



Richard Congreve, Positivist Politics, the Victorian Press, and the British Empire

Matthew Wilson

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‘Wilson has written an outstanding first biography of the leading exponent of positivism in England. The reader not only learns about Richard Congreve and all his oddities but engages in a myriad of fierce contemporary debates, especially those relating to religion, the labor movement, imperialism, and the leadership of the global positivist movement. A talented writer with a gift for storytelling, Wilson transports readers with aplomb to the Victorian age. His work uncovering this strange man on a prophetic mission and explaining these important debates is a model of scholarship!’

—Mary Pickering, Professor of History, *San Jose State University*

‘Matthew Wilson’s engaging biography of the English Positivist Richard Congreve (1818-1899) is immensely readable, meticulously researched, and rich in detail. Tracing this dour man’s journey through his early life and career to his emergence as a Positivist Priest, dogmatic anti-imperialist, apologist for dictatorships, advocate of rights, and much more, Wilson is attentive to the political and intellectual context of Congreve’s writings and actions. Although largely forgotten, in his day Congreve drew the ire of many of his contemporaries when he addressed urgent questions. This biography is especially interesting in our fractious times when power and rights are presented and fought over not in lectures, addresses, pamphlets, circulars, and the press but on Twitter, Facebook and other on-line platforms.’

—Geraldine Forbes, Distinguished Teaching Professor Emerita, *Department of History, State University of New York Oswego*

‘This is an impressive and welcome study of a remarkable Victorian utopian thinker. Tracing the development of Congreve’s Positivism and his sustained engagement with a wide range of issues, including imperialism, political economy, and social reform, Wilson has made a notable contribution to nineteenth century British intellectual history’.

— Duncan Bell, Political Thought and International Relations,
University of Cambridge

‘This is the first major study of the most outstanding opponent of imperialism in Victorian Britain, and the leading disciple of the Positivist, Auguste Comte’s, atheistic ‘Religion of Humanity’. Wilson’s exhaustive study demonstrates Congreve’s wide-ranging influence and contextualises his utopian aspirations. This

book illuminates a controversial figure, helps to restore Positivism to a central position in Victorian intellectual life, and reminds us of the centrality of the disputed imperial legacy to debates about modern Britain’.

—Gregory Claeys, Professor Emeritus of History, *The University of London*

‘The Positivist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century had a remarkable, but sometimes unseen and unacknowledged, impact on the lives of a surprising number of leading British writers, politicians and creative minds. Without Richard Congreve this would never have happened. Matthew Wilson’s important, well researched, and much needed, critique places Congreve centre stage and establishes his true significance in this largely forgotten movement’.

—Dr David Taylor, FSA author of *The Remarkable Lushington Family. Reformers, Pre-Raphaelites, Positivists, and the Bloomsbury Group*

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PREFACE

Richard Congreve (1818–99) was Paul the Apostle of the nineteenth century. Or so proclaimed his coterie of followers. The British press fiercely opposed this opinion and called for them all to be burnt at the stake. Today, it is more precise to say that Richard Congreve was a very difficult man. He was a man who opened very tough public conversations. One of his mottoes was to ‘Live Openly’, and he did so according to a fixed set of ‘Positivist’ principles. For much of his life, he was convinced that everything he did and said was the way of the future. Anyone familiar with social media will recognise the brazen righteousness of Congreve’s tone. One can consider his life a cautionary tale in delivering harsh ‘truths’ in an era of fixed ideological positions and ‘fake’, ‘click-bait’ news. Congreve became a household name for sacrificing on the altar of Positivism his career, his wealth, his friendships, and his mental wellbeing. His outspoken nature led some of his long-time allies to regard him as a man who had committed suicide. And yet, for all that he said, he did, and the causes he represented, today Congreve is forgotten. There are no statues of him to tear down. Nor are there any stately portraits of him in the National Gallery to disfigure. First editions of his publications are scarce but cheap, unmarked, and unopened. It has been over one hundred years since his death, and no single study dedicated to his life exists. So why unearth Congreve from the stiff, sticky sediment of Victorian social thought?

Contemporary readers might find Congreve of interest because he was an ideological litmus test. By the 1860s many public figures felt obliged to declare their stance in relation to his controversial ideas. Today, many readers will probably wonder how this enigmatic man could at once draw

together and act on so many seemingly paradoxical positions. His passion for anti-imperialism, abolitionism, anti-militancy, animal rights, public education, humanitarianism, and world peace will resonate with some contemporary readers. Others may find it revolting that he warmly welcomed into his circle atheists, adulterers, blasphemers, and trade unionists. Yet some people might enjoy Congreve's praise of Western supremacy, his religious conservatism, or his opposition to capital punishment. One might also identify with his love of dictatorships and his deep distrust of 'narrow-minded' liberals, election results, and feminists. In taking such positions, Congreve was acting on yet another motto, 'Love, Order, and Progress'.

Congreve's *maître*, Auguste Comte (1798–1857), introduced such mottos as part of his Positivist philosophy. Similar to Congreve, this French thinker viewed the world with the gaze of a privileged, white, arrogant, heterosexual Westerner with a saviour complex. The salvation of humanity, thought Comte, was rooted in a Positivist system of education. Late in life the philosopher went further and cast his altruistic ruminations as the 'Religion of Humanity'. Congreve took up Comte's fledgling 'religion of the future' and put it into practice. By delving into the polarising paradoxes that Congreve's defunct Church of Humanity promoted, readers will perhaps be able to detect their own ideological lenses. Or perhaps it will encourage one to become more sensitive to the ever shape-shifting values, opinions, and judgements of those around them.

Another one of my interests in writing a biography on this shadowy figure is that his work offers glimpses into the curious world of the Victorian social conscience. Along these lines, one initial draw to write this book was Congreve's anti-imperialism. I first encountered his work during the late 2000s. During this time, I was bumbling about the British Library, attempting to decode the conceptual frameworks of the polymath Patrick Geddes and his associate Victor Branford. The three names appeared together in T. R. Wright's authoritative study on the British Positivist movement called *Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (1986). On reading this book alongside biographies on Congreve's peers, their lifework offered itself as a link in a chain of ideas connecting the French philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon to the so-called Geddesian foundations of British sociology and town planning. Since this time, various studies have noted how Congreve's work was important for dispatching a courageous clarion call against the systematic violence of the British aristocracy at home and abroad. On this basis his

name is scattered throughout my *Moralising Space: The Utopian Urbanism of the British Positivists* (2018).

As I began outlining this biography alongside the work for my first book, I became increasingly interested in the relationships between Congreve's public persona and the Victorian press. I spent many waking hours fascinated, amused, and bewildered at seeing how Victorians treated one another in printed matter, the elite social media of the day. It became clear as this study developed that the press imposed on Congreve in particular, an impersonal form of social domination. This book highlights such relationships between Congreve and his critics by incorporating quotations in chapter titles, section titles, and the narrative itself the language used to portray his actions and beliefs. My aim is to show how both the press and Congreve's 'social action' aided and impaired the British Positivist movement and his Church of Humanity.

