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Kings and counselors: the politics of Francis Bacon's rhetorical theory

Philological Quarterly, Summer 1995

Late in March of 1603, just before and immediately after Elizabeth's death, Francis Bacon was scrambling to secure for himself a position in the service of the Queen's successor, James VI of Scotland.(1) Two days before her death, Bacon offered his services to Burghley and the Earl of Northumberland, who both had been corresponding confidentially with the King on the question of the succession. After the Queen's death, he wrote to three of James' courtiers, known to him through his brother Anthony, to one "Mr. Davys," who had set out to meet the new King upon his entrance into England, and to the King himself. In his letters to James' courtiers and Mr. Davys, Bacon's theme was the same: "furthering a good conceit and impression of [his] most humble duty and true zeal towards the King." In his letter to James, Bacon himself offers his service and makes "oblation of [himself] to your Majesty."(2) The reason for Bacon's scrambling can be deduced from the fact that since 1593, when he delivered a speech in Parliament that had offended the Queen, the path to his preferment had been effectively blocked.(3) In the meantime, several positions had been dangled before his nose, but they were all snatched away by a crotchety Queen.(4) However, now that the question of succession had been settled, his path seemed relatively open, and he therefore concentrated his energies to make his way along it.

Receiving an encouraging reply from Northumberland, Bacon wrote to him again, but this time he included with his letter something that, if not handled properly, could do much damage to his suit. What he enclosed was a draft of a Proclamation "drawn for the King at his entrance." Bacon explains the purpose of the draft in the letter:

I do hold it a thing formal and necessary for the King to forerun his coming (be it ever so speedy) with some gracious declaration, for the cherishing, entertaining, and preparing of men's affections. For which purpose I have conceived a draught, it being a thing in my Mistress' times to have my pen used in public writings of satisfaction.(5)

The Proclamation, then, is ostensibly intended to anticipate the King's coming and ingratiate him into the hearts of the people. However, as the letter continues, Bacon's statements become more tendentious. He suggests to Northumberland that the draft can be used in two ways. First, it can be used "properly,"

if your Lordship think convenient to shew the King any such draught; because the veins and pulses of this state cannot be but best known here; which if your Lordship should do, then I would desire you to withdraw my name, and only signify that you gave some heads of direction of such a matter to one of whose style and pen you had some opinion.

Second:

though your Lordship make no other use of it, yet it is a kind of portraiture of that which I think worthy to be advised by your Lordship to the King ['to express himself according to those points which are therein conceived'].(6)

These uses combined give two contradictory representations of Bacon. Still present is Bacon's desire to perform his "humble duty." He shows deference to Northumberland by presenting his uses as options, not as directives; he thus locates the power to choose whether to use the Proclamation or not with Northumberland. Also, Bacon's wish to have his name withdrawn is a self-effacing move (which could nevertheless lead to his possible

identification: although he does not want to appear too presumptuous, there is perhaps the hope that being signified as the "pen" of "some opinion" will pique the interest of the King and thus prompt Northumberland to mention Bacon's name). Finally, if Northumberland should decide not to deliver the declaration to the King, he will at least have a useful model upon which to base his counsel to James. However, Bacon's claim that state matters "cannot be but best known here" presupposes a lack of knowledge on the part of James (and Northumberland), an inadequacy that Bacon aims to remedy. If he should ever fulfill this aim, then Bacon will be in a position to control and determine James' perception of what are and what are not the important matters of state. Also, as the word "portraiture" implies, the Proclamation is designed to fashion an image of James according to what Bacon thinks most appropriate. On the one hand, then, Bacon hopes to be of service both to the King by easing his entrance and to Northumberland by supplying him with appropriate matter for advising the king. On the other hand, Bacon betrays a desire to control, not only what knowledge of public matters is disclosed to the king, but also the first image that the people of London will have of James as King of England.

In the Proclamation itself, the same contradictory impulses are present. On the one hand, it was written, not only to "forerun" the King's coming, but also to anticipate and preclude any disorder in the realm that might result from the succession.⁽⁷⁾ Bacon attempts to achieve the latter purpose in a highly rhetorical manner. King-Bacon repeatedly praises his new subjects for their obedience and loyalty: he describes "her Majesty's peaceable and quiet government . . . [as] accustoming the people to all loyalty and obedience"; he commends the "quietness and obedience of our own people"; and he takes comfort in the fact that "our loving subjects . . . received and acknowledged us their natural and lawful king . . . in so quiet and settled manner."⁽⁸⁾ By praising and characterizing them as such, he presents them with a model of behavior that, though it might not actually be the case, he wishes to make the case. In "Of Praise," Bacon describes this strategy and calls it *laudando praecipere* (to teach by praising): "by telling men what they are, [praises] represent to them what they should be."⁽⁹⁾ Praising is not just an acknowledgement or a submission to the virtues of the object of praise, it is also a gesture of control: in this instance, the rhetorical presentation of an obedient populace is meant to secure and sustain their compliance.

On the other hand, there are aspects of the Proclamation which work against the maintenance of the status quo. Thus, a modified version of the tactic of *laudando praecipere* can be used to describe the rhetorical dynamics occurring between Bacon and the King, assuming, that is, that James would ever read the draft. Bacon writes the Proclamation in the first person plural (using the royal "we") as if the King himself were speaking. By assuming the persona of the King, Bacon is, in a sense, telling James what he is, manufacturing a rather flattering ethos which, if the Proclamation should be delivered, would not only represent to James what he should be, but also constitute the identity presented by him to his new subjects.

