

A MYTH OF FRANCIS BACON

by

CHARLES WILLIAMS

This *Myth of Bacon* has two themes. The first is the life of Bacon, presented in its four chief episodes; the second is the purification of his interior being which proceeds simultaneously. That very great mind proposed to itself, it seems, two objects: (1) the service of the State; (2) the organisation of all knowledge and its expansion to the widest possible limits. He shaped an image of this second concern in the description of Salomon's House, or the College of the Six Days' Work of God, which closes the *New Atlantis*. The motives of his actions were no doubt often mixed; his self-interest and his duty sometimes pointed in the same direction. Lesser minds have therefore found it easy to blame him.

The *Myth* opens with the supposed appearance to Bacon of one of his own imagined pontiffs of Salomon's House, who defines for him his work and darkly threatens him with the pain which the making pure of his devotion to wisdom will bring on him. The First Episode then presents his rejection by his uncle Burleigh and his friendship with the Earl of Essex, the beginning of his political career. The Interlude which follows is the noise of the rebellion of Essex, and contains a momentary echo of the presentation of *Richard II* by the Chamberlain's men at that time. Augustine Phillipps, the manager of their company, was examined by the Privy Council upon this performance, and it is not too extreme a fancy that Shakespeare, the writer of the play, was ordered to be in attendance also. The quite possible meeting of Shakespeare and Bacon in 1601 (Bacon had published the first edition of the essays in 1597; Shakespeare in 1601 was at the *Hamlet – Troilus* period) surrounds the encounter of Bacon and the fallen Essex with the renewed sense of Bacon's prime duties, as Cecil touches his immediate profit in the matter. Shakespeare's prophecy precedes the Second Interlude – Bacon's procession as Chancellor (1618) The Third Episode presents his own fall, and the triumph of his passion for reality.

Beyond this there is shown in the Epilogue his last experiment, the appearance of the Father of Salomon's House, and his approaching death, struck into him at once by the cold of winter and by that of immortal purity. The song of the young generations to whom he commended himself accompanies him as he is carried out.

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Characters

Introducer

The Father of Salomon's House

Francis Bacon

Lord Burleigh, the Lord Treasurer

Sir Robert Cecil, Burleigh's son

Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex

Bacon's Steward

Thomas Hobbes

Rawley, Bacon's Chaplin

A Gentleman

Earl of Arundel

Earl of Shrewsbury

A Woman

The Guilds

(Characters in order of speaking)

First Episode — The Beginning. A Court in the Palace.

The Father of Salomon's House	Carol Stewart
Francis Bacon	Susan Lamert
William Cecil, Lord Burleigh	Elizabeth Pym
Sir Robert Cecil, Burleigh's Son	Nancy Joy
Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex	Biddy Grant

INTERLUDE — The Rebellion of Essex.

Second Episode — The Fall of Essex. A Courtyard near the Palace.

Augustine Phillips	Diana Keane
William Shakespeare	Joan Clark
Francis Bacon	Susan Lamert
A Secretary	Patsy Schofield.
Sir Robert Cecil	Nancy Joy
The Earl of Essex	Biddy Grant
Two Guards	P. Godman & P. Patterson

INTERLUDE — The Procession of the Lord Chancellor.

Third Episode — The Accusation. A Room in York House.

Francis Bacon	Susan Lamert
A Steward	Barbara Roffey
Thomas Hobbes, Bacon's Secretary	Rosemary Hughes
Audley	Wendy Rathbone
A Gentleman	Jay Home
A Servant	Hilary Stebbing
The Earl of Arundel	Marjorie Boyd
The Earl of Shrewsbury	A. Monier Williams

Epilogue — The Last Experiment. Highgate Hill.

Francis Bacon	Susan Lamert
Thomas Hobbes	Rosemary Hughes
A Woman	Dauphine Bosanquet
The Father of Salomon's House	Carol Stewart

Introducer:

Master of the house of knowledge
whom men's seeking minds adore,
keep thine own immortal college
evermore as heretofore.

Through our deep imaginations
send the vision now as then;
lift in us the invocations,
let us now praise famous men.

Each, our master and our neighbour,
at the sacred temple builds;
follow, follow them to labour
in the charter of the guilds.

Weigh the stars and plot the ocean,
make new engines of new might,
Still desiring in each motion
God's first creature, which is light.