While writing this biography, I was lucky enough to encounter a wide range of people who expressed interest in my research. I presented Congreve as sociologist in June 2018 at the Architecture, Media, Politics, Society conference in England; Congreve as anti-imperialist social dreamer in early July 2018 at the Utopian Studies Society conference in Spain; and Congreve the republican in mid-July 2018 at the International Planning History Society Conference in Japan. I also shared research on aspects of Congrevean Positivism at the Proportion, Harmonies, and Identities conference in Paris in 2019. My research on Congreve has since appeared in the *Intellectual History Review*, *History of Intellectual Culture*, *Modern Intellectual History*, *AMPS Journal*, *Architectural Histories*, and *Journal of Interdisciplinary History of Ideas*. I have also published articles related to Congreve and the Positivist movement in the edited volumes entitled *Intelligence, Creativity and Fantasy* (2019); *Routledge Companion to Global Heritage Conservation* (2019); and *Modernity: Frontiers and Revolutions* (2018). I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the numerous, patient, and unstintingly kind editors, copy-editors, and peer-reviewers who suffered my various pitiful scholarly misgivings. They offered me very useful feedback on this biography. Along these lines Dr Jessica Reuther, assistant professor of history at Ball State University, lent me a plethora of valuable historical insights and support as this study took shape. Many thanks are also due to all the unsung archivists and librarians who tended to my demands during the making of this book. In particular, I must acknowledge Felix Lancashire, the archivist at the Royal College of Physicians who, despite the pandemic, went to great lengths to share with

me very valuable material on Congreve's medical career. Additionally, John Cooper of the Guild of One-Name Studies unknowingly offered up extremely useful information about the Congreve family genealogy. I would also like to express sincere gratitude to Dr James Connelly, professor of political theory at Hull University, whose research on R. G. Collingwood and the 'biographical self' offered insightful ideas on how one might approach writing a Congreve biography.

For this monograph, I was also very fortunate to receive feedback from scholars with a deep knowledge of the intellectual history of Positivism. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for their contributions to improving the work herein. Dr Gregory Claeys, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of London, has encouraged me to write this book since I was a PhD student at Royal Holloway. For his guidance and inspiration since this time, I am very indebted. Since 2018 Dr Mary Pickering, the accomplished Comte scholar and Professor of Modern European History at San Jose University, offered very valuable suggestions during the making of this study. The following year, I found myself in the company of many scholars of Positivism when I took an opportunity to teach at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) in Paris. The director of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Dr Dominique Iogna-Prat, warmly invited me to present to his graduate students my research on Harriet Martineau and Congreve's acolytes known as the Mumbo Jumbo Club. The Directeur du Musée et du centre d'archives la Maison d'Auguste Comte, Dr David Labreure, kindly arranged for me to riff on ideas about this book before a small, friendly crowd at the Chapelle de l'Humanité. Then, Dr Michel Bourdeau, the emeritus senior researcher at the Institut d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences et des techniques, asked me to lecture on British Comtism in the rooms of the EHESS' boulevard Raspail campus. Here Dr Emmanuel Laznier, the Président de la Société Positiviste Internationale, among others knowledgeable in Comtism, offered me much-appreciated feedback on aspects of this study.

Apart from Congreve as ideological litmus test, and my selfish curiosity in the Victorian social conscience, I have one additional reason for writing this book. It comes from a want of working on someone other than a hashed-over, household Victorian name. I thought it strange that Congreve, the leader of an international utopian socialist movement, has not received a full-length biographical treatment like others in his social circle. Curiously Congreve did not wish, like some of his peers, to write an

autobiography. He viewed this middle-class Victorian pastime as suspicious, self-serving, and opportunistic. Yet, he and his family took ample care to preserve his papers. And, on the premise that it would exasperate future historians, Congreve scoffed at correspondents who refrained from dating their letters to him. Among his papers, Congreve left behind recollections of the Positivist movement and of the founding of his Church of Humanity. His cousin-bridge Maria Bury Congreve (1833–1915) kept these notes in a lockbox at a London bank. Herein, Congreve made note of his meetings with Comte. And he outlined some of his activities throughout the years. This chronology is by no means objective, extensive, or entirely accurate. It usually consists of only a few words or phrases for each year. Sometimes it is not clear in what way the note is important until one delves into the myriad letters he wrote to correspondents across the globe. One significant drawback throughout Congreve's notes, letters, and manuscripts is his poor handwriting. Such eminent Victorians as John Bright complained to him about it, but his penmanship never improved. Congreve was also a frugal writer, and sometimes he and his correspondents wrote crosswise on thin translucent sheets of paper, which are now over 150 years old.

Within weeks of his death, Maria began collecting, rewriting, and editing copies of her husband's letters. Her younger sister Emily Bury Geddes (1840–1929), who lived at the Congreves' Wandsworth house for fifteen years, helped Maria draft chapters of a Richard Congreve biography. Sarah Isabella Sidgwick, the author of 'A Grandmother's Tale', also offered Maria editorial assistance. The three brief, incomplete, and unpublished chapters, now lodged at Oxford's Bodleian archives, are each around two-thousand words long. They date from the early twentieth century and take the form of two typescript drafts. The first chapter outlines information on the Congreve family and Richard's early life in Warwickshire, England. The narrative is somewhat cohesive, but it contains errors and omissions. It also lacks analysis of the intellectual and social context that framed Congreve's life-trajectory. The second chapter on his Oxford and Rugby experiences is more chaotic. It ultimately unravels into a series of cut-and-paste extracts Maria selected from Congreve's correspondence. The chapter terminates around 1852, which was the year of his second interview with Comte. The third and final chapter consists of Maria's personal recollections of the months before her husband's death in 1899. Maria survived her husband by nearly two decades, the lion's share of which she spent acting as the shadow-leader of his Church of Humanity.

Before she died in 1829, Geddes' daughter recorded her recollections of Congreve. Among other details, she commented on Congreve's love of walking his deerhound Brenda and of church architecture, gift-giving, and gardening gooseberries. He could often be found at his Wandsworth house wearing a kurta from India, feeding his cheerful canary Nils, and teaching Positivism to his adopted daughters. Geddes also reported that reading played a central role in Congreve's life. He had reputedly amassed a collection of some 4,000 books by the time of his death. They supplemented his lifetime membership to the London Library. Geddes also spoke of his frequent visits to the National Gallery to see works of the Italian and Romantic masters. The family often spent summers together at Hill House, an old farm about a mile away from Bolney, Sussex. Here they could be found strolling leisurely along the country lanes, and sketching, haymaking, blackberrying, playing piquet, riding ponies, and attending Sunday services at the countryside churches. Geddes also divulged what she considered Congreve's only fault in life: his treatment of his live-in father-in-law, John Bury. The details of their caustic relationship dramatically spilled out into British newspapers days before Congreve established his Church of Humanity. Much to Maria's chagrin, Richard also loved entertaining various worldly intellectuals. And during such times, he relegated her to the role of their hostess. Also, much to her lament, owing to her husband's polemical publications, Maria was subject to harsh treatment from the public and her acquaintances. Along these lines, Geddes also recalled how she accompanied the atheist celebrity-preacher through the busy London streets. While buying cards, gifts, and the turkey for their Christmas celebration, 'preachy women' berated Richard and Maria. Emily noted that as a child, Richard unleashed the same treatment on 'horrid' Margate street preachers in her presence. Such recollections, biographical sketches, and curated correspondence sheds ample light on Richard's domestic life, personal tastes, and inner world. With reservation, they have helped me to understand who Richard Congreve might have been.