The ethos, or "portraiture," produced presents James as a reverent, unambitious, charitable, just, peaceable, and unostentatious king. King-Bacon shows the proper respect to the recently deceased Elizabeth, praising her as a "virtuous and excellent Queen," wishing that her days could have been "prolonged," and assuring his subjects that there never "appeared in us any ambitious or impatient desire to prevent [i.e., to come ahead of] God's appointed time." He is also a disinterested and charitable sovereign who does "not take so much gladness and contentment in the devolving of these kingdoms unto our royal person, for any addition or increase of glory, power, or riches," as in the God-granted power "to reward our friends and servants . . . to comfort and relieve the hearts and estates of our people and loving subjects, and chiefly to advance the holy religion and church of Almighty God." In regard to international policy, he promises not "to espouse . . . our kingdom of England to any quarrel or war, but rather . . . to preserve them in peace and tranquility." And finally, King-Bacon refers to himself "not only [as] a just and gracious sovereign lord and king, but [also as] a special and bountiful patron and benefactor," who will "maintain every several estate in a happy and flourishing condition."⁽¹⁰⁾ Even though the ethos produced by these statements might look good on James, it is nevertheless an image created by Bacon. It allows Bacon a vicarious control over James which may actually benefit him materially as well as psychologically

if James lives up to King-Bacon's word and does, in fact, "reward our friends and servants," chief among whom one must member Francis Bacon, of course.(11)

Thus, within the Proclamation we find the opposing motives of service and control (or, rather, rule).(12) The Proclamation is written in the service of the King and of order; it is designed to create a virtual presence of the King in order to fill the power vacuum left after the Queen's death and thus to discourage sedition. Through the King it would reinforce the order of the realm both by asserting his presence and by praising the people for their obedience and tranquility. However, the Proclamation also performs an act of disorder; for the space of the draft, Bacon usurps the place of the King. And though the image produced commends the virtues of James, it also betrays a desire to command him.(13) Bacon simultaneously assumes the positions of both ruled and ruler.

Bacon's scrambling for a place in the service of James and his offer to provide the King with a Proclamation have much to do with rhetoric, both Renaissance rhetoric in general, and Bacon's conception of it in particular. His correspondence with the courtiers of the King, his letter to James himself, and the Proclamation are all motivated by Bacon's desire to serve the new King and, by implication, to serve order. However, that desire to serve can easily slide into a desire to rule. In the Proclamation, Bacon fashions an ethos or role for the King so that, should the King decide to use the declaration, he would have to submit himself to that manufactured identity as well as consent, at least for the time being, "to express himself according to those points which are therein conceived." This double and contradictory pull between the motive to serve and the motive to rule is, I will argue, at the heart of Bacon's theoretical conception of rhetoric.

Many recent studies of Bacon have examined the politics implicit in his "new science," his consideration of other philosophical issues, his Essays, and his imaginative writings.(14) However, historians of rhetoric have failed to observe the politics that inform his definition and theory of rhetoric. Instead, they do a number of other things with Bacon's treatment of the subject. Many classify it under the headings of psychology, or philosophy, or both.(15) By contrast, others construct Bacon as a great innovator whose conception of rhetoric is a "prophecy of things to come," or one who, if he is not granted the status of prophet, is, at least, "not in the tradition of Elizabethan and early Jacobean rhetoric."(16) Both of these approaches lift Bacon's rhetoric up and out of his own historical locality and place it either amidst the so called "philosophical" rhetorics or in the realm of "things to come." The net effect is that Bacon's construction of rhetoric is assumed to be in itself politically indifferent, not subject to the same ideological pressures and preoccupations (such as with social advancement) that permeated his public life.(17) However, Bacon's definition and discussion of rhetoric is, in fact, highly political. While it affirms the official ideology of a fixed social order, it also invests rhetoric with a power which subverts that order. Because rhetoric is granted such a power, Bacon prescribes and limits its proper use. His principal strategy is to allegorize the rhetorical exchange itself in such a way that every exchange conserves the social hierarchy and right rule.(18) However, even in the very allegory he constructs rhetoric retains an inescapable potential to disrupt the established order and usurp the sovereign's authority and power. This simultaneous affirmation and subversion of order is not unique to Bacon's construction of rhetoric but shares features in common with other Renaissance rhetorics, as well as with Bacon's more explicitly political writings.(19) We will find that the instability just described is located primarily in the relationship between the sovereign and those figured in the treatments of rhetoric as orator-counselors, a position Bacon aspired to and eventually came to hold.

For Bacon, rhetoric governs a transference of images and information between the faculties of the mind. He defines its end as the translation of "the dictates of the reason to the imagination, in order to excite the appetite and will." Or, formulating it slightly differently, he says, "the end of rhetoric is to fill the imagination with observations and images, to second the reason, and not to oppress it."(20) Defined thus, Bacon's rhetoric seems only to describe an operation performed by a disembodied art on disembodied mental faculties, a characterization which is clearly responsible for leading critics to celebrate Bacon's theory as a breakthrough in the psychology of rhetoric.(21) However, when Bacon goes on to characterize what this transaction entails, the

operation of rhetoric looks less like a psychological process, and more like a political one. In fact, he likens the rhetorical exchange to the quelling of a political upheaval:

[I]f the affections themselves were brought to order, and pliant and obedient to reason, it is true there would be no great use of persuasions and insinuations to give access to the mind, but naked and simple propositions and proofs would be enough. But the affections do on the contrary make such secessions and raise such mutinies and sedition . . . that reason would become captive and servile, if [the] eloquence of persuasions did not win the imagination from the affection's part, and contract a confederacy between the reason and imagination against them.(22)

