Oaths, Imprecations and Other Blasphemous Formulas in
Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan's *The Rivals*

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Some people may resort to foul language like swearing and cursing to vent uncontrollably intense feelings. These profane and stigmatized expressions, which occur in a large variety of forms, have evolved for centuries and are now deep-rooted in English-speaking countries. It is true that most of them have lost their original or literal senses and are used merely as meaningless expletives, but there are some which are still deemed strictly as taboo-social restrictions prohibit their use in public. This article deals with oaths, imprecations and other blasphemous formulas found in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). Examples are sorted according to their fundamental meanings, with some statistical analyses added in a later section for further discussion. We are concerned here particularly with the linguistic features influenced by such social factors as "gender" and "class," tracing the trends in 18th century British society. We hope to elucidate what conventional formulas were widely adopted in those days and how new modes were devised by each author.

**Keywords**: oath, imprecation, swearing, expletive, 18th c. British drama

0. Introduction

Oaths and imprecations, as a whole, are often associated with taboo words, which values of a society make one refrain from uttering in public or in ceremonious situations. Regardless of their propriety, new phrases were ever brought into the world, while some old ones survived and were passed down through the ages. Eventually, innumerable oaths and imprecations (or more explicitly put, "swearing" and "cursing") have accumulated, until they have come up to forming one significant aspect in colloquial English. Why have people never ceased to use them, at least among certain peer groups, despite the fact that they are labelled low, stigmatized or even "socially offensive"? One conceivable answer would be that these expressions sound simply "powerful," all the more for their being "felt to be wrong," as Trudgill ([1974] 2000: 19) suggests when discussing taboo and swear words.

To return to the point of values of a society, they differ in each period and the differences of values and social attitudes affect the decision whether a certain debased expression can be permitted in its full/partial use or not. Abusive language was comparatively widespread in the Elizabethan Age (its use was much more restricted, though, than today), when Shakespeare may have felt less restrained to expose it in his works, whereas its use was strictly prohibited in the Victorian Age, when ethical and moral sense permeated especially among people of gentility and education. Our concern in the present article is to investigate what modes of oath and imprecation—in single words, formulas, frames and so forth—prevailed in the 18th century, the period
between the two prominent Ages, and to explore how the social attitudes were in those days towards the abusive language.

To focus on discussing these issues, Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* (henceforth *SSC*) and Sheridan’s *The Rivals* (henceforth *Riv*) are selected here; for male/female characters in both dramas—ranged from the upper to the lower classes—may probably show richer varieties than those in many other contemporary works, and most of them are assigned to more or less substantial roles, interacting well with each other in the plays. In the course of developing our discussion, we hope to point out gender and class differences in the language, if there are any, by closely analysing the data collected.

1. In Association with the Infernal Regions

1.1 ‘Deuce’

“Deuce” is generally known to be synonymous with “devil,” signifying “the personification or spirit of mischief.” When used as an expletive in a question, it conveys strong feelings like “impatience, anger or astonishment,” emphasizing the content of the question. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth *OED*) notes that this word is derived probably from LG2 in the 17th century, its first definition being “bad luck, plague, mischief” in impreca tions and exclamations. In association with this sense, it has been considered, as suggested in the *OED*, to be originally the same with the “deuce” at dice (i.e. a gambler’s exclamation of vexation ‘the deuce!’); for “two” is the lowest and most unlucky throw.” Sheridan’s *Riv* provides a few examples, in all of which “deuce” occurs as an expletive after a wh-interrogative:

(1) —but who the deuce thought of seeing you in Bath! (*Riv* 77, *Fag*) / —but what the deuce is the meaning of it?—I am quite astonish’d! (*Riv* 127, *Sir Anthony*) / Hey! what the deuce have you got here? (*Riv* 138, *Sir Anthony*)

1.2 ‘Devil’

Applied to a great deal of undesirable qualities, “devil” has long been employed in various phrases, exclamations and proverbs. When used as an expletive or in an interjectional phrase, it expresses “impatience, irritation, strong surprise, dismay, or vexation,” similar to the above-mentioned “deuce.” Its examples abound in both dramas, particularly in *Riv* (3 times in *SSC* and 19 times in *Riv*):

As expletives:


Interjectionally:

(2b) The devil, Sir, do you think we have brought down a whole Joiners Company, or the Corporation of Bedford, to eat up such a supper? (*SSC* 137, *Marlow*) / O! the devil! how shall I support it? (*SSC* 143, *Marlow*) / Oh, the devil! (*SSC* 213, *Marlow*) / The devil they are! (*Riv* 77, *Thomas*) / Oh, the devil! my last note. (*Riv* 110, *Absolute*) / O, the devil! here’s *Sir Anthony*!—how shall I escape him? (*Riv* 137, *Absolute*), etc.