The Father of Salomon's House:

Gentles, greetings I am one
to reveal the lasting laws
and the name of secret cause
which is God's creative style.
Therefore once in a great while
cast they horoscopes to see
by divine astrology
what new child among you hath
power to take that sea-borne path
to the hostels of our land
where the helmed pontiffs stand.
Him we subtly purge and clear,
feed, indoctrinate, and rear
through his childhood and his youth
for the lucid joy of truth.
Wherefore thus it is that now
we are well content to show
how a certain man was made

pure and fragrant for our trade,
 doing you to wit that ye
 praise his good integrity,
 watching how we shaped his mind.
 in the mode that we designed,
 so that he through good and ill
 toiled for our Atlantis, till
 came conclusion to his skill
 in the snow on Highgate Hill.

(He draws back. Bacon enters.)

Bacon: I will beseech my uncle yet again
 Cannot the Earl of Burleigh do me good?
 Can he? nay, will he? Virtue in great place
 is calm; his calm is virtue's, and to aid
 a destitute nephew - that is virtue too.
 I will accost him when he - soft, who's here?
 Some foreign monster sent to please the Queen
 by Raleigh's bidding. Fellow there, give way.

(As the Father turns.)

Why, pardon: but... I know you..? I have seen
 your face in... Cambridge? no; abroad? or, where?

The Father: Francis, thou know'st me not, but thou shalt know.

Bacon: Do not let go mine eyes. I will know.

The Father: Aye.
 I will sear thine eyes in gazing: keep them fixed.
 What think'st thou of my face?

Bacon: As of a map
 strangely marked out with cities long since drowned.
 Drowned, but not dead: most wholly, wholly, wise:
 living as if all ocean were up piled
 to show a rarer world beneath its waves.

The Father: I have marked a path beneath the waves for thee,
 into a new Atlantis beyond hope.

Bacon: Do not go from me. I will follow it.
Where goes it?

The Father: Into knowledge.

Bacon: Knowledge! speak.

The Father: Of nature, man, and all things else that are.

Bacon: Aye... aye...

The Father: ... all things below and over earth,
and how man's empire judges them and rules.
See'st thou?

Bacon: I see. (*He kneels*) bless me, O father of truth.

The Father: Thou art a doorkeeper in Salomon's house,
and shalt be pontiff when thy day is come.
Feel'st thou? (*laying his hand on Bacon's forehead*)

Bacon: Cold: cold.

The Father: Aye; go, and be alone.
Thou shalt behold me when thou art alone.

Bacon: Spirit, who art thou?

The Father: I am thy desire,
thy sole friend; thou shalt have no friend but me.

Bacon: I rise not level yet with my desire,
so fast it flies into horizons of cloud.
Tell me, thou vision, tell me my desire.

The Father: Look on me once more: sees't thou?

Bacon: Ah thy face
is lucent with the hiddenness of thought,
and through its purity flash to and fro
the secret causes of all mortal things.
It is the epiphany of the universe

vastly conveyed to thought, and thought to flesh.
Ah, ah! the intolerable tormenting joy.

The Father: Thou feel'st the torment of the greatest joy
that man may know; be thou man knowing it,
be the new instauration of man's mind.
This is that hope which is unique despair
so great its scope is, and its depth so strong.
For how but by despair of plenitude
can plenitude discover all itself?
In me thou seest thy power to comprehend
the whole of nature and the whole of man.
Thou art my child as I am Wisdom's child.

Bacon: Name her again, vision, and. name thyself.

The Father: Our mother Wisdom, looking on the sea
and tawny uproar of Infinitude,
beheld there the unshaped floating limbs
of pure Imagination; then she sighed
as deep as when divinities create,
and in that sigh she summoned it to be.
At once for all those waters it arose
with its own world Atlantis, with its house
the College of the Six Days' Work of God,
beyond the waters of infinitude.
And I am of its Keepers; I am come
to bid thy heart imagine mightily
all knowledge of the everlasting laws.

Bacon: O there! O there! O pulse of my desire.
I love thee, spirit.

The Father: Also thou shalt love.
Thou shalt love purely, and for that love's sake
I warn thee I will have thee wholly pure.
Be of good cheer, Francis, for thou art mine.

(He retires backward and disappears. Burleigh and Robert Cecil enter from one side, as Bacon turns away from the vision.)

Bacon: Debts! Debts! To free myself and. then to gaze!

