**William Congreve**

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| **William Congreve** |
| William Congreve by Sir Godfrey Kneller, Bt.jpgWilliam Congreve in 1709 by [Godfrey Kneller](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godfrey_Kneller%22%20%5Co%20%22Godfrey%20Kneller) |
| **Born** | 24 January 1670[Bardsey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bardsey%2C_Yorkshire%22%20%5Co%20%22Bardsey%2C%20Yorkshire), [West Yorkshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Yorkshire%22%20%5Co%20%22West%20Yorkshire), [England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England%22%20%5Co%20%22Kingdom%20of%20England) |
| **Died** | 19 January 1729 (aged 58)London, [Great Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Great_Britain%22%20%5Co%20%22Kingdom%20of%20Great%20Britain) |
| **Occupation** | Playwright, poet |
| **Nationality** | English |
| **Period** | 1693–1700 |

**William Congreve** (24 January 1670 – 19 January 1729) was an English playwright and poet of the Restoration period. He is known for his clever, satirical dialogue and influence on the comedy of manners style of that period. He was also a minor political figure in the British Whig Party.

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**Early life**

William Congreve was born in [Bardsey, Yorkshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bardsey%2C_Yorkshire%22%20%5Co%20%22Bardsey%2C%20Yorkshire), England near [Leeds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leeds%22%20%5Co%20%22Leeds).[[note 1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-2) His parents were William Congreve (1637–1708) and Mary *née* Browning (1636?–1715). The family moved to London in 1672. They relocated again in 1674 to the Irish port town of Youghal where his father served as a lieutenant in the British army.

Congreve spent his childhood in Ireland, where his father, a [Cavalier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cavalier%22%20%5Co%20%22Cavalier), had settled during the reign of [Charles II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_II_of_England). Congreve was educated at [Kilkenny College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kilkenny_College) where he met [Jonathan Swift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Swift), and at [Trinity College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity_College%2C_Dublin) in Dublin. Upon graduation, he matriculated in the [Middle Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Temple) in London to study law, but preferred literature, drama, and the fashionable life. Congreve used the pseudonym Cleophil, under which he published *Incognita: or, Love and Duty reconcil'd* in 1692. This early work, written when he was about 17 years of age, gained him recognition among [men of letters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_of_letters) and an entrance into the literary world. He became a disciple of [John Dryden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dryden) whom he met through gatherings of literary circles held at Will's Coffeehouse in the Covent Garden District of London. John Dryden supported Congreve's work throughout his life, taking the form of complimentary introductions written for some of Congreve's publications.

**Literary career**

William Congreve shaped the English [comedy of manners](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy_of_manners) through his use of [satire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satire) and well-written dialogue. Congreve achieved fame in 1693 when he wrote some of the most popular English plays of the [Restoration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Restoration) period. This period was distinguished by the fact that female roles were beginning to be played predominately by women, and was evident in Congreve's work. One of Congreve's favorite actresses was Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle, who performed many of the female lead roles in his plays.

His first play [*The Old Bachelor*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Old_Bachelor), written to amuse himself while convalescing, was produced at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1693 and later produced by the Theatre Royale. It was recognized as a success, and ran for a two-week period when it opened. Congreve's mentor John Dryden gave the production rave reviews and proclaimed it to be a brilliant first piece. The second play to be produced was called [*The Double-Dealer*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Double-Dealer) which was not nearly as successful as the first production. By the age of thirty, he had written four comedies, including [*Love for Love*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_for_Love) (premiered 30 April 1695) staged in Lincoln's Inn Field which was nearly as well received as the first major success for Congreve, and [*The Way of the World*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Way_of_the_World) (premiered March 1700). This play was a failure at the time of production but is seen as one of his masterpieces today, and is still revived. He wrote one tragedy, [*The Mourning Bride*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mourning_Bride_%28Tragedy%29) (1697) which was extremely popular at the time of creation but is now one of his least regarded dramas. After the production of *Love for Love,* Congreve became one of the managers for the Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1695. During that time, he wrote public occasional verse. As a result of his success and literary merit, he was awarded one of the five positions of commissioner for licensing hackney coaches.

Congreve's career as a playwright was successful but brief. He only wrote five plays, authored from 1693 to 1700, in total. This was partly in response to changes in taste, as the public turned away from the sort of high-brow sexual [comedy of manners](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy_of_manners) in which he specialized. Congreve may have been forced off of the stage due to growing concerns about the morality of his theatrical comedies. He reportedly was particularly stung by a critique written by [Jeremy Collier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy_Collier) (*A* [*Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_View_of_the_Immorality_and_Profaneness_of_the_English_Stage)), to the point that he wrote a long reply, "Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations." Although no longer on the stage, Congreve continued his literary art. He wrote the librettos for two operas that were being created at the time, and he translated the works of Molière.

As a member of the [Whig](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Whig_Party) [Kit-Kat Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kit-Kat_Club), Congreve's career shifted to the political sector, and even a political appointment in Jamaica in 1714 by [George I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_I_of_Great_Britain). Congreve continued to write, although his style changed greatly. During his time in Jamaica, he wrote poetry instead of full length dramatic productions, and translated the works of Homer, Juvenal, Ovid, and Horace.