1.3 ‘Hell’

“Hell” is one of the most common and widespread expletives. Interestingly enough, the *OED* offers no examples from any 18th century literary works, although the first citation is taken from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* (1596) in the Early Modern English (henceforth *EMoDE*) and examples abound considerably in the 19th century and most in the 20th century. This explains well why there is only one example in *Riv* and none in *SSC*. The only example is found in a speech of Faulkland, a male character of the upper class. In combination with “the devil,” his irritation and vexation are further intensified in (3):

(3) Hell and the devil!—There! there!—I told you so! I told you so! (*Riv* 94, *Faulkland*)

2. Minced Forms of “God”

2.1 ‘Gad’ and its Derivatives

“Gad,” which is a minced pronunciation of “God,” started to be used in the *EMoDE* period as a mild or
softened oath. It occurs in a simple word as well as in such phrases as "by Gad" and "Gad's life." There happens to be no example of "by Gad" in either drama and only one example of "Gad's life" in *Riv* (shown in (4b)). Instead, "egad," along with its aphetic form (i.e. "gad"), occur fairly frequently in both dramas (shown in (4c)). "Egad" is considered, in the *OED*, to have represented "A God!" earlier, but in later times it may have been associated with asseverations like "i'faith" or possibly with "by God."

(4a) Gad! Sir, how came you to call my son out, without explaining your reasons? (Riv 143, Sir Anthony) / Gad! sir, I like your spirit; (Riv 145, Sir Anthony)

(4b) Hey!-Gad's life; it is.--Why, Jack,--what are you afraid of? (Riv 137, Sir Anthony)

(4c) Egad! and that's more than I do myself. (SSC 147, Marlow) / Egad! she has hit it, sure enough. (SSC 172, Marlow) / Egad! I don't quite like this chit. (SSC 173, Marlow) / 'Gad, that's true--I grow full of anger, Sir Lucius!--I fire apace! (Riv 116, Acres) / 'Egad, but I will, Jack. (Riv 120, Acres) / Permit me, Ma'am--Tol-de-rol--'gad, I should like to have a little fooling myself--Tol-de-rol! de-rol. (Riv 125, Sir Anthony) / So!--egad! I thought as much!--that d-n'd monosyllable has froze me! (Riv 125, Capt. Absolute) / 'Gad, I must try what a little spirit will do. (Riv 125, Capt. Absolute) / 'Gad! Sir, I like your spirit; and at night we single lads will drink a health to the young couples, and a husband to Mrs. Malaprop. (Riv 145, Sir Anthony), etc.

"Ecod," which is a variation of "egad," also occurs frequently as a mild oath. The date of the first citation in the *OED* is 1733 (from Fielding's work). It is very likely, therefore, that "ecod" appeared in the first half of the 18th century and may have been used widely by contemporary people. Actually, it is used vigorously by Tony and Diggory in *SSC* (17 times and 4 times, respectively):

(5) Ecod, and so it would, Master Slang. (SSC 118, Tony) / Ecod, and when I'm of age, I'll be no bas-

tard, I promise you. (SSC 118, Tony) / Ecod, I thank your worship, I'll make a shift to stay my stomach with a slice of cold beef in the pantry. (SSC 126, Diggory) / Ecod, your worship, I never have courage till I see the eatables and drinkables brought upo' the table, and then I'm as bauld as a lion. (SSC 127, Diggory) / Ecod! I'll not be made a fool of no longer. (SSC 153, Tony) / Ecod! Mamma, your own notes are the wildest of the two. (SSC 154, Tony) / Ecod! I have got them. (SSC 161, Tony), *et passim*.

2. 2 'Od/ 'Odd'

Besides "gad," "od" (or "odd") is another minced form of "God." In the case of "gad," the vowel /o/ is changed into /æ/, whereas the initial consonant /g/ is elided in "od." According to the *OED*, "od" came into "vogue about 1600, when, to avoid the overt profanation of sacred names, many minced and disguised equivalents became prevalent." In addition, a similar expression "odso" is used as "exclamation of surprise." It is corrupted from "God-so," after oaths beginning with "God's." A number of examples are found in the words of Thomas, a coachman to Sir Anthony Absolute in *Riv*:

(6a) Odd! Sir Anthony will stare to see the Captain here! (Riv 77, Thomas) / Odd! I warrant she has a set of thousands at least: (Riv 78, Thomas) / Odd! he's giving her money! (Riv 79, Thomas) / Odd! I'll make myself small enough: (Riv 140, Acres)

(6b) Odso! Then you must show me your embroi-
dery. (SSC 174, Marlow) / Od'so! she and your father can be but just arrived before me? (Riv 91, Acres) / Odd so!--I mustn't forget her tho'. (Riv 97, Sir Anthony) / To please my father! Z--ds! not to please--O, my father!--Odd so! (Riv 104, Sir Anthony)

Furthermore, a set phrase like "odd's life" (> "God's life") is used frequently in *Riv*. This formula, along with "od's me" and "od's my will," also started to appear around 1600:

(7) Hey!--Odd's life! Mr. Fag!--give us your hand, my old fellow-servant. (Riv 77, Thomas) / Odd's life! when I heard how the lawyers and doctors
had took to their own hair, I thought how 'twould go next: *(Riv 79, Thomas) / Odds life, Sir! if you have the estate, you must take it with the live stock on it, as it stands. *(Riv 97, Sir Anthony) / Odds life! when I ran away with your mother, I would not have touched anything old or ugly to gain an empire. *(Riv 104, Sir Anthony) / Odds life! I've a great mind to marry the girl myself! *(Riv 105, Sir Anthony) / By my valour, I should like to see you fight first! Odds life! *(Riv 117) / Odds life! people often fight without any mischief done! *(Riv 119, Acres) / Odds life! I'm in such spirits—I don't know what I could not do! *(Riv 125, Sir Anthony) / Odds life! Sir Lucius, I'm not going to fight Mr. Faulkland; these are my particular friends. *(Riv 142, Acres)"