With this book, my aim is to reveal the ideas driving Congreve's actions in historical context and thus to reconstruct his social biography. I seek to illuminate how at different times and places Congreve absorbed various influences, grew empathy for 'Humanity', and gradually laid a stake of authority over various social causes. To appreciate his lifework more fully, one needs not only to grasp the specificity of his unique worldview, but his

intellectual and emotional commitments, his complex internal life, and how such struggles framed his utterances and interactions with others.

It appears that much of Congreve's concern for social causes formed early in life. He grew up in a stern household with an abrasive father figure, rough older brothers, and politically-entrenched 'help'. He clung to strong authority figures while sinking into the world of romantic poetry and histories of 'the Greats', or the works of ancient Greece and Rome. When he emerged from his private education during the Oxford Movement controversies, Congreve felt empowered to speak out for the oppressed. On discovering the 'truth' of Positivism, he became deeply ensnared in the intellectual, religious, political, and social affairs of the time. Congreve created many of his historical and political productions cooped up all alone, next to a glass of wine or sherry. In a short but intense sequence of days he scribbled up a whirlwind of scathing reactions to passing incidents near and abroad. Anticipating the worst, Congreve often escaped to the continent or to his family's rural farm, just days prior to his missives appearing before the eyes of the British public. The way in which the anonymous press responded to his polemics shaped and reflected who he became. His aggressive circulars, pamphlets, placards, and petitions won him more opponents and penury than religious converts.

To make sense of his actions, this book delves deep into the broader events of the period in which Congreve lived. By amply staging his social utterances in response to the various episodes of violence between different cultures, I aim to emphasise that he was grappling with and subject to forces much larger than himself. To underscore his mercurial and abrupt shifts in focus from incident to incident, and to highlight the latency and near futility of his reactionary outcries in the name of humanity, I sometimes situate his commentary towards the end of some sections in this book. In that regard, I do not pretend to touch on every corner of his public life or private correspondence. I do not assume an expertise across the gamut of subjects over which he brazenly assumed an influence. Instead, I only seek to reveal how his language is rooted rather formulaically in a desire to realise Comte's Positivist utopia.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BI	Bishopsgate Institute Library
BL	British Library, Add. MSS
Bod.L.	MS Eng. Lett., Bodleian Library, Oxford
Bod.M.	MS Eng. Misc., Bodleian Library, Oxford
BP	E. S. Beesly Papers, University College London
DUCLO	Duke University, The Carlyle Letters Online
HCPP	House of Commons, Parliamentary Papers
HP	Frederic Harrison Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science
LPL	Archibald Campbell Tait Papers, Lambeth Palace Library
LPC	London Positivist Committee
LPS	London Positivist Society, British Library of Political and Economic Science
LSE	Charles Booth Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science
LTC	London Trades' Council Papers, London Metropolitan University
MAC	Maison Auguste Comte
OUS	Oxford Union Society minute book
PP	Positivist Papers
RCPL	Official Proceedings, Royal College of Physicians of London Library
SHC	Vernon Lushington Papers, Surrey History Centre
WC	Warwickshire County Record Office



Prelude: ‘Who Is RICHARD CONGREVE?’ It Will Be Asked

‘CUT YOUR THROATS’ FOR GRANDMOTHER’S ‘DITCHWATER’

On 16 January 1858, Richard Congreve (1818–99) appeared on the national scene as the devil incarnate. That day Britain’s most powerful rag, *The Times* newspaper, brought his recent utterances to public attention. Under the direction of its ‘greatest and most fortunate editor’, John Thadeus Delane, this broadsheet was a public institution. It was the calm, cautious, and conservative voice of the nation (White 2011, 232; Ensor 1936, 144). *The Times*’ daily run of 60,000 prints fervently condemned Congreve’s two pamphlets: *Gibraltar: or, The Foreign Policy of England* (1856) and *India: Denying England’s Right to Retain her Indian Possessions* (1857). Delane’s reviewers acknowledged that they were dragging up onto the public stage for scrutiny an otherwise unknown man (N.A. 1858). Why would this organ even bother with belabouring such an obscure figure?

Congreve expressed an invidious contempt for the church, crown, and aristocracy. He judged these historical institutions based on a futuristic code of principles that most of the nation did not fully appreciate or recognise. The zeal with which he relayed many false prophesies about an incipient global order of world peace based on ‘scientific’ thinking, if broadly understood, was far too much for many Victorians to stomach. Indeed, Congreve dispatched an array of full-throated commands at British statesmen. He beseeched them to either lead the West in a moral

revolution or to immediately resign from their office. To him, their duties involved Britain's 'repentance, restitution, and disinterested moderation and the abandonment of her acquired territories' (Congreve 1874, 93). Congreve's ideas sent even some of his closest followers reeling. One of his fair-weather friends described them as if he were shouting 'Gentlemen: I am an atheist, and I strongly advise you to cut your throats' (HP 1/4, f.98).

At over 2,000-words long, *The Times*' review appeared across the British Isles under the title "'Who is RICHARD CONGREVE?'" It will be asked.' (N.A. 1858). Delane's reviewers suggested that after reading Congreve's works, the British public would demand to know: Who was this 'propagandaizer'? Where did his ideas come from? On what grounds rested his authority to comment on the nation's foreign policy? And why should anyone acquiesce in his notion that Britain enjoy the 'good fortune of landing upon the serene and blissful shore of humanitarianism' abroad? The suggestions of Congreve, the mad 'atheist', clearly shook the nation's pride.

Along a similar vein, one certain source of *The Times*' bile was his origins and his tone. Congreve had received his education at some of England's finest of learned institutions, where he had taken away all the prizes. And prior to publishing his two recent pamphlets, the thirty-nine-year-old held high-ranking and well-regarded positions in British academia. He had served as a master at Rugby School, as an Oxford don, and as an Indian Civil Service examiner. Moreover, Congreve was an Anglican preacher. Such stations in life one might associate with the characteristics of reserved introspection, patience, conservatism, and emotional reticence. Yet, as an Oxford student Congreve was known for being tenacious and forthright at debating religious, social, and political affairs. In association with his activities at the Decade Society and the Oxford Union, he had earned the moniker the 'Congreve rocket' for his combative tone and temperament. As such, not only did Congreve's dour language shock readers, but they likely wondered about the extent to which he had influenced young and impressionable minds at Rugby and Oxford. His peers and pupils had once deemed him as an exciting lecturer and a rising scholar. Yet, buried deep within dusty historical works he published prior to *Gibraltar* and *India*, one can find instances where Congreve denounces Delane's *The Times* as the 'gloomiest' of war-hungry organs and a 'poor substitute' for public discourse (Bod.L. e 51, f.18, 25; Congreve 1855, 64-5).

