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SCANDALOUS WILL Or, Congreve's Library and Female Power

Anne F. Widmayer

William Congreve (1670–1729) was one of the early eighteenth century's most respected playwrights—John Dryden viewed Congreve as his natural successor to the post of poet laureate.¹ Congreve's contemporaries viewed his library as evidence of his literary taste and his “gentility.” After his death, Congreve's extensive library became an important possession associated with female property and power. Congreve willed his library to Henrietta, the

¹ Thomas Southerne wrote an account of Dryden's approbation of Congreve's first play, *The Old Batchelor* (1692) for Thomas Birch, who used the information when he wrote an article on Congreve for the *General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*, volume IV (1736). According to Southerne, Dryden was engaged by a “friend” of Congreve, “who upon reading it sayd he never saw such a first play in his life, but the Author not being acquainted with the stage or the town, it would be pity to have it miscarry for want of a little Assistance: the stuff was rich indeed, it wanted only the fashionable cutt of the town.” (John C. Hodges, ed., *William Congreve: Letters and Documents* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964], 151). In addition, Dryden wrote a Prologue to Congreve's second play, *The Double-Dealer* (1693) in which he calls Congreve his successor to the post of Poet Laureate: “O that your brows my Lawrel had sustain'd, / Well had I been Depos'd if You had reign'd! / The Father had descended for the Son, / For only You are lineal to the Throne” (*Complete Works*, ed. Montague Summers [New York: Russell and Russell, 1964], 2: 14).

Duchess of Marlborough, who then left the library intact to her own daughter, Mary. Later, Congreve's library was considered valuable enough to be included in Mary's own marriage settlement.² Congreve's bequest reinforced rumors that Mary was his illegitimate daughter. Thus, Congreve's relatively innocuous collection became imbued with scandalous overtones. This paper will explore how Congreve's library affected his posthumous reputation even as it allowed two generations of women to assert their independence.

As I first started to think about Congreve's voluminous library—around 620 items³—it became clear to me that I could write a fairly dull paper about how Congreve's library was organized. John C. Hodges's *The Library of William Congreve* (1955) would have been invaluable in such a project. This work transcribes the manuscript catalogue of Congreve's private library which Hodges found in an English county depository, the Yorkshire Archaeological Society in Leeds. Hodges lists the title, size, edition, and theca (shelf) number for each work, as well as which "hand" added the item to the catalogue. Three hands apparently contributed to the library cataloguing, and Hodges makes the convincing deduction that each hand noted the books that were in Congreve's possession during the amanuenses' tenures.⁴ To me, there is nothing particularly significant in the fact that Congreve tended to shelve his books by size—folios mostly with folios, quartos with quartos, etc.—or by languages—there are shelves devoted to French literature or Latin classics, especially Cicero (16), who outnumbers Dryden (13) in the library. Ovid (10), Horace (9), and Shakespeare (also 9) round out the top five authors in Congreve's library. Congreve also apparently shelved his collection by subject—individual shelves highlight his holdings in medicine, travel literature, politics, history, military history and strategy, biography, religion, French translations of Greek and Latin classics, cooking, and

² So far I have only found that Mary Godolphin's marriage settlement exists in the Leeds family books, as Hodges notes (*The Library of William Congreve* [New York: New York Public Library, 1955], 6).

³ Though the library catalogue lists 659 items, at least 39 appear to be duplicate entries, meant to serve as crossreferences.

⁴ The "first hand" "enters titles of books published through 1725 but none later"; the "second hand" "made thirty-one entries, including some as late as 1727 but none later"; and the "third hand" records forty-one entries, "including four for 1727 and fourteen for 1728 [the year of Congreve's death] but none later. Entries by the third hand are probably for books added to library during Congreve's final illness" (Hodges, *Library*, 9).

of course British literary giants like Pope, Dryden, and Shakespeare. Considering how stung he felt by being included in Jeremy Collier's *A Short View* (1698), it is also unremarkable that he had collected many of the works associated with Collier's attack upon dramatic impropriety.⁵ Congreve's *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, &c. From the Old Batchelour, Double Dealer, Love for Love, Mourning Bride* is one of only four volumes of his own works. Congreve also had two octavo editions of his collected works (1710) and the second volume only of his works in duodecimo.