2. 3 'Zooks'

"Zooks" is short for "gadzooks," expressing "vexation, surprise, or other emotion."16 "Gadzooks" is probably a corruption of "God's Hooks (the nails of the cross),"17 whose other derivatives may have been "cotzooks," "cutzooks" and "adzooks." There is only one example of this oath found in Thomas' speech:

(8) Zooks! 'tis the Captain.—Is that the Lady with him? *(Riv 79, Thomas)"

2. 4 ‘Sdeath’

"Sdeath" is a euphemistic abbreviation of "God's death." According to the *OED*, it first appeared in the EModE period.18 In Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (henceforth *DSUE*), it is suggested that this oath "should perhaps be considered S.E. (i.e. Standard English)."19 Its users are all male characters of the upper class, as seen in (9), which may endorse the suggestion made by *DSUE*:

(9) 'Sdeath!—you rascal! you have not trusted him! *(Riv 88, Capt. Absolute) / 'Sdeath! to make herself the pipe and ballad-monger of a circle! to soothe her light heart with catches and gleeles! *(Riv 93, Faulkland) / 'Sdeath! what a brute am I to use her thus! *(Riv 108, Faulkland) / 'Sdeath, I never was in a worse humour in my life! *(Riv 128, Capt. Absolute)"

2. 5 ‘Wounds’

2. 5. 1 ‘Zounds’

"Zounds," which is a euphemistic abbreviation of "God's wounds," also started to be used in oaths and asseverations in the EModE period.20 The OED's abundant citations from the 16th century resources may serve to support the observation that this oath must have been very prevalent in those days. Actually, this oath diffuses most widely (as many as 33 times) all over the two dramas. It occurs exclusively in the speech of male characters, particularly of the upper class. Some examples are given below:

(10) Zounds, man! we could as soon find out the longitude! *(SSC 122, Marlow) / Zounds! George, sure you won't go? how can you leave us? *(SSC 145, Marlow) / Zounds! here they are. Morrice! France! *(SSC 162, Tony) / Zounds! He'll drive me distracted, if I contain myself any longer. *(SSC 181, Mr. Hardcastle) / Z—ds! Thomas, she could pay the national debt as easy as I could my washerwoman! *(Riv 78, Fag) / Z—ds! had she made one in a Cotillon—I believe I could have forgiven even that—but to be monkey-led for a night! *(Riv 94, Faulkland) / Z—ds! sirrah! The lady shall be as ugly as I choose: *(Riv 98, Sir Anthony) / If not, z—ds! don't enter the same hemisphere with me! *(Riv 99, Sir Anthony) / No—z—ds! she's not coming!—nor don't intend it, I suppose. *(Riv 108, Faulkland) / Z—ds! as the man in the plays says, 'I could do such deeds!' *(Riv 116, Acres) / Z—ds! I'm not asking him to dinner. *(Riv 117, Acres) / Z—ds, David, you're a coward! *(Riv 119, Acres) / Z—ds! sirrah! why don't you speak? *(Riv 122, Sir Anthony) / Z—ds! I shall be in a phrenzy! *(Riv 127, Sir Anthony) / O! z—ds! no, Sir, not for the world! *(Riv 138, Capt. Absolute) / Zounds! Jack, how durst you insult the gentleman in a manner which his honour could not brook? *(Riv 143, Sir Anthony), et passim."

2. 5. 2 ‘Wauns’

"Wauns" was a variant of "wounds," a corruption of "God's wounds," from the 17th to the 18th century.21 The pronunciation of "wounds" is not /wʌndz/ but /wɔndz/ as its variant form "wauns" suggests. This oath is used by SSC's Diggory, a male servant to Mr. Hardcastle:
Oaths, Imprecations and Other Blasphemous Formulas in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan's *The Rivals*

(11) Wauns, and I'm sure it canna be mine. (SSC 127, Diggory)

2. 5. 3 'Oons'

"Oons" (/u:nz/) is a worn-down form of "wounds" (i.e. "God's wounds!" "Zounds!"), /w/ being dropped before /u:/, and /d/ after /u/, as is common in dialects. It is "a petty oath" used exclusively by David, a servant to Bob Acres:

(12) Oons! I'll hold a gallon, there ain't a dog in the house but would bark, and I question whether Phillis would wag a hair of her tail! (Riv 114, David) / Oons! what will the old lady say, when she hears o'it? (Riv 118, David) / Oons! here to meet some lion-hearted fellow, I warrant, with his d-n-d double-barrel'd swords, and cut-and-thrust pistols! (Riv 119, David) / Oons! I wouldn't swear it mayn't go off! (Riv 119, David) / Oons! he's out of sight! and I'm out of breath, for my part! (Riv 139, David)

3. "Lord" and its Minced Forms

3. 1 'Lord'

"Lord" is another common term used in asseverations, though it offers much less variety than "God" in either drama. When used as an interjection, it expresses "a mere exclamation of surprise," which originates from "the use in invocations."

