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## **'Bogus History' and Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay***

*In this paper I focus on Greene's Elizabethan comedy, which David Bevington has referred to as containing 'bogus history'. I argue that Greene embraced the history he inherited. The play contains three strands of history that parallel and intertwine: the pursuit of marriage for Prince Edward; the story of Margaret of Fressingfield; and a depiction of Friar Bacon, the magician. We can think of several categories of history, but 'bogus' raises different issues. 'Bogus' seems to presuppose the superiority of accuracy as a function of historical writing, an alien concept to most Tudor-Stuart writers of history. Using the examples of Spenser, Francis Bacon, and Thomas Heywood, I delineate concepts of history in Shakespeare's time. From this delineation I examine the play, ending with Bacon's speech at the play's end in which prophecy and history coalesce, reinforcing the play's link to thirteenth-century England.*

In mid-January 2012, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City reopened the recently and expensively renovated New American Wing Galleries for Paintings Sculpture, and Decorative Arts. Pride of place went to Emanuel Leutze's painting, 'Washington Crossing the Delaware' (1851), newly restored and reframed. This iconic painting, the most asked about picture in the whole museum, depicts George Washington standing proudly in a kind of row boat with the stars and stripes flapping in the wind as Washington and his troops crossed the river at Trenton in order to encounter Hessian troops on Christmas 1776. Leutze, a German, painted this idealized picture in Germany with little knowledge of the actual events.<sup>1</sup> Mort Künstler, having received a commission, has since painted a new version of this scene, one faithful to historical facts, depicting Washington on a flatboat with many soldiers and animals and no flag.<sup>2</sup> In one limited sense, we could refer to Leutze's painting as 'bogus', even as we acknowledge its manifest

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beauty. I speculate that the Metropolitan Museum will not any time soon replace Leutze's painting with Künstler's newer one. Maybe we just prefer 'bogus' history when it comes to art. At the least, we do not expect the artwork to provide us with historical accuracy, and that raises the matter of our understanding of history and its relationship to art.

In this essay I will focus on Robert Greene's Elizabethan comedy *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, which one scholar has referred to as containing 'bogus history'.<sup>3</sup> I will argue against that view, believing that Greene embraced the history he both inherited and created. He contributed to the expansion of historical consciousness that gained strength in the late sixteenth century, and *Friar Bacon* invites us to think seriously about history as a way of writing about the past and as a dramatic genre. Greene's play demonstrates the flexibility of the term 'history' in the Elizabethan era and drama's ecumenical approach to history. Clearly for Greene and others history does not exist as the opposite of fiction; rather, dramatic art moves along a spectrum between these seeming opposites. I believe that Greene's play has suffered on the matter of history by comparison to Shakespeare's English history plays that come to dominate the 1590s — and certainly since.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare seems to get by with all kinds of comic highjinks in his histories without any critic applying the term 'bogus' to his plays.

*Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* contains three major strands of history that parallel and intertwine: the pursuit of marriage for Prince Edward, the kingdom's heir apparent; the story of Margaret of Fressingfield, which also leads to a noble marriage; and a depiction of Friar Bacon, the magician. When Warwick and King Henry IV reminisce about past events in *Henry IV, Part Two*, Warwick observes: 'There is a history in all men's lives'.<sup>5</sup> Exactly. We, of course, distinguish between 'lived history' and 'written or recorded history', leading us to think about various kinds of history. From Francis Bacon and others we know about civil, ecclesiastical, natural, and political history, but where does 'bogus' fit?

'Bogus', a nineteenth-century American word derived from counterfeiting coins, as applied to history seems to presuppose the desired importance and superiority of *accuracy* as a function of historical writing. Such a concept would have been alien to most Tudor-Stuart historiographers.<sup>6</sup> We need only recall briefly the approach to history in Holinshed's *Chronicles* in which accuracy often takes a beating. Greene himself indulged in several excursions into history: *The Historie of Orlando Furioso*, *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth*, *The Comicall Historie of Alphonsus*; even his *Pandosto*

contains the running titles of *The Historie of Dorastus and Fawnia*. Greene would doubtless not have thought of any of these as 'counterfeit', 'deceptive', or a 'sham'.

Any play that offers a kind of rough definition of history's purview through the brazen head's words in scene 11, 'Time is', 'Time was', and 'Time is past',<sup>7</sup> invites us to ponder the possibility of 'bogus'. Certainly critics have been interested in the *kind* of history the play embodies, beginning with a study of Greene's sources. Percy Round, for example, points to the importance of John Bale's sixteenth-century history of Britain, as well as Holinshed's *Chronicles*.<sup>8</sup> Much of the material for Roger Bacon, the thirteenth-century friar, derives from the anonymous sixteenth-century *The Famous Historie of Friar Bacon*, which was not available in published form until 1627.<sup>9</sup> Brian Walsh more recently has plunged into the play's historical issues, including the prominent one of political succession.<sup>10</sup> Frank Ardolino's 'Greene's Use of the History of Oxford in *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*'<sup>11</sup> focuses on 'topicality' in the play, which he finds rich with historical allusions. He observes: 'Greene includes three academic characters, Burden, Clement, and Mason, who are inspired by actual students and officials associated with Oxford from medieval times to the last decade of the sixteenth century'.<sup>12</sup> Ardolino lays out a plausible case for the historicity of these characters, but I intend a larger view of history that moves away from sources and topicality, one that sorts through the variety of history in Greene's play and examines the artistic act of creating history within a narrative framework.

