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Anti-*Préciosité* in the Drama of Thomas Shadwell*

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England's literature, as well as her society, was affected by *préciosité* which originated in France and made its appearance in England during the reign of Charles I and his French queen, Henrietta Maria. It failed to reach its vogue until the reign of Charles II. Prevalent during the first decade of Charles II' reign was the comic theme of the love-game in which a gay hero and heroine in accordance to the inflexible code of the time would make a point of not being serious, carry on a witty courtship, but would never marry. This code called *préciosité*,[1] in which the lady was accorded

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[1] *Préciosité* arose in the 17th century of France from the lively conversations and playful word games of *les précieuses*, the witty and educated intellectual ladies who frequented the salon of Catherine de Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet; her *Chambre bleue* (the "blue room" of her *hôtel particulier*) offered a Parisian refuge from the dangerous political factionism and coarse manners of the royal court during the minority of Louis XIV. One of the central figures of the salon that gathered at the hôtel de Rambouillet, Madeleine de Scudéry, wrote voluminous romance novels that embodied the refinements of *preciosité*. They were suffused

divine characteristics, appeared in many of the Restoration dramas including those of John Dryden, William Congreve, William Wycherley, and George Farquhar. Not all seventeenth-century dramatists, however, were in favor of *préciosité* as we can see in the comedies of Thomas Shadwell.

Few scholars, as my research goes, have mentioned Shadwell's aversion to *préciosité*. David S. Berkeley notes that Shadwell was a satirist of *préciosité* ("*Préciosité*" 110). John Harrington Smith says, "Opposition to the strictly nonexemplary mood which dominated comedy in the early Restoration was first voiced by Shadwell; and at that time he was in a minority of one" ("Shadwell" 24). Smith, in further pointing out anti-*préciosité* in Shadwell's work, states,

> He [Shadwell] voiced his opposition to the reigning couple in comedy in the preface to his first play—*The Sullen Lovers*, 1688—describing the gay hero as "a Swearing, Drinking, Whoring, Ruffian" and the gay heroine as "an impudent ill-bred tomrig, and these are the fine people of the play." (*Gay* 120)

It is my purpose to show evidence of anti-*préciosité* as it appears in the plays of Thomas Shadwell. Of course, it is not a good idea to generalize Shadwell's attitude toward the court or the manners of his age in all of his

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with feminine elegance, exquisitely correct scruples of behavior and Platonic love that were hugely popular with a largely female audience, but scorned by most men. The "questions of love" that were debated in the *précieuses' salons* reflected the "courts of love" that were a feature of medieval courtly love. The satire of Molière's comedy *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659) punctured their pretensions. The *précieuses* remembered through the filter of Molière's one-act satire of them in *Les précieuses ridicules* (1659), a bitter comedy of manners that brought Molière and his company to the attention of Parisians, after years of touring the provinces, and attracted the patronage of Louis XIV; it still plays well today. *Les précieuses ridicules* permanently fixed the pejorative connotation of précieuse as "affected". For more about *préciosité*, refer to Byung-Eun Lee(이병은)'s "*Préciosité* in Milton's Poetry." *Milton Studies (of Korea)* 8 (1998): 281-302.

works; however, if we narrow down to the point of *préciosité* only, we may have an interesting fact about Shadwell. Serving best to illustrate this point are the following comedies: *The Sullen Lovers: or, the Impertinents* (1693), *The Virtuoso* (1691), *The Squire of Alsatia* (1693), *Bury Fair* (1689), and *The Scowrers* (1691).

Before investigating Shadwell's anti-*préciosité,* it is necessary to determine what *préciosité* is and to examine some of its qualities. Berkeley states that "the core of *préciosité* was a belief in the divine or semi-divine status of ladies of beauty and virtue" ("*Préciosité*" 114). Also associated with the code is the lover, *précieux*, who must appear completely submissive. *Préciosité* also boasts its own language, a rather flowery one, in which many terms are prevalent.