(13) Lord, Mr. Hardcastle, you're for ever at your Dorothy's and your old wife's. (SSC 107, Mrs. Hardcastle) / O Lord! she won't mind me—only tell her Beverley—(Riv 111, Capt. Absolute)

3. 2 'Lud'

"Lud" is a minced form of "lord," used "as an exclamation." It may have been quite prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries; for the date of the first citation in the *OED* is 1725 and a considerable number of examples are drawn from these two centuries. The second extract in (14) is included among the examples in the *OED*. This minced oath is used exclusively by female characters:

(14) Lud, this news of Papa's, puts me all in a flutter. (SSC 113, Miss Hardcastle) / O lud! he has almost cracked my head. (SSC 153, Miss Neville) / O lud! O lud! the most notorious spot in all the country. (SSC 204, Mrs. Hardcastle) / O lud! he'll murder my poor boy, my darling! (SSC 207, Mrs. Hardcastle) / Lud! Ma'am, here is Miss Melville. (Riv 81, Lucy) / O Lud! ma'am, they are both coming upstairs. (Riv 83, Lucy) / O lud!—now, Mr. Fag—you flurry you one so. (Riv 102, Lucy) / O Lud! Sir Anthony! (Riv 124, Mrs. Malaprop) / Lud! Child, what's the matter with you? (Riv 134, Lydia) / O Lud! What has brought my Aunt here! (Riv 135, Lydia), etc.

3. 3 'Lard'

"Lard," which is an obsolete form of "lord," was current from the 16th to 18th century. Its spelling suggests that the vowel /a:/ is changed into an open vowel /a/. *Riv* has one example of "lard," in which it is used in the optative:

(15) Master Butler wouldn't believe his own eyes, and Mrs. Pickle would cry, Lard presarve me! our dairymaid would come giggling to the door, and I warrant Dolly Tester, your honour's favourite, would blush like my waistcoat. (Riv 114, Mrs. Pickle in David's speech)

The verb "presarve" (> "preserve") in the optative also suggests that the vowel in the accented syllable is changed into the open vowel /a/. This open vowel for a mid-central long vowel /a/ occurs particularly in vulgar people's speeches. *SSC*'s Diggory, for instance, uses "perfectly" for "perfectly" and "sartain" for "certain."

3. 4 'La'

"La" is used as "a mere expression of surprise."

According to the *OED*, this "la" may have been in origin an alteration prompted by an instinctive sense of expressiveness in the vowel sound of "lo" and in later use it has coalesced with "lor" (= "Lord!") as an exclamation. Miss Hardcastle in *SSC* uses it once when she shows Marlow an affected surprise:

(16) O la, sir, you'll make one asham'd. (SSC 170, Miss Hardcastle)

3. 5 'Law' / 'Laws'

While the *OED* does not give any clear and specif-
ic statement on the origin of "law" (though it encourages us to confer the word with "la" and "lo"), DSUE regards it as "Lord," adding "Prob. arising from cumulative force of la!, lo!, and Lor." Like the case of "la" mentioned above, "law" is used by Miss Hardcastle again in a similar situation:

(17) Inn! O law—what brought that in your head? One of the best families in the country keep an inn—Ha! ha! ha! (SSC 184, Miss Hardcastle)

"Law's" was a variant form of "law" in the 19th century. There are four examples found in SSC, in all of which it is used in the phrase "by the laws":

(18) By the laws, your worship, that's perfectly unanswerable. (SSC 23, Diggory) / By the laws, I never saw it better acted in my life. (SSC 166, Tony) / By the laws, mamma, you make me for to laugh, ha! ha! (SSC 166, Tony) / By the laws, Miss, it was your own cleverness, and not my stupidity, that did your business. (SSC 192, Tony)

4. 'Heaven'

"Heaven" is the abode of God, in association with which it means "God" itself metonymically; for it is God who realizes the power of heaven. Like "God," it has diverse usages; e.g. "Heaven knows . . . " for emphasis, "Heaven send . . . " for the optative, "Gracious Heaven!" for exclamation, and so forth. There are a few examples of its interjectional usage, as seen in (19a), in which it expresses a total surprise or anger. "Heaven" also occurs in asseverations with such prepositions as "by," "through," and "before" (or aphetically elided into "fore"). Whereas the origins of most oaths can be traced down from the EModE period, the asseverative phrases of "heaven" can be traced as far back as 1000 in the Late Old English period. There are seven occurrences of "by Heaven(s)" (shown in (19b)), all of which are used by male characters of the upper class:

(19a) O Heav'n! Beverley! (Riv 112, Lydia) / Good Heavens! what assurance!--Lydia, Lydia, you ought to know that lying don't become a young woman! (Riv 113, Mrs Malaprop) / [Aside] Heav'n! 'tis Beverley's voice! (Riv 123, Lydia) / Heav'n! what do you mean? (Riv 131, Julia), etc.

