

# Roger Bacon's *Ars poetica sacra*: Spiritual Persuasion and the Christian Sublime

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Roger Bacon (d. ca. 1292) wrote extensively on rhetoric and poetics. He did so in the context of a critical overview of the religious culture of his age. He places poetry (the *argumentum poeticum*) at the very pinnacle of culture, above the sciences, above the liturgy and preaching, well above scholastic philosophy and any other mode of expression current in his age. Poetry and rhetoric are the modes of exposition capable of captivating and transporting the listener/reader. That makes them an effective means of converting and of inspiring faith. The religious culture of his own time has so far declined that it is incapable of performing this function. Bacon was looking back on real rhetorical practices that had become outmoded. In earlier days Christianity spoke with force and passion. His sacred poetics has a place in the history of pre-modern Christian discourse, one of two works theorizing *sacra eloquentia*; the other is Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*. Christian traditions of teaching, preaching, prayer, oratory, sacred music, regularly had called on modes that were emphatic, forceful and passionate: the "grand style," *sermo propheticus*, *sermo affectuosus*. Bacon's poetics commends these modes as it laments their passing.

Keywords: rhetoric, poetics, *sacra eloquentia*, grand style, spiritual persuasion

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Roger Bacon (d. 1292) wrote extensively on rhetoric and poetics. His ideas on the subject richly deserve study. They develop a kind of aesthetic mode of thought and expression which is at odds with both the conventional view of Christian aesthetics and of history of classical rhetoric in the Middle Ages. The argument of this essay is that Bacon develops an aesthetic of Christian eloquence, theorized by Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, and exemplified by the Bible, Christian poetry and music of the earlier Middle Ages. His aesthetic views are startlingly close to defining a Christian Sublime<sup>1</sup>. Bacon's aesthetic thought bypasses, or rather rides rough-shod over both the classical tradition of rhetoric and poetics and the modern conception of medieval aesthetics as a workshop model of learned craftsmanship obeying rules rather than inspirations (see below on Umberto Eco). Perhaps for that reason, it has not been discussed in any depth in modern literary history and theory<sup>2</sup>.

And yet Bacon assigned poetics and rhetoric the highest position in the system of university learning and church culture that he designed. His ideas unfold not as a systematic poetics, but as passages in a series of tracts written at the request of Pope Clement IV. They propose extensive reform, along with scathing criticism, of the thought, theology,

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<sup>1</sup> On the problematic idea of the sublime in the Middle Ages as an aesthetic category, see the essays in C.S. Jaeger (ed. by), *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music*, Palgrave, New York 2010; and Id., *The Sense of the Sublime in the Middle Ages*: [https://www.academia.edu/73053285/The\\_Sense\\_of\\_the\\_Sublime\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_Ages](https://www.academia.edu/73053285/The_Sense_of_the_Sublime_in_the_Middle_Ages)

<sup>2</sup> An exception, V. Gillespie, *The Study of Classical Authors*, in A. Minnis, I. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Vol. 2 The Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) 2005, pp. 169-172. The extensive article on Bacon in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* by Jeremiah Hackett mentions rhetoric and poetics only in their relation to logic. The aesthetics and epistemology of those topics are not mentioned (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/roger-bacon/>). Bacon is not included in the compendium R. Copeland, I. Sluiter (eds.), *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, 300-1475*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (UK) 2012.

philosophy, preaching and writing, and virtually every aspect of intellectual activity, of the church and the universities of his time<sup>3</sup>.

Bacon had received a letter in 1266 from the Pope requesting that he send him, secretly and soon, his suggestions for the remedy of the crises they had talked about earlier (not explained in his letter), obviously calling for the ideas of this venerable philosopher on the reform of the universities and the church<sup>4</sup>. Not bad for a scholar whose research had stalled and who saw himself in opposition to the major academic and religious trends of his time. The pope's request elevated Bacon to the role of papal advisor on Christian education at the highest level and potentially the architect of a new program of university studies, even more, the designer of a new intellectual world. Forty years of his study had seemed destined to wither on the vine; now fruition seemed attainable, nurtured by the greatest authority in Christianity.

