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## **Whigs on Stage**

### **Politics in Thomas Shadwell's Comedies**

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## Introduction

On the fifth of November 1688, the Dutch nobleman William of Orange landed in Torbay in England. In reaction to William's arrival, James II, then king of England, fled to France, where he started a war against William. The reason why William came to England was because Parliament sensed the danger of James II, whose inclinations to Catholicism and absolutism alarmed many English nobles. A Protestant nobleman, William was married to the English princess Mary Stuart, the daughter of James II. However contradictory, according to Parliament, William was considered a suitable candidate to rule England, and he was crowned William III in 1689. This event is also known as the Glorious Revolution, and according to popular Whig belief, the Revolution is thought to have brought stability to the country after a turbulent seventeenth century.

Preceding the Revolution were the Civil War and the Restoration of the monarchy with Charles II, who was crowned in 1660. After eighteen years of civil war, many aspects of society had changed after Charles's arrival. First of all, in terms of religion, the spectrum had expanded. As John Spurr explains in his article "England 1649-1750: Differences Contained?", the restoration of the Church of England entailed a division between Anglicans and a new category: the Dissenters (Spurr 7). This group of Dissenters was very wide and varied from Presbyterians to Quakers and Baptists (Spurr 7). Furthermore, Spurr also points out that this division was of political importance because the distinction confirmed that Anglicanism meant loyalty to the king, and Dissent meant "king-killing Puritanism" (7).

Additionally, politically the landscape changed drastically from the late 1670s onwards. While the English government existed already of a monarch ruling, in theory, together with Parliament, two separate political parties emerged in the late 1670s. The political changes were closely related to the religious changes because the polarity of these new parties, the Tories and the Whigs, was based mainly on differing religious beliefs rather

than organisation. In short, the Tories were conservative, Anglican and supported the king; whereas the Whigs wanted to minimise royal authority, considered themselves liberal and the defenders of Protestantism (Spurr 9). In this respect, Craig Rose says in his book *England in the 1690s* that the Whig and Tory parties should not be seen as twenty-first-century political institutions (63). Moreover, the political parties both had to contend with a head of government, who could have his or her own agenda, inclining to the party that suited the monarch's best interests (64). Yet, both parties were in an ongoing debate, and this strife manifested itself publicly through pamphleteering. Moreover, in a less extreme way, this strife was also noticeable in the theatre as some writers had their own political preferences.

However, for this study, the cultural changes that came with the Restoration are of more importance since this paper will focus on late-seventeenth-century theatre. During the Civil War, public performances had been banned, and when Charles was crowned, public theatre was revived after a hiatus of eighteen years. The drama that was produced after this period is also known as Restoration drama, but there is some discussion among critics about the exact periodization of the Restoration period. Robert Hume points out in his book *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* that, while the beginning of the Restoration period is the agreed date of 1660, some critics argue that this period ended in 1707, while others argue that it ended already in 1688 (4-6). Nevertheless, critics agree that the main theatrical changes that were introduced in the Restoration period are actresses on the stage, an increasing use of stage devices such as machines and music and dance on stage. In addition, it is commonly believed that a shift occurred from satirical drama to sentimental drama, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1.

The topic of this research paper is the seventeenth-century dramatist Thomas Shadwell. Even though he was poet laureate under William III and a successful playwright first appearing on stage in 1668 (Bennett par 5), far too little attention has been paid to the

writer. Thomas Shadwell was born of a Royalist family in Norfolk in 1640, and his family moved to Ireland shortly after the Restoration. Professionally, Shadwell was mainly a playwright and editor to other playwrights. Additionally, since Shadwell was musically trained, music became an integral part of his plays (Bennett par. 8). He worked with several musicians, including Henry Purcell, to produce music for his plays, but also for other playwrights such as John Dryden. Initially, Shadwell and Dryden edited each other's plays, but in 1674 they had an argument regarding the purpose of theatre. For Dryden, the main purpose of drama was to entertain, but for Shadwell drama should also have a moral and educational dimension (Bennett par 9). This argument led the two authors to satirise each other, and the most famous satire on Shadwell is Dryden's *MacFlecknoe*, which slandered Shadwell's reputation for the following four hundred years.

However, also politically the playwrights were in discord. While Dryden was the most important Tory writer, Shadwell was an ardent Whig activist. As the leader of the Whig propaganda club *The Green Ribbon Club*, he was known for his radical anti-Catholic pamphlets under Charles II. Eventually, these controversial pamphlets, together with the comedy *The Lancashire Witches* resulted in a seven-year's writing ban from 1681 until 1688 (Wheatley 342). However, after this ban, Shadwell made a successful comeback with the play *The Squire of Alsatia*. As a result of its success, Shadwell was appointed poet laureate to William III. According to Shadwell critic Albert Borgman, it was said that when the Earl of Dorset was asked why he had appointed Shadwell, he replied: "I do not pretend to say how great a poet Shadwell may be, but I am sure he is an honest man" (78). However, it could be argued that the appointment was a tactical move of the Whigs, because Shadwell was known for his radical Whig activism and was willing to justify the Revolution, which was claimed by the Whig party.

Shadwell died of an overdose of opium in 1692, and, according to many literary historians, after his death his plays were scarcely performed (Bennett par. 15). Literary historian Kate Bennett says that “for three centuries Shadwell was seen as the clumsy dunce hack of Dryden’s *MacFlecknoe*, unacceptably ‘coarse’”, and “of use only in furnishing details of interest to social historians” (par. 16). However, it seems that in recent years, critics have become more interested in Shadwell’s works. Furthermore, scholars are starting to consider Shadwell as an important figure in the understanding of late seventeenth-century socioeconomic issues and in more recent years also of political issues. The most influential twentieth- and twenty-first century critics on Shadwell are Montague Summers (1927), Albert Borgman (1928) and more recently Don Kunz (1972), John C Ross (1986), Douglas J Canfield (2001) and Christopher Wheatley (2005).