(19b) By Heaven! she weeps. (SSC 185, Marlow) / By heavens, Madam, fortune was ever my smallest consideration. (SSC 210, Marlow) / Had I a thousand daughters, by Heaven! I'd as soon have them taught the black-art as their alphabet! (Riv 85, Sir Anthony) / By heavens! I shall forswear your company. (Riv 90, Capt. Absolute) / By Heavens! I would fling all goods of fortune from me with a prodigal hand, to enjoy the scene where I might clasp my Lydia to my bosom, and say, the world affords no smile to me but here— (Riv 112, Capt. Absolute) / By Heav'n! Faulkland, you don't deserve her! (Riv 130, Capt. Absolute) / By Heav'n! Julia— (Riv 133, Faulkland)

5 Other Formulas of Oaths

5. 1 'By Jingo'

The origin of "jingo" is obscure and uncertain. The OED notes that it appeared around 1670 "as a piece of conjuror's gibberish," probably "a mere piece of sonorous nonsense," adding "a recent conjecture, since jingo began to attract attention, would identify it with the Basque word for 'God', given by Van Eys and Larramendi as Jinko, Jainko (Yinko, Yainko), Jincoa, Jaincoa; the suggestion being that this may have been caught up from Basque sailors." This observation is, however, as yet unsupported by evidence. According to the OED, the phrase "by jingo" first appeared in 1694 and seems to have been in use since then as "a vigorous form of asseveration." One example is seen in Tony's words:

(20) By jingo, there's not a pond or a slough within five miles of the place but they can tell the taste of. (SSC 203, Tony)

5. 2 'By the Elevens'

The origin of this rare oath still remains obscure and uncertain. DSUE considers this phrase as "a jocular expletive," assuming it to be 'coined by Goldsmith,' probably "punning heavens!" The following example in Diggory's speech is the only citation in the OED:

(21) By the elevens, my pleasure is gone quite out of my head. (SSC 127, Diggory)
5. 3 'By the Mass'

"Mass," which is a religious service chiefly in the Roman Catholic church, has long been used in oaths and asseverations since the Middle English (henceforth ME) period. The first citation in the OED is taken from Chaucer's work.36 This oath is used exclusively by David similar to the case of "oons," which it often co-occurs with:

(22) You are quite another creature, believe me, master, by the Mass! (Riv 114, David) / By the Mass, I can't help looking at your head! (Riv 114, David) / Then, by the Mass, sir! I would do no such thing—ne'er a St. Lucius O'Trigger in the kingdom should make me fight, when I wasn't so minded. Oons! (Riv 118, David) / Aye, by the Mass! and I would be very careful of it; (Riv 118, David) / But put the case that he kills me!—by the Mass! I go to the worms, and my honour whips over to my enemy! (Riv 118, David) / By the Mass, I think 'tis ten to one against you!—Oons! (Riv 119, David) / By the Mass! it don't look like another letter! It is, as I may say, a designing and malicious-looking letter!—and I warrant smells of gunpowder like a soldier's pouch!—Oons! I wouldn't swear it mayn't go off! (Riv 119, David) / Look'ee, my Lady—by the Mass! there's mischief going on. (Riv 136, David)

5. 4 'Gemini'

The fundamental meaning of "Gemini" is a constellation in astronomy (and one of the zodiac signs as well). It has been used, since the mid 17th century, as "a mild form of oath or exclamation" to express surprise.37 While the OED labels it simply as "vulgar," DSUE considers it "not so low" originally. DSUE also lists "gem(m)iny," "jim(m)iny" and (in the earliest example) "gemony" as its variants. The only user of this oath is Lucy, a maid servant to Lydia Languish:

(23) O, Gemini! I'd sooner cut my tongue out. (Riv 87, Lucy) / [Speaking simply.] O gemini! and I have been waiting for your worship here on the North. (Riv 100, Lucy).

5. 5 'On/Upoun One's Word'

This asseverative phrase, which corresponds to such intensives as "assuredly," "certainly," "truly," and "indeed,"38 is used by both male and female characters of the upper class, as seen in (24):

(24) Upon my word, a very well-looking house; antique, but creditable. (SSC 128, Hastings) / Extremely elegant and degagée, upon my word, Madam. (SSC 150, Hastings) / No, upon my word— (Riv 81, Lydia) / Not yet, upon my word—nor has he the least idea of my being in Bath. (Riv 82, Julia) / O, upon my word, I acquit you. (Riv 92, Capt. Absolute) / Nay, Sir, upon my word— (Riv 98, Capt. Absolute) / Very pretty, upon my word. (Riv 101, Sir Lucius) / Upon my word, young woman, you have hit it: (Riv 101, Sir Lucius) / Upon my word, Jack, thou'rt either a very great hypocrite, or— (Riv 105, Sir Anthony) / Very dutiful, upon my word! (Riv 113, Mrs. Malaprop) / Nay, sir, upon my word— (Riv 127, Capt. Absolute) / Upon my word, then, you must be a very subtle disputant: (Riv 128, Capt. Absolute) / Not I, upon my word, Sir. (Riv 142, Faulkland), etc.