I begin by looking at the title-page of the 1594 quarto of Greene's play. Several things strike me about this page, the first being the title, which is *The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon, and Frier Bongay*. In terms of font size the two largest words on the title-page are 'HONORABLE' and 'HISTORIE', both in all caps. The 1630 and 1655 editions continue this full title. (As a practical matter, several modern editions shorten the title to *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, thereby erasing 'history'.)<sup>13</sup> Also, the running titles throughout all quarto editions are invariant: '*The Honourable Historie of Frier Bacon*'. We can conclude on this basis alone that Greene clearly thought of his play as a 'history'.

In 1594, several plays appeared in print that focused on English history, such as *Jack Straw*, *Henry VI, Part Two*, *Richard III*, and Marlowe's *Edward II*, but the title-pages do not characterize these plays as 'history'. The running titles for Marlowe's play, for example, indicate 'The Tragedie of Edward the Second'. But the title-page of *Taming of a Shrew*, published in 1594, refers

to the play as a 'Pleasant Conceited Historie'; its running titles, however, say 'The Taming of a Shrew'. 'History' vanishes. In fact, Greene's *Friar Bacon* is the only printed comedy in the early 1590s that refers to itself as 'history' and then repeats that claim in its running titles. Clearly, the term 'history' seems to have been unsettled in the drama of the 1580s and 90s; its certainty as a recognizable dramatic genre solidifies later in the Shakespeare folio of 1623. Even that statement can be qualified because in the 'Catalogue' of the histories in the folio none includes the word 'history' in its title. Only *Henry VIII* on its title-page refers to the play as 'The Famous History of the Life of King HENRY the Eight'; even here, the running titles drop the word 'history'. Of Shakespeare's English histories that appeared in early editions before the folio, only quarto 2 of *Henry IV, Part One* uses 'history' in its title.<sup>14</sup>

Peter Berek has written perceptively about the matter of theatrical genre, based on printed title-pages, reinforcing the point about the folio's power in establishing genres on its title-page and the arrangement of contents.<sup>15</sup> Berek, for example, calls attention to the play *Cambyses* whose title-page describes the drama as 'A lamentable tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth', while the running titles refer to it as a comedy. Before 1600, Berek observes, 'it was common for plays to have some form of generic designation on the title page, but usually in complex language that evades summary under the tidy categories of the Shakespeare folio'.<sup>16</sup> He notes that in the time frame of the printing of Greene's *Friar Bacon* seventy-two percent of the plays had generic identification, followed by a sharp decline in the early seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> The generic variety, evident in the sixteenth century, gives way to a kind of standardization: 'By 1623, most plays identified by genre use a single word — "tragedy" or "comedy" or "tragicomedy"'. As generic designations grow more frequent, the range of words used to designate genres grows narrower'.<sup>18</sup> Even the term 'history' falls off, having peaked between 1590 and 1616. This information about genre makes all the more telling Greene's insistence on his play as 'history', underscored by title-page and running titles.

Who, therefore, would claim that *Friar Bacon* contains 'bogus history'? David Bevington for one. In the introduction to the play in his Renaissance drama anthology, Bevington says that the play has a 'mix of bogus history and cheerful romantic nonsense'.<sup>19</sup> (I choose not to focus on 'romantic nonsense' for the purpose of this essay.) I encountered Bevington's view when I first used the anthology for a class and I have been thinking about it ever since. But Bevington's description could fit any number of plays. We could,

for example, imagine a play set in the early fifteenth century in which the last part takes place on a battlefield where war rages between royalist and rebel forces in a crucial battle in English history. Into this scene, fraught with historical importance, wanders an ahistorical figure of considerable girth and theatrical power. Would this play then be ‘bogus’, or would it just be *Henry IV, Part One*? Certainly no character in Shakespeare’s English histories is more bogus than Falstaff, and Shakespeare associates the word ‘counterfeit’ with him. I do not, however, find many complaints about Falstaff on that score. Shakespeare seems to get a free pass. In the first full-length book about Shakespeare’s histories, E.M.W. Tillyard writes extensively about the *Henry IV* plays but says not a word about Falstaff’s *unhistorical* presence.<sup>20</sup> Many critics have followed Tillyard.

Bevington acknowledges that Greene’s play does place us ‘in the realm of historical fact’, but he observes that when Prince Edward encounters Margaret of Fressingfield, ‘clearly, history goes out the window’.<sup>21</sup> I will be perversely literal-minded and ask how history can go out a window, and, second, if it goes out a window, where does it go? Does history exit when Falstaff appears in *Henry IV, Part One*? These questions get at the viability of the term ‘bogus history’, which in Bevington’s formulation embraces a concept of factual accuracy.

We can also trace the rather unflattering view of Greene’s understanding and use of history to one of the first books to try to encompass all of the history plays in the Shakespearean era: Irving Ribner’s *The English History Play* (1957). Ribner heaps scorn on those dramatists who deigned to broach history without a thorough understanding of what history is — at least according to Ribner. He writes: ‘Dramatists with no historical purpose and little historical sense often used the outer trappings of history and romance which must not be confused with the *true* history play’ [my emphasis].<sup>22</sup> The next sentence quickly and inevitably follows: ‘Such a dramatist was Robert Greene’. His plays ‘accomplish none of the accepted purposes of history’.<sup>23</sup> ‘Accepted’ by whom, we might rightly ask. Ribner sees *Friar Bacon* as an example of Greene’s fraudulent history, ‘warping history in the process, and involving royal figures in a sentimental love affair whose purpose is anything but historical’.<sup>24</sup> Only one small step takes us to ‘romantic nonsense’ and ‘bogus history’. Ribner’s view makes the world safe for Shakespeare.

