

DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

53



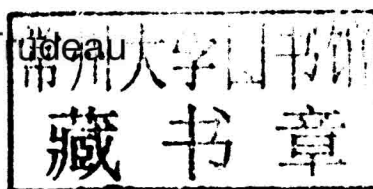
DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 53

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor



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DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

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Preface

D*rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

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By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately three to five entries are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to a playwright's work, an individual play, or a literary topic pertinent to the study of drama. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics whose work has been translated into English. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the playwright most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Also located here are any name variations under which a playwright wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises plays and theoretical works about drama by the author. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated

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- Essays offering **overviews of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; usually, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All plays and theoretical works about drama by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
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Rocha, Mark William. "Black Madness in August Wilson's 'Down the Line' Cycle." *Madness in Drama*. Ed. James Redmond. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 191-201. Rpt. in *Drama Criticism*. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 31. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 229-35. Print.

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Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay

Robert Greene

(Also wrote under the pseudonym Cuthbert Cunny-Catcher)
English playwright and prose writer.

The following entry provides criticism of Greene's play *The Honorable Historie of Friar Bacon, and Friar Bongay* (1594; commonly called *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*).

INTRODUCTION

Published in 1594 but written circa 1588-91, *The Honorable Historie of Friar Bacon, and Friar Bongay* is widely regarded as the most accomplished literary work of the Elizabethan dramatist and prose writer Robert Greene (1558-1592) and is among the most distinguished non-Shakespearean comic plays of the early modern period. Commonly referred to simply as *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, the play is essentially a romantic comedy consisting of two intersecting plots, the first focusing on a love triangle between a prince, an earl, and a gamekeeper's daughter; the other detailing the necromantic experiments and conjurations of the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon, a thirteenth-century historical figure portrayed by Greene as a conjuror with occult powers.

Greene's principal textual source for the play appears to have been the anonymous prose account *The Famous History of Friar Bacon* (probably written about 1555; the first extant edition was published in 1627), which likewise promulgates the popular conception of Bacon as a magician. Historical evidence suggests that *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* was highly popular during the Elizabethan era and may have exerted a substantial influence on subsequent plays. It is often cited as a precursor to such Shakespearean romantic comedies as *As You Like It* (1600) and *Twelfth Night* (1602), and its conspicuous similarity to Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* (1594) has attracted critical comment.

PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

The play begins in Framlingham, Suffolk, where Edward, the prince of Wales and son of King Henry III, has just returned from a hunting trip in a melancholy frame of mind. During a visit to the gamekeeper's lodge in Fressingfield, Edward became infatuated with the keeper's daughter, the virtuous Margaret. Upon hearing the reason for Edward's moodiness, the king's fool, Rafe Simnell, suggests that he and Edward exchange clothes to "beguile Love, for Love is such a proud scab, that he will never

meddle with fools nor children." The prince agrees and goes with Rafe to seek the help of Friar Bacon, an Oxford scholar and occultist, in winning Margaret's love through the use of magic. Edward asks his friend Lacy, the Earl of Lincoln, to go to the Harleston Fair disguised as a peasant, while he and Rafe are gone, and to woo Margaret on his behalf. At the fair, the disguised Lacy meets Margaret and attempts to fulfill his mission, but instead he and Margaret begin to fall in love with each other.

Before Edward and Rafe arrive in Oxford, three scholars—Burden, Clement, and Mason—pay a visit to Bacon, attended by his poor scholar-assistant Miles, to ask for proof of the friar's alleged necromantic powers. Bacon announces that he has created "a head of brasse . . . that by art shall read philosophy" and that it will give him the power to encircle England within a brass wall. Burden, the most skeptical and combative of the visiting scholars, denounces Bacon as a charlatan, whereupon Bacon exposes Burden's relationship with a tavern hostess by conjuring her out of thin air, along with a devil, and questioning her directly. Burden is outraged, but the other scholars are convinced of Bacon's skills as a demonologist.

Meanwhile, at Hampton House, King Henry is entertaining the emperor of Germany and the king of Castile, who, at Henry's request, has brought his daughter, Elinor, to be married to Edward, Henry's "wanton son." The emperor has brought with him a skilled conjuror, Jaques Vandermast, who wishes to engage with England's scholars. The party prepares to "progress straight to Oxford with our trains," where Vandermast will meet Bacon.