The Restoration period was a period of changes: religiously, politically and culturally. New political parties emerged based on more clearly defined religious movements, and growing tensions between monarch and Parliament eventually led to the Glorious Revolution. Keeping in mind that Shadwell was an ardent Whig activist, it is interesting to investigate whether he also showed his political and religious preferences under the reign of Charles II or James II, when the Whigs were the oppositional party. In this respect, the main research question of this paper will be whether the Glorious Revolution affected Shadwell’s work. In other words, is there an evolution or transition noticeable in the contents of his plays? As Shadwell was the leading Whig dramatist, I think this question is relevant because it could give more insight in the political dimensions of the late seventeenth century. In addition, a sub question rises whether the shift from satirical comedy to sentimental comedy also appeared in his works.

The paper will be organised in the following way. After the first chapter in which Restoration comedy theory will be briefly discussed, four chapters will follow in which

different plays will be analysed. The comedies that will be discussed are in chronological order: *The Volunteers* (1676), *The Lancashire Witches and Tegue O'Divelly the Irish Priest* (1681), *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), and the final chapter will discuss *The Scowrers* (1691). The analysis will mainly consist of close reading and looking at how political events might have influenced Shadwell's plays.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the paper will draw to a conclusion, in which an answer will be given to the research questions.

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<sup>1</sup> An additional note to the plays is that the plays are from different editions. However, some editions do not have lines; in these cases page numbers will be used.

## Chapter 1: Restoration Comedy and Thomas Shadwell

After the end of the Civil War in 1660, theatre was revived after a ban of eighteen years. With Charles II's arrival, some aspects of the theatre were changed. Hume points out that the most important changes were the introduction of actresses, new designs for playhouses, more use of theatrical props such as machines and a growing emphasis on music and dance (7). However, as Love states in his article "Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama", the Restoration theatre also maintained "important continuities with pre-1642 practice" (109). He clarifies his argument with a few examples: perspective scenery was still used, actors were still in the service of a powerful person, the former Caroline models of censorship were restored and patronage was still an important factor (109). Nevertheless, Love also acknowledges the changes and adds to Hume's changes that the acting companies were restricted to no more than two companies at any time, and that pre-1642 plays were drastically rewritten (109).

Since all the plays in this paper will be comedies, the theory of Restoration comedy will also be described briefly. Hume argues in his chapter "Theories of Comedy" that first of all, there was no single dominating form of comedy, and the variety of possibilities open to the late-seventeenth-century writer of comedy needs to be acknowledged (62). Hume continues that the writer could "evoke anything between contempt and admiration for the lead characters; emphasise plot, character, or discourse; and work with radically different balances of wit, humour, satire, and example" (62). Hume concludes that there is no standard theory of comedy for this period "beyond the level of a few clichés" (33).

However, Hume still seems to classify the different sorts of comedy in his chapter. First of all, he makes a distinction between comedy of Humours and comedy of Wit and Manners. Later in his chapter he also distinguishes the forms of satire, wit, humours, and sentiment. Moreover, he also covers different genres of Restoration comedies. Among the



different comedies are: the reform comedy, the comedy of wit, the sex comedy and the city intrigue comedy. However, Hume argues that all the comedies seem to follow the same pattern, using “stock characters and situations” (71). Additionally, the plots in most plays are similar to each other, where “the young man wins his girl, and usually reforms in the process; fortune is won; adulterous copulation is achieved, without discovery- or the consequences are evaded” (Hume 71-72). However, even though many critics argue that the plays have a deeper meaning, he claims that Restoration plays are mere entertainment (30). Nevertheless, this view seems rather radical, and I agree with critics such as Canfield who considers plays to be reflections of society (“Restoration Comedy” 211). Moreover, Canfield argues in his article “Restoration Comedy” that most Restoration comedies should be called social comedies because they all “socialize threats, both explicit and implicit, to the hegemonic ideology of the restored Stuarts and their court party” (211).

Moreover, a much disputed and interesting phenomenon that occurred in the late seventeenth century is the shift from satire to sentiment. According to Kirk Combe in his article “Rakes, Wives and Merchants: Shifts from the Satirical to the Sentimental”, the main difference between the two genres is that satirical comedy was motivated by the belief that humanity is corrupt, and eventually the play would reveal vice. On the other hand, sentimental comedy shows that people are motivated by ethical behaviour and sympathy towards one another, which results in exemplary behaviour (Combe 300). In this sense, the sentimental comedy had a morally instructive value, while satire attacked certain societal issues. According to Combe, it is difficult to date the transition exactly. Furthermore, the shift was gradual, as Combe points out that by the end of the eighteenth century both satire and sentimental comedy were staged (294).

Moreover, also why the shift happened is not clear, and critics have several reasons for the shift. According to Combe, the shift was related to political events. Under the regime of

William and Mary, campaigns for moral reform were launched because the earlier Restoration comedies were considered as immoral and too sexual (296). However, many critics agree that the audience changed from an aristocratic to a mercantile audience (Combe 2001; Hume 1977; Canfield 2005). Combe argues that the new Whiggish mercantile audience wanted to see not only aristocratic productions, but also plays that reflected their own social, domestic, environment (299).

Finally, the question remains how Shadwell could be placed within the Restoration theatre. First of all, Shadwell only wrote one tragedy, without success, and the rest of his works are all comedies. Christopher Wheatley gives a few characteristics of Shadwell's works in his article "Shadwell, Dufey and Didactic Drama". He states that Shadwell "consistently dramatized the danger to society of the witty, promiscuous rake, and asserted the necessity of his domestication in marriage to a virtuous woman" (345). In other words, the couples must seek relationships of mutual affection. Wheatley continues his argument that in contrast to many other Restoration playwrights, Shadwell's female characters are most of the time intellectually and morally better than the men who want to seduce them (345). Moreover, Wheatley also considers Shadwell as one of the "foremost descendants of Jonsonian humours comedy" (347). Borgman adds to this view that Shadwell consistently praised the works of Ben Jonson and deserves the title "grandson of Ben" (251). This admiration mainly manifests itself in a wide variety of humours in his plays, which indicates Shadwell's interest in creating distinctive characters instead of dramatic types (Wheatley 347).

However, while the much cited discussion between Shadwell and Dryden indicates that Shadwell meant his comedies to have an instructive and moral value, critics disagree whether the shift from satirical to sentimental drama is also visible in his plays. While some critics claim that Shadwell's 1690s comedies should be considered as proto sentimental (Borgman 1928; Hume 1977; Canfield 2005; Ross 1987), Wheatley disagrees with this view.