We must consider how we should understand the term ‘history’. In Shakespeare’s day the term could refer to any tale, story, or chronicle of events (see *OED*). The word derives from the Latin *historia* and as used in romance

languages may refer to our common modern understanding of *history* or to any narrative of events, real *or* imaginary. I cite two early writers who coped with the multivalent nature of ‘history’. First, Edmund Spenser, who in his prefatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh in the first edition of *The Faerie Queene*, writes: ‘For the Methode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were done ... but a Poet thrusteth into the middest ... recouring to the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all.’<sup>25</sup> And Spenser observes that the beginning of his ‘history, if it were to be told by an Historiographer, should be the twelfth booke, which is the last, where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii dayes’.<sup>26</sup> The poet thus focuses on strategy rather than insisting on a radical difference between the function of history and poetry, even as he claims that he has written a ‘history’.

Seeming to echo Philip Sidney who, in his *Apology for Poetry*, argued for the superiority of the poet over the historian, Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) sees imaginative poetry as assisting, perhaps improving, history. Bacon outlines various kinds of history and then hits upon what he calls ‘Fained History’ (perhaps anticipating by a few centuries Bevington’s ‘bogus’). Bacon may seem to echo Touchstone who, in *As You Like It*, explains to Audrey that ‘the truest poetry is the most feigning’.<sup>27</sup> Poetry must ‘feign’, according to Bacon, because ‘true history’ does not completely satisfy. Bacon writes: ‘because the Acts or Events of *true Historie* have not that Magnitude which satisfieth the minde of Man, *Poesie* faines Acts and Events Greater and more Heroicall’.<sup>28</sup> He adds: ‘because *true Historie* representeth Actions and Events more ordinarie and lesse interchanged, therefore *Poesie* endueth them with more Rarenesse and more unexpected and alternative Variations’.<sup>29</sup> Poetry or drama extends history but does not force it out the window.

Thomas Heywood, the only practicing playwright in the Shakespearean era to author a text about the theatre and actors, offers a defence of drama in *An Apology for Actors* (1612). In this treatise Heywood defends drama for the lustre that it provides London, attracting ‘all nations’ who come for unrivalled entertainment. Drama has also sharpened and shaped the development of the English language, enabling it to grow ‘to a most perfect and composed language’. For Heywood, the theatre clearly has a didactic purpose. Thus, the plays have ‘taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discovery of all our English chronicles’.<sup>30</sup> D.R. Woolf has in fact argued that sixteenth-century

chronicles dispersed into historical drama, leading to what he has memorably called ‘genrecide’.<sup>31</sup> Heywood asks: ‘what man have you now of that weake capacity that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conqueror, nay, from the landing of Brute, untill this day?’<sup>32</sup> The foundational national myth of the Roman Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas, who conquered and settled in Britain, had been discredited for some time as being at best dubious, but that did not keep many from continuing to believe and accept the story. In fact, Polydore Vergil in *Anglica Historia* in the early sixteenth century had raised serious doubts about the myth. But as late as 1628 in Parliament, Edward Littleton, in a heated discussion over whether Oxford was superior to Cambridge, cast aspersions on Polydore Vergil: ‘What have we to do with Polydore Vergil? One Vergil was a poet, the other a liar’.<sup>33</sup> People will persist in preferring inaccurate history.

The new historians have made a major contribution, especially for literary critics, to our understanding of how and possibly why one writes history. We can recall the efforts of Hayden White, Stephen Greenblatt, Graham Holderness, Michel de Certeau, and many others, who underscored how historians *construct* history.<sup>34</sup> Historiographers have long since abandoned a ‘providential’ view of history, which enjoyed much currency in Shakespeare’s time — think of Sir Walter Raleigh and his *History of the World*, written while imprisoned in the Tower. In its place De Certeau succinctly states: ‘the past is the fiction of the present’.<sup>35</sup> He adds: ‘any reading of the past — however much it is controlled by the analysis of documents — is driven by a reading of current events’.<sup>36</sup> Even the simple chronicler of events makes many choices, which the compiler’s understanding of the present may govern. We can only write of the past in the present, a point encapsulated in the brazen head’s cryptic comments.

For me, one author from the seventeenth century makes the point convincingly — Francis Bacon in *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* (1622). Bacon, as I have already noted, had a keen interest in history, but this book on Henry VII is his only complete history. Bacon began writing this history in 1621 during his enforced exile from the Jacobean court; clearly, he hoped that this favourable account of one of King James’s predecessors might curry favour and shorten his banishment. We have trouble determining what kind of ‘research’ Bacon engaged in, and historians have been quick to note various inaccuracies based on a better understanding of the late fifteenth-early sixteenth centuries. Bacon misleads especially on the topic of the relationship of King Henry to his wife Queen Elizabeth; Bacon could not have

reached his conclusions if he had access to archival materials. I have argued that Bacon in fact constructed this part of the history from his knowledge of the relationship of King James to Queen Anne, who had died in 1619.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Bacon writes explicitly in the present about the past. Looking back at Henry VII and Elizabeth, Bacon imposed the fiction of Henry's lack of loving loyalty to her, drawing on the reality of his experience with King James. He thereby constructs his 'fained history'.