The part of his collection that surprised me the most was the sheer number of romances—at least two shelves (thecas 23 and 26) out of 33 seem to be devoted to these works. Congreve's first foray into literature, *Incognita: or Love and Duty Reconcil'd* (1692), has been described by critics today as sharing many characteristics with romances—from its stereotypical plot to its lack of deep characterization to its episodic organization and ridiculously long accounts of conversations between the characters. However, Congreve himself seems in the Preface to that work to be at pains to distinguish his novella from romances:

Romances are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroins, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize the Reader into a giddy Delight, which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives off, and vexes him to think how he has suffer'd himself to be pleased and transported, concern'd and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read, viz. these Knights Success to the Damosels Misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinc'd that 'tis all a lye. Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresented, such which not being so

⁵ On theca 8 are shelved Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), Congreve's response, *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, &c. From the Old Batchelour, Double Dealer, Love for Love, Mourning Bride* (1698), the anonymous *A Defense of Dramatick Poetry: Being a Review of Mr. Collier's View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage* (1698), John Oldmixon's *Reflections on the Stage, and Mr. Collyer's Defense of the Short View* (1699), and Edward Filmer's *A Defense of Plays: or, The Stage Vindicated, from Several Passages in Mr. Collier's Short View* (1707). It is a little surprising that Congreve doesn't have either Collier's *A Defense of the Short View* (1699) or *A Second Defense of the Short View* (1700).

distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure near us. Romances give more of wonder, Novels more Delight. (*Complete Works* 1: 111)

Congreve soundly castigates romances for their fantastic elements while praising novels for their “delightful” realism. That Congreve owned any romances suggests that his opinion of romances is not quite as satirical as critics have assumed. As a percentage of his whole library, the “translated” romances make up roughly 9.5%, around 59 works out of 620.⁶ Perhaps Congreve really liked romances! Just because at this remove, several hundred years on, we do not share his enthusiasm because we have decided to value the “realistic” vein that led to our own modern novels does not mean that he felt as we do about these works. In fact, we can deduce that he found some romances valuable enough that he bought them as folios, the same expensive format in which he owned copies of both Dryden’s and Shakespeare’s works. Congreve owned Charles Sorel’s *Le Berger Extravagant* (1639) in an octavo edition in French, but also in an English translation as a folio entitled *The Extravagant Shepherd: or, The History of the Shepherd Lysis* (1654). He also owned two other romances in folio form: Marin Le Roy de Gomberville’s *The History of Polexander* (1648), translated by William Browne, and Mateo Aleman’s *The Rogue; or, The Life of Guzman de Alfarache* (1630), translated by James Mabbe.

Indeed, Congreve appears to have loaned several of these romances to his acquaintances—some of whom neglected to return them to him before his death. Hodges notes in his edition of the library catalogue that while most of the items had a “small cross” beside the titles, no doubt indicating that the books were present when the catalogue was checked, 37 of the listed books do not have a cross, suggesting they were missing. Hodges speculates that “Perhaps these crosses were used in connection with an inventory taken in 1729 when the books were inherited by the young Duchess of Marlborough[,

⁶ I have managed to verify that many of the works on shelves 23 and 26 are romances by using EEBO and ECCO, but not all of the works catalogued as part of Congreve’s library have been digitized. If I assume that all of the works on both of these shelves are romances, 32, and I add the other romances scattered throughout the other shelves, an additional 20, the percentage of Congreve’s collection devoted to such works increases to 8.4 percent. If one counts *Don Quixote* as a romance, the copies of this work, whether in English or Spanish, increase the number of romances in the collection by 7 and the percent of the whole collection to 9.5 percent.

Henrietta]" (*Library* 9–10). Of the 37 books missing, 6 were romances (16.2 percent), including both the French and English editions of Sorel's *Le Berger Extravagant*, Abbé Jean Paul Bignon's *Les Aventures d'Abdalla, fils d'Hanif* (1713), Nicholas Baudot de Juilly's *Germaine de Foix, Reine d'Espagne* (1700), Madame de Tenain's *La Religieuse Intéressée et Amoureuse, avec l'Histoire du Comte de Clare* (1695), and Thomas-Simon Gueulette's *A Thousand and One Quarters of Hours; being Tartarian Tales* (1716). The only book that we know Henrietta, the less famous Duchess of Marlborough, borrowed from Congreve (and returned the time that the library catalogue was being checked against the actual inventory) was also a romance, Anne Marguerite Petit Du Noyer's *Lettres Historiques et Galantes* (1710).

What is also interesting about where Hodges found the manuscript list of Congreve's library is that the marriage settlement for Henrietta's youngest daughter, Mary, Duchess of Leeds, was also found in the same collection of papers (*Hodges, Library* 6). Mary demonstrated an active interest in the library when she chose several of the books to be sent to her personally before the whole library was transported to the Leeds family home: "An additional larger cross surrounded by four dots appears before eleven items...to indicate books sent—so the librarian says in a marginal note—to the Duchess of Leeds. These larger crosses could not have been made, of course, before 1740," when she married the fourth Duke of Leeds (*Hodges, Library* 10). One can only assume that Mary wished to have these books in her own personal collection, rather than have them swallowed up by the Leeds' family's library. Mary, who is rather a shadowy figure in eighteenth-century history, seems to have most valued the musical items in Congreve's library. Six of the 11 items she had sent over for her personal use are music books: Peter Motteux's *Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus. An Opera, after the Italian Manner* (1705), Giovanni Bononcini's *Cantate e Duetti* (1721), John Eccles's *A Collection of Songs for One Two and Three Voices* (1704), Johann Galliard's *Six English Cantatas after the Italian Manner* (1716), Henry Playford's *Harmonia Sacra: or, Divine Hymns and Dialogues* (1703), and Henry Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus. A Collection of all the Choicest Songs for One, Two, and Three Voices* (1698). The other five include Antoine Galland's *Les Mille & une Nuit* (1705), Alain René le Sage's *Histoire de Gil Blas* (1715), Nicholas Baudot de Juilly's *Relation Historique et Galante, de l'Invasion de l'Espagne par les Maures* (1699), Giovanni Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido, Tragi-comedia Pastorale* (1678), and Cardinal de Retz's *Mémoires* (1718). So we