I must be free ere I can free the world
 with instruments and organs of new power,
 to make a myriad truths into one truth.
 Cecil! O Cecil, be the key wherewith
 I will enlarge myself then the world!
 My lord! Sir Robert!

(Burleigh moves a hand. Robert Cecil nods.)

If I dare intrude
 upon your lordship's pleasure....

Burleigh: The old. tale?

Bacon: Some small - the smallest station; but to serve
 you and the Queen's Grace.

Burleigh: Many are apt to that.
 In more need; of more mark.

Bacon: Your lordship knows
 My father's death encumbered me with debts,
 I am unknown - I pray for chance and time
 And I will show you how I shall be known,
 I think not boastfully.

Burleigh: Be safe; boast now
 truth yet unproved which, proved, may thwart the boast.
 There is no office open. To the Courts;
 there labour; labour shall bring gold; gold fame.

Bacon: I thank your lordship's counsel: yet I dare
 once more petition: we are kin, my lord,
 and the Queen needs sure service.

Burleigh: I have spent
 these forty years to learn what the Queen needs.

Bacon: Forty years! forty years of study! O,
 give me, my uncle, give me forty years
 of learning and of vision: give me ten -
 I have taken all knowledge for my province - ten,
 and afterwards.... I shall be dead or saved.
 Some post, some little post, to bid me thrive!

Burleigh: The Queen has little need of such as take
all knowledge for their province, but of small
diligent clerks deciphering, by the light
of candles, themselves candles, no broad suns
blasting the dazzle of morning through dark skies,
deciphering, scribbling, calculating clerks.

Bacon: But I am patient as all knowledge is -
Might I not be a better clerk to the Queen
for being a clerk to knowledge? The great forms
that are the principles of our cherished life
of taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing, they are found
but by such figuring and decipherment,
experiment, discovery, then the truth.

Burleigh: Well, Robert... no more, nephew. Void the square.
I am in privacy with Sir Robert here.
To the Courts, to the Courts, go.

Bacon: At your lordship's will.

(He withdraws, disheartened, and goes out.)

Robert Cecil: How the beggar whined!

Burleigh: I would have you, Robert, note
I have chiefly put him by because of you.
I will run no risk of wiseheads by the Queen
till you are firm with her. This learning - she
has dallied longer with learning than the Dukes
she toyed with - hand in snuggling hand. This talk....
I will not have him near her. Now for Spain,
mark this -

(Essex bursts in, dragging Bacon with him)

Essex: Ha, ha! ha, ha! What, my Lord Treasurer
despoils his family and his queen at once -
for fear, belike, of seeming touched with bribes.
This is a virtue overnice to keep
unspotted from the world. Now, by my life,
I wonder my Lord Treasurer dares to talk
with his own son in open day.

-
- Burleigh: My lord,
give you good morrow.
- Essex: Why, Francis here was sent
so hard by your good morrow that I fear
there's thunder heavy in it. What! no place?
Why, hang some rogue for treason and make room.
Nay, I must have him suited.
- Burleigh: Very like,
Treason itself must serve Lord Essex' will.
- Essex: Here's Robert younger than Francis; let him wait
a throw or two of the State dice, and learn
a neater touch with the dice-box. Come, my lord,
I must be served; a reversion, at the least,
with a retainer for a cushion to fit
the waiting-bench. The Registrarship now, ha?
- Burleigh: 'Tis promised.
- Essex: Why, unpromise then.
- Bacon: My lords,
I am unworthy of so much heat.
- Essex: No heat.
Only the Queen shall hear - the Queen shall know
how Robert Devereux is served.
- Burleigh: The Queen
has heard a many Robert Devereux brag.
Pah! I ungrace myself to talk of it.
- Essex: But whom this Robert Devereux makes his friend -
no shyness, Francis; we are friends, I hope -
might have a Cecil for a squire, and then
be served less than his merit.
- Robert Cecil: How, my lord!
You are wondrous warm.
- Essex: I could name a wondrous cold
-

shivering, frost-bitten shepherd pushed in court
by the old steward his father. Ha, sweet friend,
never despair; I'll to the Queen myself.
Am I not Gloriana's Robert?

Burleigh: Aye.

Was never Gloriana's minion yet
but Gloriana kept her royal head
and he... well, think of it one day. Farewell.
I claim the earlier audience with the Queen,
Come Robert. (*They go out*)

Essex: What, despair, nay, cheer thee, friend.