The affections are likely to "make such secessions and raise such mutinies and sedition" against reason because they lack the foresight of the latter:

For it must be observed that the affections themselves carry ever an appetite to apparent good, and have this in common with the reason; but the difference is that affection beholds principally the good which is present; reason looks beyond and beholds likewise the future and sum of all. And therefore the present [because it fills] the imagination more, reason is commonly vanquished and overcome. But after eloquence and the force of persuasion have made things future and remote appear as present [then the imagination goes over to the side of reason, and renders it victorious].(23)

These two passages are remarkably suggestive. By a series of metaphorical translations,(24) the political realm is conflated with the realms of rhetoric and the mind. In other words, the mental faculties are distributed into a three-tiered social structure with the sovereign at the top, the populace at the bottom, and a middle class in between whose identity and composition, as we shall see, varies in Bacon's thought, sometimes to be equated with the nobility and sometimes with counselors and advisors (like Bacon himself).(25) The faculty of reason, because it dictates ultimately govern the action of the will (that is, if rhetoric functions as it should), and because it is vulnerable to "secessions," "mutinies," and "sedition," may be interpreted as a sovereign. The affections represent a potentially unruly populace that needs to be "brought to order."(26) And the imagination, which, filled with rhetoric, operates in that ambiguous space between reason and the affections, shifting its loyalties from one to the other, is figured as an indeterminate middle class.

The middle figures in Bacon's political allegory, the imagination and rhetoric, are problematic: they are both necessary and dangerous. Without the imagination, the lines of communication between the mind and reality and between the reason and the will would break down.(27) "For sense sends all kinds of images over to the imagination for reason to judge of; and reason again when it has made its judgment and selection, sends them over to the imagination before the decree be put in execution" - that is, before the imagination delivers the decree of reason to the will. Thus, the imagination performs the office of an ambassador ("legatio"), or orator, working in the service of the sovereign reason and carrying messages to the will.(28) However, the imagination is also dangerous; it can ally itself with the affections, and together they can overthrow reason and gain control of the will. In "Of Sedition and Troubles," Bacon describes a similar danger occurring in the political realm:

There is in every state (as we know) two portions of subjects, the noblesse and the commonalty. When one of these is discontent, the danger is not great: for common people are of slow motion if they be not excited by the greater sort; and the greater sort are of small strength except the multitude be apt and ready to move of themselves. Then is the danger, when the greater sort do but wait for the troubling of the waters amongst the meaner, that then they may declare themselves.(29)

Just as the nobility and the commonalty may band together and rebel, so may the imagination and the affections.

Whether the imagination serves reason (and thus order), or whether it, together with the affections, mutinies against reason (and thus causes disorder), depends ultimately on whether rhetoric functions as Bacon says it should. If rhetoric is functioning properly, it seconds reason and does not oppress it. And if the affections and the imagination should raise a sedition, then the first object of rhetoric is to fill the latter with goods "future and remote" and draw it to the side of reason, rendering the latter "victorious." Thus rhetoric, if it is working in the service of reason, maintains stability, order, and the proper distribution of power within the mind; furthermore, it crushes the first signs of rebellion. In short, rhetoric, functioning as it should, works in the service of rule.

But what if rhetoric malfunctions; that is, what if it behaves in ways contrary to Bacon's prescriptions? That it has the capacity to do so is inscribed in the definition itself. Rhetoric is not a possession of the sovereign reason; in fact, the rule of reason depends on rhetoric, for without its aid, the reason is impotent. By itself, reason can only offer "naked and simple propositions and proofs" which are ineffective in bringing the affections to order; only rhetoric has the power to make the affections "pliant and obedient." The implication, then, is that an errant rhetoric will "fill the imagination with observations and images," not to second the reason, but to oppress it, and that the imagination will go over to the side of the affections, and together they will riot. Bacon himself allows for such a possibility:

[The imagination] usurps no small authority in itself. . . . [It] may come to rule [over reason] in [its] turn. . . . And again it is no small dominion which imagination holds in persuasions that are wrought by eloquence; for when by arts of speech men's minds are soothed, inflamed, and carried hither and thither, it is all done by stimulating the imagination till it becomes ungovernable, and not only sets reason at nought, but offers violence to it.(30)

An ambitious imagination, filled with persuasions, soothes or inflames the affections, carries them "hither and thither," and finally usurps the place of the sovereign reason. Thus the imagination, armed with rhetoric, can itself rule.

That Bacon's conception of rhetoric betrays contradictory impulses - the desire either to serve the established order or disrupt it by usurpation - locates his treatment of it securely in the Renaissance.(31) Usually in their prefatory matter, many Renaissance writers of rhetorics acknowledge the established order by including a re-telling of the Ciceronian myth, in which rhetoric is described as the force that created society and as the glue that holds it together.(32) Without the force of eloquence, Thomas Wilson implies, man would have forever "waxed sauge" and been "all against order."(33) However, also found in these rhetorics is a desire to disrupt order, sometimes even in the same Ciceronian myths that construct rhetoric as a civilizing force. In Wilson's version of the myth, for instance, he claims that God gave his "appointed Ministers . . . the gift of vtterance, that they might with ease win folk at their will, and frame them by reason to good order." Wilson then rocks the very foundations of that "good order" when he asks: who would "digge and delue," "tauaille and toyle," and "adventure and hassarde his life" for a King's pleasure, if he had not been persuaded to do so?(34) In other words, Wilson suggests that we have all been duped into subjection by rhetoric.(35)