Perhaps for all these reasons, *The Times* insinuated that Congreve's 'monstrous' thoughts were a threat to British life. But when coming to the origin and justification of his ideas, *The Times* amped up the hyperbole. In an almost comical Monty Python sort of way, it ranted: 'Mr. Congreve's fact is as stale as ditchwater; his inference from it is *new*, but insane; his *truths* are his *grandmother's* – his *irrational* application of them is his own' (N.A. 1858). Congreve was indeed making a first-ever (*new*) attempt, albeit an '*irrational*' one, to introduce a modern utopian foreign policy for devolving Britain's Empire. His '*truths*' were expounded by a French Positivist philosopher *The Times* cast as Congreve's '*grandmother*'. That philosopher was Auguste Comte (1798–1857).

One facet of curiosity for *The Times* was Congreve's use of the term 'Positivism'. The public would surely be 'shaking in their shoes about this awful word', it jabbed (N.A. 1858). The Oxford-educated Delane and his reviewers in *The Times* demanded to know its meaning. But they probably knew the term quite well. Since the mid-1830s, many British thinkers hailed Comte as *the* philosopher of the nineteenth century. The works of the great utilitarian thinker J. S. Mill, for instance, are profuse in references to Comte's scientific ideas, with an aim to defeat the ontological philosophy and theology that had created obstacles to social and political reform in England (Claeys 2013, 30–2; Rosen 2013, 12–3). Others, such as George Grote and G. H. Lewes, based their contributions to history and philosophy on Comte's Positivist conceptual frameworks (Dixon 2008, 42–8, 47–61; Simon 1963, 186–8). Some British Victorians had even travelled across the English Channel to meet Comte at his 10 rue Monsieur le Prince apartment, in Paris' 6th arrondissement. But the subject matter – the 'positive sciences' – for which Comte was widely known, for speaking on systematically, from memory, for hours on end, might have seemed rather innocuous. On the surface, Congreve's curt intervention into British foreign affairs thus appeared in sharp contrast to the Frenchman's heady, verbose, and detached intellectualism.

'WORSHIPPERS OF HIS MADNESS'

Those who are unfamiliar with Comte and his acolytes might also wonder about the way in which this study uses the word 'Positivism'. Herein, I follow the example of the foremost study on British Positivism, T. R. Wright's *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism*

on *Victorian Britain* (1986). Similar to Wright, I am concerned here with the proper noun Positivism, written with a capital ‘P’. This is a specific reference to Comte’s complete and interconnected world of ideas. As one of his followers explained:

Positivism is not simply a system of Philosophy; nor is it simply a new form of Religion; nor is it simply a scheme of social regeneration. It partakes of all of these, and professes to harmonize them under one dominant conception that is equally philosophic and social. (Comte 1908, viii, ix)

Positivism in this sense was a composite of centuries of religious, cultural, intellectual, and political growth based on the rise of what Comte called the ‘positive sciences’. This point is worth a short excursus to show how Congreve’s recent pamphlets followed in the controversial footsteps of his predecessors.

Comte’s work drew heavily on the ideas of the philosopher of the age of revolutions, Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). Comte and Saint-Simon believed that science was gradually withering away the ability of the existing ‘spiritual’ and ‘temporal’ powers to guide society (Manuel 1956; Saint-Simon 1975; Markham 1964; Vernon 1984). Consonant with Saint-Simon’s *Lettres d’un habitant de Genève à ses contemporains* (1803), Comte suggested during the 1820s that the power of ‘positive’ science and industry would soon fill the vacuum left by the ancient church, crown, and landed aristocracy (Saint-Simon 1868b). On this basis, Saint-Simon had urged all scientists to form a ‘permanent body of “clergy” who would create a new “church”’ (Pickering 1993, 79).

By this time, Comte was working as Saint-Simon’s secretary on *L’Organisateur*. In a piece called ‘Parabole de Saint-Simon’ (1819), this magazine scandalously asked readers to consider the question: which would be of a greater loss to society, the disappearance of 30,000 scientists, artists, and labourers, or 30,000 French nobles? The nobility were of ‘purely sentimental’ import to France, suggested Comte. By vast ‘pensions, gratuities, and allowances’ the nobility yoked the body politic and stifled the ‘speculative theories of positive knowledge’. The true and ‘glorious civilisation and prosperity’ of France would only come to fruition when the ‘sciences, beaux arts, and arts and crafts’ – the ‘soul of French society’ – were free of such burdens. Considerable controversy surrounded the piece because the radical Louis Pierre Louvel assassinated Charles

Ferdinand, Duc de Berry, who was one of ten nobles listed by *L'Organisateur* (Saint-Simon 1868a, 11–26). Saint-Simon was tried and acquitted of treason in February 1820. His peers regarded him as 'a utopian, a fantast' clutching at notoriety. But he considered himself an 'independent prophet' seeking a 'nucleus of believers' in a 'new industrial-scientific society' (Manuel 1956, 214–5; Bazard and Enfantin 1958). Saint-Simon emerged on the public scene only once more with his *Nouveau Christianisme* (1825). Herein, he accused the Vatican of 'giving bad education' and of neglecting 'the moral and physical welfare of the indigent class'. Protestants, meanwhile, had 'adopted an inferior morality', a 'bad form of worship', and a 'bad dogma'. Saint-Simon declared it necessary to create 'a social state in which science will again assume a religious character' and to pursue that 'great end': the amelioration of humankind (Saint-Simon 1834, 7, 9–48). But first, claimed Saint-Simon, it was necessary to establish a positive science of society.

For these reasons, Comte's celebrated six-volume treatise *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–42) introduced a neologism, 'sociology', for the Positivist science of society. This new science was rooted in the 'study of the fundamental linkage of various social states', or the 'social progression of humanity' towards 'human perfectibility' (Comte 1839, 252–3). In the *Cours*, Comte therefore expounded the 'scientific' Law of Three Stages. This law holds that all individuals and societies pass from a theological to a metaphysical and then on to a 'Positive' frame of mind.¹ On this basis Comte had, similar to Saint-Simon, set about constructing a classification of the positive sciences. Here the most elementary sciences of mathematics and astronomy served as the foundations for physics, chemistry, and biology. Comte claimed that throughout human existence these cosmological sciences emerged gradually, in turn, and with an increasing complexity. At the top of this hierarchy, Comte placed his new positive science of society, sociology. He claimed it was based on a synthesis of history and biology. The philosopher described sociology as a 'complementary part of natural philosophy which relates to the positive study of all fundamental laws of social phenomena'. It aims at 'discovering or perfecting the exact coordination of all observed facts'. Sociology, he maintained, could open to the 'human imagination the largest and most fertile field' of existence, life on earth (Comte 1839, 294). In his conclusion to the *Cours*, Comte wrote