Nay, we are friends, I hope. I would be loth
to find that Essex cannot serve his friend.
Depend on me - and in me on the Queen,
This hand she toys with shall, the while she toys,
pluck any jewel forth from her stomacher
and grace the hat of any man my friend.
And she shall smile.

Bacon: My honourable lord,
princes are lightly stirred to wrath; be wise;
I would not have your lordship spoil the Queen
for my sake, yours, or any.

Essex: Come, I have
a manor out at Twickenham shall be thine
while we wait greater things.

Bacon: All of my heart
that is not common land of England lies
enclosed to your sole service: yet, my lord -

Essex: Chut, wilt thou delay with my favour, man?
Why, if I would not thrust thee into place
part for thine own wise brain - as it shall serve
me also: there shall be great need: the Queen
ages - and then, thou knowest, Francis, then -
hist! the succession. I must cozen James,
we must be subtle...

Bacon: O my dearest lord,
what greatness of a man's own station can

be worthy of his ordained being? look,
 how frail our persons, our fortunes how unsure,
 and for all that what worth within our souls!
 Love duty, apprehend it, look abroad
 into the universal sway of things.
 Tis the corrupter sort of politics
 that thrust into the centre, as if all
 yea, the whole realm and world of lives should meet
 in them and in their fortunes. Glorious men
 are but the slaves of their own vaunts; whom fools
 admire and parasites idolatrise,
 whom princes never love but with an eye
 wary upon the little inch of ground
 that separates their footstool from the throne.

Essex: How, Francis, lectures?

Bacon: God be good to me
 as I desire your honourable fame
 in the Queen's mouth and all men's.

Essex: Aye, well said.
 I am the City's favourite. Come, we'll in.
 I love them marvellously; wait awhile
 and I will spite this Cecil with thee yet.

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II

(Augustine Phillipps and Shakespeare enter.)

Phillipps: This is the blessedest day of all my life!
 I hardly thought to see the sun again.

Shakespeare: Richard's own dungeon won't be half as deep
 as the pit I'll hide that play in: all because
 my lord of Essex must be picturesque,

but I'm not made for such benevolence
to the poor thrifty boat-in-floodtime world.

Phillipps: All's safe: we've slipped the danger.

Shakespeare: Have we so?
It makes me mad to think we ran so near;
to think you let yourselves be gulled and bribed
by his jerrymaking Gerry Merricks.

Phillippes: Will,
he offered us twice our pay, and -

Shakespeare: Easy fools,
to let his Merricks thumb-and-finger you.
Whenever I'm out of the theatre things go wrong.

Phillippes: You'd have stood out; you'd have refused.

Shakespeare: I am
as good a gentleman as Gollykins,
and Gellykins should jelly in Little Ease
before he took my coat of arms to wag
over his lusty bombast. Bombast's place
is on the stage, my friend; let's keep it there.

Phillippes: At least our stage is ours; our verse is yours;
we are the Chamberlain's men; but there be men,
whom the Earl made, who now not merely slip
as we do from his fall, but push him down.

Shakespeare: Close tongue: ware slitting!

Phillippes: Nay, but all men know
that Bacon will denounce him at the Trial.
Why, the Earl set him on his stage.

Shakespeare: Aye, aye!
I am something weary of being helped by the world
with so much picturesque generosity.

Phillippes: You? but I talk of Bacon.

Shakespeare: So you do.
I dream myself am Bacon at this pinch
Did you feel his *Essays*?

Phillipps: Feel his - ?

Shakespeare: Read them then?
But “feel”’s the word. I couldn’t think like that,
twining and thrusting, measuring in and out
with the very footrule of man’s mind that God
once plotted all earth’s base with. The slow words -
it’s only that that stops me envying him.

Phillipps: What stops you? Envying him? what do you mean?

Shakespeare: It’s .. it’s all but .. only it isn’t quite ...
That’s what I mean. He’s all but the perfect whole -
nay, he’s a whole that I shall never be.
To have his power, his learning, his grand style -
I’d give up everything except my own.
Not that we are such perfect opposites
we must be somewhere a strange unity.
Well - I suppose I’d rather be my half.
And - hist! it’s Bacon.