This discussion of history brings me back to Greene and a claim on the title-page of *Friar Bacon*: 'Made by *Robert Greene*'. The later quarto editions repeat this assertion as does the end of the play's text: '*Finis Friar Bacon, made by Robert Greene, Maister of Arts*'. Historian that he is, Greene makes clear his *construction* of the text. He has imposed a fiction on the historical world that he recalls: he has *made* history.<sup>38</sup> The claim on the title-page and at the end suggests self-consciousness on Greene's part about how he has proceeded and what he has accomplished. The word 'history' can also function as a verb: witness the only time that Shakespeare uses 'history' in this way, found in the Archbishop's speech in *Henry IV, Part Two* near the end of 4.1 where he characterizes Henry IV's likely reaction: 'therefore will he wipe his tables clean / And keep no telltale to his memory / That may repeat and *history* his loss / To new remembrance' (my emphasis, 201–4). This use, it turns out, is the only *oed* example in which 'history' as a verb is not passive. We can therefore see writing history as a *transitive* act. Greene *makes* a play and history.

The first major strand of history in the play focuses on the actual thirteenth-century prince, Edward, and the second, on a comic and romantic tale. The marriage of Margaret to Lacy, earl of Lincoln, may strike some as evidence of 'romantic nonsense'. But I find it not radically different from encountering Falstaff on the battlefield of Shrewsbury in *Henry IV, Part Two*, especially in 5.4, in which he springs from 'feigned' death to life, declaring that he has killed Hotspur, and carries him off in triumph — perhaps a triumph of 'fained history'!

The situation of Edward raises the essential political issue of *succession* — that is, the anticipated and desired succession of the throne's heir and his preparation for later succession through marriage. We need only recall a few of Shakespeare's histories to understand this issue, or even the late romances and their royal marriages that secure stability for the kingdoms. An orderly kingdom assures that child succeeds parent. Walsh has called attention to the use of the term 'prince of Wales' for Edward some ten times in the play,

a title that 'underlines his status as monarch-in-waiting', although the title applied to this Edward is anachronistic.<sup>39</sup> In the actual history of England's thirteenth century, Edward did indeed marry Eleanor of Castile in 1254, albeit in Spain rather than in England as the play indicates. Together they produced an heir who ultimately followed, Edward II, the first prince to gain the title 'prince of Wales'. (Indeed, they had sixteen children, most of whom did not survive into adulthood.) Greene obviously understands the basic outline of this century's political history and thus dramatizes the serious trajectory of Edward's successful marriage to Eleanor. As Walsh observes: 'the play focuses audience attention on Edward's becoming a lawful progenitor'.<sup>40</sup> This process secures succession and generates hope.

Edward's romantic infatuation with Margaret of Fressingfield complicates our understanding of his historical role: distraction, detour, debauchery, or narrative deception? I argue that Greene intends to amplify history with poetic expansion, thus anticipating Francis Bacon's concept of the relationship of poetry and history. This history endures not a breach but an expansion, like gold to airy thinness beat. As Sidney insists, 'the best of the Historian is subject to the Poet'.<sup>41</sup> I am suggesting that Greene chooses to discharge Edward's romantic energies into the Margaret fable, thereby providing us a glimpse into his heart — something that Greene does not, perhaps cannot do with regard to Eleanor. Their 'love' remains the predictable royal arrangement. When Eleanor enters the play in scene 4, she notes that King Henry has sent her 'Prince Edward's lovely *counterfeit*' (my emphasis, 4.22). She admires him for his military exploits. Indeed, she gives him a kind of 'history' when she notes his deeds: 'Edward's courageous resolution / Done at the Holy Land 'fore Damas' [Damascus] walls' (26–7). This myth-making does not, however, square with actual history. Edward, however, accepts Eleanor for what she represents: a union with the politically and militarily powerful region of Castile — not a counterfeit relationship exactly, but not a complete one either.

Edward enters the play, according to the opening stage direction, '*mal-contented*'. We soon learn from conversation with Lacy, earl of Lincoln and others the cause of Edward's agitation, namely, his attraction to the beautiful maid, Margaret. He's completely smitten with her. We need only hear Edward's lyrical language and excessive images to learn of his feelings, such as when he begins a speech: 'I tell thee, Lacy, that her sparkling eyes / Do lighten forth sweet love's alluring fire' (1.50–1). Such sentiment reaches a crescendo in the speech that begins, 'When as she swept like Venus through the

house, / And in her shape fast folded up my thoughts, / Into the milkhouse went I with the maid, / And there amongst the cream bowls she did shine / As Pallas 'mongst her princely huswifery' (72–6). This language contrasts sharply with the presumed location in rural Suffolk. In fact, the language provides a disjunction between the characters and their bucolic setting, which underscores the disparity between history and this romantic fiction. In terms of linguistic register, the court comes to the country. Margaret does not disappoint either; her language reflects learning, as when she first enters the play in scene 3 and encounters the disguised Lacy, who has been sent to woo in Edward's behalf. She says to Lacy: 'Phoebus is blithe, and frolic looks from heaven / As when he courted lovely Semele' (3.14–15). Her 'courtly' and learned language makes her all the more attractive, establishing her plausibility as a mate for a royal or noble person. Her beauty has evoked from Edward rich, if excessive, images. And Lacy does not trail behind, especially when he woos Margaret in his own right in scene 6, a spectacle that Bacon and Edward view in Oxford. Art, love, and politics converge.

The climactic moment for the intermingling of history and love comes in scene 8 in which Edward confronts Lacy and Margaret; in fact, he enters with sword drawn, ready to destroy their emerging love and to take Margaret by force. Edward asserts: 'I tell thee, Peggy, I will have thy loves. / Edward or none shall conquer Margaret' (8.51–2). But Margaret counters: 'Not all the wealth heaven's treasury affords, / Should make me leave Lord Lacy or his love' (72–3). And she focuses on the essential moral issue: 'Brave Prince of Wales, honored for royal deeds, / 'Twere sin to stain fair Venus' courts with blood. / Love's conquests ends, my lord, in courtesy' (84–6). Edward has no legitimate answer; thus, he finally relents in light of the love that Margaret and Lacy manifest for each other. Nobly, Edward leaves and will return to Oxford where the king is with Eleanor: 'Peggy, I must go see and view my wife; / I pray God I like her as I loved thee' (148–9). One might say that Edward leaves this romantic excursion in order to return to history.