Richard Rainolde's re-telling of the myth is another version that both affirms and subverts the established order; it also shares several features with Bacon's political allegory. Rainolde does not recreate the myth in its entirety; rather, his version picks up after the savage world has been tamed and society has been established by eloquence. He says, "Nothyng can bee more excellently giuen of nature then Eloquence, by which the florishyng state of commonweales doe consiste: kyngdomes universally are gouerned, the state of euery one priuatlie is maintained." Then, using famous orators from the ancient world as models for his own time, he says that they were a "great bulwarke and staie to Athens and all Greece[.] Rome also by the like vertue of Eloquence, in famous and wise orators [was] upheld." He concludes, "a common wealth or kingdome must be fortified, with

famous, graue, and wise counsellours [i.e., orators]." Rainolde then delivers a brief narrative which recounts how Demosthenes, with a "goodly Oracion," repulsed the attempted invasion of Athens by Philip of Macedon.(36) Rainolde's metaphors and story suggest that rhetoric supports, maintains, and defends the order and stability of the commonwealth.

The orator-is-fortification metaphor and the story about Demosthenes imply that the orator, as the defender of the commonwealth, occupies an intermediary position: as fortification he stands between the state and its invaders. However, in addition to being positioned between the kingdom and its invaders, the orator is also situated interstitially in the social hierarchy between the populace and prince, a position which gives him subversive potential. This potential comes out when Rainolde says that orators are to

drawe unto them the hartes of a multitude, to pluck doune and extirpate affectio[n]s and perturbations of the people . . . [as well as to] speake before Princes and rulers, to perswade them in good causes and enterprises, to animate and incense them, to godlie affairs and business, to alter the cou[n]sail of kynges.(37)

Clearly, orators are positioned above the multitude, keeping them compliant and orderly, but their position in relation to the princes is dangerous. In terms of social status, they are below the princes; however, in terms of their powers of persuasion, they are above them - and hence have the ability to turn the social order topsy-turvy by ruling their rulers.

These passages taken from Rainolde read very much like Bacon's political allegory. Just as the imagination, filled with rhetoric, is to bring the disorderly affections to obedience, so are orators to "pluck doune and extirpate affectio[n]s and perturbations of the people." Also, both the imagination and orators are portrayed as intermediary figures, operating between the sovereign reason and princes, on the one hand, and the affections and people, on the other. It is the intermediary status of the imagination and orators that makes them both ambiguous. Bacon's imagination is ostensibly subordinate to reason, yet it has the capacity to usurp the position of the sovereign and gain absolute control of the mind's will. Similarly, Rainolde's orators are presumably subjects of their princes, but when he claims that they persuade, animate, incense, and alter princes to various actions, an inversion occurs and princes becomes the subject of the persuasions of the orators. That is, in both Bacon and Rainolde, rhetoric as rule always threatens to displace the (legitimate) ruler it serves.(38)

Rhetoric is thus contradictory and threatening. Ostensibly, it is to be employed in the service of rule as a stabilizing force. However, rhetoric is given the power to destabilize the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, in particular, between the sovereign and his orator-counselors. These conflicting roles assigned to rhetoric reflect a more general contradiction that characterizes the social experience of the ambitious man in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, an experience that many Renaissance rhetoricians shared.(39) The predicament of the ambitious man is defined by a fundamental contradiction: his vested interest in the maintenance of status hierarchy, yet his need to disrupt it. On the one hand, the man seeking advancement to a place of privilege and power in the social hierarchy must acknowledge, by implication, the validity of that hierarchy and the order it represents. On the other hand, to win privilege and power, the socially ambitious must transgress the very boundaries that demarcate and keep distinct each social place. Once across a boundary, he must cover the tracks of his mobility because, while he is trying to make his way up the social ladder, the established nobility is trying to kick him back down. In order to conceal the rupture he has made and show his membership in the ruling class, he adopts their style and mannerisms; and, in order to prevent further class contamination and dispersal of privilege, he blocks the advancement of others. Thus the ambitious man is confused by competing motives: he hopes that the social hierarchy is sufficiently fluid so that advancement may be possible in the first place; and yet he desires to preserve the rigidity of the social hierarchy so that, once advanced, he can enjoy the power that place traditionally confers.(40) Although the competing impulses

assigned to the imagination and orator-counselors, in Bacon's writings, are more polarized than those assigned to the ambitious man, their trajectories are the same.

By investing rhetoric with the power to preserve and disrupt the established order, Renaissance rhetoricians, in effect, write into their theories the possibility of their own advancement, but at the cost of duplicating the competing motives just described. Rhetoric as service holds each social position in place; however, rhetoric as rule promises to move the ambitious man up the social scale, theoretically, even into the seat of rule itself. The orator-counselor position is unstable: it presupposes both the counselor's desire to serve as well as his knowledge and a certain inadequacy on the part of the sovereign. Thus, by virtue of the information that he possesses and that the king wants, power is conferred on the counselor, a power which puts a strain on the normal relationship between the socially superior king and his socially inferior counselor. If enough torque is applied, the power relationship could theoretically flip. To alleviate this strain and stabilize the act of advising, most rhetorical theorists, including Bacon, insist upon the superiority of the king. Nevertheless, as we shall see, such attempts to preserve the status quo inevitably fail because of the inherent ambiguity of the counselor's position. Indeed, that ambiguity even makes him look like a deceiver, tricking his sovereign into thinking he rules when the counselor is really in charge.