5. 6 In Combination with 'Soul'

"Soul" has been used "in various asseverative phrases or as an exclamation"39 since the ME period. There are mainly three kinds of phrases in SSC and Riv (shown from (25a) to (25c)):

(25a) I can't help laughing at that—he! he! he!—for the soul of me. (SSC 126, Diggory)

(25b) O, by my soul! there is an innate levity in woman, that nothing can overcome. (Riv 92, Faulkland) / O, by my soul! it is the most unpardonable breach of friendship! (Riv 116, Sir Lucius) / No, by my soul, they drew their broad-swords, and left the lazy sons of peace to settle the justice of it. (Riv 116, Sir Lucius)

(25c) Not I, upon my soul! (Riv 115, Acres) / No, upon my soul, I do not. (Riv 121, Absolute) / Upon my soul, Jack, thou art a very impudent fellow! (Riv 124, Sir Anthony) / Upon my soul, Ma'am— (Riv 127, Capt. Absolute) / upon my soul!—a little gypsy! (Riv 128, Capt. Absolute) / upon my soul, I should not have discovered it at this interview (Riv 128, Capt. Absolute) / 'Tis fact, upon my soul! (Riv 130, Capt. Absolute)
5. 7 In Combination with ‘Conscience’
Two asseverative phrases using ‘conscience’ are found in SSC and Riv; i.e. “of all conscience” and “on/upon one’s conscience” (frequently the final /n/ of “on” is elided). The first citation of the former in the OED is in 1568 and that of the latter is around 1290, nearly three hundred years earlier. “Of all conscience” occurs only in SSC (its examples are in (26a)), whereas “on/upon one’s conscience” occurs mainly in Riv (see the examples in (26b)). The frequent user of the latter formula is Sir Lucius O’Trigger, an Irish Gentleman. There is no evidence that this oath may be peculiar to Irish people, but many examples happen to be found in Irish characters’ speech in 18th century British literary works.

(26a) Ay, among them you are impudent enough of all conscience. (SSC 129, Hastings) / I have been mortified enough of all conscience, and here comes something to complete my embarrassment. (SSC 142, Marlow)

(26b) Good liquor will sit upon a good supper, but a good supper will not sit upon—hiccup—upon my conscience, Sir. (SSC 181, Jeremy) / Aye, and the properest way o’ my conscience! (Riv 86, Mrs. Malaprop) / Hah! my little embassadress—upon my conscience, I have been looking for you; (Riv 100, Sir Lucius) / Upon my conscience! Lucy, your lady is a great mistress of language. (Riv 101, Sir Lucius) / Tender! aye, and profane too, o’ my conscience! (Riv 110, Mrs. Malaprop) / Very ill, upon my conscience— (Riv 115, Sir Lucius) / O’ my conscience, I believe so! (Riv 123 Mrs. Malaprop) / Upon my conscience!—these officers are always in one’s way in love-affairs: (Riv 128, Sir Lucius) / upon my conscience, Mr. Acres, you must leave those things to me. (Riv 139, Sir Lucius) / Upon my conscience, Mr. Acres, your valour has oozed away with a vengeance! (Riv 142, Sir Lucius)

(27) Absolutely I propose so—then if I can find out this Ensign Beverley, odds triggers and flints! I’ll make him know the difference o’t. (Riv 95, Acres)

Sheridan suggests, effectively through the dialogue between Capt. Absolute and Acres, that this type of oath is new and innovative, being called ‘oath referential’ or ‘sentimental swearing’:

ABSOLUTE: Spoke like a man—But pray, Bob, I observe you have got an odd kind of a new method of swearing—
ACRES: Ha! ha! you’ve taken notice of it—’tis genteel, isn’t it?—I didn’t invent it myself though; but a commander in our militia—a great scholar, I assure you—says that there is no meaning in the common oaths, and that nothing but their antiquity makes them respectable;—because, he says, the ancients would never stick to an oath or two, but would say By Jove! or by Bacchus! or by Mars! or by Venus! or by Pallas! according to the sentiment—so that to swear with propriety, says my little major, the ‘oath should be an echo to the sense’; and this we call the oath referential, or sentimental swearing - ha! ha! ha! ‘tis genteel, isn’t it?

(Riv 95-96)

Other examples of Acre’s referential oaths include:

(28) Odds whips and wheels (Riv 91) / Odds Blushes and Blooms! (Riv 91) / Odds Crickets! (Riv 92) / Odds Minmums and Crotchets! (Riv 92) / Odds swinnings! (Riv 94) / odds frogs and tambours! (Riv 95) / Odd’s jigs and tabor! (Riv 114) / Odds slanders and lies! (Riv 115) / Odds hilts and blades! (Riv 116) / Odds flints, pans, and triggers! (Riv 116) / Odds balls and barrels! (Riv 116) / Odds blades! (Riv 118) / odds crowns and laurels! (Riv 118) / Odds levels and aims! (Riv 139) / Odds bullets (Riv 140) / Odds tremors! (Riv 140) / Odds files! (Riv 140) / Odds Backs and Abettors! (Riv 142) / Odds Daggers and Balls! (Riv 143) / Odds Wrinkles! (Riv 145) / Odds Tabor and Pipes! (Riv 145), etc.