When Eleanor and Edward meet in scene 12, Edward speaks seven apparently rehearsed lines — at least they come across that way — and she responds with five. That's the sum of their romantic courting. The king of Castile insists: 'Let's haste the day to honor up the rites' (12.21). The royal marriage will happen, but Edward leaves passionate love behind in Suffolk. Edward thus fulfils his historical and political role, but clearly his heart remains elsewhere in Greene's dramatic art.

Since Greene does not want to engage in deceptive history, he cannot allow Edward and Margaret to marry: even 'fained history' has to draw the line somewhere. Instead, Greene allows the historically inaccurate relationship between Lacy and Margaret to flourish and culminate in their marriage — a triumph of poetry over historical fidelity. They arrive at court in scene 16 at Edward's request, apparently to round off the royal marriage with a passionate, loving one. In fact, the opening stage direction of scene 16 brings in all the principal political/historical figures, including the German emperor, the king of Castile, and the English royalty and nobility, with Margaret arriving on the left hand of Eleanor.

Edward yields all 'honors unto Eleanor', as history constrains him to do. Margaret offers her 'orisons to mighty Jove' and pledges 'obedience and humble love' to Lacy (16.18, 23). Curiously, in her only speech Eleanor praises Margaret and welcomes her to court: 'I give thanks for Margaret to you all' (31). Neither she nor Edward speaks explicitly of love for one another; only Margaret gives voice to her love, directed to Lacy. She, as the focus of love, serves as the historical variable in the setting of this royal wedding, the poetic expansion of history.

The scene closes with Friar Bacon's prophetic speech, which envisions a time of great peace. How does the play reach this moment of Bacon's involvement? This magician figure derives from the thirteenth-century Franciscan friar, Roger Bacon. Bevington observes: 'Once again, Greene shows no interest in historical accuracy';<sup>42</sup> that is, we find another instance of 'bogus history'. Indeed, no evidence exists for the friar's dabbling in magic; rather, Roger Bacon gained renown for his *scientific* projects and his investigations of optics, astrology, and alchemy. Greene's representation of him comes in large measure from the anonymous sixteenth-century *The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon*. Greene echoes Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, probably performed in 1594, by adapting a source whose 'accuracy' he apparently accepts. Arguably, therefore, Greene reflects faithfully the history that he found; he just happened to be misled, just as later, for example, Shakespeare will use Greene's *Pandosto*, which led him to include the 'seacoast of Bohemia' in *The Winter's Tale*. As Greene may be glancing at Faustus in some of Bacon's actions, he thereby accurately reflects *literary* history.

At the end of the play's first scene, Prince Edward outlines his plan for wooing and winning Margaret, and he urges Lacy: 'Send letters speedily to Oxford of the news' (1.1.156). Then he announces that he will himself go to Oxford to the friar whose art 'Mayst make me lord of merry Fressingfield'

(167). Edward hopes by this two-pronged approach to secure Margaret's love. Clearly, he thinks that he needs Bacon's magical assistance, his 'art'. Thus the play's love plot will incorporate Bacon and create its own history. The second scene shows Bacon in his study with other scholars, who heap praise on him: 'Thou art read in magic's mystery', Burden says (2.14). They discuss Bacon's creation of the 'brazen head' and his plan to encircle England with a wall of brass, making the island impregnable against attack. Should Bacon be successful, these events will 'Eternize Friar Bacon for his art' (43). Meanwhile, he indulges in magical highjinks by conjuring the hostess from Henley and a devil figure. Such trivialization of Bacon's great powers parallels Faustus' similar acts.

Edward arrives in Oxford in scene 5 and encounters Bacon, who instantly sees through the prince's feeble attempt at disguise. Bacon says to Edward: 'Thou comest in post from merry Fressingfield, / Fact-fancied to the keeper's bonny lass, / To crave some succor of the jolly friar' (5.73–5). Bacon ominously observes the potential danger inherent in Lacy's task of wooing Margaret on Edward's behalf: 'But friends are men, and love can baffle lords. / The earl both woos and courts her for himself' (78–9). Bacon and Edward will go immediately to the friar's study where 'in a glass prospective I will show / What's done this day in merry Fressingfield' (105–6). The art of love as Edward intends to practice it now intersects with Bacon's love of magical art: two historical figures engaged in non-historical activity. Their histories intertwine in narrative fiction.

Scene 6 yokes the love story with Bacon's skill, the ability to see into the actions in far-off Suffolk from the safety of the Oxford study, all thanks to the 'glass' through which Bacon and Edward peer.<sup>43</sup> In a sense, the pair look into the narrative history being made in Fressingfield, Edward unable to do anything about the love expressed between Margaret and Lacy. In that way Edward resembles a historian, who can look into the past but cannot alter it. Bacon, on the other hand, through his magic can intervene. Greene has created a fascinating scene with multiple layers of fiction and history, a kind of play-within-the-play with Bacon and Edward as an 'audience' to the staging of events in Suffolk. The scene stirs the prince's passions, but the Fressingfield 'theatre' continues its performance, ignorant of this audience member's reaction. Edward gazes into the glass: 'I see the keeper's lovely lass appear / As bright-sun as the paramour of Mars, / Only attended by a jolly friar [Bungay]' (6.12–14). Edward sees through the glass clearly but finds dark actions, a betrayal of friendship. We, the larger audience, through theatre's

magic see and hear everything. When Lacy enters, Bacon tells Edward: 'Sit, still, my lord and mark the comedy' (48). But Edward sees no comedy; instead, he watches a history unfold, and it is not honourable.