(Bacon enters, with a Secretary)

Bacon: These to the copying clerks.
This to the Secretary: this I’ll keep.
The examinations press him hard.

The Secretary: He’s dead,
If he can make no better at his trial. *(He goes out.)*

Bacon: Ha, sirs! at Court still? Well, you’re going free.
Take heed to what you play another time –
or what you write, you poet. *(Phillipps bows and goes.)*

Shakespeare: Truth, but verse
teaches its maker more of its will than prose;
that’s why the greater minds choose prose. They know
before they write it more of what they mean
than we poor poetasters.

Bacon: Oracles
dancing the inspiration!

Shakespeare: Neither so.
But - don't your Essays teach you how to act -

Bacon: How now!

Shakespeare: May not a paltry poet have read
and contemplated study's horizon?

Bacon: You -
What, sir! you flatter!

Shakespeare: Can I flatter you
or what your mind discerns or what it - serves?

Bacon: What then?

Shakespeare: Less than perfected knowledge?

Bacon: Known!
All known - all knowledgeable wonder brought
into the edifice of the mortal mind.
The vault of worms, the skiey spire of stars,
and all the involuting laws of each -
the operation of the secret forms -
man, man shall hold it soon.

Shakespeare: Sooner for you.

Bacon: You are the playwright Shakespeare, are you not?

Shakespeare: For business' sake; somewhat for pleasure too.

Bacon: Because the actions and events of man
are less by much than his desires, less great,
heroical and potent, you draw up
tales to delight his fiction of himself.
You must reduce the shows of things to be
subordinate to man's longing: reason bows
man's mind to things in their own nature, what,
my master-mummer, can knowledge mean to you?

Shakespeare: Upon the shore, say - look, you there, I here!
 you judge the waves, you measure currents, plot
 the palpitating air in calm or storm:
 your exquisite pattern! your strong government. I
 build up a cameleopard from the sand
 wet from the ebb, blowing soft wind through it
 till the small image stretches, rises, talks,
 looms terribly leviathan, and therewith
 goes crunching from the pebbles such a sound
 as is your very pattern come to song.
 Shall you mock me or I mock you? Brave hearts,
 at least we both whistled the wind; it came,
 and the same salt is clustered on our beards.
 We are strangely separate and as strangely one.

Bacon: What, fictitious and witty prattle with that deep
 excellency of learning, whereby man
 all pleasures else surpasses, and ascends
 into the heavens, making their motions bare
 as his hand's palm to study: the supreme,
 immortal, incorruptible reason! Out!

Shakespeare: I could say that! I could say that! but you -
 O Master Bacon, could you take my word?
 You cannot; I am you; you are not I.
 You are the intellect that cannot love.

(Enter Cecil. Essex between his guards.)

Cecil: My lord, I dare not sound the Queen.

Essex: One word;
 Cecil, be wise: if I ride out this storm -
 you know the Queen - men that have slipped have stood
 as firm again. But give me speech with her.

Cecil: My lord, I dare not name you to the Queen
 except her Highness open.

Essex: Why, by chance -
 have me by chance somewhere when she goes by -
 She loved me.

your life, your very mind -

Bacon: No, by God's life.
I that was born for the service of mankind -
I that have sought to serve the commonwealth
as a man serves his mother, on his knees,
with what poor art he can; and serving so
might hope to win his mother's listening thoughts
to let him on a voyage of great skill
to - where? some lost Atlantis.

Essex: Lost! you lie.
The Queen shall hear, shall see, shall relish me.

Cecil: (*signing to the Guards*): Farewell, my lord. God send your lordship good.

(*He is carried off*)

Cecil: (*To Bacon*) Cousin, the Queen's Grace bid me send for you.
Sir Edward Coke will lead against the Earl;
she chooses you to second.

Bacon: Second the Earl!

Cecil: You are merry, coz: second Sir Edward Coke
in the prosecution. Come to me to-night.
I shall show you certain secret things. Meanwhile,
your answer?

Bacon: I am her Highness' creature; ever hers.

Cecil: You do well; you were somewhat thought to be -
what shall I say? - intimate with his thought -
this readiness will purge you: you may look
for recognition. Give you joy, good coz. (*He goes out*)

Bacon: I warned - a score of times I warned him. God
knows I am free of all blood-guiltiness.
I bade him keep from Ireland; I besought,
nay, wrestled with him. I was never his
but while - no longer - while he was the Queen's.

