

Review, *The Martyrdom of Francis Bacon*, by Alfred Dodd  
by Christina G. Waldman  
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*The honest manner in which he lived was the sole cause of his poverty.*<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, it seems as if people prefer an intriguing lie to the plain, unvarnished truth, as Francis Bacon observed four hundred years ago in his essay, “Of Truth.” That tendency becomes a problem, though, when it leads to inaccuracies in the history books. A sound opinion is one based on objective facts, not colored by bias or preconceived notions. For this tenet, too, we have Francis Bacon to thank. For example, in his preface to the *New Organon*, part 2 of his *Great Instauration*, “one of the world’s masterpieces of thought,”<sup>2</sup> Francis Bacon wrote:

If any one would form an opinion or judgment either out of his own observation, or out of the crowd of authorities, or out of the crowd of authorities, or out of the forms of demonstration (which have now acquired a sanction like that of judicial laws), concerning these speculations of mine, let him not hope he can do it in passage or by the by; but let him examine the thing thoroughly; let him make some little trial for himself of the way which I describe and lay out; let him familiarize his thoughts with that subtlety of nature to which experience bears witness; let him correct by seasonable patience and due delay the depraved and deep-rooted habits of his mind; and when all this is done and he has begun to be his own master, let him (if he will) use his own judgment.<sup>3</sup>

About Bacon’s *New Organon*, W. Hepworth Dixon, author of several books on Bacon, said, “It is a book which has in it the germs of more power and good to man than any other work not of Divine Authority in the world.” (19).

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Amboise, Bacon’s first biographer, *Histoire Naturelle de Francois Bacon ...*, also trans. by Pierre Amboise (Paris, 1631), cited by Alfred Dodd, *The Martyrdom of Francis Bacon* (London: Rider, 1946), 123. See “Discourse on the Life of M. Francis Bacon, Chancellor of England,” by Pierre Amboise,” <http://www.sirbacon.org/amboiselife.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> 18 (Unless otherwise stated, page references in parentheses are to Dodd, *Martyrdom*). See also “The Martyrdom of Francis Bacon,” Sir Francis Bacon’s New Advancement of Learning, <http://www.sirbacon.org/links/martyrdom.htm>; ch 2, “His Birth, Life, and Labors, 1561–1621,” *Martyrdom*, 30–35, <http://www.sirbacon.org/doddch2martyrdom.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> *The Works of Francis Bacon* 4 (of 14): 37–43, 43, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longmans, 1857-1874). HathiTrust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006685889>.

In *The Martyrdom of Francis Bacon* (“*Martyrdom*”), Bacon scholar Alfred Dodd (d. 1953) sets out to “prove incontestably the innocence of Francis Bacon of the crime of “Bribery and Corruption” .... (170), while recognizing it might ultimately fall to another to “vindicate forever the innocence of the wisest man in Christendom; the purity of the mind through which coursed the noblest thoughts ever conceived by the human soul” (5).

Thus, Dodd, like Nieves Mathews whose book, *Francis Bacon: The History of a Character Assassination*,<sup>4</sup> was published by Yale University Press in 1996, both held Bacon in high regard and felt keenly that his reputation had been grievously wronged by historian inaccuracies. “Posterity,” Dodd writes, has judged Francis Bacon with such merciless severity that it is difficult today to obtain an impartial hearing within the schools of learning or the popular press ....” (23–24). To an unfortunate extent, that is still true.

Through his studies, Dodd began to see Bacon was not a “prosy philosopher and a very corrupt judge,” as he had been taught. (171). He came to conclude that a good number of the Shakespeare *Sonnets* could be read as cantos addressed by Bacon to King James (the “James Cantos”), “the heart-cries of an Innocent Man trapped in the foul snare of a plot.”<sup>5</sup> Since he was a poet, concealed, but acknowledged as one during his own lifetime, we might expect he would write poetry about these events.

Dodd would no doubt have been delighted to read Matthews’s vindication of Bacon in part 2 of her book (89–226; 467–496). It is odd to me, though, that she does not cite Dodd’s *Martyrdom*. She would likely have known of it. In her book, she seemed critical of authors who shared the view—for which there is evidence—that Bacon was the secret son of Queen Elizabeth and Robert Dudley. Among them was Dodd in his two-volume 1949 book, *Francis Bacon’s Personal Life Story*.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that Matthews tends to be critical of writers on Bacon, in general.

Although the Francis Bacon Society respected Dodd’s scholarship, at his death, its journal *Baconiana* called him “a Baconian of the most radical views.”<sup>7</sup> He had

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<sup>4</sup> See “*Francis Bacon: The History of a Character Assassination* by Nieves Mathews,” Sir Francis Bacon’s New Advancement of Learning, <http://www.sirbacon.org/nmathewsbook.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Dodd, 115, referring to “Nos. 119–144”; see also 99 (re *A Lover’s Complaint*), 139, 147 and crediting *Shake-speare’s Sonnet-Theme* (172), about which I currently do not know more. See Alfred Dodd, *The personal poems of Francis Bacon: Shake-speare’s sonnet diary* (Liverpool: Daily Post Printers, 1937), reprinted, part 1, *Baconiana* 120 (July, 1946), 93–98; part 2, *Baconiana* 121 (October, 1946), 159–164; part 3, *Baconiana* 122 (January, 1947), 23–30; *Baconiana* Collection on SirBacon.org, <http://sirbacon.org/baconiana-collection.html>; <http://www.sirbacon.org/doddpoems.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> London: Rider, 1949, expanded 1987 ed., 2 vols; Matthews, 391, 545 n40.

