

Rhetoric on the Mind

Rhetoric, the Passions, and Memory

in Francis Bacon and John Donne

by

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Synopsis

This thesis examines some of the writing of Francis Bacon and John Donne. It studies their rhetorical practices with reference to early modern beliefs about how the mind works. Thus it explores the connections between their rhetorical activities and various broad conceptions of cognitive activity such as mental image formation, reasoning and passionate feeling. It explores especially those connections made within the theoretical traditions of rhetoric and faculty psychology that Bacon and Donne inherited. Having done so, it puts the writings of both men into that context and tries to extend understanding both of what was available to them in constructing an approach to their audience's cognitive capabilities on particular occasions, and of their own self-awareness of the processes of rhetorical planning.

In identifying the connections early modern theorists and practitioners made between certain rhetorical skills and their understanding of the mind's functions, I identify three kinds of rhetoric, each of which says something respectively about how to engage a reader's capacity for mental image formation, reasoning, and passionate feeling. They are what shall be called the "enargetic", "thetical", and "tropical" resources. "Enargetic" describes the kind of skills that could be connected to mental image making, "thetical" the skills for activating the faculty of reason, and "tropical" the skills for managing emotional contexts. Each of these intersections between rhetoric and the mind combine. Even more significantly though, for the sake of understanding what Bacon and Donne are doing in particular texts, it is the faculty of memory that is central to each of the three, and their combinations. That is to say, each resource – the enargetic, thetical, and tropical – is a means of accessing and challenging things that were familiar to their readers and listeners. The fact of always having to deal the familiar, even when pointedly hoping to challenge it, opens up questions about how writers such as Bacon and Donne attacked various problems related to using familiar things to challenge other familiar things. It also opens up questions about what might account for the differences we detect in their divergent approaches to that challenge.

Their combinations of the enargetic, thetical, and tropical rhetorics can be connected, I argue, to the interests, or 'oughts', that Bacon and Donne were most concerned with. In Bacon's

case, the most significant is his lifelong concern to get people using the ‘right’ method. In Donne’s case, it is his never-ending quest to belong. Such oughts, or characteristic views about how things should be, drive, to a significant degree, the uses of the three rhetorical resources. But to the extent that such oughts define the different stances taken toward the expected cognition of readers and listeners, they also define the very choices that Bacon and Donne make about what familiar things to make reference to. Their different oughts offer us a critical perspective on their different ‘styles’ of rhetorical practice, styles understood in terms beyond just diction and structure.

Statement of Candidature

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Rhetoric on the Mind: Rhetoric, the Passions, and Memory in Francis Bacon and John Donne” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Introduction

Two Shakespearean moments point to the questions I wish to take up here in this study of Francis Bacon, John Donne, and rhetoric. When Iago first plants the suspicion of infidelity in Othello's mind, he first whets Othello's appetite for cogitation with an infuriating reticence, something to do with his wife and his lieutenant Cassio. Iago then asks Othello to link up the known fact of Desdemona's willingness to deceive her father, with an 'honest' suspicion about Cassio's guilt. Replying, then, to what we infer is a visibly affected Othello, Iago says "But I do see you're moved. / I am to pray you not to strain my speech / To grosser issues..."¹ Painfully ironic, it is exactly the "straining" of "grosser issues" that Iago strives to activate in Othello's mind so that his persuasive poisons will take effect. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the aggressive 'lovers' Benedick and Beatrice are tricked back into affection by their friends, who speak of the nice things about each while the other is hidden but listening intently. Hero and Ursula speak the virtues of Benedick and the vices of Beatrice while the latter sits nearby. Hero, attempting to prick Beatrice's heart with the arrows of Cupid, claims of Beatrice that "She cannot love, / Nor take no shape nor project of affection".² Hero means that Beatrice cannot even shape a conception of what it would be to love. Ironically, of course, she knows perfectly well that Beatrice is able to perform those mental activities, for the shaping and making of love's "projects" is precisely what Hero is striving to activate in Beatrice's mind.