Shakespeare: You cannot move except against the Earl.

And can you cease to move?

Bacon: I cease? withdraw,
leave the State service? leave the greater thing
whereto the State may serve?

Shakespeare: It cannot be.
The incorruption and the corruption drive
your feet at once; impurity - purity.

Bacon: He rose not in his service, and he took
order to make his service fall with him.

Shakespeare: It is a dreadful thing - this purity
that works within us; this most pregnant cold
wherein the sense of all our senses lives
yet is repugnant to all outer sense,
and overthrows it; happy if we still
find that, losing the outer. But the men
who love us, living in our outward sense,
find us grown treacherous to them where they live.
Witness the poor wretch babbling in the Tower.

Bacon: The State is more than any score of Earls.

Shakespeare: Reason - good reason; the true reason lacks.
There's something in you never cared for him.

Bacon: I loved him.

Shakespeare: Aye, the incorruption loves.
'Tis the incorruption hath you: wait awhile -
The incorruption shall have you nearer yet;
it shall divide you - sharp; flesh from bone,
giving you but yourself to be your food.
The skeleton shall feed on living flesh
when the day comes,

(He moves off)

-the day that does not end.

(He goes out. Bacon also departs)

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III

(A room in York House. Bacon enters with his steward.)

Bacon: The tapestry of Psyche seeking love
 goes it to Gorhambury?

The Steward: Even today.

Bacon: The two gilt salt-cellars and the silver cup
 Mr. Attorney sent last New Year's day -
 these shall go too. I am here richly-devised
 and would be there.

The Steward: You are more magnificent
 than any lord. in England.

Bacon: For itself

I care not, but magnificence shall make
 study applauded by the world: her sons
 too long are outdone in the eyes of men
 by folly's brood of babblers. [Cloth of gold
 may be worn nobly: if the markets gape
 first at the wear they may beyond the cloth
 marvel at mind that wears it] Get you gone.

The Steward: So please your lordship, I must pay the hire...

Bacon: Why, take it from yon drawer: I keep that full
 of gold and silver for such casual chance.

The Steward: Pardon, my lord, 'tis empty.

Bacon: Empty, how!

The Steward: O my good lord, pardon! Your gentlemen,
 Knowing your habit, being in need of gold,
 furnish themselves therefrom. I see it done
 and have not dared to speak of it.

Bacon: Why, so.
 I cannot help it, friend. I cannot count
 each coin against them. Folly! here at home
 I should be careful as I am abroad,
 of my own revenue as of the King's:
 I have promised it - and always broke me word.
 I will procure the gold ... begin the work
 and you shall have it. Are my letters gone?

The Steward: Aye, my good lord.

Bacon: To France? I would not have
 my learned friends wait for me. There is now
 a movement in the very air of thought,
 and we must move upon it; as on wings
 excelling and ascending through our minds
 to view invention and discovery
 from the full zenith.

The Steward: They are gone, my lord.
 (*He goes out, meeting Hobbes.*)

Bacon: Ha, Thomas! What news from the House?

Hobbes: Strange news.
Know you Sir Thomas Egerton?

Bacon: Egerton -
a last year's applicant, was he? sued. a case
in chancery - and lost it.

Hobbes: Nothing more?
Had you no present?

Bacon: Present? Very like.
It never swayed my judgement. What of him?

Hobbes: Once more - a Chancery suit one Aubrey brought
and brought (he says) a hundred pounds to lure
your lordship's favour: rests it in your mind?

Bacon: What is this talk of favour, Thomas Hobbes?
What are these Aubreys and Egertons to me?
The law have dealt with them.

Hobbes: The House is loud
with their complaints of how you dealt with them.

Bacon: I dealt? their suits were answered.

Hobbes: Aye, and lost.
They brought their presents and they lost their suits.
There are petitions now before the House
against the Lord Chancellor -

Bacon: Against me?

Hobbes: for sore
bribery and corruption.

Bacon: Against me!
I never outweighed justice by a hair.
None dares accuse me -

Hobbes: all the House accuse!
Devising and petitioning the Lords
There were two cases uttered when I left -
by now there may be twenty.

Bacon: No truth - none.
Their presents never gained them ought from me.

Hobbes: May you deny the gifts?

Bacon: Why there indeed? -
but this is enemies' practice. Egerton -
a matter of a mere four hundred pounds
He sent it; I received it; sure, the Lords
cannot...