Instead, he argues that Shadwell's characters reform because "of a recognition that what is forgivable in youth becomes inappropriate and aesthetically unpleasant in men and women who have social roles to fill" (351). These opinions will be discussed further in the last chapter of this paper. In the following chapters, four plays will be analysed and the answer will be sought to the question whether Shadwell's works were affected by the change of regimes.

## Chapter 2: *The Virtuoso*<sup>2</sup>

The first comedy that will be discussed is *The Virtuoso*. The play was staged for the first time in 1676 and was attended by King Charles II (Nicholson xii). At that time, the Tory and Whig parties had not emerged yet and, while the country was at war with the Dutch Republic, the national politics seemed relatively stable. In this respect, this chapter will argue that Shadwell wrote this play for entertaining purposes, ventilating a popular opinion, rather than attacking the Carolean court.

The play was a success, as seventeenth-century critic Gerard Langbain wrote that “the University of Oxford, who may be allowed competent Judges of Comedy (...) applauded it: and as no Man ever undertook to discover the Frailties of such pretenders (...) before Mr. Shadwell (...) ever drew so many different characters of humours, and with such Success” (quoted in Nicholson: xiii). The play tells a story about the love of the two heroes Bruce and Longvil for Clarinda and Miranda, who are the nieces of the Virtuoso. However, the main theme of the play seems to be science, or in a sense, the irrelevance of science. According to most critics, this theme of science is the reason why the play must have appealed to the seventeenth-century audience because natural science was gaining more territory in the late seventeenth century. Nonetheless, most people were sceptical about the emerging scientific theories, and this play is a good illustration of this popular sentiment about science.

The play clearly is a satire. The Virtuoso, whose name is Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, together with his foolish accomplice Sir Formal Trifle forms the focal point of satire. The seventeenth-century meaning of the concept Virtuoso is according to the Oxford English Dictionary: “One who has a special interest in, or taste for, the fine arts; a student or collector of antiquities, natural curiosities or rarities” (section 2). It is often assumed that the nature of satire in Shadwell’s play should be interpreted as a direct attack on the Royal Society (Borgman 1928; Lloyd 1923). In addition, it is interesting to note that the Royal Society

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<sup>2</sup> The Nicholson and Rodes edition.

members were closely associated to, or members of the royal court, which could give the theme a political dimension. In this respect, the assumption that this play is an attack on the Royal Society raises the question whether this play should be interpreted as a form of criticism directed at the royal court.

Borgman argues that the play was most likely a direct attack on the Royal Society because Shadwell exaggerated the Society's language and must have read some scientific treatises to give his satire a deeper dimension (173). Furthermore, Rodes and Nicholson comment in their introduction that Shadwell's satire clearly was "more immediate and specific than Johnson's [*The Alchemist*], since his light artillery was more trained particularly upon the Royal Society of London" (xv). Also Claude Lloyd backs this theory up in his article by giving examples of scientific writings of members of the Society, and of how Shadwell has deformed and ridiculed these through the experiments of the Virtuoso in the play (489-492). Moreover, Shadwell also turned the language of the Society members into the exaggerated pompous and unintelligible gibberish of the Virtuoso's foolish admirer Sir Formal Trifle. A good example of his language is his greeting speech to Bruce, who is one of the heroes: "Sir, I never could admit a thought within the slender sphere of my imagination that could once suggest to me the not meeting with a good reception from a person that is so strictly oblig'd by and so nicely practic'd in the severer rules and stricter methods of honour as you are" (I.i 1.204-205).

However, as Claude Lloyd argues, Shadwell did not attack any scientists personally and did not want to oppose them as a whole (492). Yet, the Virtuoso is clearly made into a fool in several ways, which could be interpreted as the Royal Society being ridiculed. First of all, his preoccupation with the knowledge of the experiment rather than the practicality of it is an important aspect that defines his folly. This results in ridiculous scenes such as in II.ii where Gimcrack, the Virtuoso, has himself tied to a table like a frog in order to learn how to

swim. Nonetheless, when the sensible character Longvil asks him whether he ever tried it in water, the Virtuoso answers with “No, Sir; but I swim most exquisitely on Land” (II.ii l.79). When the other hero Bruce asks him then whether he considers practising in water, Gimcrack’s answer emphasises his foolishness: “Never, Sir; I hate the water. I never come upon the Water, Sir” (II.ii l.81-82). Another way of how the Virtuoso is ridiculed is through the emphasis on the futile nature of his experiments. An example where Shadwell illustrates this futility can be found in IV.iii, in which Gimcrack stores bottles of air in his house (l.256-259).

All these ways of ridiculing the Virtuoso could be interpreted as Shadwell ridiculing the experiments of the Royal Society, which are considered pointless by Shadwell. However, Gimcrack is not only being ridiculed through his own unpractical experiments and illogical reasoning, also the contemptuous remarks of Miranda, Clarissa, Bruce and Longvil, who are the sensible characters of the play, emphasise the foolishness of the Virtuoso. Throughout the play, he has no control over his two nieces, Miranda and Clarissa, who confiscate all his property at the end of the play. What is more, not only his nieces look down on him, also his wife despises him for his preoccupation with science. Consequently, he is not only a fool in his profession; he also appears to be a cuckold, the ultimate fool in Restoration comedy. In this respect, his foolishness goes beyond his own scientific practices. Additionally, the unworldly character of the scientist reaches a climax at the end, when everyone has left him alone. Eventually the Virtuoso realises that he should have been more involved with “mankind instead of spiders and insects” (V.vi l.122-123).

However, the play does feature a political element in III.ii, when Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, the Virtuoso, compares a colony of ants to the Dutch Republic:

Bruce: Sir, I take ‘em to be the most politic of all insects.

Sir Formal: You have hit it, gentlemen. They have the best government in the world.

What do you opine it to be?

Longvil: O, a commonwealth most certainly.

Sir Nicholas: Worthy sir, I see you are a great observer; it is a republic resembling that of the States General.

Bruce: Undoubtedly. And the Dutch are just such industrious and busy animals (l. 28-35).

Clearly, the Dutch are in this part mocked by being compared to ants. The fact that Shadwell mocks the Republic would have had political implications for a seventeenth-century English audience because the Dutch Republic and England were at war under Charles II. What is more, at the time the play was written, in 1676, England had already fought three wars with the Republic. With regard to these contemporary tensions, flaying the States General should have kept Shadwell safe from possible accusations of being against the king as he asserted his loyalty to his country. Moreover, Gimcrack's unpatriotic attitude adds to his foolishness but cannot be seen as criticism against the Royal Society.