In soliloquy, Lacy admits his love for Margaret and the moral problem that this creates for him: 'Recant thee, Lacy, thou art put in trust' (54). But he cannot. Margaret tries to slow things down: 'Love ought to creep as doth the dial's shade, / For timely ripe is rotten too too soon' (85–6). Startled, Edward remarks, 'How familiar they be, Bacon'; but Bacon instructs him to sit still and 'mark the sequel of their loves' (108–9). Fearful that the couple are about to kiss, Edward cries: 'Gog's wounds, Bacon, they kiss! I'll stab them' (127). Worried that the prince will destroy the glass, Bacon intervenes, reminding him that he cannot reach from Oxford to Suffolk. Finally, at Edward's insistence, Bacon uses magic to prevent Friar Bungay from marrying the couple on the spot. Indeed, a devil enters and carts Bungay off, to Edward's delight, as he now determines to go to Fressingfield himself, the action of scene 8, as discussed above.

As scene 8 presents a 'contest' for Margaret's love, so scene 9 offers a 'contest' at Oxford among magicians: first Bungay versus the German Vandermast, and then Bacon and Vandermast. Bungay conjures the appearance of a tree with a dragon shooting fire, and Vandermast counters by conjuring up Hercules, who appears in a lion's skin and begins to tear the branches of the tree. But with Bacon's entry in line 115, everything changes, as he exercises his superior 'art', first by transfixing Hercules and then dispatching the German back to his country. Bacon earns the king's praise: 'Bacon, thou hast honored England with thy skill, / And made fair Oxford famous by thine art' (9.165–6). In addition, this scene includes the first encounter between Edward and Eleanor, who exchange a mere ten lines of purported love, although noticeably Edward offers her only a 'welcome' (188). But Eleanor's father, Castile, has heard sufficient: 'And therefore, Edward, I accept thee here, / Without suspense as my adopted son' (199–200). The 'lovers' remain strangely reticent, as also later in scene 12. Scene 9 closes with Bacon offering everyone a stunningly sumptuous and sensuous meal. The friar has reached an apogee of magical power, which continues to intersect Prince Edward's love destiny. The remainder of the play questions the purpose and efficacy of Bacon's 'art'.

The contest between Lambert and Serlsby for Margaret's affection in scene 10 prefigures the friar's disintegration. Lambert calls her 'Suffolk's fair Helen and rich England's star', whose beauty conquers everyone (10.35). These

country squires offer Margaret wealth; she, however, remains steadfast to Lacy's love for her. But the post enters with a damning letter from Lacy in which he claims to have married a 'Spanish lady ... chief waiting woman to the Princess Eleanor' (131–2). By this false letter Lacy intends to test Margaret's love; clearly Lacy has read too many romances. Of course, she feels betrayed and determines to enter a nunnery — not exactly what Lacy had desired. Love appears to have collapsed, and in scene 11 so does Bacon's 'art'.

In this scene Greene adheres closely, to the point of quotation, to his historical source, the sixteenth-century *Famous Historie*. The playwright invents by constructing a parallel between the course of true love and Bacon's magical power. All the essential elements of scene 11 Greene has adapted from Roger Bacon's presumed history — faithful, not bogus. This memorable scene, which eventually manifests itself in a pictorial representation on the title-page of the 1630 quarto of the play, involves the brazen head and the vigil that anticipates hearing the head speak. Alas, Bacon places Miles, the rather dim-witted servant, in charge, as he goes off to sleep. Instead of expected profound wisdom, the head utters only the three phrases: 'Time is, Time was, and Time is past'. Thunder and lightning then break the head, and Bacon's hopes come crashing down, as he observes: 'My life, my fame, my glory, all are past. / Bacon, the turrets of thy hope are ruin'd down' (11.95–6). Seven years' labour has come to naught. 'But now the braves of Bacon hath an end' (112), the friar laments. He foresees a dismal future. Margaret exists in a similar position; thus, the play's multiple histories not only intersect, but also they parallel.

The Lambert-Serlsby pursuit of Margaret takes a bizarre and tragic twist in scene 13, which also demonstrates the collapse of Bacon's 'art'. Bacon and Bungay gather in the study as Bacon laments the destruction of the brazen head. Bacon offers a prescient comment: 'I find this day shall fall out ominous. / Some deadly act shall 'tide me ere I sleep' (13.13–14). When the sons of Lambert and Serlsby enter and choose to look through the prospective glass at their fathers, echoing scene 6, Bacon adds: 'Bungay, I smell there will be a tragedy' (36). (This foreboding contrasts with Bacon's assurance to Edward in scene 6 that he by looking through the glass will find a comedy; these contrasts underscore the play's problematic genre up to this point.) The unnamed scholar sons see their fathers fight and kill each other, which in turn leads to the sons' stabbing of each other. Bacon says: 'See, friar, where the fathers both lie dead. / Bacon, thy magic doth effect his massacre' (74–5). With that assessment, Bacon breaks the glass and repents, the sort of recognition that

Faustus never achieves. We may be wondering whatever happened to the play's 'cheerful romantic nonsense'.