can conclude that Mary loved music, especially vocal music, and that she was interested in exotic tales, comic histories, and the Cardinal's gossip memoirs. About her mother's taste in literature, however, we know relatively little beyond the fact that Congreve willed all his books to her, along with the rest of his estate.

Neither woman appears to have been that literary, though Sarah, Henrietta's mother, notes slightly that Henrietta often hung out with poets like Gay and Congreve, society that the grande dame Sarah found "low." After Sarah's death, a narrative entitled *An Account of the Dutches [sic] of Marl. & Montagus Behavior Before & After Their Fathers Death*, dated 19 September 1722, was found in her private papers. She roundly criticized both of her daughters' behavior in this work. About Henrietta she writes, "She soon fell into very ill company,...& at last having a great mind to be thought a Wit [socialized with] Mr. Congreve & several Poets, and in short the worst company that a Young Lady can Keep."⁷ So the association of these women with Congreve's books, a collection that Jacob Tonson, the eminent publisher, wished to own himself because it was such a good selection from such a notable thinker, is surprising. On 27 January 1728/9, Tonson remarked in a letter to his nephew less than a week after Congreve's death: "His collection of Books were very genteel and wel chosen. I wish you coud think them worth your buying; I think there were in [his] books several notes of his own or corrections and every thing from him wil[l] be very valuable" (quoted in Hodges, *Letters* 147).

I would be misleading you, however, if I let you think that Congreve specifically willed his books to Henrietta, who then specifically willed the same collection to her daughter Mary, who then specifically named the books as part of her marriage settlement. No, Congreve's library was just part of the "estate" that is named in all three documents. In the fourth codicil to his will, Congreve apparently refers to an earlier version which named "Henrietta Dutchess of Marlborough,

⁷ Quoted in Kathleen M. Lynch, "Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough," *PMLA* 52 (1937): 1072-93, 1082. Mrs. Arthur Colville quotes a letter that Sarah wrote as further evidence for why Henrietta and her mother did not get along: "She [Henrietta] has starts of giving 100 guineas to a very low poet that will tell her that she is what she knows she is not, which I think so great a weakness that I had rather give money not to have such verses made publick" (*Duchess Sarah: Being the Social History of the Times of Sarah Jennings Duchess of Marlborough...* [London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1904], 312). Unfortunately, Colville does not give a reference for this letter.

my sole Executrix" (15), though the will was probated on 3 February 1728/9 with her husband, the Earl of Godolphin, as the sole executor, as the later will states (5).⁸ Congreve's will bequeaths

All the Rest and Residue of my Estate [outside of some small legacies], the same consisting in personal Things only (not having any Lands, or other real Estate) I give and bequeath to the Dutchess of *Marlborough*...to her sole and separate Use, and...her said Husband, or any after-taken Husband,...shall not intermeddle, or have any controuling Power over [it],...but [it] shall be had and received, issued and paid, as she the said Dutchess of *Marlborough*, shall by writing under her Hand, from time to time direct and appoint....(4-5)

Congreve's wording prevents his estate from being either controlled by or swallowed up within the estate of Henrietta's husband, and the will gives her virtually complete control over what he has willed to her. Congreve thus treats Henrietta as legally independent from her husband. When Henrietta composed her own will, she bequeathed Congreve's estate to her youngest daughter, Mary:

I also give to my said Daughter Mary all Mr Congreves Personal Estate that he left me....[And] Item my Will is that if my said Daughter Marries then and in such case I hereby Order and Direct my Executors to Assign my Fine Brilliant Diamond Neck-lace which cost Five Thousand Three hundred Pounds And also the fine Diamond Ear-rings with Diamond Drop's to them which cost Two thousand Pounds and all other my Jewells and also all my Plate both Gold and Silver of what Nature or kind soever as well that with my own Armes as that will [with?] Mr Congreves Armes to proper Persons to be Named by my Executors In Trust for the Sole separte Personal and peculiar use of my said Daughter Mary

⁸ *Mr. Congreve's Last Will and Testament, with Characters of His Writings* (London: Printed for E. Curll in the Strand, 1729).