¹ Comte later claimed that he condensed seven meanings in the word 'positive': 'real, useful, certain, precise, organic, relative, and even sympathetic' (Comte 1855, 17).

that the premier human science of sociology might form the basis of a positive church. Perhaps for such reasons, the *Cours* appeared on the Vatican's list of dangerous and forbidden books, the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, in 1864 (Pickering 2009a, 1). Notwithstanding, Comte's next great work, the four-volume *Système de politique positive* (1851–4), caused great consternation and bewilderment amongst some of his followers. It coupled sociology to the 'science of morality', which Comte called the Religion of Humanity. It appeared to Comte's followers that the philosopher had abruptly abandoned science and taken on a curious 'second career' in religion.² The figure who was, before Congreve, the philosopher's chief British ally, J. S. Mill, called this new religion 'trash' (1865, 39). The Victorian press announced, as such, that there were 'pupils of his sanity, and the worshippers of his madness' (N.A. 1877).³

A 'SOCIAL CUCKOO'?

In the *Système*, Comte relaxed the notion of 'objective truth' (Adorno 1979, 33). He linked together various political, religious, and social practices and fashioned a creed of civic duty.⁴ The Religion of Humanity was a 'positive' system of love,⁵ he claimed. And it was 'more real and more

²Recent research has presented Comte as a historian, a sociologist, a political theorist, and a philosopher of science (see: Gane 2006, 1–12, 128–34; N.A. 1877, 355–6; Gouhier 1970, 5–30; Mill 1866; Bazard and Infantin 1958; Bridges 1866; Pickering 2009b, 358–9; Bourdeau et al. 2018, 20; Benton 1977, 18–45; Harp 1991; Wernick 2001; Cashdollar 1978; Smith 1967, 84–103; Logan 2009, 30–33, 43, 90–100; Bryson 1936; Style 1928). Comte was a 'polymathic' figure or generalist, like many of his followers (Kitchen 1975; Vogeler 1984; Bridges 1908).

³Along these lines, scholars have argued that the 'sociological imagination' of Comte's early scientific writings in the *Cours* offered a critical foundation for the ideas of Émile Littré, Herbert Spencer, and Émile Durkheim (see: Fuller 2006; Mills 1967, 6, 15; Giddens 1971, vii, 65–91, 115, 133; Scharff 1995).

⁴Scholars have shown that with the rise of historicism some Victorians considered science and religion compatible (Turner 2015, 84–120).

⁵For Comte, Positivism offered a complete alternative to ostensibly everything from Christianity to Confucianism and from capitalism to communism. At the same time, it was to eradicate all scientific specialisations without a genuine social purpose. In perhaps its simplest form, however, Comte claimed that Positivism represented love. Love was the 'sole source of voluntary cooperation' (Comte 1877, 40). Comte accordingly coined the word 'altruism' as the opposite of 'egoism' (Dixon 2008). Along these lines he claimed that art was

complete than any other' religion (Comte 1875a, 265). Comte wildly proclaimed that his atheistic cult had at its end, the 'total and direct reorganisation of society' into a utopian world of 500 city-states (Comte 1852, v–x, xvi–xvii).⁶ He called this utopia the *République occidentale* and declared Paris the Positivist Mecca.

In this vision, there were four key social roles people would take in order to 'rule in turn' in relation to the spaces of the city-state or republic. The Positivist sociologist Patrick Geddes called the first two roles the 'spiritual power' of *Intellectuals* (sociological priests or physicians) and *Emotionals* (women).⁷ The others he referred to as the 'temporal power' of *Chiefs* (employers) and the *People* (the unionised proletariat).⁸ And in the Positivist system of education, everyone was to be moralised, under the guidance of the 'Positive' priests of modernity, into learning their place or role in society. This system of education included civic sacraments⁹ and public duties to live one's life making altruistic contributions to improving life on earth.¹⁰ Along these lines, the fourth volume of Comte's *Système* outlined various utopian Festivals of Humanity connected to a new thirteen-month, twenty-eight-day calendar.¹¹ It celebrated the feats

the closest ally of Positivism because of its abilities to stoke the emotions, passions, and love of life. Art promised to bring unity to social life by guiding the sympathetic instincts of science and industry (Comte 1877, 51).

⁶As the basis of this scheme, Comte claimed to have coordinated the 'confused' but powerful ideas of Fontenelle, Diderot, Hume, and Condorcet (Comte 1852, v–x, xvi–xvii).

⁷Comte referred to this 'spiritual' pair as '*le Sacerdoce, ou la vie contemplative*' and '*la Femme, ou la vie affective*' (Wilson 2018a, 54–5).

⁸Comte labelled this 'temporal' pair as '*l'Industrie, ou le pouvoir pratique [banque, commerce, fabrication, agriculture]*' and '*le Proletariate, ou la vie active*' (Wilson 2018a, 54–5).

⁹(See: BL 43844, ff.3–34; N.A. 1869). These ceremonies acknowledged key stages in personal development. (Comte created nine sacraments for men and seven for women). According to Congreve (n.d., 9) they 'consecrate the successive phases of private life by connecting each with public life'. Comte based these rites off Christian sacraments. They included: presentation (year one, akin to baptism); initiation (year fourteen, akin to confirmation); admission (year 21, akin to confession); destination (year 28, for men only, and akin to ordination); marriage (years 21–8 for women, and 28–35 for men); maturity (year 42, for men only); retirement (year 63); transformation (upon death); and incorporation (seven years after death, akin to beatification).

¹⁰Comte relegated women to the home on the premise that they were 'bearers of Humanity', objects of 'heartfelt adoration', and representatives of the 'Great Being' (Comte 1877, 96, 349; 1875b, 302–6, 349; 1858, 349).

¹¹Comte listed 558 names of 'eminent men', but hardly any women in his Positivist Calendar. His followers boasted that they were of 'all ages, races, and countries' and repre-

of ‘great men’.¹² Comte also expended much energy on outlining library, temple, hospital, and house designs for the Positive era, in addition to a new flag system, regional currencies, and a ‘moral’ global banking system (Comte 1877, 139, 256–96, 372–80, 567; MAC, M.COM.87; Comte 1903, 39–40, 305–6).

For Congreve, the realisation of the *République occidentale* utopia was the goal of the Religion of Humanity. For this reason, he asserted that late in life Comte had become a ‘great artist’ (Bod.M. c 346, f.178). The Oxford don and Anglican minister was entering his mid-thirties when he decided to dedicate his life to the study of the philosophy of history (sociology) and the social action of the Religion of Humanity. He was captivated by Comte’s notion of how sociologists, acting as the priest-intellectuals of the so-called spiritual power of modernity, could systematically usher in

representatives of ‘religion, poetry, philosophy, war, statesmanship, industry and science’. The days and months of the calendar appeared in historical sequence. The ‘greatest men’ were associated with the thirteen months. They were: Moses, Homer, Aristotle, Archimedes, Caesar, St. Paul, Charlemagne, Dante, Gutenberg, Shakespeare, Descartes, Frederick II (of Prussia), and Bichat (Harrison 1892, v). Comte also wished to reset the year-system, just as the Christians had. Year I coincided with the opening of the French Revolution or specifically the Gregorian calendar date of 1 January 1789. Comte in fact created two new calendar schemes. He published the first provisional calendar in 1849, and it related to the nineteenth century and Western Europe. In 1854, he published a more abstract and permanent calendar of the Religion of Humanity (Harrison 1904).