Bacon's responses rained down on the pope. By 1267 he had completed and sent to Rome his major work, *Opus majus*, and two follow-ups, the *Lesser* and the *Third Opus* (*Opus minus*, and *Opus tertium*). Various shorter treatises followed, summarizing the larger works and focusing on individual aspects. In their printed form they fill over 1000 pages. They form a proposal for university reform of comprehensive scope. They point the way out of the stale, stagnant culture of universities that had set in «in the past forty years». They were full of thunderous denunciations of the current situation.

Unfortunately, the path marked out by these writings was not taken. Pope Clement IV died in 1268. An intellectual climate congenial to Bacon's ideas was a century or two in the future. His criticism of church and university resonate at many points with those of Francesco Petrarca (d. 1374). Many features of his reform would have been welcome in the intellectual life of the Italian Renaissance two centuries later.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Power, *Roger Bacon and the Defense of Christendom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) 2013, pp. 190-193. T.J. Johnson, *Roger Bacon's Critique of Franciscan Preaching*, in F.J. Felten, A. Kehnel, S. Weinfurter (eds.), *Institution und Charisma: Festschrift für Gerd Melville zum 65. Geburtstag*, Böhlau, Cologne 2009, pp. 541-548; Id., *Preaching precedes Theology: Roger Bacon on the Failure of Mendicant Education*, in "Franciscan Studies", n. 68, 2010, pp. 83-95.

<sup>4</sup> Bacon's letter responding to Pope Clement IV, in J.S. Brewer (ed. by), *Fratris Rogeri Bacon Opera Quaedam Hactenus Inedita*, vol. 1, Rolls Series 15, Longman, London 1859, rpt. 1965, p. 4.

He confronted the present decline of culture with a vision of an age recently past in which sacred discourse was poetical, passionate, practised in a mode closer to the style which (as Bacon saw it) the holy spirit infused into truth at the creation of the world, giving humans the gift of wisdom in poetic form, a gift they have since marred and abused. That at any rate is the model of Christian discourse he held up against what he saw as the trivializing, desiccating influence of Scholastic rhetoric, philosophy, theology, and university learning. He deplored the dust of the contemporary intellectual-spiritual scene and stirred up a big wind to blow it away.

His comments on rhetoric, poetry, music, oratory, are spread through his major works<sup>5</sup>. If the scholarship on medieval rhetoric has had little to say about Bacon on poetry and rhetoric, it is in part because it lacks the categories that would clarify Bacon's position. What is this «unorthodox», «unusual poetic» practiced by Augustine and Bacon? (Fredborg, note 5 below; Druart, note 12 below). He does not fit in the dominant strain of modern history of rhetoric, concerned exclusively with the survival and adaptation of classical tradition. He makes no acknowledged use of Ciceronian rhetoric or the professional rhetoric of the Roman schools. Margareta Fredborg, tasked, in a book on the Ciceronian tradition, with discussing