Exclusive of her Husband or any other Husband she shall or may hereafter Marry. (Quoted in Hodges, *Letters* 265-66)⁹

Henrietta honors Congreve's impulse to keep his estate out of any husband's hands by preventing Mary's future husband(s) from disposing of it. Both Congreve and Henrietta obviously viewed his estate as singularly for Henrietta's use.

The diamond necklace referred to in Henrietta's will was the one that Henrietta bought with the residue of Congreve's estate, as Edward Young notes: "The duchess showed me a diamond necklace, . . . that cost seven thousand pound, and was purchased with the money Congreve left her."¹⁰ Mary thus owned a diamond necklace and a diamond ring thanks to Congreve, who in the third codicil to his will bequeathed the ring to her in a small legacy: "*Item, To the Lady Mary Godolphin, youngest Daughter to the Dutchesse of Marlborough, I give and bequeath her Mother's Picture Enamelled, in Miniature, together with my white Brilliant Diamond Ring*" (10). Henrietta underscores how the diamond necklace and earrings make Mary independent of her husband: "my said Daughter Mary shall and may notwithstanding her Coverture and Without the consent of her Husband and as fully as if she were Sole and Unmarried and independent of her Husband Give the said Diamond Neck-lace Diamond Ear-rings Drop's and other Jewells together with all the said Plate or any part thereof to which ever Child she has as she Pleases" (quoted in Hodges, *Letters* 267). Thus, Congreve's estate, through its passage to Henrietta and then on to Mary, supported these women's financial and legal independence.

It appears that Congreve's plate and the diamonds Henrietta bought with the residue of his estate became more important than his books to his female heirs. This is odd, considering that the Marlboroughs were one of the richest families in England at the time. That Mary did in fact receive the necklace is suggested by an anecdote that Sir Walter Scott records:

⁹ Henrietta's will is unpublished. The will can be found at Somerset House, London, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 113 Derby. A copy of the will is in the British Library, Add. MSS. 28,071, ff. 34-39.

¹⁰ Quoted in Joseph Spence, *Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men Collected from the Conversation of Mr. Pope and Other Eminent Persons of His Time*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 216.

"The Duchess of Portland once borrowed her [Mary's] jewels to wear at a masquerade, and as they were examining them together, the other taking up this massive necklace, asked her whether she could guess why the letters W.C. were engraved upon the back of every collet? 'I have often puzzled myself to divine what could be my mother's meaning in it,' said she, 'do you think it was the name of the jeweler?' 'Oh yes, it must have been so,' replied the Duchess of Portland, well knowing the cypher meant William Congreve, and in a hurry to get rid of the subject." (quoted in Hodges, *Letters* 269)

Mary was nine when her mother died. Such naiveté about the letters W. C. seems incredible, however, considering that the necklace and Congreve's will had caused so much gossip about whether Mary was Congreve's daughter. This anecdote thus seems to add another fillip to the scandalous conclusions drawn from Congreve's and Henrietta's behavior.¹¹

Scholars before me have had their own theories about why Henrietta and Mary were so favored by Congreve, and their theories seem to have been greatly influenced by what contemporaries thought about the friendship between Congreve and Henrietta at the time of his death in 1729. And what scandalous tidbits were floating around! The facts are these: Congreve and Henrietta's friendship was close enough that when Congreve decided to go to Bath to alleviate his gout in 1722, Henrietta spent the whole season with him there. At the age of forty-one, Henrietta gave birth to her youngest daughter, Mary, having apparently benefitted from the waters' ability to cure barrenness. Robert Pierce in *Bath Memoirs* (1697) notes that women's "common Cause" for visiting Bath was to be "render'd fruitful,"¹² and William Sympson in

¹¹ Interestingly, in France a similar scandal was associated with a diamond necklace. Peter Wagner recounts the "diamond necklace affair of 1785, which hastened both [Marie-Antoinette's] fall and that of a French monarchy" (*Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* [London: Secker and Warburg, 1988], 94). The diamond necklace which Louis XV was to have purchased for his lover, Madame Dubarry, was instead supposedly offered to Marie-Antoinette by Madame de la Motte to further the career of her lover, the Cardinal Prince de Rohan. Madame de la Motte's husband absconded with the necklace to England, and Marie-Antoinette's innocence was established at an open trial.

¹² Robert Pierce, *Bath Memoirs: Or, Observations in Three and Forty Years Practice, at the Bath, what Cures Have There Been Wrought...* (Bristol: Printed for H. Hammond, Bookseller at Bath, and the Devizes, 1697), 195.