The heroine, *précieuse*, thinks herself superior to those around her. She demands that her lover adore her and approach her with "the most formal speeches and humble postures" (Malone 20). It was believed that the lady's eyes held irresistible charms that were capable of darting out and reducing her lover. The *précieuse*, who is subject to fainting spells and sighing, is often so involved in her own emotions that she fails to use whatever intelligence she may happen to possess.

On the other hand, one finds the *précieux.* He may appear as the whining lover who exemplifies *préciosité* in his submission to the *précieuse*. This gay gentleman, or gallant, as he may sometimes be called, adheres to his lady's demands often to the extent of standing with arms folded, or lying prostrate at her feet. The rake or villain is the man who ridicules the forms of the whining lover but ends up being converted—usually in the fifth act of the play (Malone 37, 46).

The flowery language associated with *préciosité* includes such terms as "canting," "romantic," "whining," "killing," and "dying." "Dying" refers to the lover's being prostrate at the feet of his mistress. "Killing" is the woman's ability to charm a man. Defining the word "whine," Berkeley

comments, "in this sense whine is a pejorative referring to what Restoration society at times calls 'romantic' (i.e. like a romance) love" ("Whining" 226). Thus the *précieuse*, *précieux*, and the language are the primary aspects of *préciosité*. It is in the treatment of these three that this paper shall proceed with an examination of Shadwell's plays.

Since the *précieuse* was the center of *préciosité*, much of Shadwell's ridicule is of her. Most prominent of his comedies in this aspect is *Bury Fair*. The main plot of this play concerns Wildish's hiring of a French wigmaker, La Roch, to pose as a count and court a very *précieuse* lady, Madam Fantast. Wildish, on arriving in Bury in Act 1, Scene 1, says of Madam Fantast, "I must confess, God has given her one good Face; but by her most insupportable Affectation, she screws it into twenty bad ones."[2] (1.1.2) After Wildish displays his aversion to the *précieuse* when he says,

> Of all female Creatures, my aversion is to the Lady Fantast, and her Affected, Conceited, Disdainful Daughter: I will have this fellow [La Roch] personate a French Count, and make Love to the Daughter. (1.1.11)

Gertrude, the step-sister of Madam Fantast, is also contemptuous of the *précieuse*. In fact, she says to Madam Fantast in Act 2, Scene 1, "[I] have no Art or Affectation" (2.1.17). Wildish, speaking to Bellamy of the pretended count's flirtation, states, "My Lord, I must take off this Rogue, my Honour may be question'd: for, tho I hate the Affected Creature [Madam Fantast], I wou'd not have this go on to a Marriage, or a Contract" (4.1.45). Oldwit, Lady Fantast's husband, is quite frank as he gives his ideas of a *précieuse* to her, saying, "Such counterfeit Breeding and false Wit, as you, old doting Fop, with the most Affected and Fantastick Thing your

[2] Thomas Shadwell's works are from *ProQuest Literature Online*, and will be cited parenthetically by the act, scene, and page number from the website.

Daughter do posses, I utterly renounce" (5.1.4). After learning of the departure of Lady Fantast and her daughter on learning they had been tricked, Oldwit further comments, "Heav'n be prais'd, for this great Deliverance; no more shall I be plagu'd with their damn'd Wit and Breeding" (5.1.8). After reading comments of the characters, one can see that the *précieuse* is represented by Lady Fantast and her daughter, Madam Fantast, as they dote on their reputations and breeding. Wildish, Oldwit, and Gertrude are the major opponents of the *précieuse* in this comedy.