Altogether, this chapter argued that *The Virtuoso* was written for an entertaining purpose rather than criticism directed at the Carolean court. The comedy satirises the emerging scientific movement and its organisation, the Royal Society, and Shadwell mainly does this in several ways through the foolish character of Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, the Virtuoso. Furthermore, as there is a link between the Royal Society and the court of Charles II, it could be argued that the play can be interpreted as criticism on the royal court. However, this does not seem to be the case because the play does not aim directly at any members of the court. Furthermore, Shadwell was cautious not to provoke the court by not referring to particular courtiers and by adding a patriotic element through ridiculing the Dutch Republic.

In this respect, the play should be considered as entertainment, in which Shadwell ridicules a contemporary fashion rather than making a political statement.



### Chapter 3: *The Lancashire Witches and Tegue O'Divelly, the Irish Priest*<sup>3</sup>

*The Lancashire Witches* is considered by most critics as Shadwell's most explosive play, in which he is believed to have taken an explicit position in the party political strife for the first time (Wheatley 2001; Summers 1920; Kunz 1972). In this respect, analysing this comedy will be helpful to answer the main question of this paper. The play was staged in a controversial climate, and Shadwell felt that this had affected the English theatre as well, as he says: "But all run now into Politicks, and you must needs, if you touch upon any Humour of this time, offend one of the Parties" (*Lancashire* preface). With religion as one of its main themes, the play is politically charged since, as Rose states, "the ideological polarity between Whig and Tory was rooted, above all, in religious controversy" (65).

Moreover, written in 1681, the play touched on the sensitive issue of the Popish plot, which happened three years before *The Lancashire Witches* was staged. The Popish plot was a fictitious conspiracy invented by Titus Oates. What is more, Oates claimed that it was a Catholic conspiracy to assassinate King Charles II. Even though Oates's accusations were unlikely to be true, the plot caused an anti-Catholic hysteria in England, which resulted in the execution of several Catholics. Moreover, as Steven Pincus points out, the Plot is believed to have led to the Exclusion Crisis, in which certain members of Parliament tried to have a law passed that would prohibit the succession of James II, who was Catholic and Charles's brother (152-153). As a result, the Popish plot had caused a profound distrust of Catholics among English people. In this play, the plot has a significant meaning because it was one of the Whig propaganda tools against the Tory establishment.

This chapter will argue that *Lancashire Witches* can be considered as Whig propaganda offending the Tory party. Already before the play was staged, the comedy was met with a lot of opposition (Borgman 52). In his chapter "Political Controversies", Borgman recounts that Shadwell was already informed that the play was opposed by several parties

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<sup>3</sup> The Montague Summers edition.

who thought that he satirised the Church of England (52). As a reaction, the Master of Revels, Charles Killigrew, who at first had licensed the play, censored most elements that would be offensive and “full of dangerous Reflections” (quoted in: Borgman 52). However, even though the play was heavily censored, the Tories were convinced that the play was “written Seditious and Treason, [and Shadwell] had reflected upon His Majesty, and that the scope of the Play was against the Government of *England*” (quoted in: Borgman 53). Eventually, Shadwell’s opinions in the play were considered too offensive by the establishment, which resulted in a seven years’ ban from stage (Wheatley 342). In this respect, it is interesting to include this play as it was the first explicit manifestation of Shadwell’s Whig opinions on stage.

First of all, the theme of witchcraft in the play should be discussed. While it remains unclear whether the witches should be considered as a real entity or a figment of the imagination of the characters, the theme is of importance since it distinguishes the sensible characters from the foolish ones. The play is set on the country estate of the sensible Sir Edward Hartford, who is presented as “A worthy Hospitable true English Gentleman, of good understanding, and honest Principles” (*Lancashire dramatis personae*). The two main antagonists are Sir Edward’s chaplain Smerk and the Irish priest Tegue O’Divelly, who is invited by Sir Edward’s foolish neighbour, sir Jeffrey Shacklehead, to expel the witches on the estate. Kunz explains in his article that Shadwell probably intended the witches to reflect innocent people who had been falsely accused by the Catholics (265). Nevertheless, due to the elaborate censorship on the play, the witches “degenerated from carefully planned Whig propaganda into operatic buffoonery” (Kunz 266).

The main element of satire in the play is religion, which was intrinsically related to politics. Shadwell ridicules the Catholic Church in several ways through the Irish priest Tegue O’Divelly, who is “an equal mixture of fool and knave” (*Lancashire dramatis personae*). His

name O'Divelly is remarkable because it resembles the word devil and signifies already that the play should be considered as anti-Catholic. Yet, most provocative is that Catholicism is compared to witchcraft in the play. As the priest tries to expel the witches with relics, Lady Shacklehead, "a noble and discrete lady" (*Lancashire dramatis personae*), remarks: "But I do not know what to think of his Popish way, his Words, his Charms, and Holy Water, and Relicks, methinks he is guilty of Witchcraft too, and you should send him to Gaol for it" (IV p.162). Moreover, he also appears to be a lecherous hypocrite as his ridiculous acts finally reach a climax when he has sex with one of the witches and asks her to marry him (V p.168). In the end, he is exposed and turns out to have taken part in the Popish plot. What is more, he appears to be a "Kelly" (*Lancashire V*), referring to a Popish plotter, who was accused of murdering the English magistrate Sir Edmond Berry Godfrey (Kunz 275). He is then expelled by Sir Edward, who says that his "house is not for Traytors" (V p.185), but the priest consoles himself with the thought that "if they vill hang me, I vill be a shaint indeed" (V p.188). These last ironic words add to the hypocrite nature of Catholicism that Shadwell wants to convince his audience of.