Given the contexts of persuasion, Shakespeare's metaphors for mental action at those two moments – straining, issuing, shaping – encourage us to question what underlying beliefs about mental activity were (and could be) connected to carrying out acts of persuasion, and how so. What did those strainings, issuings, and shapings, as engendered by rhetoric, actually mean in terms of renaissance psychology? More importantly for the present purposes, what

¹ *Othello*, 3.3.221-23; text and line numbers are from *The Oxford Shakespeare*.

² *Much Ado About Nothing*, 3.1.54-55.

sort of beliefs about the mind's functions shaped Bacon and Donne's efforts to move and inspire their audiences, not to mention challenge things that were all too familiar?

In one sense, that is not difficult to answer. Their concepts of mental function were indelibly shaped by the (largely Aristotelian) faculty psychology tradition. People have an imagination, a reason, and passions, Donne might have said. They form mental images of things at different levels of complexity, they perceive analogous relationships between them and then reason about them, and they feel passionately toward them, Bacon might have replied. But how were any of those beliefs relevant to rhetoric? What connections can be made between them? Where did Bacon and (or) Donne derive their own understanding of such connections from? In other words, how did psychological ideas intersect, when it came right down to moving people, with the sort of rhetorical skills that Bacon and Donne learnt at university both from ancients like Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, and from near contemporaries like Agricola, Erasmus, and Wilson? We may also ask, legitimately I think, what Bacon and Donne's part in renaissance England's stream of rhetorical activity tells us about the mind's responses to rhetoric?

This study, then, is two things, closely linked together. First, it is an examination of early modern understandings of human cognition as they developed, in particular, within the rhetorical tradition. By 'cognition' I mean not merely the epistemological processes of forming knowledge, but also other mental activities that extend from and contribute to knowledge, and to reformulations of it. I shall be interested, especially, in three widely recognized and broadly conceived mental activities, or processes, which were of much significance in the search for rhetorical power: forming mental images, using the reason, and experiencing passionate feelings. But more specifically, the study applies the interconnections between rhetoric and cognition, thus broadly conceived, to our understanding of Bacon and Donne's rhetorical practices. I shall try to describe those practices from the point of view of the resources for linking up rhetoric and human cognition that were available to them.

Many scholars have offered valuable interpretations of early modern literature from the perspective of human "cognition". In doing so, however, they have tended either to utilize

perspectives from modern cognitive science, to the neglect of perspectives from the faculty psychology tradition, or have tended to focus specifically on things that tell us little about the rhetorical self-understanding of important writers like Bacon and Donne and their rhetorical power across multiple genres. Mary Thomas Crane's *Shakespeare's Brain* makes us see Shakespeare's creations in terms of his embodied mind, offering a "materiality of the author" from a "cognitive" perspective that helpfully challenges the problematic tendency to erase the authorial agency associated with the historicisms of Foucault and Greenblatt.³ Along with Ellen Spolsky's *Word vs Image*, Crane's approach offers a range of ways to understand authorship as well as the functions that literary texts could perform, such as the "cognitive hunger" for images in the wake of reformation iconoclasm.⁴ But none of this tells us about an author's rhetorical choices, the things they decided to do, with what limited agency they had, in order to maximize the chances of being rhetorically successful – whatever that meant in a variety of individuated contexts. The embodied renaissance mind is one aspect of the variety of things that constitute authorship, but not, of course, the only one. The concepts of mental function that Bacon and Donne's own embodied minds inherited are just as important as their neural networks for understanding what they are doing as authors.

There is much value in adopting perspectives from modern cognitive science and in setting those perspectives alongside historical ones, as both Kinney and Cockcroft do, though that can often mean restricting the focus significantly.⁵ Kinney's study keeps what he calls "Aristotle's legacy" on cognition – that is, 'knowing' – in dialogue with perspectives on the same from neuroscience, but it is entirely focused on Shakespeare's drama and on one particular part of what may be called 'cognition'.⁶ Cockcroft's study of "rhetorical affect" links the Aristotelian proofs – ethos, pathos, and logos – with the memory structures of

³ Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain*, p. 6.

⁴ Spolsky, p. x-xii.