In Oxford, when Edward and Rafe are admitted to Bacon's presence, the friar quickly discerns their true identities and the reason for their visit. He uses a magic mirror to show Edward a scene taking place that day between Margaret and Lacy, who declare their love for one another and ask Friar Bungay (based on another real-life historical figure reputed to have been a magician) to marry them. Edward is enraged by Lacy's betrayal, and Bacon halts the imminent marriage by using magic to take away Bungay's voice and "fetch" him "straightway" to Oxford. When Edward returns to Framlingham, he confronts the couple and threatens to kill Lacy, but after hearing their protestations and seeing the depth of their love for one another, he relents and gives them his blessing. He invites Lacy to come with him to Oxford so they may meet Elinor and hear the philosophical disputes and magical conjurations in the confrontation of Vandermast and the friars.

When the king's party arrives at Oxford, Vandermast takes on Bungay in debate first, but he is clearly overmatched. Then, Bacon steps in and bests Vandermast's magic, calling him a "novice" before whisking him away to Hapsburg. Shortly thereafter, Edward and Lacy arrive on the scene, and Edward makes the acquaintance of Elinor, with whom he falls in love.

Back in Fressingfield, two landowners, Lambert and Serlsby, vie for Margaret's hand, eventually deciding to fight a duel. Margaret puts both of them off, and, after receiving a letter from Lacy informing her that he no longer wishes to marry her, she decides to enter a nunnery. The setting changes to Bacon's cell, where he falls asleep while waiting for his "brazen head" to speak. Miles witnesses the head make three cryptic utterances before it is magically destroyed. Informed upon his awakening of what happened, Bacon is deeply dismayed at the loss of seven years' work, and he angrily condemns Miles to hell for not waking him up. Bacon is later visited by the sons of Lambert and Serlsby, who use his mirror to observe their fathers dueling and killing each other; the two sons then kill each other in turn. Upset by the role of his magic in this slaughter, Bacon renounces his use of necromancy and pledges to devote the remainder of his life to pious devotion. Miles is visited by a devil, who offers him a position as a tapster in hell, which he accepts.

Lacy, who only sent Margaret the letter as a test of her devotion, visits her in Fressingfield and proclaims his love, whereupon she leaves the abbey. The play ends with the double wedding of Edward and Elinor and Lacy and Margaret at the royal court. At the ceremony, Bacon prophesizes the glory that will accrue to England during the reign of Elizabeth I.

MAJOR THEMES

Central to *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* is a thematic emphasis on the disruption of the social order, which must be made whole again by the end of the play. Throughout the narrative, each of the three central settings of the action—the English court, the pastoral countryside, and the intellectual domain of Oxford—are presented as being fatally compromised in some way through the actions or experiences of their inhabitants. The courtly Edward, expected to marry Elinor, forsakes his obligations as the king's heir in order to pursue a momentary infatuation with a young maiden of low status, allowing a gross impostor to take his place. Margaret, depicted as an avatar of country purity, is besieged by the predatory attentions of Edward in a way that suggests that the jaded world of the court is spilling over into the innocent countryside and tainting it. Additionally, the erudition of Oxford has degenerated into hubris, as manifested by Bacon's cavalier employment of black magic to further his ends and aid his acquaintances. The play's conclusion, with the central

characters having transformed and matured over the course of the narrative, marks the reintegration of the social order.

The principal driving forces of the plot's various complications are love and magic, which perform analogous functions within the narrative and are shown in both positive and negative manifestations. The action of the play is initiated by Edward's designs on Margaret, a shallow form of love; likewise, a shared infatuation with Margaret ultimately leads Lambert and Serlsby to murder each other. A more genuine and heartfelt type of love serves as a conciliatory force, dissipating Edward's plans for violent revenge after he realizes the depth of Lacy and Margaret's feelings for one another. Similarly, magic is used both for good purposes—as when Bacon vindicates English intellectualism by besting Vandermast—and bad ones, as when Bacon's necromancy prevents Lacy and Margaret's marriage and indirectly leads to the deaths of Lambert and Serlsby's sons. Love and magic are not treated as equally valuable, however; although the play ends with an affirmation of love, magic by then has been effectively repudiated.