<sup>7</sup> “Editorial,” *Baconiana* 37, no. 146, August, 1953, 50, [http://sirbacon.org/archives/baconiana/1953\\_Baconiana\\_No%20146.pdf](http://sirbacon.org/archives/baconiana/1953_Baconiana_No%20146.pdf).

dabbled in spiritualism. He writes openly as a Freemason, explaining how Bacon founded the secret society of Freemasonry for beneficent purposes and how Bacon's use of the Shakespeare pseudonym fit those aims (e.g., 22, 179–180). Clearly, one need not agree with an author on every point to benefit from reading his/her/their book. I found Dodd to be a credible and passionate advocate for Bacon who marshalled facts to support his arguments in a readable fashion.

Both Dodd and Matthews relied upon the work of W. Hepworth Dixon, British barrister, in his *Personal History of Lord Bacon from Unpublished Papers*<sup>8</sup> and *The Story of Lord Bacon's Life*.<sup>9</sup> Also, both Dodd and Matthews found the account of Bacon's secretary, Thomas Bushell, of Bacon's "pre-fall" interview with King James credible, though Spedding expressed doubts. Bushell was Bacon's secretary and seal-bearer (Dodd, 98; Matthews, 190). It is plausible that Bacon contemporaneously dictated the account to Bushell when he (Bacon) was still reeling from incredulity, stinging from the pain of betrayal by purported friends. Bacon may have—as he did with Rowley regarding unpublished manuscripts—instructed Bushell to wait forty years to share his account with the world at large.

Bushell went to some effort to bury his account deeply within a published *extract* of a work he had published the year before on mining (which, Dodd, says, really has to do with esoteric Freemasonry, using the word "mineral" as code for "masonry"). Tellingly, the extract has the word "prosecutions" in the title.<sup>10</sup> The very fact that he went to such trouble lends credence to his account. Moreover, as Dodd points out, Bushell's account is corroborated by the "Hacket account of Dean Williams' prior interview with the King."<sup>11</sup> Spedding concedes that, "if true," it would "help to make intelligible a letter preserved in Toby Matthew's collection, for which it would be

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<sup>8</sup> London, Boston, Leipzig, 1861, Internet Archive, [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_KASFgd2HfMwC](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_KASFgd2HfMwC); HathiTrust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000426113?type%5B%5D=all&lookfor%5B%5D=Hepworth%20Dixon&ft=>.

<sup>9</sup> London, 1862. Dixon also wrote *Proof Private. Lord Bacon's Confession; a statement of the facts* (London, 1861). Google Books.

<sup>10</sup> *An extract by Mr. Bushell of his late abridgement of the Lord chancellor Bacon's philosophical theory in mineral prosecutions published for the satisfaction of his noble friends that importunately desired it* (London, 1660; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), 19–20, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A28210.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext> (not <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/B17399.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>); see Dodd, 97–98, 172; Matthews, 164–7, 190–191, 305, 328, 481(n15), 487, 563; Spedding 14:199–200, 235.

<sup>11</sup> Hacket (Bishop), John, *Scrinia Reserata, A Memorial Offered to the Great Deservings of John Williams*, 1693, pt. 1, 50; Dodd, 95–98, 173; Matthews, 101, 598.

otherwise difficult to find a place” (14:200–201). It is worthy of note that Bacon referred to himself as a “pioneer in the mine of truth.”<sup>12</sup>

Dodd includes sections on “notes of importance” (141–155), a timeline (156–170), a dense/condensed bibliography (171–173), and three appendixes: (1) notes on illustrations (174–180); (2) Spedding’s shortcomings as Bacon’s biographer; and (3) Hepworth Dixon’s “complete list of charges of corruption and bribery” et al (Dodd, 184–191, 188–191; Dixon, *The Story of Lord Bacon’s Life*, 422–432). An online, searchable edition would be welcome, since the book does not have an index.

Without effort, it can be difficult for most of us *not* to think that, when a person is charged with a crime, they must be guilty of *something* (even though we are *taught* that a person is innocent until proven guilty). Indeed, Bacon confessed to “partaking of the offenses of his time” (110, 119), although in a private letter, in Latin, he quoted the Roman author Juvenal, “The censor’s office is indulgent toward the crows but harasses the doves” (*Saturae*, vol 1, 63)<sup>13</sup>. Although he worked for legal reform (41, 49, 109), it was slow in coming, and his efforts earned him enemies. One, Lord Edward Coke, was the chief engineer of his downfall; but he did not act alone (63–73). Bacon, trusting in his own innocence and—naively—the goodness he saw in others, simply did not see the plot unfold. Even if he had, he was still the intended “fall guy” for King James and Lord Buckingham. Had they heeded his previous good counsel regarding expenditures and monopolies, though, they might not have found themselves in such dire straits with Parliament (having bankrupted the treasury) that James would feel constrained to sacrifice his trusted counsellor Bacon, his “Oracle,” as his scapegoat (52, 55–63).

