when any of the rogues address Sir William Belfond or his cultivated son, Belfond Junior, they make sure they use as many cant words as possible to make their discourse almost unintelligible, and they mock their inability to understand cant. Consequently, the rogues' community is a closed in-group which aims to be restrictive and excludes the rest of the society by means of their variety.

4.3. Outsiders' Perception of the In-group: A Reflection of Early Modern English Reality

As explained in the previous point, an in-group has to relate to the context which surrounds it, but, in the same way, society judges and perceives it in some particular manner. In Shadwell's fictional society, the characters outside the criminals' subgroup have a negative view of the rogues, their community, and their language. Examples of this are the reactions that both Sir William Belfond and Belfond Junior have towards cant. Sir William contemptuously regards cant as "a particular Language which such Rogues have made to themselves, call'd Canting, as Beggars, Gipsies, Thieves and Jayl-Birds do" (Shadwell 10). Later in the play, when he meets again his older son, Belfond Senior, he is completely appalled by his use of cant, and regards him as "a most perfect downright Canting Rogue" and "a most confirm'd Alsatian Rogue" (Shadwell 56). Likewise, Belfond Junior has the same derogatory reaction when he notices that his brother "has got the Cant too" (Shadwell 39). The fact that Thomas Shadwell decided to reflect these reactions in his fictional world is very revealing. It gives us socio-linguistic information about his contemporaries' perception of cant language and makes us realize

that *The Squire of Alsatia* is a reflection of the 17th century linguistic setting in London. Sir William Belfond and Belfond Junior's attitudes show the author's own negative perception of cant language and its speakers. Thus, in his play, Shadwell advocates for the adoption of the language spoken by the non-roguish characters: Standard English, London English, "spoken by the 'superior sort'" (Blank 39). As the rogue characters show, cant was only well-regarded within the community in which it was used, that is, it had not public but covert prestige. So, through *The Squire of Alsatia* Thomas Shadwell provides us with a valuable testimony to the role of cant language as a social and linguistic phenomenon in the 17th century, and depicts an Early Modern England in which London English was the prestigious variety while the canting language and its speakers were rejected.

5. Conclusions

In this study, I have proposed a linguistic and historical sociolinguistic approach to Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688). I have tried to prove the relevance and reliability of the play in cant studies by showing the lexicographic potential of some of the cant terms used by Shadwell. The great number of words which are first attested in the play —*tattler*, *clear*, *caravan*, *blowing*, etc.— and the fact that all of them appear documented in other later works such as *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699), confirm both the importance and reliability of Shadwell's work in canting lexicography. Furthermore, I have attempted to demonstrate that the function of cant language in the play is to create an in-group that tries to mark itself off from the rest of the society, and also, to shape the identities of the in-group members. That is the case of, for example, the character of Cheatly, whose use of cant shows his desire to mark the exclusiveness of his community and helps to create his identity and his role as the head of the in-group, the braggart-linguist, the "Jack man". This way, I have explored the internal and external functioning of this community, examining how its social hierarchy or structure is clearly dependent on language, and how it is a closed in-group due to its desire to exclude the rest of London society, the outsiders. Finally, I have argued that Thomas Shadwell's fictional society is a reflection of the 17th century linguistic environment, in which Standard, London English held the public prestige while cant language was refused, being prestigious only among its speakers, the rogues.

6. Works cited

- Bennett, Kate, "Shadwell, Thomas (c.1640–1692)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Web. 14 February 2014.
- Blank, Paula. *Broken English. Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- But, Roxanne. "'A kind of gibberish used by thieves and gypsies": The social significance of 'cant' in the eighteenth century." Crime and the City symposium. Moot Court, School of Law, University of Sheffield. 4 February 2011. Conference Presentation.
- Coleman, Julie. *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries. Volume I: 1567-1784*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.
- Gaby, Rosemary. "Of Vagabonds and Commonwealths: Beggars' Bush, a Jovial Crew, and the Sisters." *Studies in English Literature* 34.2 (1994): 401-424. *Jstor*. Web. 25 February 2014.
- Gotti, Maurizio. *The Language of Thieves and Vagabonds: 17th and 18th Century Canting Lexicography in England*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999. Web.
- Hand Browne, Wm. "Thomas Shadwell." *The Sewanee Review* 21.3 (1913): 257-276. *Jstor*. Web. 27 February 2014.
- Lancashire, Ian, ed. *Lexicons of Early Modern English*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006—. Web. 2014.
- Profitt, Michael et al., eds. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000—. Web. 2014.

Shadwell, Thomas. *The Squire of Alsatia*. London: Printed by James Knapton, 1688.

Early English Books Online. Web. 2014.

Staves, Susan. "Recent Studies in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century." *Studies in*

English Literature 33.3 (1993): 659-703. *Jstor*. Web. 25 February 2014.

Webster, H. T. "The Canting Language: Some Notes on the Old Underworld Slang."

College English 4.4 (1943): 230-235. *Jstor*. Web. 25 February 2014.

7. Appendix: Glossary Entries

The following glossary entries include the most remarkable cant terms used in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) and exemplify the lexicographic relevance of the play, in which we are able to find instances that, for example, antedate the first records for these terms in the *OED* and *LEME* database. The structure of the glossary entries has been organised as follows:

Cant term [Etymology] *morphological category* ¶ *OED label (if available)*

LEME dictionaries definitions (if available). *OED* definitions (if available).

Example taken from *The Squire of Alsatia*

First documentation in *LEME* | First documentation in the *OED*.