The History of Scarborough Spaw (1679) gives instances of women who had children again after four-, five- and seven-year hiatuses.¹³ But the gossip runs thus: According to Hodges, Sarah, the elder Duchess of Marlborough, "referred to Henrietta regularly as 'Congreve's Moll.'"¹⁴ About the inscription to Congreve's monument that Henrietta erected in Westminster Abbey, Henrietta's mother commented that her daughter had had "Happiness perhaps, but not honour" (quoted in Colville 311), from (as the epitaph reads) "the Sincere Friendshipp of so worthy and Honest a Man" (quoted in Hodges, *Letters* 262). Contemporaries such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu declared afterward that Henrietta had "exposed herself to most violent ridicule" throughout the relationship (Hodges, *The Man* 116). Seemingly influenced by such gossip, critics today assume that Henrietta and Congreve did have an affair which resulted in Mary's birth.

Hodges goes so far as to conjecture that Congreve wished to bequeath all his estate to Mary directly, but was afraid of the scandal: "In none of his plans, perhaps, was he rash enough to consider seriously the naming of Mary directly as his heir.... As Congreve's sole executrix, Henrietta would clearly be able to transfer his property according to his wishes. But could not the same end be achieved more discreetly?" (*The Man* 118-19). Later critics have all followed Hodges's reasoning: Bonamy Dobrée writes that "it is hardly questioned now that he was the father of the Duchess's younger daughter, Lady Mary.... [for] he left the larger part of his fortune to the Duchess of Marlborough, who spent most of it on a diamond necklace for her daughter";¹⁵ Maximillian Novak observes, "he traveled to Bath in 1722 where Henrietta was spending the season, and he became the father of her child, Mary, in 1723";¹⁶ and Harold Love remarks, "From the testimony of Congreve's friends, we gain the impression of an amiable hedonist who complained about his weight, his gout, and his poor eyesight, yet in his forties was still able to win the heart of the bluestocking Duchess of Marlborough,

¹³ William Sympson, *The History of Scarborough Spaw*.... (London: Printed for Tho. Simmons at the Princes Arms in St. Pauls Church-yard, 1679), 105-7.

¹⁴ John C. Hodges, *William Congreve the Man: A Biography from New Sources* (New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966), 116.

¹⁵ Bonamy Dobrée, *William Congreve* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1963), 9-10.

¹⁶ Maximillian E. Novak, *William Congreve* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Incorporated, 1971), 36.

and at fifty-three to father a child by her."¹⁷ None of these critics doubt that Congreve and Henrietta had a child together, though there is no evidence that they even had an affair—no letters, billets doux, etc. It seems clear that the only evidence for concluding there was an affair is rather circumstantial: they were friends who spent a lot of time together, and he willed his estate to her.

I believe the critical commentary (which is slight, by the way, since most critics seem to have assumed that the friendship was not platonic) has been unduly influenced by the scandalous gossip and literature that circulated after Congreve's death on 29 January 1728/9. Only Samuel Johnson in his sketch of Congreve in *Lives of the English Poets* (1781) kept an open mind about whether the poet had an affair with Henrietta, though he finds other reasons to censure his behavior: "a monument is erected to his memory by Henrietta dutchess of Marlborough, to whom, for reasons either not known or not mentioned, he bequeathed a legacy of about ten thousand pounds;...which, though to her superfluous and useless, might have given great assistance to the ancient family from which he descended."¹⁸ Johnson's tempered remarks here stand out in contrast to the amazingly salacious scandalous literary works that came out shortly after Congreve's—and later, Henrietta's—deaths.

The scandalous literature seems to have been inspired by a one-paragraph notice in *The Daily Post* for 15 July, 1732, nearly three and a half years after Congreve's death. The *Post* reports: "We hear that the Effigies of the late ingenious William Congreve, Esq.; done in Wax-work, at the Expence of 200 l. and which was kept at a Person of Quality's House in St. James's, was broke to Pieces by the Carelessness of a Servant in bringing it down Stairs last Monday Night."¹⁹ This scurrilous tale fired the imagination of the anonymous authors of *Phinodol. A Poem. In Hudibrastic Verse*. (1732), who freely embroider upon it, making up a story of how the "Great Hotonta" (Henrietta) so missed "Comick Con" that

She something *more of Substance* wants;
Something that she might, with her Arm,

¹⁷ Harold Love, *Congreve* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 1–2.

¹⁸ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (New York: Octagon Books, 1967), vol. 2, 212.

¹⁹ *The Daily Post*, No. 3997 (15 July 1732).