Let us look briefly at what is recommended by Puttenham, as a representative of the rhetorical tradition in the Renaissance, before we move on to Bacon whose meditations on counsel repeat and elaborate that tradition in subtle and remarkable ways. One way to preserve the superiority of the king is to invoke the power relation inscribed in the social hierarchy. George Puttenham says, "in matters of aduice it is neither decent to flatter [a Prince] for that is seruile, neither to be rough or plaine with him, for that is dangerous."(41) Here the social hierarchy provides the basis for the principle of decorum, and it is used to stabilize the act of advising a prince, first by reaffirming the positions of those involved and, second, by ensuring that they stay put. By neither flattering nor being "rough and plaine," the advisor affirms his own position (above those who are "servile") as well as the superiority of the prince. He also keeps each participant in his place, preventing the advisor from slipping into a position of servility or from assuming a position above the prince. In short, the principle of decorum is here applied in order to preserve the status quo. Puttenham's discussion of the levels of style and how they should be used in speaking or writing about princes offers another good example in which decorum is used as a strategy for reinforcing the status quo, that is, social stratification: "[I]n speaking or writing of a Princes affairs and fortunes there is a certaine Decorum, that we may not use the same termes in their busines, as we might very wel doe in meaner persons, the case being all one, such reuerence is due to their estates."(42) However, decorum may be observed, not to preserve the social hierarchy, but as an expedient to win some other end. After saying that it is improper both to flatter a prince and be "rough and plaine with him," Puttenham introduces an example in which a counselor uses decorum as a pretense to gain control over a prince: "Cineas Counsellour to king Pirrhus . . . kept that decencie in all his persuasions [i.e., he neither flattered Pirrhus nor was rough and plain], that he euer prevailed in aduice, and carried the king which way he would."(43) By giving his advice the appearance of preserving the power relation inscribed in the social hierarchy - that is, "decencie" - Cineas was able to invert it and lead king Pirrhus "which way he would."(44)

As Puttenham's prescriptions and example suggest, the act of giving advice to a superior presupposes a distribution of power that inverts the normal, appropriate, or legitimate one. In order to alleviate the strain, the inappropriate distribution must be made to seem like the appropriate one, but the instability of the act persists: even if an inversion of power is not necessarily the goal of the counselor, it is nevertheless always present as a possibility. Bacon has his own model for counseling that is similarly designed to alleviate strain and impose stability, but, as with Puttenham, it is ambiguous and unstable. However, its ambiguity and instability focuses, not on social status and decorum, but on the bodies of both the king and his counselors.

Bacon's essay "Of Counsel" begins with a statement that is meant to answer the objection that counsel threatens

to invert the established order between a king and those beneath him - in this case, his counselors. "The wisest princes need not think it any diminution to their greatness, or derogation to their sufficiency, to rely upon counsel."(45) Bacon goes on to argue that kings need counselors for the effective management of state affairs, and, in order to stabilize the potentially disruptive effects of giving advice, he invokes a power distribution inscribed in a myth involving both a marital and a sexual relationship:

The ancient times do set forth in figure both the incorporation and inseparable conjunction of counsel with kings, and the wise and politic use of counsel by kings: the one, in that they say Jupiter did marry Metis, which signifieth counsel; whereby they intend that Sovereignty is married to Counsel: the other in that which followeth, which was thus: They say, after Jupiter was married to Metis, she conceived by him and was with child, but Jupiter suffered her not to stay till she brought forth, but eat her up; whereby he became himself with child and was delivered of Pallas armed out of his head.

Counsel is expressed in terms of, and is stabilized by, an institutionalized social relationship, marriage, a relationship that maintains the proper distribution of power: the masculine king holds dominion over his feminized counselor. More interesting, though, is Bacon's interpretation of the myth in which he specifies the "politic use of counsel by kings." Here he prescribes a "remedy" for the potential "weakening of the [king's] authority":

[This] monstrous fable containeth a secret of empire; how kings are to use of their counsel of state. That first they ought to refer matters unto them, which is the first begetting or impregnation; but when they are elaborate, moulded, and shaped in the womb of their counsel, and grow ripe and ready to brought forth, that then they suffer not their counsel to go through with the resolution and direction, as if it depended on them; but to take matter back into their own hands, and make it appear to the world that the decrees and final directions . . . proceeded from themselves.(46)

The eroticization of the rhetorical exchange between counselors and kings is figured in such a way that it affirms the authority and power of kings over their counselors. What Bacon calls "the first begetting or impregnation" characterizes the exchange as one of invasion and occupation: a king penetrates his counselors and fills them up with "matter." After the "matter" has been "moulded" and "shaped," yet before its delivery, the king then takes it "back into [his] own hands," and thus appropriates the power of the counselors to bring an idea to fruition. The motive for doing so is to preserve the power imbalance which the act of giving counsel threatens to upset.

However, at the very moment Bacon affirms the authority of the kings, he undermines it, first by showing their dependence on counselors, and second, by exposing the basis of their authority as trickery. The king appropriates the generative powers of the counselors by an act of ingestion: after inseminating his counselors, the king eats them. In one respect, this is an act of absolute domination and control - the incorporation of one body into another. However, once the counselors are ingested, the king is himself filled and occupied; whereas once the king impregnated his counselors, now they literally fill him up as they nourish and sustain him. Bacon's interpretation of the myth thus reveals the king's mastery to be a form of dependency. Moreover, it also identifies the king as a trickster. For when the king eats his counselors, he swallows the evidence of his own dependency. That is, he eats his counselors so that it will "appear to the world that the decrees and final directions . . . proceeded from" himself (my emphasis). In other words, the king plays a trick on his counselors and subjects. However, by proposing such a model of counsel, publishing it in an essay, and thus making it public knowledge, Bacon creates a situation which undermines the trickery of kings and shows whoever reads his essay that their power to deliver "decrees and final directions" depends ultimately on the fecundity of their counselors.