Shadwell is shown as a foe to the gay couple in *The Sullen Lovers*. In this play Caroline has the advantage; and Lovell is a serious lover, not a gallant. Anti-*précieuse* is probably best seen in the character of Lady Vaine. Pretending to be a *précieuse* and being suspected of being one so strongly by Sir Positive-At-All that he marries her, she is described in the *dramatis personae* as "a whore, that takes upon her the name of a Lady, very talkative and impertinently affected in her Language, always pretending to Vertue and Honour." J. L. Styan categorizes her as "the least acceptable, and most laughable, of female aberrations, those of the maiden lady of 'high profession and low practice'" (129). They are so afflicted with the affectation of virtue that "they must be constantly on the alert for men who they believe harbour designs upon their persons" (Styan 130).

Isabella and Teresia of *The Squire of Alsatia* are not *précieuses*; therefore, no direct aversion to the *précieuse* is shown in this play. However, the comedy which is anti-*préciosité* as a whole, will be further examined later.

Lady Maggot of *The Scowrers* shows herself to be *précieuse* as she questions, "Are there no Gallants left?" (2.1.5) and again when she says, "I am experienced, and proof against temptation, By my known Vertue and Wisdom." (3.1.1). In Act 5 she is made fun of as she goes to meet Wildfire, her pretended lover, and instead is trapped by Tope; so that Wildfire can go to her house to court her daughter, Clara.

In *The Virtuoso* Clarinda and Miranda have *précieuse* names; yet they do not expect Longvil and Bruce to act the whining lovers. Snarl, who is very much against the period in which they live, including *préciosité*, says in the presence of Miranda and Clarinda, "I'd not kiss a Lady of this Age, by the Mass, I'd rather kiss my horse" (1.1.13).

As well as making jabs at the *précieuse*, Shadwell ridicules the lovers. This is perhaps best seen in *The Sullen Lovers*, and even narrowed down in the character of Sir Positive-At-All. The two truly serious gentlemen, Lovell and Bruce, often make fun of the gallant, Sir Positive. At one point in Act 3, Scene 1, Sir Positive comments about hanging being a pensive position of a defected lover. On hearing this, Stanford makes fun of him. Later Stanford teases Sir Positive by saving sarcastically to him, "O no Sir, by no means; 'twould be the rudest thing in the World to disobey your Mistress" (4.1.59). In his last speech after he has married the counterfeit Lady Vaine, Sir Positive defends her even though he has discovered she is a harlot. Lovel asks, "What will not a Positive Coxcomb defend?" (5.1.96).

Of Shadwell's ridiculing the gallant in *The Squire of Alsatia*, John Harrington Smith says,

> By the success of his combination of gay hero with serious heroine in *The Squire*, Shadwell established a pattern which was to be used repeatedly thereafter for restraining the gallant. (*Gay* 126)

In this play the gay hero is Belfond Junior, while the girl is Teresia. It is interesting to see the debate of Sir Edward and Sir William over the character of Belfond Junior:

> Sir William: . . . But you have been so gentle to him [Belfond Junior], he is run into all manner of Vice and Riot; no bounds can hold him; no shame can stop him; no Laws nor Customs can restrain him.

> Sir Edward: I am confident you are mistaken: He has as fair a Reputation as any Gentleman about London: 'Tis true, he's a good fellow, but no Sot; he loves mirth and society, without Drunkenness: He is, as all young Fellows I believe are, given to Women; but 'tis in private; and he is particular: no Common Whore-master: and in short, keeps as good Company as any man in England.
>
> Sir William: Your over-weening makes you look through a false Glass upon him. Company! why he keeps Company for the Devil: Had you come a minute sooner, you might have seen two of his Companions; they were praising him for Roaring, Swearing, Ranting, Scouring, Whoring, beating Watches, breaking Windows: (1.1.13-14)

The two brothers are talking past each other. Belfond Junior drinks, but that is not a vice in Sir Edward's view because he is not a drunk, and he whores around, but discreetly, as a gentleman should. To Paul E. Parnell and Donald Bruce, Belfond Junior acts as a rational calculating machine. Parnell says that "The younger Belfond's reformation does not, however, occur because of Sir Edward's rebuke, but because the youth's life of pleasure has reached the point of diminishing returns" (210). Bruce claims that Belfond Junior coaxes "others when it suits his purpose, and . . . behave[s] with a hard selfishness when there is nothing to be gained" (75). Shadwell maybe expects the reader to take Belfond Junior's repentance seriously at the last but, as Christopher Wheatley points out, that is a mistake (36). The author, consciously or unconsciously, must have ridiculed the gallant.

