

LIFE OF WILLIAM CONGREVE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649635559

Life of William Congreve by Edmund Gosse

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

EDMUND GOSSE

**LIFE OF WILLIAM
CONGREVE**

LIFE
OF
WILLIAM CONGREVE

BY
EDMUND GOSSE, M.A.

CLARK LECTURES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AT TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

LONDON
WALTER SCOTT, 24 WARWICK LANE
NEW YORK : THOMAS WHITTAKER
TORONTO : W. J. GAGE & CO.
1888

(All rights reserved.)

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
The Congreve family; William Congreve born at Bardsey, February 10, 1670; removal to Youghal and Lismore; goes to Kilkenny, 1681, and to Trinity College, Dublin, 1685; begins to write at college; friendship with Swift; returns to England, 1688; writes <i>Incognita</i> , not published until February 25, 1692; account of that novel; <i>The Old Bachelor</i> composed in a country garden, 1690; entered at the Middle Temple, March 17, 1691; the life in London coffee-houses; introduced to Dryden; the <i>Juvenal and Persius</i> published October 27, 1692; forms the friendship of Southerne, Hopkins, Maynwaring, Moyle, and other men of letters; <i>The Old Bachelor</i> accepted at the Theatre Royal, and produced, January, 1693, with very great success; characteristics of this comedy; anecdote of Purcell and Dennis	13

CHAPTER II.

Congreve's success; friendship with Montague; <i>The Double Dealer</i> produced in November, 1693; characteristics of that play; Dryden's eulogy on it; Swift's epistle to the	
--	--

	PAGE
author; Queen Mary's patronage of Congreve; introduction to Addison; theatrical intrigues in London, and foundation of the Lincoln's Inn Theatre; Congreve publishes <i>The Mourning Muse of Alexis</i> , January 28, 1695; <i>Love for Love</i> produced at Easter, 1695; characteristics and history of that comedy; Dennis publishes <i>Letters upon Several Occasions</i> , containing Congreve's essay on Humour in Comedy, dated July 10, 1695; Congreve is made a commissioner of hackney coaches; he publishes the <i>Ode to the King</i> ; produces <i>The Mourning Bride</i> early in 1697; characteristics and history of that tragedy; Congreve publishes <i>The Birth of the Muse</i> , Nov. 18, 1697	4

CHAPTER III.

The licence of contemporary drama; the attitude of the clergy; signs of impatience among the Puritans and Nonconformists; protests made early in 1698: those of Merriton and Blackmore; Jeremy Collier publishes the <i>Short View</i> in March, 1698; analysis of the contents of that work; the sensation it produced; Gildon replies in the preface to <i>Phaeton</i> , April, 1698; another hand, probably Wycherley's, follows with <i>A Vindication of the Stage</i> ; replies put forth by Filmer and by Dennis; Vanbrugh publishes his <i>Short Vindication</i> , June 8th; the Play-houses are prosecuted for tending to debauchery and profanity; Congreve at length, on the 12th of July, issues his <i>Amendments</i> in answer to Collier; this treatise described; the scurrilous pamphlets it called forth; <i>The Stage Condemn'd</i> and <i>The Stage Acquitted</i> ; Collier publishes, on the 10th of November, his <i>Defence of a Short View</i> ; the attitude of Dryden during the controversy; the condition of literary society at the close of the century	9
--	---

CHAPTER IV.

Depression of the theatres in London; the Royal Order of February 18, 1699, directing the actors to modify their language; revival of <i>The Double Dealer</i> , March 4, 1699;	
---	--

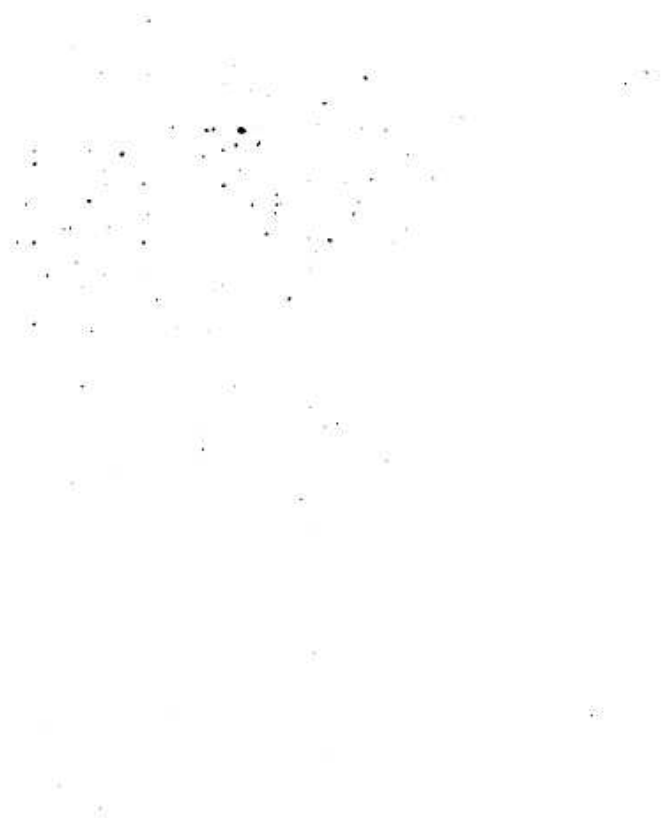
CONTENTS.