In "Of Counsel," kings are both tricksters and dependent on their counselors only because Bacon says so. That is, Bacon's description of the trickery and dependency of kings is his own interpretation of the myth, and a highly

self-interested interpretation at that.(47) Bacon himself was a member of the Learned Counsel, nominally under Elizabeth, properly under James;(48) he thus had a vested interest in how the position of counselor was constructed. By interpreting counselors as indispensable to kings, he argues not only for the importance of counselors, but also for the continuation of that position. Bacon, in effect, ensures the maintenance of his own social position by writing it into his interpretation. We saw a similar strategy at work in the constructions of rhetoric we have already examined. The investment of rhetoric with so much power is a projection of the rhetoricians' own desires for an advancement that leaves the social hierarchy intact. The instability of the orator-counselor figure speaks to the fact that rhetoric is simultaneously the servant of rule and rule itself.

Bacon's rhetoric is not a disembodied art operating on disembodied mental faculties, nor is it politically indifferent. As we saw, in the allegory he uses to define the operation of rhetoric, the role assigned to the imagination possesses the same instability that he, as a man seeking advancement, shows himself to possess in writing the Proclamation for the King, and that other Renaissance rhetoricians assign to orators in general. Rhetoric is constructed as reinforcing the established order, on the one hand, and as subverting it, on the other. In his essay "Of Counsel," this instability is expressed in terms of the bodies of both kings and their edible counselors.

As a conclusion, let us look briefly at Bacon's letter offering his service to James, which was mentioned in passing at the beginning of this essay, for in it the contradictions between service and rule are present, and the orator-counselor's desire for power over his sovereign appears in a striking image of the body which both continues and inverts the images in "Of Counsel." The letter ostensibly is an "offer of service to his Majesty . . . upon his first coming in," but the means by which Bacon tries to persuade the King to accept this offer involves a remarkable construction of the King's body.(49) In the first part of the letter, giving the reasons why Bacon felt encouraged to offer his service "immediately to your Majesty," he makes reference to that body, describing it as permeable and open to access. James' "person is not inclosed for a few." Rather, he is endowed with the "royal virtue of access, which nature and judgment have planted in your Majesty's mind as the portal of all the rest." Bacon was also encouraged by "a supposal that unto your Majesty's sacred ears (open to the air of all virtues) there might perhaps have come some small breath of the good memory of my father," Nicholas Bacon, the late Lord Keeper. That James' "person is not inclosed," but open to "access" and that his ears are also open to "air" and "breath" evoke the imagery of Bacon's myth of Metis in which kings penetrate their counselors. However, in the letter, it is Bacon who hopes to penetrate the open body of the King. In other words, the letter intimates the fantasy of power at the heart of the oratorical enterprise in the Renaissance: while James is making his entrance into his new country, Bacon will be making his entrance into the King, impregnating, impersonating, and dominating him. Bacon's imagery reveals the profound desire of the orator-servant to be the master of his master.

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NOTES

1 James Spedding, *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1868), 3:59-66. Hereafter all references to this work will be abbreviated as follows: *Letters and Life*, 3:59-66.

2 I would like to acknowledge and thank Wayne A. Reborn for his patience in reading several drafts of this paper and for his helpful suggestions for revision.

3 At the Queen's command, the House of Lords demanded from the Commons a bill of three subsidies to be paid in, as it was eventually settled, four years. Bacon, then a member of the lower house, supported the triple

subsidy but opposed the proposal that it be paid in so short a time. Before the motion was voted on, he delivered a speech in which he voiced his objections. The Queen, upon hearing of his speech, banned Bacon from coming into her presence. An account of the circumstances that prompted the speech, a recorder's note of the speech itself and its consequences as well as the relevant letters can be found in *Letters and Life*, 1:209-41. See also F. J. Levy's "Francis Bacon and the Style of Politics," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (Winter 1986):(101-22). Levy offers an interesting analysis of the incident and Bacon's attempts to repair the situation (108-11).

4 Bacon was not alone in having his ambitions frustrated. In "The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England," in *Crisis in Europe, 1560-1660*, ed. Trevor Aston (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), 309-31. Mark H. Curtis argues that frustrated ambition was a relatively widespread social phenomenon. Although Curtis locates this phenomenon in the early Stuart period, Levy's argues that it was already occurring in the 1590s when "the demand for classically-educated gentlemen was slackening" ("Politics of Style" 104).

5 *Letters and Life*, 3:67.

6 The clause in brackets appears in another copy of the same letter. See *Letters and Life*, 3:67, n. 2.

7 In his unfinished "The Beginning of the History of Britain," Bacon says, "For it had been generally dispersed [abroad] . . . that after Queen Elizabeth's decease there must follow in England nothing but confusions, inter reigns, and perturbations of estate See *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1868), 6:277. A similar convention of abbreviation will be used with references to this work as with the *Letters and Life*: for example, *Works*, 6:277.

8 *Letters and Life*, 3:68-69.

9 *Works*, 12:259.

10 *Letters and Life*, 3:68-71.

11 Ironically, Bacon's "reward" was not immediately forthcoming. At the accession of James, Bacon did not receive a governmental position, even though he nourished strong hopes for one. Late in July of that same year, he was knighted, but any sense of triumph Bacon felt must have been dampened by the fact that he was knighted among a throng of 300 other "claimants." See Catherine Drinker Bowen's *Francis Bacon: The Temper of a Man* (Fordham U. Press, 1993), 97-101; and Joel J. Epstein's *Francis Bacon: A Political Biography* (Ohio U. Press, 1977), 64-71.