¹² Among these festivals was one dedicated to a *culte* day of the ‘Virgin-Mother’. Comte’s pining with unrequited lust for a young woman named Clotilde de Vaux shaped his ideas about the ‘Great Being’ or humanity (Pickering 2009a; Macey 2011, 70). On de Vaux’s sudden illness and death, he began to reflect on the ‘brutish sexual impulses of men’ (Pickering 2009b, 324). Wishing to free women from ‘all coarse dependence’ on men financially, and from their obligations of sexual pleasure and ‘servile reproduction’, Comte introduced his ‘utopia of the Virgin-Mother’. Based on Dante’s *Paradise* and The Assumption, it would replace the ‘intellectual belief in the Sacrament of the Eucharist’ (Comte 1877, 358). Comte asserted that his utopia would enable women to fully develop ‘physically, morally and intellectually’ and to realise the ‘Christian dream’ of ‘human perfection’ (Comte 1877, 266–7, 357–8). This ‘feminine utopia’ would entail the ‘abstract worship of women’ and a ‘public festival of the Virgin-Mother’. Moreover, it promised the possibility of pregnancy without sexual intercourse by way of women using ‘stimulants’. It would thus render sexual relations with men unnecessary (Pickering 2009b, 324; Comte 1877, 266–7). Along these lines, Comte later declared that only ‘truly virginal’ women were ‘fully worth worship’ and emblematic of humanity (Armenteros 2017, 91–116). A ‘satisfactory institution of the worship of women’, and the ‘Utopia of the Middle Ages’, was ‘out of the question’ otherwise (Comte 1877, 357–8).

the Positive era. This global utopia would commence with these scientific elites moralising European governments into returning their colonial exploits. Then, under the guidance of these sociological priests, each nation would install a dictatorship of the proletariat.¹³ This government of one would dissolve after the nation's ostensible spiritual power of the home – women – reared a generation of so-called moral capitalists and trade unionists, trained to serve as the new 'temporal power' of society. Out of this generation of moralised citizens, city-states of the *République occidentale* would take shape through the election of their commerce, manufacturing, and agriculture chiefs. The Positivist creed would remain the sole link between these new autonomous states (Comte 1858, 345–6). The first step to realising Comte's utopia, as indicated, was to occur at the level of international relations.

Effectively, with his recent pamphlets demanding Britain return its colonial exploits, Congreve was acting as an agent of the Religion of Humanity. Yet Comte died before he had a chance to fully flesh out the liturgy and worship of humanity. The leadership of the philosopher's Positivist Society in Paris fell into the hands of Pierre Laffitte, much to Congreve's dissatisfaction. Along with other members of the society, this French mathematician was less inclined to act on Comte's utopia-making political religion. In 1859, just after drawing the ire of the national press, Congreve went rogue. He launched the 'Church of Humanity'. His 'church' was not, however, what one might expect. This book argues that the humanity preacher in fact considered the Positivist religion as an extreme manifestation of politics. In Congreve's mind, the polemical pamphlets, petitions, placards, and circulars that he and his disciples produced, fully embodied the devotional observances of his Church of Humanity. Their works aimed at answering what Comte called *the*

¹³ Comte desired to see a 'republican dictator' assume the place of a 'parliamentary regime' and the so-called chaos of democracy. A strong, enlightened, executive power, he thought, would act as a saviour for women and the proletariat (Comte 1852, xvi–xvii; Pickering 2009a, 332). My use of this phrase 'dictatorship for the proletariat' is an attempt to be concise. Comte promoted dictatorships for social regeneration before Marx and Engels. See Gareth Stedman Jones' introductory comments in *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 2002, 3–26). Comte's ideas about dictatorships are similar to those of Étienne Cabet. During the 1840s, Cabet described how a 'benevolent Napoleon or super-Robespierre' could implement 'radical reform' (Collingham 1988, 67–8, 345–75). His work at that time was more popular in France than that of Fourier, Marx, Saint-Simon, or Comte.

‘question of modern times’, the ‘incorporation of the Proletariat into Modern Society’ (Comte 1876, 523).¹⁴ Indeed, Congreve and his coterie of followers developed especially close links to labour collectives.¹⁵ As a ‘spiritual power’, they aimed to act as the medieval church once had: to mediate the ‘temporal power’ in relation to the priority of social justice. Their aim here was to form, following Comte’s command, a ‘systematic connection with the socialist movement towards internal regeneration’ (Comte 1901, 63).

More broadly, this book argues that Positivism on Congreve’s watch became a praxis that was at once a scheme of education, a polity, a religion, a school of philosophy, and a method of government (Harrison 1907, 44–5; 1908, 428; Ellis 1885; N.A. 1867). Like other Comtists, Congreve spent much of his life attempting to employ his various vocations – as a preacher, polemicist, translator, historian, tutor, physician, and sociologist – to disseminate Positivism across Victorian society. He and his acolytes acted in such a way that G. J. Holyoake called them ‘Political and Social Cuckoos’. This one-time Comte sympathiser wrote that the British Positivists laid their eggs ‘in the nests of any party likely to hatch them’ (Holyoake 1879). Indeed, references to Comte, Comtism, Positivism, and the Religion of Humanity have been found not only within Victorian

¹⁴For several years, Comte delivered very popular lectures to working men (Pickering 1993, 436–7). They likely served as the inspiration for the Positivist lectures Congreve delivered in the basement of ‘the Institution’ on London’s Cleveland Street during the early 1860s (See: Comte 1876, 523; Branford 1908, 14; Higginson 1897; Caird 1885, 173). There ‘is no more distinctive note of the Positive religion than its power to deal with industrial activity’, wrote Comte (1877, 51). Along these lines, some people defined Positivism as a ‘moral and religious socialism’ (Comte 1908, viii, ix). Also see: Bridges 1866, 19; Harrison 1891; Wilson 2018c.