Another asseverative phrase peculiar to Acres is "by my valour." "Valour" occurs 18 times in Riv (never in SSC), out of which Acres uses it as many
as 16 times, with the remaining two also referring to his use of this word, though spoken by Sir Lucius. This phrase often co-occurs with another oath, usually beginning with "odds," as in:

(29) By my valour, I should like to see you fight first! Odds life! (Riv 117) / By my valour! then, Sir Lucius, forty yards is a good distance. (Riv 139) / Odds bullets, no!--by my valour! there is no merit in killing him so near; (Riv 140) / -so, by my valour! I will stand edge-ways. (Riv 141) / No--I say--we won't run, by my valour! (Riv 141) / Mind, gentlemen, he calls me a Coward; Coward was the word, by my valour! (Riv 142) / -and if I can't get a wife without fighting for her, by my Valour! I'll live a bachelor. (Riv 144)

6. 2 On the Analogy of 'By All That's Good'

Some new phrases are made on the analogy of "by all that's good," though this formula itself also occurs a few times both in SSC and in Riv e.g. "By all that's good, I can have no happiness but what's in your power to grant me. (SSC 211, Marlow);" "By all that's good, Sir-- (Riv 127, Capt. Absolute)." The coined phrases may serve to convey each situation or emotional state of mind:

(30) Ha! what do I see? Miss Neville, by all that's happy! (SSC 140, Hastings) / I tell you, Tony, by all that's precious, the jewels are gone, and I shall be ruin'd for ever. (SSC 166, Mrs. Hardcastle) / By all that's impudent, it makes me laugh. (SSC 182, Mr. Hardcastle) / By all that's just and true, I never gave miss Hardcastle the slightest mark of my attachment, or even the most distant hint to suspect me of affection. (SSC 199, Marlow) / Father-in-law, by all that's unlucky, come to take one of his night walks. (SSC 205, Tony)

Mr. Hardcastle is particularly characterized by the following asseveration:

(31) By the hand of my body, I believe his impudence is infectious! (SSC 174, Mr. Hardcastle) / By the hand of my body, but you shall not. (SSC 213, Mr. Hardcastle) / Then, by the hand of my body, I'm proud of the connexion. (SSC 213, Mr. Hardcastle)

7. Miscellaneous

7. 1 'Burn it'

The use of "burn" in imprecations may probably have started around the beginning of the 18th century, as the first citation in the OED is taken from Swift's Letters. This formula appears only once in Riv:

(32) O burn it, Ma'am, the hair-dresser has torn away as far as Proper Pride. (Riv 84, Lucy)

7. 2 'Odd rabbit it'

Another formula used once in Riv is "odd rabbit it," in which "rabbit" functions as a verb in the imprecation. The OED considers this meaningless verb to be "a fanciful alteration of rat" in "od rat" which corresponds to "drat." "Rabbit" is treated in DSUE as an equivalent of "confound." Both the OED and DSUE refer to the citation from Fielding's Joseph Andrews (1742): "Rabbit the fellow," cries he." In addition, the first citation in the OED of "od rabbit it" is also taken from his Tom Jones (1749). Though it is not certain whether this formula was originally coined by Fielding or not, we can at least affirm that it must have appeared around the mid 18th century. It is still common dialectally from Cumbria to Wight, Kent and Devon in England.

(33) Odd rabbit it! when the fashion had got foot on the Bar, I guess’d ’twould mount to the Box! (Riv 79, Thomas)

7. 3 'Damme'

"Damme" is a shortened form of "damn me!" used as "a profane imprecation." According to the OED, this shortened form started to appear around the mid 17th century. There are a few examples found in SSC. Sheridan extends this imprecation to use as a noun in his Riv (meaning "the oath itself or its utterance"), as seen in (34b). This interesting example is adopted as the first citation in the OED:

(34a) I'll drink for no man before supper, Sir, damme! (SSC 181, Jeremy) / Baw! damme, but I'll fight you both, one after the other--with baskets. (SSC 193, Tony)

(34b) Come--now, shall I begin with an oath? Do, Sir
Lucius, let me begin with a damnme. (Riv 117, Acres)

7. 4 'My Stars'
This phrase first appeared around 1700 and has been used in ejaculations, since then, "as a mild exclamation of surprise," similar to "my God!" and "my gracious!" Its elliptical form "my!" (or "oh, my!") is still common especially in the US. This exclamatory phrase, along with "gemini" and "burn it," are used exclusively by Lucy:

(35) My stars! Now I'd wager a six-pence I went by while you were asleep. (Riv 101, Lucy) / O true, sir --but then she reads so--my stars! how she will read off-hand! (Riv 101, Lucy)

7. 5 'My Genus'
"Genus" (> genius) originates from the Latinate word 'genius.' In Latin the word mainly means "the tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character, and finally to conduct him out of the world," whereas in English it extends to mean "a demon or spiritual being in general." The first citation in the OED of this sense is in the EModE period. It appears now chiefly in plural, "as a rendering of Arab. jinn, the collective name of a class of spirits (some good, some evil) supposed to interfere powerfully in human affairs," as the OED notes. Tony uses this unique term once, with its diphthong /ə/ reduced into a simple schwa:

(36) O! my genus, is that you. (SSC 161, Tony)

7. 6 'Damned'
"Damned" has been used as an intensifying adjective, meaning 'profanely as a strong expression of reprehension or dislike," since Shakespearean times, and is now common and widespread all over English-speaking countries. Here is an interesting example from Riv, in which the hero is totally perplexed by his fiancée's addressing him as "sir" instead of a more friendly term:

LYDIA: Sir!

ABSOLUTE: [Aside.] So!--egad! I thought as much!--that d--n'd monosyllable has froze me!

(Riv 125)

Some other examples include:

(37a) Pray Mr.--what's his d--d name? (Riv 93, Faulkland) / Oh! d--n'd, d--n'd levity! (Riv 94, Faulkland), etc.