However, a more controversial character than the priest is the chaplain Smerk. While he is Anglican, he sympathises with Catholicism, and his anti-Puritanism is stressed in the play. Throughout the play, he appears to be foolish and naïve. In this respect, not only the Catholic Church is slandered, but also the Anglican Church is ridiculed. This is interesting because the Anglican Church was associated with loyalty to the king (Spurr 7). What is more, the Whigs accused the Tories of promoting Catholicism in their support of the king (Rose 69). Therefore, Smerk's fickle nature and flexibility of faith is another means of propagating the Whig principles through criticism of the Tory establishment. Moreover, the Irish priest convinces Smerk that the Popish plot was actually a Presbyterian plot because "none but Phanaticks, Hobbists, and Atheists believe the Plot" (III p.144). Smerk is then reprimanded by

one of the intelligent characters, Bellfort, who tells Smerk that “All the Eminent men of the Church of England believe the plot and detest it with horreur, and abominate the Religion that contriv’d it” (III p. 144). While the Plot was in fact an invention by Titus Oates, it was clearly intended to have been a real fact. Moreover, being one of the pet subjects of the Whigs, Shadwell used it to propagate Whig ideas.

All these satirising elements stand in stark contrast to the common sense and patriotism of the characters Bellfort, Doubty and Sir Edward. First of all, they do not believe in witches because they believe that all inexplicable events have natural causes. Furthermore, Sir Edward clearly conveys the contemporary Whig opinions, and he should be considered as a “fusion of English Renaissance, restoration and Augustan ideals” (Kunz 257). He is admired by his fellows, who tell him that “Princes may envy such an English-man” (III p.137). In addition, Sir Edward considers himself a patriot with Whiggish beliefs: “I love the Princes Rights and Peoples Liberties, and will defend them both with the last penny in my purse, and the last drop in my veins, and dare defy witless Plots of Papists” (III p.137). The stresses on “peoples liberties”, and the phrasing “penny in my purse” promote the mercantilism that was one of the characteristics of Whig ideology.

What is more, the accusations that Shadwell also attacked courtiers who supported Charles II are not unrealistic in the play as there are a few explicit passages that could indicate this criticism. The clearest example can be found in the third act of the play, in which the sensible characters Belfort and Sir Edward bemoan current politics:

Bell.[to Edward]: Methinks you represent to us the Golden days of Queen Elizabeth, such sure were our Gentry then; now they are grown servile Apes to foreign customs, they leave off Hospitality, for which We were famous all over Europe, and turn Servants to Board-wages.

(...)

Edw: But our new-fashion'd Gentry love the French too well to fight against them; they are bred abroad without knowing anything of our Constitution, and come home tainted with Foppery, slavish Principles, and Popish Religion. (III p.136)

Clearly, this conversation could have been provocative towards the courtly audience because they are accused of Catholicism, and also of being unpatriotic. Especially the negative connotation of the words “slavish principles” and “Popish Religion” should be interpreted as Whig propaganda because the Whigs opposed those concepts. Furthermore, Shadwell provokes his opponents more when Belfort goes on to criticise the English gentry: “but our Gentry are so much poisoned with foreign Vanities, that methinks the Genius of England seems sunk into the Yeomanry” (III p.137). The provocation reaches its climax when Sir Edward answers with: “We have indeed too many rotten Members” (III p.137).

To conclude, this chapter argued that *The Lancashire Witches* is full of Whig propaganda. After a close reading of the play, it can be said that the comedy is full of contemporary political reflections. Shadwell has taken his stance as a Whig and sets out their opinions explicitly throughout the play. The Whig in Shadwell's comedy is cultured and civilised, and as Susan Owen phrases, “the wise defender of English Protestant tradition” (133). At least that is what Shadwell seemed to want to instruct his audience in the play. However, in doing so, he slanders the opposition, the Tories, in several ways. Not only does he ridicule the Tories for their alleged cooperation with Catholics, he also ridicules the Anglican Church through the fickle character of Smerk, who flirts with Catholicism. Even more, he also explicitly provokes court members in conversations between the Whiggish characters. As a consequence, in a climate that was intolerant to overt and extreme Whig ideologies or anti-Catholicism, the play gained an emotionally charged value that would lead to Shadwell's banishment from the stage for the next seven years.

#### Chapter 4: *The Squire of Alsatia*<sup>4</sup>

*The Squire of Alsatia* is interesting because it was the first play staged after the writer's ban, under the reign of James II. In this chapter, I will argue that even though the play does not criticise the Jacobite government explicitly, it does set out Whig views on society. Probably in the early days of May 1688, the comedy *The Squire of Alsatia* was performed for the first time in London (Borgman 75). Shadwell's reappearance after his seven years' writer's ban was welcomed with enthusiasm by his contemporaries. Borgman shows that in May 1688, Lord Granville wrote in a letter: "[w]e are promised this week another new play of Shadwell's, called the Alsatia Bully, which is very much commended by those who have had the private perusal of it"(75). Borgman continues that this play was awaited with such enthusiasm because in the years between 1681 and 1688, really new and original plays were scarcely produced (76). Therefore, the new comedy by Shadwell was much anticipated and very successful (76).

The main theme of this play is fatherhood in relation to the education of children. The main elder characters, the brothers Sir Edward and Sir William, are constantly in discussion about what should be the best education for their children: Belfond Senior and Belfond Junior. While both children are Sir William's biological sons, Sir Edward has adopted Belfond Junior. However, this theme could be interpreted in several ways. The most obvious interpretation would be what the best education should be within a domestic father and son relationship. Nevertheless, the play does contain many political elements and seems to reflect the political debate at the eve of the Glorious Revolution, but because the play was staged under the reign of James II, Shadwell remained cautious not to criticise the court. However, John Ross points out in his book *Thomas Shadwell, the Squire of Alsatia, A critical Edition* that James was not eager to attend the play (11). Ross clarifies his suggestion by explaining that James watched the play on its ninth evening, when *The Squire of Alsatia* "already had

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<sup>4</sup> The J.C. Ross edition.

survived an unusually long run”, which suggests “a fairly grudging tolerance” (11).

Ross continues that there are no open political references in the comedy, but he also says that Shadwell's Whig attitude was clear for those who chose to recognise it (11). Indeed, after a closer reading the play seems to reflect Whig opinions that would be obvious in hindsight. What is more, after the change of regimes, the play could be considered as very suitable to serve as Williamite propaganda. Canfield cites John Ross saying that especially with *The Squire of Alsatia* “for the first year or so [of the Williamite era], as the one established Whig professional writer there was, [Shadwell] bore a serious responsibility to provide cultural validation for the Revolution Settlement” (107). His argument makes sense as there was a strong opposition to the Glorious Revolution, and there are a few instances in the play that, in hindsight, could be interpreted as a justification of the new regime.