⁵ In terms of linking old and new perspectives, one might imagine the value and interest say of linking Gentner, Holyoak, and Kokinov's *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science* to the place theory of someone like Rudolph Agricola, and its intellectual sources in Aristotle and Cicero, where the practical reasoning required for rhetorical practice develops by searching for analogies between, say, the concepts of 'man' and 'animal', or between 'man' and 'rational'.

⁶ Kinney, pp. 1-24.

modern schema theory.⁷ His purpose is that “in applying modern analytical methods to early modern texts, we should be better placed to understand their persuasiveness than the authors themselves.”⁸ His selection of recent cognitive theory aims to “shed the most light on the effective use of *pathos*”.⁹ I shall take up two things left aside here. I shall extend my analysis of affect, or passion, to include mental images and rationality. But also, rather than considering just the “effectiveness” of Bacon and Donne’s persuasions, I apply the rhetorical tradition’s discourses of the mind to Bacon and Donne’s own self-awareness of what they were trying to do in particular texts. That kind of self-reflexive thought potentially adds something to our own understanding of what we are doing to people’s minds when we try to persuade them. The scope of this work, then, means focusing more broadly on other cognitive activities but more narrowly on ancient and early modern understandings of them.

The scholarship above, with its focus on epistemology, foregrounds the profoundly fundamental importance of the formation of mental images in Aristotle’s psychology. The centrality of mental images, and the role they played in understandings of rational thought, has not gone unnoticed by earlier criticism. Studies of the renaissance image, though, by Rosemond Tuve, Patrick Grant, and Christopher Collins each in their different ways paid much more attention to the status of the image as a poetic phenomenon than as a rhetorical one, that is, as an image intended to do a certain job or jobs on a particular occasion.¹⁰ But literature, especially for Bacon and Donne, was rhetorical, in the sense that it did things. In Donne’s case, all too often, and all too painfully, it didn’t do things.¹¹ In what sense then were all the connections between images, rationality, and the passions, of use to Bacon and Donne when working out how to move minds toward the ‘right’ place?

⁷ See Cockcroft, pp. 12-20; the discussion here also draws on schema theory from Schank’s *Dynamic Memory*.

⁸ Cockcroft, p. 11.

⁹ Cockcroft, p. 11.

¹⁰ See Tuve’s *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, Grant’s *Images and Ideas*, and Collins’s *Poetics of the Mind’s Eye*.

¹¹ I refer to his attempts to use his poetry to show his mettle within the courtly coterie as one who could be trusted in government employment, an objective I take up in particular when coming to the *Holy Sonnets*.

Scholars linking Bacon and (or) Donne's texts to the rhetorical tradition have also tended to neglect the psychological elements of that tradition, even when they have explicitly focused on such texts as rhetorical artifacts. Many debates about Bacon and rhetoric focus, for example, on his view of the art itself, and in relation to ancient and renaissance traditions.¹² While extremely useful for understanding the complicated relationship between the traditions of rhetoric and Bacon's own views, such work gets us no closer to understanding how we may interpret the actual combinations of rhetorical skills Bacon displays in texts like *New Atlantis*, *Essayes or Counsellis*, the parliamentary speeches, and the *Novum Organum*, and why he made those choices on a particular occasion. Similarly, older debates about Donne and rhetoric discussed the logical appeal of his poems in particular, with little attention to other works like the *Essayes in Divinity* and the sermons, and almost completely without a sense of Donne's having a particular audience or occasion.¹³ Two recent – and excellent – monographs, those of Nelson and Shami, have sought to do this, but both are concentrated discussions of Donne's sermons only.¹⁴

Bacon and Donne themselves offer an interesting window onto the interconnections between rhetoric and cognition in early modern English writing. Between them their writing spans multiple genres except drama. Their careers were almost exactly contemporary. They seem to have known each other, and moved in similar circles.¹⁵ The rhetorical resources they

¹² On Bacon's understanding of and relation to the rhetorical handbook tradition, the main studies are Wallace (1943), Vickers (1968), Jardine, Cogan, Zappen (1975) and (1985), and Gore. For all his insights, Briggs' discussion of Bacon's "rhetoric of nature" also looks very broadly on the connections between Bacon's main project, the rhetoric tradition, and his concept of nature as a "code" that has to be broken, p. 11.