7

production of <i>The Way of the World</i> , at Lincoln's Inn Theatre, March, 1700; partial failure of this play; its publication, and description of its contents; death of Dryden, May 1, 1700; Congreve's retirement from public life; he goes abroad; correspondence with Joseph Keally commences; the masque of <i>The Judgment of Paris</i> is performed in Dorset Garden, March, 1701; <i>Ode for St. Cecilia's Day</i> , Nov. 22, 1701; <i>The Reliquia Gethiniana</i> of 1699 and 1703 described; <i>Squire Trelooby</i> , adapted by Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Walsh, is performed at the New Theatre on the 30th of March, 1704; the history of this farce obscure; revivals of <i>Love for Love</i> in 1704 and 1705; Congreve's health continues to fail; he joins Vanbrugh in the management of the Haymarket Theatre, April, 1705; he is made Commissioner of Wine Licences, Dec., 1705; <i>The Tears of Amaryllis</i> published June, 1705; death of Mrs. Arabella Hunt; the theatrical vicissitudes of the age; Congreve publishes <i>A Discourse on Pindaric Ode</i> ; critical importance of this essay; ceases to be a Commissioner for Licencing Hackney Coaches, October 13, 1707; publishes his <i>Works</i> , December, 1710; his health gradually declines; forms an intimacy with Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough; writes his <i>Epistle to Lord Cobham</i> in 1728; dies in his house in Surrey Street on January 19, 1729; buried in Westminster Abbey	131
---	-----

CHAPTER V.

Congreve's appearance; Mrs. Manley's description of him; his wit; the Kit-Cat Club; Voltaire's visit to Congreve; his habits, his friendliness; his collections; the reputation of Congreve as a writer; Lamb's theory of artificial comedy; characteristics of Congreve's style; compared with Ethredge and Wycherley; final attitude of criticism to his work	174
APPENDIX	187
INDEX	189



PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS is the first time that any attempt has been made to write a detailed biography of Congreve, and that circumstance may be held to excuse the intrusion of what is commonly dispensed with in the volumes of this series—a lengthy prefatory note. There can be no question that, unless fresh material should most unexpectedly turn up, the opportunity for preparing a full and picturesque life of this poet has wholly passed away. The task should have been undertaken a hundred and fifty years ago, when those were still alive who had known him personally. This occasion was unaccountably allowed to slip by, partly, no doubt, because the modern art of biography was but very poorly understood, but partly, also, because Congreve was no very fascinating or absorbing human being. Correct biographies of Pope or Swift were not published until long after the decease of those writers, yet we have no difficulty whatever in restoring them to life in fancy. But then they possessed an interesting personal quality, of which the author of *The Way of the World* seems to have been devoid.

In 1730, the year after Congreve's death, that audacious

pirate Curll issued a volume entitled *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Amours of William Congreve, Esq.* He had the effrontery to invite Mrs. Bracegirdle to contribute facts to it; in refusing, that admirable actress predicted that the book would not have "a new sheet" in it. She might safely have said "a new page." It is an absolutely worthless construction of scissors and paste, containing nothing previously unprinted, except one or two lies, and it is mainly occupied either with reprints of Congreve's scattered minor writings or with gossip absolutely foreign to his career. The name of Charles Wilson appears on the title of this wretched forgery; it is understood that there never existed such a person, and it has been conjectured that it was John Oldmixon, "that virulent party writer for hire," who was the guilty hack.

The publication of these spurious *Memoirs* seems to have dissuaded any honest writer from undertaking in earnest the task which "Charles Wilson" pretended to have carried out. At all events, no life of Congreve has appeared since that date, until the present volume. The best account of Congreve, published during the age after his death, is the article by Dr. Campbell in the *Biographica Britannica*. Campbell can scarcely have known Congreve personally, but he was helped by the aged Southerne, who had been Congreve's friend from college onwards, and who supplied him with notes. In later times the known particulars of his life have been more or less accurately summarized and added to by Dr. Samuel Johnson, Leigh Hunt, and Macaulay. The portion of an essay which the last-mentioned writer dedicates to Congreve is well known, and is so admir-