Stroke o'er, and Finger ev'ry Charm;
 Might privately survey the Part,
 That made the Conquest of her Heart....
 She now, judicious, gives a Plan,
 To raise in Wax the God-Like Man.
 She shews his *Statue*, how't must be;
 Assigns the Limbs their Symmetry.
 Make *Face* and *Eyes*, says she, *just so*—
 But let the *Nose* be *long*—you know—
 Somewhat approaching—that below.²⁰

And with a Shandyesque euphemism, the authors make it very clear that Henrietta was “won” by Congreve through his decidedly amorous wooing.²¹ Paul-Gabriel Boucé notes that for the eighteenth century, “In popular sexual semiotics, the size of the nose was a physiognomic indication of penile size.”²² The poem becomes successively more scandalous as it describes Hotonta’s “relations” with the statue: “The Figure form’d, with lively Grace, / Having for *Niche*, a *curious Case*, / She visits oft the *dear lov’d Place*. / Breaths out her soft Desires, some say, / Full Half a Dozen Times a Day” (9–10). As no doubt you have inferred from my suggestive commentary, Henrietta is characterized in the poem as using Congreve’s statue as a dildo many times a day. According to a Frenchman travelling in England in 1713–14, “There were always some women in St James’s Park, London, carrying baskets full of dolls which seemed to be in great demand with the younger ladies. Instead of legs, they sported a cylinder, covered with cloth, which was about six inches long and one inch wide” (Wagner 27), so one can deduce that dildoes were still readily available at the time that *Phino-*

²⁰ *Phino-Godol. A Poem. In Hudibrastic Verse* (London: Printed for J. Towers, near Charing-Cross, 1732), 9.

²¹ Laurence Sterne’s volume IV of *Tristram Shandy*, which includes Slawkenbergius’s Tale, was published much later in 1761.

²² Paul-Gabriel Boucé, “Some Sexual Beliefs and Myths in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982: 28–46), 31. Boucé uses a section from Nicholas de Venette’s *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d* (1707) to support his assertion that nasal and penile sizes were commonly associated: “Admitting it true what Physiognomists say, viz. That Men with big Noses have also stout Members, as also that they are more robust and courageous than others, we have no reason to wonder at *Heliogabalus*’s...making choice of big nosed Soldiers” (quoted in Boucé, 31).

Godol was published, nearly twenty years later. Under "dildo" in *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns*, Frankie Rubinstein states that in the Renaissance dildoes were "made of wax, horn, leather, glass."²³ The wax statue/dildo in the poem is destroyed when "Tom" drops it as he is moving it to another room. Hotonta goes into paroxysms of mock heroic despair, renounces all men, and asks "Connelia" (Mary) to help her to "collect them [the statue's remains], and bemoan; / For thou must give me Groan for Groan" (16), with a nice final double entendre.

After Henrietta's death on 24 October 1733, another scandalous literary work tells the story of "Henrada" (Henrietta) and "Congravino" (Congreve) as a romance, entitled *The Secret History of Henrada Maria Teresa* (1733), and subtitled *Her Amours and Intrigues with Congravino, a famous Poet, by whom she had one Daughter; her Seperation [sic] from her Husband, Count Adolphus, who had been extreamly fond of her; her inheriting a superior Title upon the Death of her Father, and a large Estate to support the new Dignity; her Behaviour at the Time of her Death, and an Account of her making her Daughter her sole Heiress, to whom she bequeathed Congravino's Estate, which he left to her, and a considerable personal Estate.*²⁴ As you can tell from the subtitle alone, Henrietta's character, rather than Congreve's, is most damaged by this heroic romance, since she has apparently thrown away the love of a good man, "Count Adolphus" (the Earl of Godolphin). Adolphus is described at length as having "all the Qualifications necessary to form a complete Gentleman; but above all he was singularly remarkable for the noble Endowments of the Mind, he was strictly Virtuous and strictly Chaste; Charitable, Even-temper'd, Good-natur'd, and a most kind and indulgent Husband" (15). Congravino, on the other hand, whose works Henrada takes a "secret Pleasure" in reading, is the master of "double *Entendre's*, to raise a becoming Blush in the Fair Sex: And when he made Love his Subject, he writ such Softness, that he made a deep Impression in their Hearts. This was the fate of *Henrada*, who was captivated with his Poems" (15–16).

²³ Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance* (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1984), 76. For the seventeenth century, Rochester's monsieur in "Signior Dildoe" "appears in a plain Leather Coat" (John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, "Signior Dildoe" in *Poems on Affairs of State, From The Reign of K. James the First, To this Present Year 1703* [London: ?, 1703], vol. 2, p. 189, line 14).

²⁴ *The Secret History of Henrada Maria Teresa...in The Court Parrot. A New Miscellany, In Prose and Verse...* (London: 1733).