¹³ See for example, Empson, Sloan (1963), and Sullivan (1982). Sloan's *Humanist Rhetoric* looks at Donne the renaissance controversialist rhetorician but more in terms of his relationship with that part of the tradition than in terms of what he's doing on particular occasions.

¹⁴ Likewise, Skouen studies Donne's use of a "rhetoric of passion" but only in the communicative contexts of the *Holy Sonnets*.

¹⁵ Following the evidence of a letter of Donne's from the Tobie Matthew Collection, p. 308, Bald, p. 161, notes that it was Bacon who first introduced Donne to Lord Hay, the Earl of Carlisle, who, apparently, put in a good word for Donne to the king at least once.

drew on derived from the same humanist education system.¹⁶ And yet their career directions, interests, and rhetorical styles became highly divergent. That divergence is interesting because it highlights what two very different people did with the same tradition. The divergence becomes even more interesting to the extent that it is capable of reconverging at times. As Killeen and Forshaw's collection makes clear, readings of nature and readings of scripture shared certain "hermeneutic methods", methods for reading two distinct but deeply related "books".¹⁷ Bacon's procedures in reading nature and Donne's in reading scripture and tradition, and their means of communicating it, potentially relate to each another. Thus, a comparative study of Bacon and Donne's rhetorical practices offers a particularly interesting perspective on divergent applications of common sources.

In this study I make one important claim that closely relates to and in some cases underlies others. That is that any attempt by Bacon or Donne to activate and get control of people's mental images, reasoning, and emotions, is also, implicitly, an activation of familiar remembered material. Memory, as chapter one will try to show, is absolutely central to the connections made by rhetorical theorists between particular verbal skills and the functions of the soul's different faculties that rhetorical skills engage. The skills for evoking mental images call on remembered image fragments. The skills for activating tendentious kinds of reasoning involve remembered commonplaces. Those for generating, or mitigating, passions involve both remembered emotional scripts and particular remembered images and ideas which will bring about certain perceptions of objects around which the desired emotional response can be developed.

The first four chapters explore various implications of this idea: that is, the idea that making use of mental images, reasoning, and the passions, means engaging the familiar. In chapter one I explore some of the main writings in the rhetorical tradition Bacon and Donne inherited in order to search for the kinds of connections commonly made between rhetorical

¹⁶ Bacon was at Cambridge between 1573 and 1575 (Jardine and Stewart, pp. 34-35) and Donne was at Oxford from 1584 for the next few years (Bald, p. 537).

¹⁷ See Killeen and Forshaw, p. 1: the collection explores the ways in which "natural philosophy emerged from and was imbricated with the practices of biblical exegesis". On the "two books", see also Harrison.

skills, or sets of skills, and the cognitive activities expected of the audience when deploying them. To some extent, then, the discussion focuses more on the culture of rhetorical practice that Bacon and Donne's texts participate in and the way their rhetorical power is conducted, than on polemics about what such texts 'mean' more widely. However, I think that studying the texts as rhetorical artifacts does contribute to our understanding of their meaning. Chapter two compares Bacon's *New Atlantis* and some of Donne's *Verse Letters* and the attempts there to evoke mental images and utilize them for the particular purposes of those texts. Drawing on the connections identified in chapter one, I shall call the skill set for evoking mental images an "enargetic" rhetoric, a skill set involving more than just enargeia. Chapter three compares rhetorical engagements of the reasoning faculty in Bacon's *Essayes or Counsels Civill and Morall* and Donne's *Essayes in Divinity*. The skills displayed there for compressing arguments and mobilizing them into new orientations I shall call a "thetical" rhetoric. Coming back to pathos, chapter four looks at the relationship between amplification and passionate feeling, and the attempts by Donne and Bacon to generate and make use of it in their public speaking. The range of skills involved there I shall call a "tropical" rhetoric.