The play displays a pronounced strain of English nationalism. The outcome of the contest between Vandermast and the Oxford scholars functions as an unabashed celebration of English victory against foreign powers and stands as the only scene in which Bacon's use of necromancy—complete with devils—is presented in an unambiguously positive light. The play's nationalism does not, however, preclude the possibility of friendly relations between England and other European nations, represented by Edward's impending marriage to Elinor. Likewise, the isolationism inherent in Bacon's plan to surround England with a brass wall is expressly rejected. Meanwhile, the audience is strongly encouraged to draw connections between the play's historical setting and the present by Bacon's final prophecy, which specifically alludes to the reign of Elizabeth I, who ruled when the play was written.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay is often cited by critics as Greene's greatest success as a dramatist, both aesthetically and in terms of popularity. The play was evidently well received by Elizabethan audiences, attaining sufficient renown to inspire an anonymous sequel, *John of Bordeaux; or, The Second Part of Friar Bacon* (produced by 1593), which some scholars attribute to Greene himself. Critics often place less emphasis on the merits of *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* than on its significance within literary history. The play's pioneering of narrative elements found in William Shakespeare's comedies is a particularly common topic of discussion, as is the work's status as a possible influence on Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, though critics remain

divided regarding the precise relationship between the two plays, since neither can be dated with certainty.

Much scholarship on *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* is devoted to placing the text in a specific literary or cultural context and often discusses particular influences on the play. Waldo F. McNeir (1948) connected the legendary aspects of Greene's depiction of Bacon to the sorcerers of traditional medieval romance, and Charles Hieatt (1981; see Further Reading) put forth John Lyly's play *Campaspe* (1583-84) as a probable textual source for Greene's play. Other critics have focused more on the play's engagement with Greene's Elizabethan milieu, as in Robert W. Maslen's 2008 overview of the play's plot and themes, in which he placed particular emphasis on Greene's response to the anti-theatrical rhetoric common in the early modern period. Likewise, Frank Ardolino (1988) scrutinized the play's nationalistic glorification of Tudor England. Taking a more concrete approach, Barbara D. Palmer (2009) presented a logistical analysis of the realities of staging plays on provincial tours, examining the props and costumes of *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* alongside those of two other Elizabethan plays.

Other criticism concentrates on the thematic significance of some key narrative elements. Frank Towne (1952) studied the play's depiction of Bacon's magic, contending that Greene portrays it negatively rather than as harmless "white" magic, as some scholars have asserted. Bryan Reynolds and Henry S. Turner (2008; see Further Reading) connected Greene's portrayal of celebrity to his own attempts to establish a cultural identity for himself. Todd Andrew Borlik (2011) examined the thematic implications and associations of the brazen head Bacon creates, and Vin Nardizzi (2013) studied the tree prop that appears during the contest between Vandermast and Bungay, providing a detailed overview of the various connotations such a prop would have had in England at the time the play was written.

James Overholtzer

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- Perimedes the Blacke-Smith, a Golden Methode, How to Use the Minde in Pleasant and Profitable Exercise.* London: White, 1588. (Prose)
- Ciceronis Amor. Tullies Love. Wherein Is Discoursed the Prime of Ciceroes Youth.* London: Newman and Winington, 1589. (Prose)
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Perimedes the Blacksmith; Pandosto. Ed. Stanley Wells.
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*These works are attributed to Greene.

†Includes an appendix in which Greene translates *Débat de folie et d'amour*, by Louise Labé.

‡This collection is partly translated from *Dottrina della virtù*, by Oraziofin Rinaldi, among other sources.

§These works are doubtfully attributed to Greene.

CRITICISM

Waldo F. McNeir (essay date 1948)

SOURCE: McNeir, Waldo F. "Traditional Elements in the Character of Greene's Friar Bacon." *Studies in Philology* 45.2 (1948): 172-79. Print.

[In the following essay, McNeir traces Greene's portrayal of Roger Bacon in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* back to the sorcerers of the medieval romance tradition. He considers Greene's treatment of the character in the context of other traditional sorcerers, such as Merlin, Oberon, and Vergilius.]