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<sup>5</sup> R. Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, ed. by J.H. Bridges, 2 vols., Oxford, Clarendon 1897 (here abbrev. *OpMaj*). Its seventh book treats *Moralis philosophia*. The fifth part of the *Moralis philosophia* is a dissertation (Bacon calls it an *argumentum* and a *persuasio*) on rhetorical poetics as the endpoint and fulfillment of logic, and is central to the issues raised here. Of interest are its last chapters, 72-75, an extensive criticism of church music, theology and preaching along with a survey of rhetorical poetics as the neglected ideal. Others: Id., *Communia mathematica Fratris Rogeri*, ed by R. Steele, *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi* 16, Oxford, Clarendon 1940; Id., *Roger Baconis Moralis Philosophia*, ed. by E. Massa, Thesaurus mundi, Zurich 1953, chs. 72-75, pp. 295-310 (now available in English translation: Id., *Moral Philosophy*, trans. by T. Maloney, J. Hackett, Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure (NY) 2024); Id., The *Opus Minus*, *Opus tertium* (=*OpTert*), and *Compendium philosophiae in Fratris Rogeri Bacon Opera quaedam Hactenus Inedita*, Vol. 1; Extensive criticism of scholastic philosophy in *Opus minus*, ed. Brewer, 1, pp. 322-330. The *Opus tertium* gives a lengthy overview of music, rhythm, metre and accent, the *argumentum rhetoricum*, leading up to and culminating in *argumentum poeticum* (*Opus tertium*, chs. 59-64, pp. 228-68), now available in German translation: ed. by N. Egel, Miner Verlag, Hamburg 2020). On the order of Bacon's works, see the article by G. Molland in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at [http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb\\_9780198614128-e-1008?rskey=EStNnt&result=1](http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb_9780198614128-e-1008?rskey=EStNnt&result=1) Also J. Hackett, *The Published Works of Roger Bacon*, in "Vivarium", 35, 2, 1997, pp. 315-320; and Id., *Roger Bacon: His Life, Career and Works*, in Id. (ed. by), *Roger Bacon and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays*, Brill, Leiden 1997, pp. 9-24. An earlier essay by A.G. Little is useful but must be checked against more recent work: *On Roger Bacon's Life and Works*, in A.G. Little (ed. by), *Roger Bacon: Essays Contributed by Various Writers on the Occasion of the Commemoration of the Seventh Centenary of this Birth*, Oxford, Clarendon 1914, pp. 1-31. A. Power, *RB and the Defense of Christendom*, cit.

Bacon within that tradition, finds him «a strange bird» and «a rebellious, quarrelsome, original and prolific writer»<sup>6</sup>. She stresses Bacon's marginalizing of Cicero in favor of a Christian poetics of preaching (p. 185). With that she gives us a context for understanding Bacon on poetics. I believe she is right. The comment calls for a large-scale enterprise of defining that term, «Christian poetics of» – let's broaden it – «discourse». «Christian poetics», *sacra eloquentia* are terms that need to graduate from descriptive to conceptual.

Bacon's main inspiring source on the subject is Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (*De doctrina Christiana*, abbreviated here as DDC)<sup>7</sup>. He claims that everything he writes on rhetoric he has taken from Augustine: «Beautifully and magnificently (*pulchre et magnifice*) the church fathers and especially the blessed Augustine have taught. This entire book [i.e. the one Bacon is writing] is from that work, and almost everything touching philosophy that I have said now is found in that book»<sup>8</sup>.

The fundamental thought and the influence of Augustine DDC in the history of medieval rhetoric has barely been touched. It has been too easy to merely subsume Augustine as an offshoot of classical rhetoric<sup>9</sup>. Properly understood in its influence, it opens up a second channel of thought and practice alongside classical rhetoric. A *sacra eloquentia* of medieval Christianity developed out of DDC or, at least this was its earliest significant formulation. Sacred rhetoric was theorized on a broad scale by two writers in late antiquity and the Middle Ages: Augustine and Roger Bacon.

And it has a vast body of texts which either call on or are based in that particular branch of rhetoric: sermons, prayers, biography, poetry lyric and epic, liturgy. It has its own vocabulary of concepts, techniques, styles. Its classes of style are now coming into focus:

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<sup>6</sup> His views on rhetoric «are as broad as they are unorthodox». K.M. Fredborg, *Rhetoric and Dialectic*, in V. Cox, J.O. Ward (eds.), *The Rhetoric of Cicero in its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, Brill, Leiden 2006, pp. 165-192, here p. 184, p. 186.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine of Hippo, Saint, *De doctrina Christiana*, R.P.H. Green (ed. by), Oxford University Press, Oxford UK 1995; eng. trans. by D. W. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, Indianapolis-New York, Bobbs-merrill 1958.