(Enter Rawley)

Rawley: My lord -

Bacon: What news?

Rawley: - Doubtless a thing for mirth,
but - Master Hobbes! you brought the tale?

Hobbes: What tale,
if aught beyond the Commons' malice?

Rawley: Aye:
but how far went their malice?

Bacon: Tell me all.
[I am become the plaything of the void
unless]
This cannot hold. Tell me.

Rawley: One from the House
brings news - 'tis mere delirium -

Hobbes: Tell him, for pity's sake.

Rawley: .. impeach ..

Bacon: Impeach!

Hobbes: Of what?

Rawley: High misdemeanours,
Corruption, bribery, justice bought and sold,

Bacon: Can men suppose my life so base a thing?
I ever lived in public: why the gifts
were taken publicly.

Hobbes: They swear, not so.

Bacon: Not mine the darkness then. They know me, Hobbes.
I built broad windows all about my mind
to let the light stream in.

Hobbes: They, looking through,
see a broad hall piled high with gifts.

Bacon: They lie,
and fifty times they lie. What, freely sent,
was freely taken - No; I see, I see.
O Thomas Hobbes, mayhap I would not see.

Hobbes: I will not see but as your lordship will -

Bacon: Was I the only man that had no depth
or dared I never look into myself?
or did I hope that others were content
and credulous to believe me credulous?

Rawley: Either your lordship must deny the charge
or make submission, pleading guiltiness.

Bacon: No, by my life! folly - accuse me there -
the squinting foolishness of negligence,
greed for my greatness - not my greatness: no,
I have a thought within me is not mine
that I would house in splendour: I have erred -
but yet the Commons will not - if they do,
the Lords, the King's self...

Rawley: O my lord, the King!

Hobbes: Take counsel; mayhap things are not so lost
but something may be saved -

Bacon: What can be saved?
All things fall after me because I fall,
and how should I that am grown bottomless
find standing for them? O forget, forget
that ever there was such a man as I.

Rawley: If it please God to show -

Bacon: If it please God
to let a man with gifts of rare perfumes
stink out the house of truth - God knows the stink:
let the man know it. O love-making to truth
O longing for it - yet not here, not here,
not in this breast.

Hobbes: I have heard your lordship say
the enjoying of truth is, over all things else,
the sovereign good. of human nature. Light -
light always -

Bacon: Is it light? -

Hobbes: The enjoying of truth.
Enjoy it then.

Bacon: Enjoy... no, not enjoy.

Hobbes: Purpose enjoyment then, if this be truth.

Bacon: I feed upon my own flesh: can I judge
the taste and dressing?

Rawley: Maybe, till a man
hath for some while lived on his proper flesh
he cannot taste God's plenty.

(Enter a servant.)

Servant: My lord, the Peers in session send to you;
The Earls of Arundel and Shrewsbury wait,

(The Earls enter)

Arundel: My lord, we hold commission from the Lords
to bring to Francis, Viscount Verulam,
Lord Chancellor of England, their demands
on certain charges of malpractice, brought
by the Commons against the said Lord Chancellor
and pray him for an answer.

Bacon: Even at once?

Shrewsbury: All decent time - all reasonable grace -

Bacon: My lords, my lords, press not a falling man.
Show me the paper; what is true thereof
I will confess; what false - all's false to me!

(he takes the paper)

It was a present - Egerton - he sent
four hundred pounds for kindness done him, naught
said, naught supposed of favour. Cabinet -
I have begged to have it taken from my house,
this cabinet they talk of. Could I help
if some fool sent... a New Year's gift; I swear
I thought it was a New Year's gift come late...
I gave, even as I took: was I to search
and see if that or this man had a cause
adjourned from court to court or hour to hour?
could I? O there... there I confess I took...
and there again, the cause in action still...

(he drops the paper)

My eyes are seared with blood; I cannot read.

Arundel: The Lords will move but in the rule of law.
The charges shall be answered or confessed.

Shrewsbury: All reasonable privilege allowed
of time and evidence.

Bacon: It shall not need.
How subtle Envy is to utter truth -
and yet for truth's sake I will answer her.

Arundel: No envy -

Bacon: None: pure honour.

Shrewsbury: No despite -

Bacon: None: virtue stinging me with godly fangs.