Robert Greene's portrayal of Friar Bacon, the central figure in his romantic comedy of *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, ca. 1589, is based on the benevolent necromancer who appears in the contemporary popularized romance, *The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon*.¹ As is well known, the chief personage in both the chapbook and the play is Roger Bacon, the philosopher and scientist of thirteenth-century Oxford, who was linked in the Elizabethan imagination with wizardry and feats of magic.² Greene appropriated Bacon the necromancer largely as he found him in *The Famous Historie*, the hero of a fully-developed but vulgarized romantic tale whose birth, boyhood deeds, and accomplishments, like those of the heroes of chivalric narrative, are presented in a series of adventurous episodes culminating in his death. Of the 2102 lines in the play, slightly more than 700 are directly related to the source-book. Clearly, Greene wrote with intimate knowledge of the Bacon legend as it had been gathered up in *The Famous Historie*. At the same time, the character of his magician-hero is traditional, for Friar Bacon belongs to a company which includes Merlin in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Maugis in *The Foure Sonnes of Aymon*, Pacolet in *Valentine and Orson*, Oberon in *Huon of Bordeaux*, and Virgilius in *The Lyf of Virgilius*.³ The importance of tradition in the formation of this character is revealed when it is traced back through the immediate source and studied in relation to its prototype, the sorcerer of medieval romance.

While following the outline of the mythical biography given in his source, Greene has dignified his powerful

necromancer by omitting the vulgar japes that mark the hero's career in the popular romance. A strong *fabliau* element can be identified in Bacon's exploits in *The Famous Historie*, when he causes a black pudding to adhere to Miles's face in punishment for his servant's fast-breaking, when he outwits the Devil on a point of law, and when he gulls an old usurer.⁴ Such episodes were not in keeping with the aristocratic character of a learned master of the magic art. Nor does the play contain any allusion to Bacon's birth, although *The Famous Historie* states explicitly that "In most men's opinions he was . . . sonne to a wealthy farmer."⁵ The omission of his humble birth differentiates him from another popular magician, Faustus, whose father according to the English *Faust Book* was "a poore Husbandman."⁶ By implication, at least, it brings him closer to Maugis, who is the son of Duke Benes of Aygremounte;⁷ to Virgilius, who belongs to the highest nobility of Rome;⁸ and to Oberon, who is of royal blood.⁹ The increased dignity of Friar Bacon becomes apparent when we see him as the familiar associate of Prince Edward (II, iii),¹⁰ as the protégé of King Henry III of England in the magicians' contest (III, ii), as the respected host of nobility and royalty in his college quarters (III, ii, 1295 ff.), and finally as the counsellor of the nation and prophet of its fame (V, iii). This emphasis on Bacon's royal friends is carried much further than the suggestions in the source.¹¹ In social status, therefore, it may be said that Greene's Friar Bacon resembles his aristocratic forerunners in medieval romance. Merlin, the earliest of these, is the attendant and adviser of King Arthur.¹² All of the associates of Maugis are noble or royal.¹³ And Virgilius at times dominates the Emperor, his patron.¹⁴

The education of the necromancers in romantic fiction follows a convention which betrays the popular distrust of learning and its traditional association with magic. The magicians of romance are all learned men, and their knowledge of occult science is usually a result of their university training.¹⁵ Pacolet studied "at the scole of tollette," where "he learned so much of the arte of Nygromancy that above all other he was perfyte."¹⁶ Virgilius, likewise, "was at scole at Tolenten," where he became "conynge in the scyence of negromancy aboue all men than luyuyngne."¹⁷ Toledo was celebrated for the magic in its curriculum.¹⁸ Later sorcerers apparently learned their magic at home, Faustus at Wittenburg,¹⁹ and Bacon at Oxford, "where he long time studied, and grew so excellent in the secrets of art and nature, that not England onely, but all Christendome admired him."²⁰ In this respect, the characterization of the English enchanter in both *The Famous Historie* and in Greene's play follows an established pattern.

The powers exercised by Greene's Friar Bacon are typical of those associated with earlier necromancers. He shares his control over space, for example, a faculty which is given more emphasis in the play (I, ii; II, iii; III, ii; V, ii) than in its source, with Merlin, Maugis, Oberon, Pacolet, and Virgilius, all of whom can easily transport bodies through the