<sup>8</sup> R. Bacon, *Moral Philosophy* (= *MorPhil*), 5. 4. 1, p. 258.

<sup>9</sup> The Encyclopedia Britannica characterizes DDC as «an imitation of Cicero's *Orator* for Christian purposes». <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Augustine>. R. Copeland, *Emotion and the History of Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (UK) 2021, p. 59, calls DDC «The definitive Christian appropriation and synthesis of ancient rhetoric». More in line with Augustine's intention would be, «the definitive antithesis and emancipation» of Christian from ancient rhetoric, whatever technical/structural use it makes of the latter (e.g. «genera dicendi»).

*sermo humilis, sermo affectuosus*<sup>10</sup>, *sermo potens, sermo propheticus*, and most important for the nexus Augustine – Bacon, the grand style: *stilus grandis*<sup>11</sup>. I will revisit this conceptual frame later in this paper. For now, Bacon's ideas of rhetoric and poetics are the point of departure.

Bacon divided poetic rhetoric into *argumentum poeticum* and *argumentum rhetoricum*, best translated «poetic discourse» and «rhetorical discourse». The two books of Aristotle, the Poetics and the Rhetoric, were known only partially, but the commentaries on them by Arabic commentators supplemented them<sup>12</sup>. Bacon knew Aristotle's *Rhetoric* the way one knows a wine one has smelled but not tasted<sup>13</sup>, but he made good use of illustrious names to give allure to his own ideas<sup>14</sup>.

He does not distinguish sharply between the two *argumenta*. These two «ways of arguing» are the keystone of the entire large enterprise of Bacon's reform. He described the object of his writing on rhetoric and poetics as, «the modalities of eloquence ... following the paths of holy men and philosophers»<sup>15</sup>. At the end of the seventh book of his *Opus majus* entitled

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<sup>10</sup> C. Casagrande, *Sermo affectuosus: Passions et éloquence*, in P. von Moos (ed. by), *Zwischen Babel und Pfingsten: Sprachdifferenzen und Gesprächsverständigung in der Vormodernen* (8. Bis 16. Jahrhundert, Berlin/Vienna, Lit Verlag 2008), pp. 519-532; Ead. *Sermo potens: Rhétorique, grâce et passions dans la prédication médiévale*, in N. Bériou, J.-P. Boudet, I. Rosier-Catach (eds.), *Le pouvoir des mots au moyen age*, Brepols, Turnhout 2014, pp. 225-237.

<sup>11</sup> See C.S. Jaeger, *Sermo propheticus: The Grand Style in the Medieval Sermon from John the Evangelist to Aelred of Rievaulx*, in “Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch”, LV, 2020, pp. 1-39; D. Shuger, *The Grand Style and the ‘Genera Dicendi’ in Ancient Rhetoric*, in “Traditio”, LX, 1984, pp. 1-42; Ead., *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1988.

<sup>12</sup> I. Rosier-Catach, *Roger Bacon, Al-Farabi et Augustin: Rhétorique, Logique et Philosophie morale*, in G. Dahan, I. Rosier-Catach (eds.), *La Rhétorique d'Aristote: Traditions et Commentaires de l'antiquité au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, J. Vrin, Paris 1998, pp. 87-110.