Bully [Origin uncertain] *n.*

1699 B. E. *New Dict. Canting Crew. Bully*, *c.* a supposed Husband to a Bawd, or Whore; also a huffing Fellow. *OED*. n¹. II. 4. The ‘gallant’ or protector of a prostitute; one who lives by protecting prostitutes.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als.* I. [Cheat.] But thou must squeeze my Lad:
Squeeze hard, and Seal my *Bully*.

LEME B. E. *New Dict. Canting Crew.* (1699) | *OED* 1706 D. DEFOE *Jure Divino* I. 9.

Bumper [perhaps < *bump* n¹ < onomatopoeic, or *bump* v¹: with notion of a ‘bumping’, i.e. large, ‘thumping’ glass] *n.*

1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew. Bumper*, a full glass. *OED*. n¹. 1. A cup or glass of wine, etc., filled to the brim, esp. when drunk as a toast.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als.* IV. [Belf. Sen.] I have been drinking
Bumpers and *Facers* till I am almost Cleare.

LEME B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew* (1699) | *OED* 1677 T. D’URFEY *Madam Fickle* v.52.

Cod [In later times, apparently used as an abbreviation of *codger* n.; but it is very doubtful if this is the origin, since it appears much earlier than *codger*] n. ¶ *slang*.

1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*. *Cod*, a good sum of Money; also a Fool. *OED*. n⁵.

1. A slang appellation applied to persons, with various forces.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. IV. [Belf. Sen.] I have a lusty *Cod* Old Prigg.

LEME B. E. *New Dict. Canting Crew* (1699) | *OED* 1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*.

Crump [Compare *crimp* n² < origin uncertain] n. ¶ *Obs*.

1699 B. E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*. *Crump*, c. one that helps Sollicitors to Affidavit-men, and Swearers, and Bail, who for a small Sum will be Bound or Swear for any Body; on that occasion, putting on good Cloaths to make a good appearance, that Bail may be accepted. *OED*. n³.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. I. [Scrap.] I like the business well. I am going to the man you call *Crump*, who helpeth Sollicitors to Affidavit-men, and Swearers, and Bail.

LEME B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*. (1699) | *OED* 1699 B. E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*.

Mobile [Short for mobile vulgus n. or its etymon classical Latin *mōbile vulgus*] n. ¶ Chiefly *contemptuous*. *Obs*.

1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*. *Mobile*, the Vulgar, or Rabble. *OED*. n². The mob, the rabble; the common people, the populace.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. I. [Sham.] This morning your Cloaths and Liveries will come home, and thou shalt appear rich and splendid like thy self, and the *Mobile* shall worship thee.

LEME B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew* (1699) | *OED* 1676 T. SHADWELL *Libertine* v. 81.

Ogling [*ogle* v. < origin uncertain, + *-ing suffix*¹] *n.*

1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*. *Ogling*, c. casting a sheep's Eye at Handsom Women. *OED*. The action of *ogle* v.; the giving of admiring, amorous, flirtatious, or lecherous looks; an instance of this.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. I. [Cheat.] What *Ogling* there will be between thee and the Blowings : Old staring at thy Equipage .

LEME B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew* (1699) | *OED* 1682 T. SHADWELL *Tegue o Divelly*. (1691) II. Epil. 80.

Rigging [Origin uncertain; perhaps < *rig* v² < origin uncertain, + *-ing suffix*¹] *n.*

1688 T. SHADWELL. *Squire of Als*. *Rigging*. Cloathes. *OED*. n² 3. An item of clothing; (more usually) clothing, dress.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. II. [Belf. Sen.] Sirrah, behold me: here's *Rigging* for you; Here's a Nabb : you never saw such a one in your life.

LEME T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. (1688) | *OED* 1664 J. WILSON *Cheats* I.i.

Scamper [Origin uncertain] v. ¶ *Obs.*

1688 T. SHADWELL. *Squire of Als*. To *Scamper*, to rubb, to scowre. To run away. *OED*. 1. To run away, decamp, 'bolt'.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. I. [Hack.] I am ready to give you satisfaction: Lugg out; come you Putt: I'll make you *Scamper*.

LEME T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. (1688) | *OED* 1687 T. BROWN *Saints in Uproar in Wks*. (1720) I. 89.

Sharper [*sharp* v. < OE **scierpan*, *scępan*, *scyrpan*, + *-er suffix*¹] *n.*

1688 T. SHADWELL. *Squire of Als*. A *Sharper*. A Cheat. *OED*. n¹ 2. A cheat, swindler, rogue; one who lives by his wits and by taking advantage of the simplicity of others; esp. a fraudulent gamester.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. I. [Sham.] The Tools of *Sharper* , false Dice.

LEME T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. (1688) | *OED* 1681 N. LUTTRELL *Diary in Brief Hist. Relation State Affairs* (1857) I. 99.

Sock [Compare *sock* v² < origin uncertain] *n.* ¶ *slang.*

1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*. *Sock*, *c.* a Pocket; also to Beat. *OED*. n⁴. 1. A blow; a beating.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. I. [Hack.] But Squire, I had damn'd ill luck afterwards: I went up the Gaming Ordinary, and lost all my Ready; they left me not a Rag or *Sock*.

LEME B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew* (1699) | *OED* 1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*.

Whip [Origin uncertain] *v.* ¶ *Obs. slang.*

OED. 3. To pierce with a sword-thrust; to run through.

1688 T. SHADWELL *Squire of Als*. I. [Hack.] No man e're gave me such words, but forfeited his life; I could *whip* thee through the Lungs immediately.

OED 1699 B.E. *New Dict. Canting Crew*.