That Shadwell criticizes the gallant is well shown from the fact Belfond Junior is unlike the young gallants in French comedies from where the English *préciosité* tradition had come from. At the end of the play, Belfond Junior shows no inclination for marriage to the woman who has given him her real love, and very little, despite his protestations for her, for a continuing relationship of any kind of her, as T. G. A. Nelson points out.

In the final scene Belfond Junior tells Lucia that he will never again meet her as a lover, though he will always treat her as a friend. Belfond Junior's indulgent uncle, "because his [Belfond Junior's] Love has gone so far" (5.1.80), presents Lucia with £1,500, while Belfond Junior goes off to marry a wealthier, unsullied woman: no real consideration is given to Lucia's continuing need for love. It would be "grotesque" (Nelson 378) to conclude that comedies offer an exact representation of real social practices.

In *The Scowrers* Shadwell still ridicules the gallant; Tope shows his aversion to the lovers, Sir William and Wildfire, when he says (4.1),

> Why you brace of Baboons! what melancholy dull Puppies does Love make of Fellows? A Pox of your Love. Love! 'tis a silly boyish Disease, and should never come after the Chicken pox and Kib'd heels. (4.1.35)

Again he states his opinion as he addressing the rakes,

> Ha, ha, ha, fine Fools, turn sober Sots, give over all Vanities, as you call 'em, for the greatest Vanity on the Earth, Matrimony! you may leave any other Vanities when you please, but that will stick to you with a Vengance. Matrimony ha, ha ha, there's nothing in the world worth being in earnest, I am sure not being sober, 'tis all a Farce. (5.3.53)

In *The Virtuoso* Shadwell is against the *précieux* as he shows us by having the two heroes be pure lovers; but he has Snarl, another character, speak against the gallants when he says in Act 2, Scene 2,

> Why then are vitious illiterate foolish Fellows, good for nothing but to roar and make a noise in a Play-house. To be very brisk with pert Whores in Vizards, who, though never so ill-bred, are most commonly too hard for them at their own weapon, Repartee – And when Whores are not there, they play Monkey-tricks with one another, while all sober men laugh at them. (2.2.31)

Sir Formal Trifle epitomizes the lover, for he never speaks without employing flowers of rhetoric. He is teased and made fun of throughout the play, but the climax comes when he is shut up in the virtuoso's trap by Clarinda. Sir Samuel Hardy, disguised as a woman, is put into the same trap; and Sir Formal, lover that he is, tries to seduce him. This ridicule of the lover is one of the most humorous parts of the play.

The main attack at the lover in *Bury Fair* comes when Gertrude tells Lord Bellamy, who is courting her, how she feels about the *précieux*, she comments,

> 'Tis all alike. "Madam, your Beauties! your excellent Accomplishments! your extraordinary Merits! Divine, &c. The lustre of your Eyes! and the rest. The honour to kiss your fair hands! &c." All this we have in Romances, and Love and Honour Plays. Trust me, my Lord, 'tis tedious. (3.1.35)

Shadwell uses the language associated with *préciosité* many times. Some of the more eloquent phrases are to follow. Usually the person who is using these terms will be ridiculed later in the play, or else he is using the words as a joke. In *The Virtuoso* Lady Gimcrack, when caught with her lover by her husband, declares "I shall faint. I shall faint" (4.2.54). Tope of *The Scowrers* says to Lady Maggot (5.2), "Oh, Madam, Ladies should not kill but with their Eyes" (5.3.48). Sir William Rant of the same play says, "Oh that dear sweet Eugenia, she has kill'd me" (1.1.7), and later to Eugenia, "I am struck in a moment, you have already converted me" (2.1.18). *Bury Fair*, too, has its share of flowery language. For example, Mr. Trim and Madam Fantast have donned names befitting *préciosité* as they call each other Eugenius and Dorinda. These are but a few examples of the *précieuse* language as it appears in Shadwell's comedies.