<sup>13</sup> R. Bacon, *MorPhil*. 6, p. 267: «Studiosi homines possunt a longe olfacere eius sentenciam, non gustare; vinum enim, quod de tertio vase transfusum est, virtutem non retinet in vigore». The comment is a slap at the translators of Aristotle, but the formulation, and the facts, encourage including Bacon in the criticism. Quoted in I. Rosier-Catach, *Roger Bacon, Al-Farabi et Augustin*, cit., p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> My selective reading (in English translation) of the sources on rhetoric claimed by Bacon made me wonder about his use of them. That scepticism is borne out in a recent study by T.-A. Druart, *Roger Bacon and His “Arabic” Sources in His *Moralis philosophia**, in K. Krause, N. Lopez-Farjeat, L. Oschman (eds.), *Contextualizing Premodern Philosophy: Explorations of the Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Latin Traditions*, Taylor and Francis, New York 2023. Her summary conclusion, p. 93: «[Bacon] simply uses his sources as authorities to convince the pope of his own views and manipulates them for his own purposes». On poetics she comments astutely, «[Bacon in *MorPhil* 5] uses a kind of poetic that is little known among the Latins, except as practiced by Augustine in his DDC». Aristotle and the commentators provided allure to Bacon's ideas, not the ideas themselves.

<sup>15</sup> Bacon, letter to Pope Clement IV, *Opera Quaedam Hactenus Inedita*, cit., p. 4: «eloquentiae modulos ... secundum vias sanctorum et philosophorum brevibus comprehendi».

*Moralis philosophia* (=MorPhil), he assigns an unusual place in the hierarchy of studies to rhetoric and poetics: the fulfillment and highpoint of them all, the consummation of moral philosophy<sup>16</sup>, and moral philosophy is the consummation of all other disciplines of learning. He explicitly puts aside the Ciceronian tradition<sup>17</sup> to move to the real object of his attention, the aesthetics of Christian discourse: writing but also other forms of representation within the hierarchy of learning in Christian culture, not only in the more restricted sense of Christian writings on doctrine, morals, spirituality.

### ***Beauty Stirs the Soul***

His *Communia mathematica*<sup>18</sup> gives a terse but broad summary of his ideas. He justifies a chapter on poetics in this treatise on mathematics by reference to his concept of the unity of all learning: «All disciplines are in their turn connected. It is certain that they fit together in many ways»<sup>19</sup>. Mathematics has a fundamental role in music and prosody, as does geometry in pictorial representation. A line of development that begins with mathematics and progresses through logic, culminates in the *argumentum poeticum*, which he commends above all others:

This form of discourse is more useful than any other since it leads to the health of the soul, moves [the listener] towards virtues and happiness, and brings about the diminishing of vices. This discourse is properly treated in the scheme of moral philosophy and in theological proofs [*probacionibus*] and teachings. And in these this discourse can move [i.e. inspire, stir, persuade: *plus potest hoc argumentum in illis movere sine omni comparacione*] incomparably more profoundly than a logical demonstration, however powerful it may be regarded ... According to

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<sup>16</sup> R. Bacon, *MorPhil*. 4. 1, Proem., p. 187: «morali philosophie subiciuntur omnes sciencie».

<sup>17</sup> Id., *MorPhil*. 5. 2, p. 251. Fredborg stresses Bacon's marginalizing of Cicero in favor of a Christian poetics of preaching (pp. 185-186). He sees himself as introducing this learning: «Latini nondum habent scientiam horum argumentorum secundum artis logicae potestatem» – *Op Maj* 3. 2, ed. Bridges vol. 3, pp. 87-8. Cited in I. Rosier-Catach, *Roger Bacon, Al-Farabi et Augustin*, cit., p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> See G. Molland, *Roger Bacon's Knowledge of Mathematics*, in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences*, cit., pp. 150-174. The treatise dates probably 1267.

<sup>19</sup> R. Bacon, *Communia Mathematica Fratris Rogeri*, cit., ch. 1, p. 2. Amanda Power shows the connections that link the various arts in Bacon's thoughts, especially in the chain, mathematics, music, rhetoric, poetry. J. Hackett, *Roger Bacon on Rhetoric and Poetics*, in Id. (ed. by), *Roger Bacon and the Sciences*, cit., pp. 133-149.