The most clear reflection of criticism on the Jacobite government in the play is the following line spoken by the sensible character Sir Edward: “[t]his man I got to instruct my Son in some old Common Law Books, the Statutes, and best Pleas of the Crown, and the Constitution of the old true *English* government” (Shadwell II.i 1.400-403). Especially the last part, “the old true *English* government” reflects the Whig opinion on the Jacobite government. As James II had strong alliances with Louis XIII of France, many Whigs felt threatened by his inclinations towards absolutism and Catholicism. In addition, when William of Orange came to England, however paradoxically, the country was according to the Whig party restored to its original English, Protestant government. The idea of the original English government entailed a minimal power of a Protestant king. Even though this idea was contradictory, a Dutchman ruling a formerly hostile country, this idea of the restoration of the English constitution was one of the propaganda tools for the Whigs to justify the Glorious Revolution (Rose 70). In this respect, these lines could be interpreted as such by the Williamite audience.

Not only reflections of the Whig opinions on the Jacobite government give the play a political dimension, also the characters in the play show strong features of the Whigs and the Tories. The protagonists Sir William, Sir Edward, Belfond Senior and Belfond Junior can all be interpreted as stereotypes of the political opinions of the Whigs and the Tories. Sir William is depicted as the stereotypical Tory: he is presented as a man of the country with an estate and is “rigid, morose, most sordidly covetous, clownish, obstinate, positive and froward” (*The Squire dramatis personae*). His behaviour can be linked to the Tories in the late 1680s, as Berman states, when the Tory party was in a standstill as many former members of Parliament resigned because of the unsatisfying political situation (379). The conservative approach of Sir William is again emphasised in his elder son Belfond Senior, who was “bred after his Fathers Rustick, swinish manner, with great rigour and severity” (*The Squire dramatis personae*).

The other two protagonists, Sir Edward and Belfond Junior are the complete opposite of the others. Sir Edward is presented as “a Merchant (...), [who] lives single with cause and pleasure, reasonably and virtuously. A man of great humanity and gentleness and compassion towards mankind” (*The Squire dramatis personae*). This description tends to show more of the Whig ideals of Shadwell’s time. Sir Edward is a liberal and rational man, who lives in the progressive city instead of the backward country. His nephew, Belfond Junior, who was raised by Sir Edward, is “instructed in all the Liberal Sciences, and in all the Gentlemanlike education (...) an ingenious, well-accomplish’d gentleman; a man of honour and of excellent disposition and temper” (*The Squire dramatis personae*). He is presented as the perfect Whig and is surrounded by good company, as his friend Truman is presented as “a man of Honour and Fortune” (*The Squire dramatis personae*). In contrast, his older brother chooses the wrong company. In this respect, Belfond Senior’s selection of company could be interpreted as criticism of the Tories and their adherence to James II.



Furthermore, it is remarkable that the play is constituted out of oppositions. Moreover, these opposition are clearly used by Shadwell as a tool to reflect on the political strife, and to slander the opposition. Not only are the characters each other's opposites, the play also features oppositional themes that can be related to Shadwell's political views. Among the themes Berman mentions in his article "The Values of Shadwell's Squire of Alsatia", the country versus the city theme and the unnatural versus the natural theme can be interpreted politically (376; 381).

The first theme of country versus city is omnipresent in the play. Sir Edward and the younger Belfond, who can be perceived as the Whigs, are from the city. On the other hand, Sir William, the Tory, is attached to the country. The contrast created between the city and the country reflects Shadwell's political views. Moreover, this contrast also seems to have an instructive dimension because the city is placed in a more positive light than the country. This view is made clear through the character of Sir William but also through Belfond Senior, who was raised in the country and is as a result naïve. An example of the country, which is associated with a lack of civilisation, is already found in the word choice in the description of Belfond Senior. He is "bred" instead of raised and in a "swinish manner" (*The Squire dramatis personae*). These words tend to be more associated with cattle than people. Another example where the inferiority of the country becomes clear is the scene in which Belfond Junior reprimands Belfond Senior: "are you mad? Has the country robb'd you of all good manners, and common sense?"(II.i 1.301-302).

Furthermore, another oppositional theme that seems to reflect political debates, which Shadwell incorporated in the play, is that of natural versus the unnatural. This theme mainly occurs in the discussions between Sir Edward and Sir William. The following passage, in which they discuss what the better education is for their sons, is a good example:

Sir Edw.: You are his [Belfond Junior] father by nature, I by choice. (...) Rigour makes nothing but hypocrites.

Sir Will: Perhaps when you begin late; but you should have been severe to him in his Childhood; abridged him from Liberty and Money.

(...)

Sir Edw: I must govern by Love. (...) This I take to be the difference between a good Father to Children and a harsh Master of Slaves.

Sir Will: Yes and see what your government is come to; his Vice and Prodigality will distract me.

Sir Edw: Why should you be condemn'd? He is mine, is he not?

Sir Will.: Yes, by adoption, but he [Belfond Junior] is mine by nature.

Sir Edw.: 'Tis all but Custom. ( I.i l.445-461)

There are a few remarkable aspects of this passage. First of all, the mention of “Master of Slaves” could be interpreted as the alleged inclinations to absolutism that the Whigs opposed in James II. Moreover, Sir William condemns ideas that Whigs thought were important, as he thinks Liberty and Money corrupt children. However, the last two lines of this passage can also be interpreted in two ways, depending under which regime the play was attended. For the audience under James II, this could be seen as criticism of the king in relation to the Exclusion Crisis, when the Whigs were in favour of another successor than James II. However, in hindsight, the dialogue could be interpreted as a reflection of the debate concerning the ascension to the throne by William III. While William III was not the natural successor of James II, the Whigs were in favour of this unnatural succession. The Tories on the other hand could not fully accept William’s ascension because they preferred a natural successor.

Altogether, this chapter has argued that the play could be interpreted in several ways.