12 Joshua Scodel observes similarly opposing motives in Bacon's theory of ethics, a theory which "reveals his conflicting visions of himself as a loyal member of the established order, on the one hand, and as a self-determining individual on the other" ("Mediocrities' and 'Extremes': Francis Bacon and the Aristotelian Mean," in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint et al. [Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992], 91).

13 Jonathan Goldberg argues that, on the occasion of his entrance, James used the representations of himself by artists to legitimate his authority. However, this use was also a form of dependency and could lead to a dislocation of power. See his *James I and the Politics of Literature* (The Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1983), chap. 1.

14 Many recent studies see a coherence among Bacon's scientific project, his political writings, and his political career. See, for instance, Julian Martin's *Francis Bacon, the State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge U. Press, 1992) which argues that Bacon's natural philosophy is informed by a consistently conservative politics. In his *Francis Bacon and the Politics of Science* (Iowa State U. Press, 1994), John E. Leary argues that "Bacon's political and philosophical careers seem to display a certain parallel development, both apparently drawing on the same energies, reflecting the same motives, rising and falling together" (12). See also Howard B. White, *Peace Among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1968). Interestingly, yet (I think) unpersuasively, Markku Peltonen challenges what he sees as a consensus among Bacon scholars that a coherence exists between Bacon's political and scientific writings. See his "Politics and Science: Francis Bacon and the True Greatness of States," *The Historical Journal* 35 (1992): 279-305. The politics of Bacon's other philosophical concerns have also been examined. See, for instance, Ian Box, "Politics and Philosophy: Bacon on the Values of War and Peace," *The Seventeenth Century* 7 (Autumn 1992): 113-27; and Scodel, "'Mediocrities' and 'Extremes.'" On the Essays, see Levy, "Style of Politics"; and Box, "Bacon's Essays: From Political Science to Political Prudence" *History of Political Thought* 3 (Spring 1982): 31-49. Finally, see Jerry Weinberger, "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: and Introduction to the Reading of the New Atlantis," *American Political Science Review* 70 (1986): 865-85; and Sharon Achinstein, "How to be a Progressive without Looking Like One: History and Knowledge in Bacon's New Atlantis," *Clio* 17 (1988): 249-62.

15 George Kennedy, for example, argues that Bacon belongs to the tradition of "philosophical rhetoric," a category that, because it is transhistorical and posited as an ideal, abstracts Bacon's notion of rhetoric from its own historical locale. See his *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (U. of North Carolina Press, 1980), 219. James L. Golden Goodwin F. Bergquist, and William E. Coleman place Bacon in "the psychological-philosophical or epistemological school." See their *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1989), 160.

16 Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (Princeton U. Press, 1956), 375. Karl R. Wallace, *Francis Bacon on Communication and Rhetoric* (U. of North Carolina Press, 1943), 218. See also Wallace's valuable, yet ahistorical, "Bacon's Conception of Rhetoric," in *Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians*, ed. Raymond F. Howes (Cornell U. Press, 1961), 114-38.

17 Levy examines the impact of Bacon's public life on the first edition of the Essays ("Style of Politics" 102-11), and Martin examines its impact on Bacon's natural philosophy (Bacon chaps. 2, 3, and 4).

18 Achinstein argues that Bacon deploys a similar strategy in *The New Atlantis*, but on a much grander scale. That is, through this fictional work, Bacon reconciles his political conservatism with the subversive energies implicit in his calls for an "innovation" of human knowledge, a reconciliation by which the latter is contained by the former ("How to be a Progressive" 249-50). By contrast, my contention about Bacon's allegorization of the rhetorical exchange is that while it might be seen as an effort to restrict the power of rhetoric, it also betrays its subversive potential as well.

19 In *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (New York: Longman, 1990), Thomas M. Conley also argues that Bacon's construction of rhetoric, while differing from "Tudor rhetorics current in Bacon's time," does share features in common with continental rhetorics of the same period. These similarities include a concern with the "affect and will" and with "intrapersonal negotiation" (164). Conley, however, fails to note the political dimensions of Bacon's rhetorical theory and how these dimensions place him, contrary to Conley's claim, squarely in the Tudor tradition.

20 *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (hereafter abbreviated as *De Aug.*), in *Works*, 2:439-40.

21 See, in addition to the critics cited in n. 10, Marc Cogan's "Rhetoric and Action in Francis Bacon," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 14 (1981): 212-33. Cogan celebrates Bacon's disembodied definition of rhetoric as liberating: "By reorientating the discussion of rhetoric to the faculties, [Bacon] makes a striking innovation in rhetorical theory, for the nature of rhetoric is thereby determined by certain mental operations of the mind and their exigencies, rather than by the requirements of certain sorts of issues, the shape of certain sorts of arguments, or the effects of certain sorts of language" (214). This celebration leads to a very provocative, but extremely ahistorical, interpretation.

22 *Works*, 2:441-42. Howell discusses this and the next passage, but, I think, misreads it. For Howell, the three faculties represent "three powerful rival kingdoms," and not three classes within one kingdom. Also, Howell makes no attempt to relate Bacon's political allegory to Elizabethan and Jacobean notions of social structure and its vulnerability to disruption. See his *Logic and Rhetoric*, 372.