**Later life**

Congreve withdrew from the theatre and lived the rest of his life on residuals from his early work, the royalties received when his plays were produced, as well as his private income. His output from 1700 was restricted to the occasional poem and some translation (notably [Molière](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moli%C3%A8re)'s *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*). Congreve never married; in his own era and through subsequent generations, he was famous for his friendships with prominent actresses and noblewomen for whom he wrote major parts in all his plays.These women included [Anne Bracegirdle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Bracegirdle) and [Henrietta Godolphin, 2nd Duchess of Marlborough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henrietta_Godolphin%2C_2nd_Duchess_of_Marlborough), daughter of the famous general, [John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Churchill%2C_1st_Duke_of_Marlborough). Congreve and Henrietta probably met by 1703 and the duchess had a daughter, [Mary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Osborne%2C_Duchess_of_Leeds) (1723–1764), who was believed to be his child. Upon his death, he left his entire fortune to the Duchess of Marlborough.

As early as 1710, he suffered both from gout and from cataracts on his eyes. Congreve suffered a carriage accident in late September 1728, from which he never recovered (having probably received an internal injury); he died in London in January 1729, and was buried in [Poets' Corner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poets%27_Corner) in [Westminster Abbey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_Abbey).

**Famous lines**

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| https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/fa/Wikiquote-logo.svg/34px-Wikiquote-logo.svg.png | Wikiquote has quotations related to: [***William Congreve***](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/William_Congreve) |

Two of Congreve's phrases from [*The Mourning Bride*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mourning_Bride) (1697) have become famous, although sometimes misquoted or misattributed to [William Shakespeare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-3)

* "Musick has charms to soothe a savage breast," which is the first line of the play, spoken by Almeria in Act I, Scene I. This is often rendered as: "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast" or even savage beast.
* "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned," spoken by Zara in Act III, Scene VIII,[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-4) but paraphrased as "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned".[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-5)

Congreve coined another famous phrase in *Love for Love* (1695):

* "O fie, Miss, you must not kiss and tell."

**References in popular culture**

A fictitious play by Congreve, *The Gallivant*, features prominently in the novel [*Flowers for the Judge*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flowers_for_the_Judge) by [Margery Allingham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margery_Allingham).

In British TV series The Hustle in first season fifth episode, the main protagonists attempt to pull out a con concerning a bitter woman named after Congreve.

In season 7 of Star Trek Next Generation, counselor Troi refers to "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" at 43:49 in the episode Eye of the Beholder.

Quotes from numerous Congreve works head a number of chapters in Robert Galbraith's ([J.K Rowling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.K_Rowling)) second [Cormoran Strike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cormoran_Strike) novel [*The Silkworm*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Silkworm).

Lemony Snicket claims that William Congreve was an associate of V.F.D in "A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Hostile Hospital" and quotes "Musick has charms to soothe a savage beast."

**Works**

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| https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4c/Wikisource-logo.svg/38px-Wikisource-logo.svg.png | [Wikisource](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikisource) has original works written by or about:[***William Congreve***](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author%3AWilliam_Congreve) |

* [*The Old Bachelor*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Old_Bachelor) (1693)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-6)
* [*The Double Dealer*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Double_Dealer) (1694)[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-7)
* [*Love for Love*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_for_Love) (1695)[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-8)
* [*The Mourning Bride*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mourning_Bride) (1697)[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-9)
* [*The Way of the World*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Way_of_the_World) (1700)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-10)

**See also**

* [Restoration comedy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restoration_comedy)

**Notes**

* 1. [Samuel Johnson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Johnson) doubted Congreve's claim to have been born in Bardsey in 1670 ("Neither the time nor place of his birth are certainly known; if the inscription upon his monument be true, he was born in 1672. For the place; it was said by himself, that he owed his nativity to England, and by every body else that he was born in Ireland."), and berated him for disowning his native country. However, [Edmond Malone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmond_Malone) later found a baptism entry for Congreve in the *Register of Bardsey, in the West Riding of York* that would seem to prove that Congreve was not lying when he said that he was born in England: "William, the sonne of Mr. William Congreve, of Bardsey grange, was baptised 10 February 1669 [i.e. 1670 by the modern reckoning of the new year]".[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Congreve#cite_note-1)

**References**

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  [*"You are [mis]quoting Shakespeare"*](https://folgereducation.wordpress.com/2011/12/22/you-are-misquoting-shakespeare/)*. Folger SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY. Retrieved 3 November 2015.*

  *Congreve, William (1753).* [*The Mourning Bride: A Tragedy*](https://books.google.com/books?id=U3ACAAAAYAAJ)*. Dublin: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper in the Strand. p. 46. Retrieved 17 June 2017.*

  *Merz, Theo (21 January 2014).* [*"Ten literary quotes we all get wrong"*](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/10556095/Ten-literary-quotes-we-all-get-wrong.html)*. Telegraph.co.uk. The Telegraph. Retrieved 17 June 2017.*

  [*The Old Bachelor: A Comedy by William Congreve*](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1192?msg=welcome_stranger)*.*

  *[The Double-Dealer: A Comedy by William Congreve](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1191?msg=welcome_stranger).*

  [*Love for Love: A Comedy by William Congreve*](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1244?msg=welcome_stranger)*.*

  *Congreve, William (1 January 1753).* [*The Mourning Bride: A Tragedy*](https://books.google.com/books?id=U3ACAAAAYAAJ)*. J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper in the Strand.*

* 1.  [*The Way of the World by William Congreve*](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1292?msg=welcome_stranger)*.*

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 "Love for Love." *Drama for Students*. Ed. Jennifer Smith. Vol. 14. Detroit: Gale, 2002. 175-205. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 3 November 2015.

 [Macaulay, Thomas Babington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Babington_Macaulay%2C_1st_Baron_Macaulay%22%20%5Co%20%22Thomas%20Babington%20Macaulay%2C%201st%20Baron%20Macaulay). *The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration.* London, Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853.

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