Shown below are a few examples of 'damned' used as intensifying adverbs:

(37b) I thought it was d--n'd sudden! (Riv 124, Sir Anthony) / I did not think her romance could have made her so d--nd absorb either. (Riv 128, Capt. Absolute) / What's this?--here's something d--d hard! (Riv 138, Sir Anthony), etc.

cf. So then, all's out, and I have been damnably imposed on. (SSC 184, Marlow)

It is very likely that "damned" started to be used as an intensifying adverb around the mid 18th century; for the date of the first citation in the OED is 1757. This adverbial usage must have been quite prevalent in the latter half of the 18th century, judging from a large number of examples quoted from contemporary literary works.

7. 7 'deadly'
This is also an intensifying adjective, which means "excessive, 'terrible', 'awful'" in a colloquial situation. The following example from SSC is cited in the OED:

(38) Lock-a-daisy, my masters, you're come a deadly deal wrong! (SSC, 121, Landlord)

7. 8 'devilish'
Similar to the case of "damned" mentioned above, "devilish" functions both as an intensifying adjective (an example from SSC is shown in (39a)) and as an intensifying adverb (in (39b)). As seen from the examples in (39b), it can collocate with favorable adjectives, as well as with unfavorable ones, though it qualified "originally of things bad." In later use it became "a mere coarse intensive."

(39a) I shall make devilish work to-night in the larder, I promise you. (SSC, 136 Marlow)

(39b) I'm dev'lish glad to see you, my lad: (Riv 77, Fag) / But I was sly, Sir--devilish sly! (Riv 88, Fag)
8. Data Analyses

This section is wholly devoted to the analyses of the data collected above. The first task is to show the frequency of each formula, comparing the differences by gender and class.

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From the statistical result shown above, we can temporarily point out the following:

1. The dates of the first citations of most formulas are in the EModE period (particularly around 1600).
2. Oaths and imprecations are used much more frequently by male characters.
3. Male characters of the upper class are the more predominant users.
4. There are male/female-exclusive formulas as well as male/female-preferential ones.
5. There are class-exclusive formulas as well as class-preferential ones.

Regarding 3, this observation can be controversial; it is true that the two dramas have various characters both of the upper and of the lower classes, but the male characters of the upper class outnumber the others. In addition, the most vigorous users of oaths are Tony in SSC and Sir Antony Absolute and Bob Acres in Riv, all of whom are of the upper class. These two factors contribute markedly to the predominant occurrences. The result of the frequency itself may, therefore, be dubious and unreliable in this case. The more important thing to be pointed out here is that some characters have their own use of language (i.e. idiolects), characterized chiefly by the oaths and imprecations peculiar to them; e.g. Tony's use of unusual oaths in SSC, and Acres' use of fancy oaths and David's recurrent use of "oons" and "by the Mass" in Riv.

Final Remarks

Through our linguistic investigation into the two dramas, we have found that a wide variety of minced oaths, mostly related to religion, started to appear in the EModE period, when Shakespeare and his contemporary dramatists were active in Elizabethan London. Those euphemistic expressions became
prevalent through theaters to avoid profanity in public and many of them were still in common use in the 18th century. We have also found that while Goldsmith and Sheridan adopted numerous conventional formulas in their dramas, they were at the same time creative enough to invent new modes within the range where they would not neglect values and social attitudes in those days.

In passing, the social attitudes towards swearing and oaths in the 18th century are partly reflected in the following two extracts from Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*:

... unless the Postillion, (a Lad who hath been since transported for robbing a Hen-roost) had voluntarily stripit off a great Coat, his only Garment, at the same time swearing a great Oath, (for which he was rebuked by the Passengers) 'that he would rather ride in his Shirt all his Life, than suffer a Fellow-Creature to lie in so miserable a Condition.'

(Bk I, Chap. XII, 47)\(^6\)

...; but Mr. Adams was not greatly subject to Fear, he told him intrepidly that he very much approved his Virtue, but disliked his Swearing, and begged him not to addict himself to so bad a Custom, without which he said he might fight as bravely as Achilles did.

(Bk II, Chap. VIII, 117-18)

**Notes:**
1. See "deuce" n'. b. in the *OED*.
2. i.e. Low German.
3. See "deuce" n'. a. in the *OED*.
4. The underlined parts are mine in each case.
5. The name in each parenthesis refers to the speaker of each extract.
6. All the subsequent quotations of *SSC* and *Riv* are from the editions indicated below in the *TEXTS* section.

12. *OED*, s.v. "od!'
17. *OED*, s.v. "cotzooks."
19. *DSUE*, s.v. "sdeath!, sdeyns!, 'sdiggers!
29. *DSUE*, s.v. "Law!"
33. *OED*, s.v. ibid., A. *int. and n. 2.*
34. *OED*, s.v. "eleven," n. 3.
35. *DSUE*, s.v. "elevens!, by the."
42. *OED*, s.v. "rabbit," v.\(^2\)
44. *OED*, s.v. "od!" 1.b.
47. *OED*, s.v. "star," n. 3.
55. These two quotations from *Joseph Andrews* are from the edition indicated below in the *TEXTS* section.

**E-TEXTS**
ftp://sailor.gutenberg.org/pub/gutenberg/etext95/ssctq10.txt

- 90 -
http://www.geocities.com/muhammad_shafii/RIVAL_S.html

**TEXTS**


**REFERENCES**