One interpretation is that the play is about education. However, even though the play was not banned under James II, the play does contain political elements that seem to reflect criticism directed at James II, and it contains pre Revolutionary Whig ideas. In this respect, Whiggish ideas are presented with caution, hence the ambiguous theme. Nevertheless, the overall play seems to have an instructive dimension, through which Shadwell wanted to convey Whig opinions. Furthermore, through contrasting themes, the party strife between the Whigs and the Tories is reflected in the play, in which the Whigs are presented more positively than their Tory counterparts. Eventually, under William III, these positive Whig ideas could have served as a justification for the Glorious Revolution.

### Chapter 5: *The Scowrers*<sup>5</sup>

The final play that will be discussed is *The Scowrers*. Written in 1691, Shadwell was freer in expressing his political preference as the Revolution was mainly supported by the Whigs. While the Williamite government was a mixture of Tories and Whigs, the Whigs claimed the Revolution as theirs. Furthermore, Shadwell had been appointed poet laureate, and this play shows that he felt free to propagate Whig principles. In this respect, it is interesting to include the play for this study. The comedy was first staged in 1691 at Drury Lane, and it seems that the play was well received by its contemporary audience. Furthermore, the play was considered as a completely original play as Langbaine wrote: “how this Play succeeded on stage I know not; but I think ‘tis far from the worst of his Comedies; and I believe is wholly free from Plagiary” (quoted in Summers 1927: 81).

The comedy tells the story of the sensible young man Sir William Rant, who enjoys the act of scouring with his friends Wachum and Tope at night in London. Scouring had a different meaning in the seventeenth century. In Shadwell’s time, the act of scouring entailed young men who wandered drunk through the city at night, while destroying anything passing their way. According to Borgman, scouring was a considerable problem in late seventeenth-century London (238). However, Sir William is eventually reprimanded by his father, Mr. Rant, and the son promises his father to live a better life by marrying Eugenia, one of the two virtuous heroines in the play.

However, the play does not only have contemporary relevance through the theme of scouring, also the political elements that appear in the play were very up to date for the Williamite audience. There are many examples in which Shadwell clearly shows his own political preferences more explicitly in the play than he did in his previous plays. Moreover, the play seems to reflect some of the party political strife between the Tories and the Whigs and act as bulwark of the Williamite regime. In this respect, this chapter will argue that the

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<sup>5</sup> Montague Summers edition

comedy serves as propaganda for the Whigs and their Revolutionary theory.

First of all, the more extreme Tories are attacked in this play. Also known as the Jacobites, they were the main opponents of the Williamite regime because they supported King James II, who had fled to France. In the play, the Jacobites are ridiculed through the character of Sir Humphrey in several ways. This is already noticeable in the *dramatis personae*, in which Sir Humphrey is presented as “a foolish Jacobite Alderman” (*The Scowrers*). Moreover, throughout the play, Sir Humphrey is more concerned with foreign affairs rather than his own son. Sir Humphrey’s foreign preoccupation is also at odds with his function as an alderman, who should be more concerned with internal affairs. Furthermore, the Jacobite in the play is preoccupied mainly with reading letters about King Louis XIV: a clear reference to James II, who fled to France, where he was sheltered by the French absolutist king.

What is more, through Sir Humphrey’s continental obsession, the play gains an extra contemporary dimension as England was at that time at war with France in the Nine-Year war. However, the following passage suggests more than a military fixation: “Goodluck! *Teckely* and the *Cossacks* upon *Ukrain* have totally routed Prince *Lewis* of *Baden*, and cut his Army all to pieces, Well this *Louys* is the bravest King” (I.i p.94). Sir Humphrey seems to admire the national enemy, which turns him into the ultimate fool in the play. Moreover, this admiration could also be an accusation against the Jacobites for collaborating with the enemy.

Nevertheless, the Jacobites are not only ridiculed on their political beliefs, as Shadwell also attacks their religious stance. As the Jacobites were pro James II, who was Catholic, Shadwell uses Catholicism to emphasise the foolishness of the Jacobite, who is obsessed with foreign, hostile, politics: “Well that master *Catinat*<sup>6</sup> is a very pretty man, he’ll soon destroy the Presbyterians and burn the anti-Christian town of Geneva. Oh this Louis is a glorious prince, what would I give to see him”(I.i. p. 95).

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<sup>6</sup> Catinat was a French Marshal under the reign of Louis XIV.

However, the party political strife is not only ventilated through Sir Humphrey because the more moderate Tory party is also attacked by Shadwell. A good example is the act in which the two sensible characters Tope and Wildfire discuss politics:

Tope: (...) you shou'd be here in a morning, and observe crowchin Spaniels hastning to some great mans Levee, whom they wished hang'd; and lean, assiduous knaves of business running from Office to Office, to get all they can under the Government they hate.

Wild: How many Villains that wish the Government destroyed, yet crowd for places in it.

Sir Will: Such Rogues can do the government no harm if they be kept out.( II.i. p. 102)

This passage clearly is a direct attack on the many Tories who were in Parliament under William III. Even though some Tories left Parliament after the change of regimes, many stayed, since, while they did not acknowledge William III *de jure*, they still did *de facto* (Rose 67). Through this dialogue between the characters Tope and Wildfire, Shadwell takes the Whig stance that all Tories were against William's ascension and criticises them for still being in Parliament.

Furthermore, also the Whig Revolutionary ideology is omnipresent in the play. It is interesting that this ideology is mainly ventilated through the heroines Eugenia and Clara. The fact that they are reasonable throughout the play and marry well in the end suggests that they are right to oppose their mother. A clear example is the conversation between the two girls plotting to escape their tyrannous, - absolutist mother:

Eug: In short, we are both resolv'd not to endure any longer the intolerable Yoke of Arbitrary power, under which we have so long groan'd (...)  
(...)

Eug: (...) we that are resol'd to cast off my Mothers Tyranny, will no longer suffer thy [Priscilla's: their chaperone] Insolence.

Pris: What will become of poor me?

Clara: we are true English women, Co-heirs of two thousand pounds a year, and are resolv'd to assert our Liberty and Property. (II.i p. 97).

The words “arbitrary power”, “liberty” and “property” certainly must have sounded familiar in the ears of the Williamite audience because they were typical Whig propaganda words. Furthermore, according to Canfield, hearing these words through the mouths of the two heroines of the play transforms the girls from rebels into revolutionaries, who bring the Revolutionary theory “into the domestic realm” (“Late Shadwell” 120). In this respect, Shadwell propagates the Revolution in a more tangible way for the audience. This domestic aspect was also a typical element of the late seventeenth century, when the focus shifted more to the bourgeoisie (“Late Shadwell” 106).