Bacon at the scene's end pledges: 'I'll spend the remnant of my life / In pure devotion, praying to my God / That he would save what Bacon vainly lost' (106–8). Bacon, in such speeches, regularly addresses himself in the third person, as if rendering judgment on some part of himself, presumably his 'art' and not his complete person. Earlier praised as one who will be 'eternized' for his art, Bacon now must pick up the remnants of his character from the broken shards of the brazen head and prospective glass. Bacon's narrative and spiritual trajectory moves from success to failure, resembling that of Faustus, but it does, fortunately, lead to genuine repentance, making his appearance in the play's last scene plausible and credible.

By scene 16, Edward has married Eleanor, and Lacy has rescued Margaret from the nunnery and married her. Margaret now serves Eleanor. Amidst all this joy, Bacon stands out; indeed, the king asks him: 'why stands Friar Bacon here so mute?' (16.35). And he answers: 'Repentant for the follies of my youth, / That magic's secret mysteries misled' (36–7). Confronting the sober Bacon, the king decides that he has some power of prophecy; thus, he asks: 'Why, Bacon, what strange events shall happen to this land?' (40). The friar may have abandoned his 'art', but he retains a prescient understanding of the future, which will unfold in historical time. Bacon observes: 'I find by deep prescience of mine art ... / That here where Brute did build his Troynovant, / From forth the royal garden of a king / Shall flourish out so rich and fair a bud' (42–6). In order to forecast the future, Bacon gains credence from the country's mythic past. As stated earlier, the doubtful story of Brutus's establishing Britain had been questioned from the early sixteenth century, but Bacon — perhaps Greene himself — retained faith in the presumed history. As Peter Mortenson observes: 'The Trojan history and its aftermath culminate here in the glorious renewal of England's garden: Eleanor-Europa is united with Edward-England in Albion'.<sup>44</sup>

The brightness that Bacon foresees 'shall deface proud Phoebus' flower, / And over-shadow Albion with her leaves' (47–8). Finally, 'wealthy favors plenty shall enrich / The strond that gladdened wand'ring Brute to see, / And peace from heaven shall harbor in these leaves' (53–5). 'Venus' hyacinth', 'Pallas' bay', and 'Ceres' carnation, in consort with those, / Shall stoop and wonder at Diana's rose' (58–62) — the triumph of Queen Elizabeth. From Brutus through civil wars to the Tudors and specifically Elizabeth the country has moved. Not surprisingly, King Henry cries out: 'This prophecy is

mystical' (63) — whatever its degree of historical accuracy.<sup>45</sup> By calling it 'mystical', Henry acknowledges that he finds it enigmatic and esoteric. The theatre audience might respond similarly and yet rejoice. Certainly King Henry does: 'Thus glories England over all the west' (76).

Walsh takes a particularly grim view of this closing prophecy. He writes, for example: the play 'uses prophecy ascribed to the past not merely to cast an ominous shadow over the nation and its aging ruler, but to cast this shadow *and* direct its audience to concentrate on the realities of the present as a means to prepare for and produce a desirable future'.<sup>46</sup> I think that we cannot presume to understand how an audience might have responded to the play's ending nor imagine that the play expects this audience to 'produce a desirable future'. Since Friar Bacon speaks from the historical thirteenth century, we might regard the 'accuracy' of his prophecy up to the glorious reign of Elizabeth as quite remarkable. Walsh concludes: 'The play's final speech at first appears as an encomium in praise of Elizabeth and the halcyon order she inaugurates. But in fact, it is an *elegy* for the twilight of the Tudors, the ruling house whose extinction was well within sight for the English in the last decade of the sixteenth century'.<sup>47</sup> Bacon's speech, however, does not conclude the play: King Henry's follows with a joyful tone. Greene probably writes on the heels of the Spanish Armada; thus, much hope and pride abound for the country, not yet consumed with worry about their aging queen. Early audiences and readers of Bacon's prophetic speech might have more readily found confidence in their country's history that has brought them to this moment.<sup>48</sup>

In the play's closing moments history and prophecy coalesce, as they often do in Shakespeare's histories, as, for example, in Cranmer's prophecy in *Henry VIII*.<sup>49</sup> I think that Bacon's prophecy underscores the historical function of this last scene as it reverses the order of the brazen head's words. I suggest that the opening part of the prophecy emphasizes the 'Time is past' part of the earlier oracular statement, that is, from the beginning of the prophecy to about line 49, as Bacon reaches as far back as one can in British history to refer to the Brutus-Trojan settlement. The next several lines embrace the 'Time was' statement when Bacon refers to the settlement of civil wars, presumably referring to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century political and military activities. The final movement of Bacon's prophecy illustrates 'Time is', as it brings everything up to the present moment in the sixteenth century. The prophecy thus encapsulates in abbreviated form Britain's history with Time as the marker of change.<sup>50</sup> Greene seems to anticipate T.S. Eliot's opening

lines in the *Burnt Norton* section of *Four Quartets*: 'Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past'.<sup>51</sup> The workings of Time remain mystical. Greene's audience participates in the completion of Friar Bacon's prophecy, which is simultaneously anticipated and fulfilled. The conclusion of the play's love pursuits and the weddings herald a new time of peace, as Bacon reaches back to England's presumed historical past to heighten the play's link to thirteenth-century England.