Shadwell sometimes ridicules *préciosité* as a whole rather than any

segment of it. In *Bury Fair* Sir William complains of the affectations and pretense of people when he first arrives in Bury,

> There are Men of Wit, Honour, and Breeding; and Women of great Wit, Beauty, and Ingenuity, and Well-bred too, in this Town, which is really a sweet Town; but these pretend to nothing: Your pretenders never have any thing in 'em. (1.1.2)

Stanford also speaks against the age of *préciosité* to Emilia in *The Sullen Lovers* as he says,

> Who wou'd live in such a treach'rous Age, to see this Gentleman that Courts the t'other Gentleman's Wife, meet him and embrace him; and swear he loves him above the World: and he poor fool dotes extreamly upon him that does the Injury. (2.1.26)

Moreover, Shadwell himself tells us in the epilogue of *The Squire of Alsatia* that he has carefully avoided *préciosité*:

> No Princess frowns, no Hero rants and whines,
> is weak Sense enbroyder'd with strong lines:
> No Battels, Trumpets, Drums, not any dye;
> No Mortal Wounds, to please your Cruelty; (“Epilogue”)

Allardyce Nicoll thinks *The Squire of Alsatia* displayed “a valuable picture of middle class citizens, thieves, and rascals of the seventeenth century” (208). Nicoll also describes Shadwell as a “perverted moralist: and it is precisely his perverted morals—his relating of art to life—that causes us to shrink somewhat from the picture which he presents to us” (208). Shadwell was a popular dramatist in his time, and this fact serves to emphasize the relationship it held to the thoughts of Shadwell’s time and the lives of his contemporaries.

Again by the use of an epilogue does Shadwell show his feelings toward *préciosité*. In *The Virtuoso* he says,

> But of those Ladies he despairs today,
> Who love a dull Romantick whining Play;
> Where poor frail Woman's made a Deity,
> With sensless amorous Idolatry,
> And snivelling Heroes sigh, and pine, and cry. ("Epilogue")

Shadwell's rejection of *préciosité* might have come from his rival relationship with Dryden. From the beginning of his career, Shadwell disliked Dryden's comedies, including the witty duels between resistant heroines and their suitors, which he condemned as lewd and impudent. Instead, Shadwell established a pattern of "sincere and serious" heroines, whose chief obstacles to love lie not in their coy refusals but also in the objections of parents and guardians. the bases of these differences are political as well as aesthetic and moral.[3] Dryden used the idea which raised romantic idolatry of women to the highest pitch by giving them a function ordinarily reserved to the deity. Dryden's dedication of *The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man* furnished an illustration of the complimentary use of *précieuse*. Addressing "To Her Royal Highness, the Dutchess," he wrote,

> You are never seen but You are blest: and I am sure You bless all those who see You. Thus, Madam, in the midst of Crouds you Reign in Solitude; adn are ador'd with the deepest Veneration, that of Silence. . . . 'Tis the nature of Perfection to be attractive; but the Excellency of the object refines the nature of the love. It strikes an impression of awful reverence. . . . Mortality cannot bear it often; it finds them in the

[3] For a further reading of the relationship between Shadwell and Dryden, refer to Kirk Combe's "Introduction: Considering Shadwell," *Restoration* 20 (1996): 94-97.