23 *Works*, 2:442. The passage in brackets is taken from a translation by J. E. Creighton, *The Advancement of Learning and the Novum Organum* (New York: Colonial Press, 1899), 179. I chose his translation in this instance because it is clearer than Spedding's. The Latin: *tum demum, abeunte in partes rationis phantasia, ratio.*

24 That Bacon means for his metaphors to be taken seriously, we have his own words as evidence: "those whose conceits are beyond popular opinions, have a double labour; first to make them understood, and then to prove them; so that they are obliged to have recourse to similitudes and metaphors to convey their meaning" (*Works*, 2:433). And in *Wisdom of the Ancients*, he says, "And even if any one wish to let new light on any subject into men's minds . . . he must still . . . call on the aid of similitudes" (*Works*, 6:698). On the importance of analogy and argument in Bacon, see Brian Vickers, *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose* (Cambridge U. Press, 1968), chaps. 5 and 6.

25 For Bacon's conception of society as being organized into a tripartite structure, see his essays "Of Nobility," "Of Counsel," and "Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and States," *Works*, 12:121ff., 146ff., and 176ff.

26 In his discussion of ethics, in *De Aug.*, Bacon again compares the mind to a political state and the affections to an unruly mob: in order to master the affections, one must often "set affection against affection. . . . For as in the government of states it is sometimes necessary to bridle one faction with another, so it is in the internal government of the mind" (*Works*, 2:220-21).

27 In Bacon, the will is identified with action; if the imagination failed in its function, the reason would have no control over behavior: see *Works*, 2:359.

28 *Works*, 2:359.

29 *Works*, 12:128-29.

30 *Works*, 2:360.

31 On the features of Renaissance rhetoric that distinguish it from rhetoric both in antiquity and the middle ages, see Wayne Rebhorn, "'The Emperour of Mens Minds': The Renaissance Trickster as Homo Rhetoricus," in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, et al. (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 31-65.

32 Cicero, *De Inventione*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Harvard U. Press, 1976), I.ii.2-3. Bacon himself delivers a version of the myth in his interpretation of the myth of Orpheus in his *De Sapientia Veterum*: see *Works*, 13:112. For other Renaissance re-tellings see Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593), intr. William G. Crane (Gainesville, FL: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1954), ABiii recto-ABiii verso; George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), intr. Baxter Hathaway (Kent State U. Press, 1988), 22-24. For Puttenham, it is poetry (though a highly rhetorical poetry) that was the "cause and the occasion of the first assemblies." Thomas Wilson, also, gives a version of the myth in the preface to his *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), ed. G. H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), Avii recto-Avii verso.

33 Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, Avi verso.

34 *Ibid.*, Avii verso.

35 See Frank Whigham's keen analysis of Thomas Wilson's preface in his *Ambition and Privilege: the Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (U. of California Press, 1984), pp. 1-3.

36 *The Foundation of Rhetorike* (1563) (rpt. New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), Ai recto-Aii verso.

37 *Ibid.*, Ai verso.

38 Rebhorn, "The Emperour of Mens Minds": Specifically in the Renaissance, "the rhetorical exchange between orator and audience constitutes the very act of governing. To persuade, in short, is to rule" (52).

39 As was already suggested, Bacon spent the better part of his life in pursuit of advancement. Although little is known of Rainolde's life, the frequent appearance in his rhetoric of historical figures who rose from a mean birth to the pinnacle of society shows where his sympathies lie. Demosthenes and Cicero, for instance, "were borne, of verie meane parentes and ancestors: yet thei throwe their learnyng and vertues, became famous ascending to all nobilitie" (*The Foundation of Rhetorike*, Axlvii verso). Little is also known of George Puttenham's life, though one of the announced aims of his book is to provide the would-be courtier with the necessary instruction for "pulling him first from the carte . . . to the Court" (*The Arte of English Poesie*, 305). In the dedicatory epistle of his *The Garden of Eloquence*, Henry Peacham expresses the hope that his treatise will win the favor of his dedicatee, the Lord Keeper John Puckering (ABiv verso).

40 This paragraph was influenced by the first chapter of Whigham's *Ambition and Privilege* and by Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford U. Press, 1967), 36-39.

41 *The Arte of English Poesie*, 301.

42 *Ibid.*, 280.

43 *Ibid.*, 301.

44 A similar strategy can be found operating in the mature works of Machiavelli. Wayne Rebhorn argues that, although Machiavelli, in his later works, announces himself as an "advisor or counselor to his readers," he nevertheless assumes the "guise of teacher" The role of teacher allows him to concede his social inferiority, yet,

at the same time, it allows him to assert his intellectual superiority. The ambiguity of the role gives him enough leverage to manipulate and control his readers. See Reborn, Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Men (Cornell U. Press, 1988), 217-25.

45 Works, 12:146.

46 Ibid., 147-48. The same myth and a similar interpretation appear in De Sapientia Veterum, 13:62-63.

47 C.W. Lemmi argues that, although Bacon's interpretation of the myth of Metis was influenced by the tradition of myth interpretation in general, and by Natalis Comes' interpretation in particular, the distinctive political slant of it is Bacon's own contribution. See his The Classical Deities in Bacon: A Study of Mythological Symbolism (The Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1933), 164.

48 Letters and Life, 3:72.

49 This and all following quotations are from Letters and Life, 3:62-63.

Abstract

English author Francis Bacon's letters to the courtiers of King James VI before the monarch succeeded Elizabeth I reveals his concept of rhetoric as a tool for political advancement. Bacon wrote several letters to gain the king's confidence, in which he expressed his intent to portray the king in the most positive light to his subjects once he enters England and assumes the throne. The letters are remarkable in the way they suggest that Bacon can create a persona for the king through the power of rhetoric, since Bacon includes the draft of a speech which he hoped would be used by the king in a public appearance.

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