What is more, the following scene features another bourgeois element propagated by the Whigs, which could serve as a justification of the Revolution. This bourgeois element is the idea of a meritocracy, which meant that important social positions should be earned instead of obtained by birth. A clear example of this idea can be found in v.i., in which Mr Rant indicates in his sermon to his son Sir William Rant that he had chosen to give his knighthood title to his son: “and when the Court had offered Knighthood to me, I made it be bestowed on you, Not that I think it much of Value, unless it be conferr'd for value” (v.i.). Through this scene, Shadwell aptly promotes the bourgeois Whig ideology to replace the succession theory, since the sensible character Mr Rant has been given the title on the basis of merit instead of being born with it. Furthermore, Mr Rant insists that knighthood should be bestowed on merit: a clear justification of the Revolution Settlement because it defies the traditional succession theory.

Additionally, an interesting note to the play is that the comedy has a sentimental element. According to Borgman, *The Scowrers* should be seen as a proto sentimental comedy (242). While Shadwell ridicules the act of scouring, he does not attack the practice and instead transforms it into “a source of comic action” (240). The scene in which Mr Rant reprimands his son is remarkable because this father and son scene, where the two end up both in tears (V.i. p.138-139), is not usual of Shadwell’s time; in this respect, Borgman considers the play sentimental *avant la lettre* (242). However, it is not as unexpected as Borgman states because as Canfield points out in his article, the Whig movement initiated a shift from focus on nobility to bourgeoisie (“Late Shadwell” 106). Accompanying this shift is also the shift from satire to sentimental comedy. In this respect, since Shadwell was such a Whig advocate, this sentimental element could be considered as an extra Whig dimension Shadwell added to the play.

In sum, the comedy *The Scowrers* contains many instances of contemporary politics. While the play revolves around the act of scouring, there is a more political theme underneath. The play clearly is in favour of the Whig party. Not only the political party strife between the Tories and the Whigs is reflected in the play, also foreign politics is included mainly through the character of Sir Humphrey. Moreover, it is interesting to see that the Whig ideology on the Revolution is mostly ventilated through the heroines Eugenia and Clara. What is more, the sentimental element in the play is a bourgeois addition to the Whig-coloured play. Eventually, Shadwell seems to stress the importance of patriotism once again. However, in contrast to his previous plays, in this play the Crown is on his side, which allows him to convey his political preference explicitly to his audience.



## Conclusion

This paper has investigated comedies by the seventeenth-century dramatist Thomas Shadwell. In this investigation, the aim was to find an answer to the main research question whether the change of regimes in 1688 had influenced Shadwell's comedies. An additional question was whether the shift from satire to sentimental is visible in his plays. In order to find an answer to the question, four plays have been analysed. The plays, *The Virtuoso*, *The Lancashire Witches*, *The Squire of Alsatia* and *The Scowrers* have been selected for this paper. Through close reading, the following conclusions can be drawn from the analyses. First of all, the study has shown that Shadwell's works were influenced by the change of regimes up to a certain point. It is clear that once Shadwell was poet laureate to William III, his political opinions are expressed explicitly. However, his play *The Lancashire Witches* also shows overt Whig opinions, when the Whigs were the oppositional party. What is more, even though *The Lancashire Witches* was written under the reign of Charles II, Shadwell did not seem to be cautious enough to avoid banishment from stage.

Nevertheless, an evolution can be found in his plays. As the Whig and Tory polarity was not as explicit yet at the time *The Virtuoso* was written, there are no reflections of certain political ideas. Moreover, it should be considered more as entertainment than criticism against court. Furthermore, even though the play does contain a political element, and the satire of the Royal Society could be interpreted as criticism of the royal court, the criticism is not overtly directed at certain members of this Society. In this respect, the play should be seen as satirical entertainment. The second play on the other hand was written after the new parties had emerged, and Shadwell seemed to be strongly influenced by contemporary politics, in which the dramatist ridicules the opposition through satirising the Catholic Church but also the Anglican Church. However, this play appeared to be too controversial, and this is noticeable in his next play, *The Squire of Alsatia*. Published under James II, it is clear that Shadwell was

more cautious expressing Whig opinions and in this respect, not to cross the line. However, the play has an ambiguous theme that can be interpreted as Whig propaganda. Even more, in hindsight, after the Glorious Revolution, the play was considered as a good cultural validation of the Revolution Settlement. The final play that was investigated in this paper, *The Scowrers*, can be considered as explicit propaganda of Whig ideas. The reason behind this explicitness is that the Whigs had claimed the Revolution as theirs and were in that respect on the side of Shadwell's own political preference. Taken together, it seems that Shadwell was influenced by contemporary politics.

However, there is also a consistency in his plays. In all the plays, Shadwell stresses the importance of patriotism. In *The Virtuoso* his patriotism is ventilated through the slandering of the Dutch Republic. His other three plays follow a similar pattern in which his patriotism is expressed by the sensible characters. Furthermore, in *The Virtuoso* and in *The Scowrers* the foolish characters admire national enemies, which emphasises his own patriotism. Through all the plays, Shadwell takes a patriotic stance, but, except in *The Virtuoso*, he also seems to want to instruct his audience in Whig principles. This becomes clear through the sensible characters, who are either presented with qualities that were seen as ideal by the Whigs or who exclaim Whiggish principles.

Finally, to answer the sub question whether the shift from sentimental to satirical was visible in his plays, the last play that was discussed in the play is most significant. While Wheatley argues that Shadwell never wrote sentimental drama, *The Scowrers* can be considered as a sentimental comedy. This conclusion can be backed up with the theory that under influence of the Whiggish mercantilism the audience changed. Moreover, keeping in mind that Shadwell had Whig opinions, it can be argued that this shift can be found in the playwright's works.

Nevertheless, one limitation needs to be considered. As this paper has a limited

amount of space, only a selection of Shadwell's plays could be analysed in this paper.

Furthermore, in this respect, it is not clear especially whether the shift from satirical to sentimental can be found in other plays that were written under the Williamite regime. Hence a further study, in which his later plays will be investigated more elaborately, would be interesting.

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