Greene here practices what I will call 'genre inclusion' — the sort of thing that Sidney disdained. In scene 6, as discussed above, Friar Bacon urges Prince Edward to 'Sit still, my lord, and mark the *comedy*' (my emphasis, 6.48) as they view the love pursuits in Fressingfield. Then in scene 13, the atmosphere darkens ominously in the conflict between Lambert and Serlsby and their sons, noted by Bacon's comment to Friar Bungay: 'I smell there will be a *tragedy*' (my emphasis, 13.36). The play's final scene highlights the functioning of *history*. In this understanding Greene unwittingly anticipates how the editors of Shakespeare's folio arrange the plays by genre. Greene's recipe for writing history includes a pinch of historical fact, a measure of historical figures, a dash of romantic fantasy, and a dose of magic. Stir and shake, and we end with an 'honorable historie', carrying its own truth or, more exactly, *truths*. Greene might ask with that wonderfully ahistorical, 'bogus' Falstaff: 'Is not the truth the truth?' (*IH4*, 2.4.220–1). In fiction many 'truths' abound, only some of which may be historically accurate. History is a mansion of many rooms with various entrances and exits, comprising multiple genres. Instead of a 'bogus', 'warped', or 'fraudulent' history, Greene in *Friar Bacon* has created a playful history.

## Notes

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- 1 My information derives from the report by Corey Kilgannon in the *New York Times*, 24 December 2011.
- 2 The painting is called 'Washington's Crossing' (2011).
- 3 David Bevington, *English Renaissance Drama* (New York, 2002), 129.
- 4 Lawrence Danson suggests in *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres* (Oxford, 2000) that 'it would be only a small exaggeration to say that "history play" is the only genre he [Shakespeare] actually invented' (87). If Danson is referring to Shakespeare's English histories that claim may be mainly true, but as Greene and others show, the idea

- of history functioning in a play did not originate with Shakespeare. This assessment risks once again privileging Shakespeare to the neglect of other playwrights.
- 5 William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part Two*, ed. Claire McEachern (New York, 2000), 3.1.180.
  - 6 For an excellent discussion see D.R. Woolf, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England* (Toronto, 1990).
  - 7 All quotations from the play come from *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, ed. Daniel Seltzer (Lincoln, 1963).
  - 8 Percy Z. Round, 'Greene's Materials for *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*', *Modern Language Review* 21.1 (1926), 19–23.
  - 9 In his edition of the play, Seltzer helpfully surveys Greene's use of sources, xii–xvi.
  - 10 Brian Walsh, "'Deep Prescience': Succession and the Politics of Prophecy in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*", *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 23 (2010), 63–85.
  - 11 Frank Ardolino, 'Greene's Use of the History of Oxford in *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*', *American Notes & Queries* 18.2 (2005), 20–5.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 20–1.
  - 13 See, for example, the Norman Rabkin and Russell Fraser anthology, *Drama of the English Renaissance: The Tudor Period* (New York, 1976). David Bevington in his anthology *English Renaissance Drama* gives the complete title only in a note.
  - 14 For more material about Shakespeare's titles, see Thomas L. Berger, "'Opening Titles Miscreate": Some Observations on the Titling of Shakespeare's "Works"', D.C. Greetham (ed.), *The Margins of the Text* (Ann Arbor, 1997), 155–69.
  - 15 Peter Berek, 'Genres, Early Modern Theatrical Title Pages, and the Authority of Print', Marta Straznicky (ed.), *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England* (Amherst, 2006), 159.
  - 16 *Ibid.*, 162.
  - 17 *Ibid.*, 164.
  - 18 *Ibid.*, 168.
  - 19 Bevington, *English Renaissance Drama*, 129. Let me make clear that I have unsurpassed respect for my friend David Bevington, and I am being playful about his statement.
  - 20 E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London, 1944).
  - 21 Bevington, *English Renaissance Drama*, 130.
  - 22 Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, rev. ed. (London, 1965), 25.
  - 23 *Ibid.*
  - 24 *Ibid.*, 269.

- 25 Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, quoted from O.B. Hardison (ed.), *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance* (New York, 1963), 201.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Frances E. Dolan (New York, 2000), 3.3.17.
- 28 Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, quoted from *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*, 206.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, quoted from *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*, 226.
- 31 D.R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), 26.
- 32 Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, *English Literary Criticism*, 226.
- 33 Quoted in Woolf, *Reading History*, 24.
- 34 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978); Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980); Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (New York, 1985); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York, 1988).
- 35 Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 10.
- 36 Ibid, 23.
- 37 David M. Bergeron, 'Bacon's *Henry VII*: Commentary on King James I', *Albion* 24 (1992), 17–26. .
- 38 I make a similar point in 'Shakespeare Makes History: 2 *Henry IV*', *Studies in English Literature* 31 (1991), 231–45.
- 39 Walsh, "Deep Prescience", 70.
- 40 Ibid, 70.
- 41 Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, quoted from *English Literary Criticism*, 115.
- 42 Bevington, *English Renaissance Drama*, 132.
- 43 While this prospective glass is quite fanciful, it may also reflect Roger Bacon's actual interest in optics.
- 44 Peter Mortenson, 'Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay: Festive Comedy and "Three-Form'd Luna"', *English Literary Renaissance* 2 (1972), 207.
- 45 Walsh, "Deep Prescience", 67, suggests that Henry's response of 'mystical' means that 'he has no interpretation'. But I see no particular reason why the king should have an 'interpretation'. He registers an emotional response.
- 46 Ibid, 64.
- 47 Ibid, 71.
- 48 I admire much in Walsh's compelling interpretation of the play, but I find that his analysis of Bacon's prophecy overlooks Greene's cheerful tone in the play's final

scene. Whether the big issues of the country's future under their aging monarch entered the heads of audience members is impossible to say.

- 49 Walsh also makes the link to Cranmer's prophecy (80–2), which he finds more hopeful because it 'intimates futurity' (82) — no elegy here.
- 50 David Scott Kastan has written effectively about Time's intersection in history in *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (Hanover, NH, 1982).
- 51 T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton* in *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950* (New York, 1958), 117.