Hobbes: (*apart to Bacon*) Be gentle with yourself; be wise with them.
Be honourable -

Bacon: Thomas...

Hobbes: in yourself
as you have kept the honour of the law.

Bacon: I would fain see - I would fain see one case,
one judgement that the worst of them can change.
There is no word, no comma, nay, no stroke
that shall be altered or repeated.

Hobbes: They stand:
and you -

Bacon: I fall away from under them,
outcast by my own work.

Hobbes: Approach the lords.

Bacon: My lords, I pray your pardons. I will write
as the honourable peers require. My lands
my house, my fame, my life, are at their feet.
The Great Seal... is the King's. I will return
these charges, answered or confessed.

Arundel: Your hand,
your very hand, set to them.

Bacon: It shall be
my hand, my seal, my heart. Pray you, farewell.
O Thomas if they keep this day as white
as their feigned honour shows it to the world -
what's that to me?

He slips the last who cares not for the first.
Ho there, good woman! (*A woman runs in, flustered*)

The Woman: Please your lordship' s grace -

Bacon: Those are your fowls - out yonder?

The Woman: Please you, yes.

Bacon: I have a mind to one.

The Woman: O sir, at once.
Or broiled or roasted as your lordship choose.
They are the best in Highgate. A poor house,
but if your lordship will but wait awhile -

Bacon: No cooking, gammer: catch and kill, the fowl.
Here's a payment.

The Woman: So much for one fowl? My lord,
you shall have the fattest chicken in the roost.

(*She runs out*)

Bacon: It stands with reason: stuff it full with cold,
the putrefaction might be hindered. Snow
and a chicken and I together - try the trick.
It will be Easter soon and snow be gone.
God send she be not long.

Hobbes: Will you return
into your coach?

Bacon: I have ever wondered much
on conservation of bodies: think'st thou not
winter is feared too much, too little used?
Refrigeration, 'tis but scanty known
how healthful and preservative... Cold, cold.
It strikes within me. I remember once
being young I dreamed of such a stiffening cold.

(*The singing, nearer and louder*)

Through our deep imaginations
send the vision, now as then:

Lift in us the invocations,
let us now praise famous men.

(The Father of Salomon's house enters)

Bacon: The flesh itself clean...

The Father: Francis!

Bacon: Vision, thou!
I have longed these forty years to look on thee;
why hast thou hidden from me forty years?

The Father: We have chilled thee, Francis, and, preserved thy soul
by operations of benevolence
to make thee pure to us. The work is done -
nigh done.

Bacon: Not yet! not yet! there is so much
unplotted, unprepared; organs of thought,
the instauration of science but begun,
the interpretation of all nature. Time!
a little longer time!

(The father lays his hand on Bacon's head.)

O cold, cold, cold!

(The Woman runs back with a fowl)

The Woman: Please your kind lordship. Is his lordship ill?

Hobbes: Ask not.

The Woman: Is he talking to himself?

Hobbes: Away.

The Woman: But -

Hobbes: Give me the fowl. Begone.

The Woman: But if he's ill -

Hobbes: Think, Francis Bacon speaking to himself

is a thing that loftier eyes than yours or mine
might shade themselves from. You are paid: begone.

(She goes out)

The Father: This little, little last of things, my son -
You cannot reach Atlantis till you die,
{ } this thing. Think, a fowl stuffed with snow -

Bacon: Aye, bodies stuffed. with snow: preservativ { }
quick, Thomas, hold it, press it full... more... more.

(As they work, the singing breaks out all around)

Each, our master and our neighbour
at the sacred temple builds;
follow, follow them to labour
in the charter of the guilds.

Bacon: My scarf to bear it - ah! the chill at heart.
Quick, Thomas, hold it; press it full - so - so.
My scarf to bear it safely to the coach.
Aid me: the cold hath ta'en me. Thine arm -
no, I will bear it: quick, thine arm - or thine -
I lean on immortality: yes, yes,
I sinned, my Father, but I kept the faith,
I have desired the very soul of truth,
the purity of knowledge. O the world,
the throughfares of the world are full of light
God's first, God's best of creatures, blessed light!

(He is supported by Hobbes and the Father. The guilds begin to throng the stage)

Weigh the stars and plot the ocean
make new engines of new might;
still desiring in each motion
God's first creature, which is light.

Bacon: My name, my hope, my will - to foreign lands,
to future ages I bequeath myself.