¹⁵The Positivists’ language regarding the ‘moralisation of capital’, scholars have shown, passed from the trade union movement and into the discourse of socialism (see: Bevir 2011, 3–9; Harrison 1965, 3–4, 210–339; Harris 2010). Oddly, the British Positivists rarely appear within the historiography of Victorian republicanism (see: Mahlberg and Wiemann 2013; Nash and Taylor 2000; Royle 1980; Rumsey 2000; Williams 1997; Taylor 1999; Claeys 2010). The Positivists’ critiques of Victorian life motivated the activities of various political thinkers (see: Smith 1973; Linton 1851a, b; Besant 1881; Harrison 1965, 3–4, 210–339; Hinton 1878, 322; Bernstein 2004, xxv, xxxiv; Bevir 1993; N.A. 1900; Rykwert 2000, 62).

politics but also within science¹⁶ and culture.¹⁷ Congreve, however, increasingly acted more so on the lines of the openly 'aggressive territorialism' of Britain's favourite bird, the robin (N.A. 2015). It was of course not on Congreve's account alone that Positivism took root in various corners across the globe, creating 'Worlds of Positivism'.¹⁸ Indeed, for the last

¹⁶Some scholars of Positivism have suggested that as a system of scientific thought 'only scientists seem to have been unanimously hostile to the pretensions of Positivism' (Wright 1986, 3). The British Positivists examined social phenomena and the built environment decades before the founding of the Sociological Society, the Le Play House, and the British Sociological Association. The movement attracted such well-known names as Charles Booth, Herbert Spencer, Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford, Sybella Gurney Branford, Ebenezer Howard, and L. T. Hobhouse, among others (see: Vogeler 1979; Webb 1926; Branford and Geddes 1919; Branford and Farquharson 1924; Wilson 2018b; Harrison 1902; Scott and Bromley 2013; Collini 1983, 152 n16). These sociologists were active around the time of the Royal Statistical Society and the Social Science Association, but neither of these bodies acknowledged their efforts. Victor Branford claimed that such institutions remained 'unilluminated by reference to the constructive and directive formulae of the main founders of sociology ... they put to sea without a compass' (Branford 1914, 373). Also see: Bod.L. c 186, ff.98–146; Bod.L. e 57, ff.136–9; Branford 1893.

¹⁷George Eliot was 'always to be found' among the listeners of Congreve's sermons, and she was a great friend to his wife, Maria Bury Congreve (Wright 1977, 1981; McCarthy 1899, 204–5). Positivist ideas also played out in such novels as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Romola* (1863), and *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868). Congreve described the last as a 'mass of Positivism' (Gardner 1912, 198). Arguably, it was Congreve who inspired Eliot's rendering of the pompous Rev. Edward Casaubon in her masterpiece *Middlemarch* (1871). (Also see, however: Faubert 2010; Rilett 2016; Wilson 1982.) Congreve's family also claimed that he was the inspiration for 'Dr. Rocket' in William Fraser Rae's *Maygrove* (1890). Other such Victorian writers as George Gissing made Positivism the subject of *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *Demos* (1886). *The New Paul and Virginia* (1878) by William Hurrell Mallock, meanwhile, displayed the dystopian tendencies of Positivism (Lucas 1966; Wright 1984). For a fleeting moment various well-known cultural figures looked into the window of Positivism. They included: Leslie Stephen, Matthew Arnold, Gilbert Murray, Edward Caird, William Morris, Walter Pater, Annie Besant, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Mary Augusta Ward, Harriet Martineau, and Beatrice Webb (Besant 1881; Webb 1926; Hardy 1928, 1930; Edel 1962; Wright 1986; Peterson 1976; Smith 1967; Royle 1974; Morris 1901, 176–7).

¹⁸For some time, intellectual historians have used a 'diffusionist model' to demonstrate how various topics within the history of ideas spread across the world (Pocock 1975, 1980; Harris 2010). W. M. Simon and others, for instance, have suggested that Comte's principles *diffused* across time and space by way of public lectures, lending libraries, publications, and book reviews (Simon 1963, 73–93; Ardao 1963; Woll 1976; Woodward 1971; Zea 1974; Annan 1959; Galison 1990; Harp 1995; McGee 1931; Pinto 1986; Havens 1970; Sartori 2014; Wunderlich 1992; LeGouis 1997). As an alternative to the 'diffusionist model' of 'flows', 'influences', and 'transfers', some intellectual historians have begun to employ a discourse of global 'world-making' (Bell 2009). On this basis, the editors of *The Worlds of*

twenty years of his life, Congreve only really cared to interact with those fully committed to ‘English Positivism in the *true* sense, the *complete* sense, the *religious* sense’ (Bod.L. c 347, f.103).¹⁹

A ‘MASS OF WOUNDS AND BRUISES, ENDING IN DEATH’

If one measures Congreve’s success as a humanity-preacher in terms of the number of people he converted to complete Positivism, in the decade after he launched his Church of Humanity, the number at his table was fewer than Christ’s apostles (Crompton 1899, 9). By the time of his death in 1899, only 137 people from across the world were contributing to his ‘sacerdotal fund’ (McGee 1931, 185). Congreve’s successors complained that he never actually formed a true ‘church’ (Quin 1924). And rather paradoxically, Congreve and his ‘congregation’ struggled with the worship and even the concept of humanity.²⁰ On account of his aggressive,

Positivism (2018) emphasise how certain historical actors re-particularised the principles of Positivism to suit locally defined agendas. Positivism didn’t diffuse, they maintain, but evolved from a ‘bricolage of Comtean and Millenian ancestries’. ‘Archetypes’ of Positivism have been found in Poland, India, Russia, Germany, Turkey, Brazil, and Sweden, among other places (Feichtinger et al. 2018, 1–23, 349–356). Although that work ignores Congreve, his earliest pamphlets made clear how Positivism was intended to mediate between conservative and socialist as well as Catholic, Hindu, and Muslim world-views.

¹⁹To appreciate what the classics-trained Congreve meant by Positivism in the ‘religious sense’, one might look to the etymology of ‘religion’ and ‘religious’. Here one finds that for the former, the Roman grammarian Servius used the Latin word *religare*, which means ‘to bind’. The Christian philosopher Lactantius, who was the advisor to the first Christian emperor Constantine I, drew on this meaning. For the latter, religious, the Roman emperor Cicero used *relegere*, meaning observant, conscientious, and strict (Hoyt 1912; Gane 2006, 108; Pickering 2009b, 67).

²⁰Comte claimed it was not until the emergence of the ‘social science’ of Pascal that the ‘conception of the Great Being’ or ‘Humanity’ became possible (Comte 1875a, 269). Along such lines, the ‘object of Positivist worship is not like that of theological believers, an absolute, isolated, incomprehensible Being, whose existence admits of no demonstration, or comparison with anything real’, wrote Comte (1875a, 267). Initially, he claimed that the ‘universal family’ of the dead alone – ‘all the animal races’ which acted on the cooperative basis to ‘Live for Others’ – represented ‘Humanity’ (1877, 22–3, 32–3). Some half-committed Positivists accordingly claimed that to worship humanity meant nothing other than ‘reverence and love for all that is good and great’ in society (Harrison 1907, 285). The ‘worship’ of humanity thus seemingly entailed the study of all cooperative creations, be they moral, artistic, scientific, or industrial (Comte 1877, 24). Yet Comte soon thereafter proclaimed that the religion ‘has already irrevocably taken possession of the Past in its whole range’ and the ‘priesthood of Humanity’ would ‘take possession of the Future’ (Comte

atheistic, and bigoted diatribes against the British church and state, the press brought people to think the worst of Congreve's faith and his actions in 'the name of Humanity'. One newspaper critic theorised about how worshipping 'humanity' amounted to embracing a great stinky, hairy 'mass of wounds and bruises, ending in death'. Positivists had nothing else to look forward to other than 'merely blindness to the grave, the lunatic asylum, the hospital, and the other circumstances of life' (N.A. 1874).