Henrada writes Congravino a billet doux, setting up an assignation. When Henrada asks him to read one of his love poems to her aloud, he "raised such an Emotion in the young Countess, that she could not refrain from squeezing his Hand, and thereby letting him know what an Extacy she was in" (17). She appears to be the seducer, though he quickly seizes the initiative, finishing that poem and then turning to other poems "To work up her Imagination to the Height, hoping thereby to gratify his Inclinations" (17-18). The anonymous author of this work has clearly read both Congreve's and Henrietta's wills because he or she employs the diamond ring that Congreve willed to Mary as a love token from Henrada to Congravino (18). Thus, to an audience who is also assumed to have read Congreve's published will, his bequest to Mary of that same diamond ring merely returns to her family the love gift he had supposedly received from her mother. This is clearly a sexual relationship, since after "revelling together for the space of two Hours," Henrada proves to be pregnant, and the two decide not to go to the "Spaw" (Bath) for fear of being discovered; instead, they go to "Aix le Chapele" (19). Congravino's will makes Henrada his sole executor, and the author explains why he doesn't leave his estate to their child: "'Tis true, he did not recommend the Child to her, which he imagined would be fruitless, being persuaded that *Henrada* would always look upon her with an Eye of Tenderness and Affection" (21). The romance ends with Henrada on her deathbed willing her estate to their daughter and "died a Penitent, and was sorry she had wronged so good a Husband as *Adolphus*" (22). Thus, as these final lines make clear, Henrietta and Congreve's love affair is most shocking because she has abused such a good husband. Peter Wagner, in his exhaustive account of Enlightenment erotica, states that "It was the wives of aristocrats who came under literary and graphic satirical attack, often in the form of ribald and obscene pamphlets" (105), and clearly *The Secret History of Henrada* adheres to the general trend Wagner identifies. Congravino/Congreve, on the other hand, is not much damaged by this romance.

The worst scandal and calumny in both *Phino-Godol* and *The Secret History of Henrada* fall upon Henrietta rather than Congreve. One wonders whether this is part of the continuing backlash in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries against strong, public women, starting with the many furious attacks upon Aphra Behn's virtue. Since Congreve's will highlights Henrietta's legal and financial autonomy, she appears to become a threat to the reigning patriarchal order, and both

of these scandalous works diminish her reputation by noting that her independence is dangerous. Near the end of *Phino-Godol*, Hotonta/Henrietta is described as being responsible for Congreve's second death: "O, Shade immortal! (does she cry) / *Twice* it was given Thee to die" (16). These lines, hinging upon the common double entendre of "die," suggest that the authors of *Phino-Godol* blame Henrietta for "killing" Congreve by sullyng his posthumous reputation. As Barbara Benedict remarks about pornographic and erotic poetry during the Restoration, "Many of these poems are veiled attacks on women";²⁵ in this case, Hotonta/Henrietta's hearty sexual appetite destroys even the image or memory of the man she loves. In a similar way, the final lines of *The Secret History of Henrada* suggest that Henrietta repented of hurting her husband when she followed her own desires and chased after Congreve. Both works describe how Henrietta's power destroys men.

Later in the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, Henrietta's reputation is further damaged as her supposed affair with Congreve leaves her verging on insanity. Medical texts in the eighteenth century, according to Julie Peakman, "portrayed sexually rapacious women as out of control, deranged and hysterical, whereas men retained control of their reasoning faculties."²⁶ Theophilus Cibber's *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, to the Time of Dean Swift* (1753) picks up the idea of the effigy: "He [Congreve] was sprightly as well as elegant in his manner, and so much the favourite of Henrietta duchess of Marlborough, that even after his death, she caused an image of him to be every day placed at her toilet-table, to which she would talk as to the living Mr. Congreve, with all the freedom of the most polite and unreserved conversation."²⁷ Nothing wrong here with Congreve, just Henrietta—who is talking to the effigy like an invisible friend. Andrew Kippis's *Biographia Britannica: or, the Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who Have Flourished in Great-Britain and Ireland* (1778–93) adds information from a "respectable correspondent" that

²⁵ Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 78.

²⁶ Julie Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth-Century England* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 58.

²⁷ Robert Shiells, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, To the Time of Dean Swift... By Mr. Cibber* (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, at the Dunciad in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1753), vol. 4, 92.

This Lady, commonly known by the name of the young Duchess of Marlborough, had a veneration for the memory of Mr. Congreve which seemed nearly to approach to madness. Common fame reports, that she had his figure made in wax after his death, talked to it as if it had been alive, placed it at table with her, took great care to help it with different sorts of food, had an imaginary sore on its leg regularly dressed; and to compleat all, consulted Physicians with relation to its health. These things are usually ranked under the appellation of *whim*. But whenever a person acts thus absurdly, the best excuse is insanity.²⁸

After this round denunciation of Henrietta as insane, Kippis writes that this is based upon "common report, [and] there is the highest probability of its being greatly exaggerated" (4: 79). Such a mealy-mouthed retraction, however, does nothing to save Henrietta's reputation. Neither Cibber nor Kippis explain why the Duchess might act in this unbalanced way or why she might have been so entranced by Congreve's effigy; instead, both authors prefer to discount any reports that Congreve and Henrietta had an affair. So we are left with a hysterical madwoman.