In each case, the "enargetic", the "thetical", and the "tropical" rhetorics are ways of considering the nexus between rhetorical skills and rhetorical purposes, viewed psychologically. They are not, I stress, just one thing in each case, but instead are ways of describing how a given rhetorical maneuver functions in its persuasive context. Some skills, such as the use of rhetorical questions, for example, might serve a purpose that makes them a thetical rather than tropical or enargetic in that particular purposive context, and that will depend on what kind of cognitive activity we are linking them to. The goal then is to attain deeper understanding of the processes that lead to the construction of the texts by Bacon and Donne by linking what we know about their political contexts to what we know about the traditions that both writers inherited, traditions that shaped their thinking about rhetorical skills and psychological processes. In summary, each of the three rhetorics are ways of describing the resources available to Donne and Bacon, and other early modern writers, for moving mental image construction, rational thought, and passionate feeling in hearers and readers. Of course, the rhetorics combine too, and they combine in different ways for both writers.

While the combination happens in all the texts I discuss here, chapters five and six both widen and narrow the focus by looking at how all the enargetic, thetical, and tropical rhetorics work together in more detail. Each of them focuses on a text by Bacon or Donne that represents a long term life project. In the case of “project-Bacon”, chapter five examines the *Novum Organum* in detail. In terms of project-Donne, chapter six takes on the *Holy Sonnets*. Both projects, and the texts employed to advance them, involve a separate view about how the world *ought* to be. For Bacon, people ought to do natural philosophy in the ‘right’ way. There are of course other values involved in Bacon’s natural philosophy project, not the least of which is the ‘value’ of possessing greater power, but the desire to get the method right is, I argue, one that significantly shapes his rhetoric in *Novum Organum* and even in other texts less obviously connected to the project. For Donne, it is that he, John Donne, ought to belong to the community that befits him. This is a guiding ought for much of Donne’s life, a point often made, especially up to 1615, when he was ordained, and explains much of his rhetorical style in many texts including the *Holy Sonnets*. My use of ‘ought’ as a noun is self-consciously distinct from alternatives like ‘agenda’ or ‘ideology’.¹⁸ Given the political baggage associated with them, such alternatives obscure the fact that project-Donne and project-Bacon are driven by very particular views about what is ‘good’. Both projects did political work, of course, but the emphasis here is on how a view about something ‘good’ translates into rhetorical power. The value of belonging to a particular community is not a ‘good’ that Donne can afford to forget. Likewise, the value of self-consistency and the eradication of idolatrous reading is also not a value Bacon can forget about or deconstruct, since it underlies his project by his own admission.

In both the *Novum Organum* and the *Holy Sonnets*, Bacon and Donne’s oughts do not just make use of what is familiar to their readers but also come sharply up against familiar things. Each of the three rhetorics is a place from which to challenge the familiar because each is an activation of familiar things within the soul’s activities. When making the unfamiliar familiar, Bacon and Donne’s different combinations of the enargetic, thetical, and tropical rhetorics mean they have resources for putting some familiar things up against others. For

¹⁸ It also reflects the ‘is’ and ‘ought’ distinction described by Hume in the *Treatise* 3.1.1.

example, a familiar idea may be challenged with otherwise familiar mental images in the attempt to make some other unfamiliar thing clearer. Or, a familiar passionate response toward an object might be challenged and channeled into a different one, by using some familiar mental image of something else to reorient the listener's perception of that object, a move that has the potential to alter the passion. The familiar can certainly be 'idolotrous' for Bacon, but at the same time a philosopher always uses it to some extent when communicating with others. Thus a key problem is how to find a rhetorical style that negotiates the tension. The 'ought' of method thus has shaping power because it makes claims on Bacon's own rhetorical practice in the *Novum Organum*. While Donne is less belaboured with the problem of self-consistency than Bacon is, in his *Holy Sonnets* he also finds himself up against something all too familiar: the problematic and complicated picture that people have of him. Donne started to see the 'compromises' of his marriage and background as stumbling blocks on the road to promotion because of the picture of him that they engendered. The rhetoric of project-Donne then principally involves the challenge of taking apart those familiar views of him and encouraging certain modifications through his clever manipulations of religious personhood. The 'ought' of belonging is driving and shaping here the process as well as the style he adopts in doing it.