Dodd provides the full text of Bacon’s notes in preparation for his interview with King James and his “Memoranda” afterwards (112, 114; Spedding 14:235–238). King James told Bacon he “did not wish the charges to be defended” (106, 113), even before Bacon had seen the charges! So much for due process! As befit his sense of his place as the King’s servant, Bacon felt constrained to obey his Sovereign’s command and pleaded guilty, though protesting that “the law of Nature impels a man to defend himself when attacked” (113).

*Since Chancellor Bacon pleaded guilty, he must have been guilty—right? Ah, but did he plead voluntarily—or under duress? Therein lies the rub, to paraphrase*

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<sup>12</sup> Robert M. Theobald, ‘Mines and Forges,’ in ch 10, “Philosophical Maxims,” *Shakespeare Studies in Baconian Light* (San Francisco: J. Howell, 1901 and London: Sampson, Marston, Low, 1901), 167–171, 167, 168, citing, inter alia, Spedding 8:309 (*Life of Bacon* 1), 3:351, and Shakespeare, <http://www.sirbacon.org/downloads/shakespearestudi00theo.pdf> (Table of Contents; <http://www.sirbacon.org/theobald.htm>).

<sup>13</sup> See Christina G. Waldman, *Francis Bacon’s Hand in Shakespeare’s ‘The Merchant of Venice’: A Study of Law, Rhetoric, and Scholarship* (New York: Algora Press, 2018), 30 n 1.

Hamlet; for in law, “a plea under duress is “as worthless as the statements of a man wrung out of him under torture.” (106). There is much more to this “chapter of history” than most history books portray, as Dodd—and Matthews—demonstrate; in Dodd, see especially chapter 9, “The Vindication” (106–123).

After making a rigorous analysis of the case against Bacon, British barrister W. Hepworth Dixon concluded: “Thus on a scrutiny, unparalleled for rigor and vindictiveness into Lord St. Alban’s official acts, not a single fee or remembrance traced to the Chancellor himself, could by any fair construction, be called a bribe. Not one appeared to have been given on a promise; not one appeared to have been given in secret, not one appeared to have corrupted justice.”<sup>14</sup> Other lawyers who concurred were Bacon’s *Works* editor Basil Montague (London, 1825–1837), barrister C. Y. C. Dawbarn, and solicitor Parker Woodward<sup>15</sup>; in Dodd’s words, “the cases were so transparently unreal that they could never have been entertained in any modern Court ... an obvious frame-up” (107).

Those who are still reading are doubtless persons for whom it *does* matter whether Bacon was guilty or innocent. It should matter to all, for truth is the foundation on which we build. And yet, despite the best efforts of diligent scholars to put the events of 1621 into fair and accurate perspective, Bacon’s thought continues to be misconstrued and his reputation defamed.<sup>16</sup> One would think that no fair-minded historian today would still in good conscience quote Thomas Babington MacAulay’s “deplorable” essay on Bacon (as his own biographer Cotter Morrison called it, 171); yet Bacon’s honesty continues to be unjustly impugned.<sup>17</sup> We are talking here about one of the wisest, noblest, and best persons ever to walk the earth! Is it not ironic that his noble vision, his action plan for a Great Instauration that would revolutionize the world, included at its very core strategies for freeing our minds from the fetters of misconception! The truth may not lie on the surface, but surely it is worth the digging!

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<sup>14</sup> Dodd, 118, citing Dixon, *The Story of Lord Bacon’s Life*, 429–430, with references.

<sup>15</sup> C. Y. C. Dawbarn, author of *Bacon-Shakespeare Discussion* (Liverpool: Henry Young & Sons, 1903); Parker Woodward, author of, inter alia, *Sir Francis Bacon: Poet, Philosopher, Statesman, Lawyer, and Wit* (London: Grafton, 1920), <http://www.sirbacon.org/woodward.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> For some of the writers who have defended Bacon against the mischaracterization of his work by Carolyn Merchant and other “ecofeminists,” see Christina G. Waldman, “Francis Bacon, Shakespeare, and Tortured Secrets: Violence, Violins, and—One Day—Vindication?” May 21, 2021, Sir Francis Bacon’s New Advancement of Learning, 1–9, 17, 20, <http://sirbacon.org/waldman/Waldman%20Violence%20Violins%20Vindication%20final%205-21-21.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> David Simpson, “Francis Bacon,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (first published February 20, 2003, last updated July 15, 2005), <https://iep.utm.edu/bacon/>; compare Jürgen Klein, ‘Biography,’ “Francis Bacon,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (first pub. Dec. 29, 2003, subst. rev. Dec. 7, 2012); Dodd, 47, 106, 171; Matthews, 19–33 et al (see index).