It gets worse. In his *Dramatic Miscellanies* (1783-84), Thomas Davies suggests that the effigy is made of ivory, an "automaton...made exactly to resemble him,... which was supposed to bow to her grace and to nod in approbation of what she spoke to it."²⁹ With the transformation of the original *Daily Post's* wax effigy into an ivory one, the idea of Congreve as Henrietta's dildo again surfaces, "nodding" when she spoke to it. The most ridiculous version of Henrietta's and Congreve's relationship comes a little over a hundred years after Congreve's death, in an article by Thomas Macaulay in *The Edinburgh Review* (January 1841):

Her grace laid out her friend's bequest in a superb diamond necklace, which she wore in honour of him; and, if report is

²⁸ Andrew Kippis, *Biographia Britannica: Or, the Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who have Flourished in Great-Britain and Ireland...* (London: Rivington and Marshall, 1789), vol. 4, 79.

²⁹ Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Micellanies* [sic]: *Consisting of Critical Observations on Several Plays of Shakespeare...* (London: Printed for the Author, and sold at his Shop, in Great Russell-Street, Covent-Garden, 1784), vol. 3, 382.

to be believed, showed her regard in ways much more extraordinary. It is said that she had a statue of him in ivory, which moved by clockwork, and was placed daily at her table; that she had a wax doll made in imitation of him, and that the feet of this doll were regularly blistered and anointed by the doctors, as poor Congreve's feet had been when he suffered from the gout.³⁰

So now there are two effigies—one of ivory, one of wax. Henrietta has by the middle of the nineteenth century been turned into a collector, and one whose collection is valuable partly because it can never be completed. As Jean Baudrillard theorizes,

an object only acquires its exceptional value *by dint of being absent*... What we have begun to suspect is that *the collection is never really initiated in order to be completed*... Whereas the acquisition of the final item would in effect denote the death of the subject, the absence of this item still allows him the possibility of simulating his death by envisaging it in an object, thereby warding off its menace.³¹

So in effect Henrietta's collection of Congreve's effigies (and dildoes) derives its value from Congreve's absence, and her own death is psychologically forestalled by collecting images of a man's body who is forever absent. Macaulay, however, defends Henrietta at the same time that he has made her seem even more odd through increasing the number of her effigies: "the world in general appears to have thought that a great lady might, without any imputation on her character, pay attention to a man of eminent genius, who was nearly sixty years old, who was still older in appearance and in constitution, who was confined to his chair by gout, and was unable to read from blindness" (279). Macaulay's attempt to save Henrietta's reputation doesn't make up for the hundred years of infamy heaped upon her head.

³⁰ Thomas Macaulay, Rev. of *The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar* by Leigh Hunt, *Edinburgh Review* 146 (January 1841): 258–79, 279.

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994: 7–24), 13.

So where does this take me in my investigation of Congreve's library and its afterlife? Congreve's "remains," his library, appear to be mostly intact, with some fracturing, à la *Phino-Godol*, and his collected remains also spur on a new collection: Henrietta's alleged collection of dildoes. Is this a liberating connection for Henrietta and her daughter Mary? At first glance, it seems not. These women's association with Congreve's intelligence and learning has the same effect upon their reputations as Aphra Behn's first plays did: women and learning are diminished through reference to their voracious sexual appetites. Throughout the long eighteenth century, "women were perceived to be particularly susceptible to masturbation because of their imagination" (Peakman 56). Imagination was one of the most discussed attributes of any educated man's mind; that women's imaginations were automatically associated with excessive and dangerous sexuality made it easier for their contemporaries to write off their intelligences. As Barbara Benedict writes about an anonymous 1741 novel entitled *A Court Lady's Curiosity*, "female curiosity," because it was so threatening to men, "becomes a sexual or masturbatory exploration....Female curiosity denotes the usurpation of public value for private use: the pleasure of their own bodies."³² Instead of being the public property of their husbands, masturbating women carve out a space separate from men where they can use their imaginations.

However, that Henrietta is associated with a collection of dildoes suggests that in fact Congreve's property allows her to dispense with men sexually, so this is also an acknowledgement of Henrietta's sexual independence. In essence, Henrietta has become—in Baudrillard's words—"the sultan of a secret seraglio" since she is as collector "Surrounded by the objects [she] possesses" (10). In addition, her putative collection and assumed employment of her dildo-effigies has rebellious overtones: Jeffrey Kahan argues that such "an undercurrent of rebellion or the threat of rebellion can be traced in the use of dildoes, a device that replaces the sexual need for men and creates the possibility of a society of women."³³ While Kahan is specifically discussing literary works from ancient Greece like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* which fore-

³² Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 152.

³³ Jeffrey Kahan, "Violating Hippocrates: Dildoes and Female Desire in Thomas Nashe's 'The Choice of Valentines,'" *Para-doxa* 2.2 (1996): 204–16, 208.

ground female societies, Congreve's legacy to Henrietta and her daughter Mary valorizes their right to be independent—legally, financially, intellectually, and physically—of their husbands. Though the scandalous chronicles written after Congreve's and Henrietta's deaths attempt to demonize Henrietta through casting her as a sexually unbridled collector of dildoes, ultimately this strategy for diminishing women's intellectual and physical independence of men backfires.