As we have seen above, *The Times*' review of January 1858 presented Congreve's cries in the name of 'Humanity' as at once enigmatic, outrageous, and uncommonly principled. This instance in which the public began speculating on how he laced his polemics with latent meanings and motivations afforded us an opportunity to examine the Positivist utopia more fully. Against this backdrop we will explore, through the course of this book, the ways in which both the press, Congreve, and his followers aided and impaired the impact of the Positivist movement in Victorian Britain. We will see that *The Times*' review was in fact one of countless attacks dispatched against him. In Congreve's recollection, however, this review was so 'venomous' that it 'especially ruined' his reputation (Bod.M. c 350, f.205).

Throughout his life Congreve became obsessed with negative commentary appearing in the popular press. He went as far as to collect a scrapbook of reviews, some of which he scribbled responses to in the margins. Perhaps he was aware how his work was opening difficult public conversations. It anticipated a shift in attitudes towards the Empire nearly four decades before such views gained wider appeal. At the same time, the media imposed on him and his family an impersonal form of social domination; it treated Congreve's coterie of followers in a like manner, and he often came to their defence. This book demonstrates this condition by frequently featuring quotations in its chapter titles, section titles, and the narrative itself of the language people used to portray Congreve's actions and beliefs. The divisive persona he projected into the world affected both his personal relationships and mental harmony. This book weaves together his personal and public life as such.

In Chap. 2 we begin with young Congreve on the family farm. From there we will see that, about the fishing hole, boarding school, and chapel, the young Congreve encountered conflicting social outlooks. He faced the radical thinking of farmhands, the severe conservatism of his father,

1877, 8). The point of the religious observance of the 'Great Being' was 'perfecting the order of man's world, for the individual as well as society' (Comte 1877, 35).

and a rigid evangelical pedagogy at Walter Bury's boarding school in France. Then, the young, socially awkward poet-historian embraced the idealism of Percy Bysshe Shelley, accepted the manly Christian duties of S. T. Coleridge, reflected on Robert Owen's socialist utopias, and absorbed Thomas Arnold's Broad Church thinking. These contrasts that he confronted as a Rugby and Oxford student, shaped and shook his adolescent persona: the unbending evangelical. The chapter argues that Congreve's study of history, utopias, and Christian service spoke to him of how the past experiences of life could light the way to a new, brighter future.

We begin Chap. 3 in the late 1830s. These were years of severe sadness, new friendships, and intensive study for Congreve. Within a decade's time, people considered this Anglican minister a very dangerous man. The chapter argues that central to this persona was his keen enthusiasm for the combative element of Oxford Union Society debates. Here among other places, he engaged in difficult conversations concerning public education, Chartism, home rule, social reform, and Tractarianism. His continental, socially conscious teachings as an Oxford 'coach' were popular among undergraduates. But, by the mid-1840s, rumours of his secret writings left his peers and pupils suspicious of the extent to which he was a religious and political infidel. Controversy after controversy left him in search of a way out of Oxford.

In Chap. 4 we see that Congreve experienced great inner turmoil during his tenure at Rugby School. On discovering that for various reasons he was Rugby's *persona non grata*, Congreve immersed himself in the works of Thomas Carlyle, G. H. Lewes, J. S. Mill, and Auguste Comte. Their ideas informed his fiery utterances on free trade, elections, revolution, and autocracy. After headmaster A. C. Tait pushed him out of his Rugby post in the late 1840s, the ordained minister and liberal pamphleteer received a warm welcome as a don at Wadham College, Oxford. By the time Congreve's French prophesies had attracted a coterie of disciples there, he had dedicated himself to serious study of Positivism. The chapter argues that, based on critiques surrounding the Christian church, he saw in Positivism the true purpose and duties of the emerging spiritual leaders of modernity.

In Chap. 5 we encounter a Congreve who is tired with the idea of reforming Oxford into a modern institution, with sound teachings for empowering British elites to drive social change. During a 'tearful crisis' involving his faith, finances, and a new fiancée, Congreve abandoned academia and the Anglican clergy for the sake of 'the truth': Positivism. He

became the first 'true disciple' of Comte's Religion of Humanity. The chapter argues that, with 'complete' Positivism as his ballast, Congreve proceeded to publish studies embedded with forecasts of the demise of the British Empire. These publications extended scientific and religious justifications of Comte's utopian vision in tandem with a new international policy. On this basis, Congreve was rising as the centre of an emergent Positivist school in Britain.

Chapter 6 demonstrates that by the 1860s, Congreve had metamorphosed into a polymathic man of multifarious vocations. He published anti-imperialist tracts, began studying medicine, and translated Comte's religious utterances. He assumed the unsavoury role of sociologist 'super-historian' by writing through the lens of the Positivist philosophy of history. Meanwhile, Congreve also led sweeping attempts to forge an international trade union movement. He and his coterie of elusive disciples aimed to build a band of working-class followers who believed their historical destiny was to realise Comte's utopia. They united in publishing the first composite scheme for an ideal British foreign and domestic policy. The chapter argues that such vocations were rooted in Congreve's self-appointed role as 'vicar' of the Church of Humanity, which took a great toll on his personal life.

Chapter 7 shows that the period of 1866 to 1878 was one of great celebrity for Richard Congreve. He formally met the qualification for the Positivist priesthood. And with an aim to develop a proletarian brotherhood, he delved into issues surrounding suffrage reform, the Irish question, anonymous journalism, the scientific and philosophical merits of Positivism, popular education, the Paris Commune, and the Ashanti War. Such efforts gained the support more so of 'the educated' than 'the working-class'. This chapter argues that although such allies supported the founding of his Positivist Society of London and school at Chapel Street Hall, few would commit to what was, by 1870, his essentially defunct Church of Humanity. Yet we will explore why it seemed by 1877 as if his congregation was more faithful than ever.

In Chap. 8, we see that Congreve entered a secret plot to undermine the leadership of the international Positivist Society. After one of his co-conspirators exposed his ill-fated ambitions, Congreve severed all connections with the Society and his closest followers. He relaunched his Church of Humanity. But rather than kindling an atmosphere of brotherly love, he proceeded to publish polemics 'in the name of Humanity' on crises in eastern Europe, China, Zululand, the Transvaal, Egypt, and Uganda.

Congreve's co-religionists felt that such utterances stunted the true worship of 'the Great Being' or humanity. The chapter argues, however, that the misunderstood preacher instead intended to forge an anti-imperialist proletarian church. He expected from his 'congregation' a full commitment to 'public duty', as social reformers seeking to realise Comte's utopia, the *République occidentale*.

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