The differences of 'ought' may even turn out to be a productive way of comparing their 'styles' of rhetorical practice, though such a question, and its answer, may be less confidently asked and answered. It would be to argue that in project-Bacon the ought of right method not only determines the combinations of enargetic, thetical and tropical resources, but also the very way he approaches what is familiar to people. For project-Donne it would be to say that the ought of belonging determines the same things but shapes them differently. If we are to compare Bacon and Donne's rhetorical 'styles' in that way, it involves comparing more than their diction and structures. It means comparing their different approaches to audience, and the reasons for those different approaches. Such a 'cognitive' view of style itself draws particularly on the work of Thomas and Turner, who conceive of style not simply as "verbal skills", but as the "conceptual stands" that writers (or speakers) take toward certain fundamental questions about who it is who is speaking and to whom, and about the nature of

the language being exchanged. The answers to those questions define a style.¹⁹ The idea of a style deriving from the writer's "stance" becomes clearer when Thomas and Turner write, for example, that "a bad conversationalist may have a very high level of verbal skills but perform poorly because he does not conceive of conversation as distinct from monologue".²⁰ I wish to argue here that both Bacon and Donne are very far from being the bad conversationalists that Thomas and Turner describe. Instead they are brilliant communicators whose different views about how things ought to be in relation to others define the differences in their rhetorical styles.

I account for Bacon and Donne's rhetorical practice to a large extent by reference to the context of early modern psychology as it developed within the rhetorical tradition, however, my interest in their 'oughts' implies also a certain intentionalism. The shaping forces on Bacon and Donne's rhetorical forms are both contextual and intentional. The intentionality and purpose I attribute to them draws in particular from the moderate view of intentionalism developed by Mark Bevir and called variously "weak intentionalism" and "postfoundational" intentionalism.²¹ Such an intentionalism allows for an exploration of the philosophically defensible middle ground between a sheer textualism, on the one hand, in which any concept the historian has of writerly agency always falls back into the textuality of his or her own presuppositions or the textuality of the social forces controlling the past writer's productions, and, on the other hand, a (largely discredited) foundationalism, in which the past writer is conceived as some sort of controlling entity working independently of social contexts. Much of the philosophical contestation of Bevir's attempt to explore this middle ground has either misunderstood his attempt to expand on the two options or, instead, found productive collaborative links with his approach.²² For example, Robin Dunford identifies the

¹⁹ Thomas and Turner, pp. 9-27. This way of talking style also distinguishes my discussion from earlier debates about prose style, such as are familiar from writings by Croll, Lewalski, and even Vickers' *Renaissance Prose*. For another set of approaches to cognition and style, see the collection edited by Jeffries, McIntyre, and Bousfield.

²⁰ Thomas and Turner, p. 3.

²¹ See Bevir, *Logic*, pp. 31-77 and "How to be", p. 210.

²² See Vivienne Brown's early attack on Bevir, his response in "How to be", and her reply to that with "Historical Interpretation".

similarities between the “weak” intentionality of Bevir and rejections of the “fully autonomous” subject accomplished both by Foucault and Deleuze.²³ The sufficient stability of the subject required even for there to be a writerly intentionality for the historian to find, on both anti-foundationalist ‘sides’, coheres around what Bevir himself calls a “situated agency”.²⁴ Agency is still agency even as it works within a situation. It is that situated agency that I draw on when describing things like Bacon and Donne’s rhetorical ‘power’ and ‘purpose’, as well as the ‘oughts’ which drive, in my view, their acquisition of rhetorical power.

Since there is no direct access to the “actual experiences” of the people who listened to or read Bacon and Donne’s texts in the early seventeenth century, we can either judge the textual record by using what scientific models we have about how people read those texts or we can try to judge what Bacon and Donne thought they were doing with reference to their sources and situated agency. The former is a useful approach, to be sure, but not the one taken here. The latter is just as important, and much of the ground of my own arguments depends on what the tradition of rhetorical teaching held out to the situated agencies of early modern writers trying to plan out a strategy for moving minds. To that tradition I turn first.

²³ Dunford, pp. 44-54.

²⁴ Bevir, “then and now”, p. 112.