> eagerness and height of their Devotion. Moral Perfections are rais'd higher by you in the softer Sex: as if Men were of too coarse a Mould for Heav'n to work on, and that the Image of Divinity could not be cast to likeness in so harsh a Metal.[4](Vol. 12, p. 82)

There are, moreover, many cases of *préciosité* in Dryden's dramas, such as *Marriage à-la-mode*.[5] For Shadwell, comedy required an instructive moral purpose, while Dryden insisted on writing for entertainment alone.

Unfortunately Thomas Shadwell has not been well remembered for his work but mostly as being the butt of John Dryden's attacks.[6] However, since *préciosité* was often seen in Restoration comedies, and, the *précieuse* was the center of Restoration comedy (Malone 34), and, moreover, when Restoration comedy deals with love, it is a conscious mixture of *préciosité* and anti-*préciosité* elements (Berkeley "*Préciosité*," 128), and a knowledge of *préciosité* increases the appetite for the mock-*précieuse* and furnishes a target for manners wit, it seems that Shadwell's attack on *préciosité* would be an important part of seventeenth-century drama.

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[4] Dryden's works are from *The Works of John Dryden,* ed. H. T. Swedenberg Jr., et al. 20 vols. Berkeley: U of California P, 1950-2000.

[5] For the Dryden's favor of *préciosité,* refer David S. Berkeley's "The Art of 'Whining' Love," *Studies in Philology* 52.3 (1955): 478-496, "An Unnoted Sense of 'Whining'," *American Speech* 27.3 (1952): 225-228, and "*Préciosité* and the Restoration Comedy of Manners," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 18.2 (1955): 109-128.

[6] See John Dryden's "MacFlecknoe, or a Satyr upon the True-Blew-Protestant Poet, T. S."

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ABSTRACT

Anti-*Préciosité* in the Drama of Thomas Shadwell

Byung-Eun Lee

England's literature, as well as her society, was affected by *préciosité* which originated in France and made its appearance in England during the reign of Charles I. Prevalent during the first decade of Charles II' reign was the comic theme of the love-game in which a gay hero and heroine in accordance to the inflexible code of the time would make a point of not being serious, carry on a witty courtship, but would never marry. This code called *préciosité*, in which the lady was accorded divine characteristics, appeared in many of the Restoration dramas including those of John Dryden, William Congreve, William Wycherley, and George Farquhar. Not all seventeenth-century dramatists, however, were in favor of *préciosité* as we can see in the comedies of Thomas Shadwell.

It is the purpose of this paper to show evidence of anti-*préciosité* as it appears in the plays of Shadwell. Serving best to illustrate this point are the following comedies: *The Sullen Lovers: or, the Impertinents* (1693), *The Virtuoso* (1691), *The Squire of Alsatia* (1693), *Bury Fair* (1689), and *The Scowrers* (1691). For example, since the *précieuse*, the heroine, was the center of *préciosité*, much of Shadwell's ridicule is of her. Most prominent of his comedies in this aspect is *Bury Fair*. Wildish says of Madam Fantast, "I must confess, God has given her one good Face; but by her most insupportable Affectation, she screws it into twenty bad ones." As well as making jabs at the *précieuse*, Shadwell ridicules the lovers. This is perhaps best seen in *The Sullen Lovers*, and even narrowed down in the character of Sir Positive-At-All.

Since *préciosité* was often seen in Restoration comedies, and, the *précieuse* was the center of Restoration comedy, and, moreover, when Restoration comedy deals with love, it is a conscious mixture of *préciosité* and anti-*préciosité* elements, and a knowledge of *préciosité* increases the appetite for the mock-*précieuse* and furnishes a target for manners wit, it seems that Shadwell's attack on *préciosité* would be an important part of seventeenth-century drama.

Key Words | Thomas Shadwell, anti-*préciosité*, Restoration comedy, *The Sullen Lovers*, *The Virtuoso*, *The Squire of Alsatia*, *Bury Fair*, *The Scowrers*

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