Aristotle and the exposition of Alfarabi<sup>20</sup>, this form of discourse draws on speeches that are beautiful and of ultimate symmetry [*hoc argumentum utitur sermonibus pulcris et in fine decoris, ut rapiatur animus subito in amorem virtutis et felicitatis*] so that the mind is snatched up [*ut rapiatur animus*] swiftly and suddenly and [moved] to love virtue and happiness and to hate vice. And therefore poetic speeches [*sermones poetici qui sunt completi et pulcritudine et efficacia movendi animum*] which are composed with beauty and with the ability to stir the mind ought to be ornamented with all beauty of narrative speech and bound tightly to every law of metre and rhythm, as in holy scripture in the original language, Hebrew, and in Boethius *On the Consolation*, and Alanus *On the Complaint of Nature*, and the *Poetics* of Horace, and the hymns of the church and much of the divine office, so that by beauty and sweetness of speech the mind will be immediately and strongly moved [*ut decore et suavitate sermonis animus subito et fortiter moveatur*] ... And so the composition of this discourse is taught through the elegance of every prose or narrative sermon/speech, and through all the kinds of metres and rhythms<sup>21</sup>.

Rhetoric and poetics merge, at least in the language Bacon uses: *sermones* must be «effective in moving/stirring the mind». That effect requires beauty of speech (*venustas loquendi*), along with the basic elements of poetry, meter and rhythm. This is a concise statement of Bacon's ideal of a poetic *sacra eloquentia*. It can make common cause with classical rhetoric, though he mentions only Aristotle, Al Farabi and Augustine, not Cicero or Quintilian. He lauds this mode above philosophical and theological argumentation (*probaciones*): a proposition persuasively stated in the *argumentum rhetoricum* is worth more than a thousand logical proofs<sup>22</sup>.

His stress on the beauty of narrative and on rhythm and metre is clearly outside of classical Roman rhetorical thought. So is his frequently repeated intention of poetry: to stir and rouse the reader, to snatch up the mind, to move the soul, to inspire a state of ecstasy – repeated five times in the passage just quoted<sup>23</sup>. These are closely related to the art of persuasion, as

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<sup>20</sup> Bacon enumerates the roots of *argumentum poeticum* in Aristotle and his Arab commentators, *Comm. Math.*, pp. 16-17. The study by I. Rosier-Catach, *Roger Bacon, Al-Farabi et Augustin*, cit., is based on Bacon's claims of his sources. The study turns up no parallel texts either in Alfarabi or his Latin translators that the reader can compare with Bacon.

<sup>21</sup> R. Bacon, *Communia Mathematica*, cit., p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Id., *MorPhil*, 5. 3., p. 254

<sup>23</sup> He claims that the source for this connection of beauty and transport of the soul is in the books of Aristotle and his Arab commentators, only available in faulty translations: «In illis enim docetur quomodo fiant sermones sublimes» (*OpTert.* 75, pp. 304-305). Cited in I. Rosier-Catach, *Roger Bacon, Al-Farabi et Augustin*, cit., p. 100.

we will see. This is a poetic-literary experience. It has a very different object than meditation and mystical contemplation which also stir the soul and transport the listener. Bacon's literary-poetic ecstasy has a distant relative in the Sublime, the effect of which is defined by pseudo-Longinus, writing, in Greek, probably in the first century, C.E.: «The effect [of the sublime] is not to persuade the audience, but rather to transport them out of themselves»<sup>24</sup>. Persuasion means more for Bacon, however. It transports the reader/listener to love of virtue and the Good. When induced by music it has a «miraculous power» to transform all of nature and to reform character (*mores*)<sup>25</sup>. It is a means of converting.

### *A Treatise on the Grand Style*

For these effects the *argumentum poeticum* depends on the grand or sublime style. For Bacon the grand style is the core and the engine of poetic speech. Bacon is formulating more sharply than Augustine a sacred rhetoric based on beauty and exclusively in the grand:

This argument [poetic] always uses the grand style, because it always discourses on great and magnificent things, and for that reason it is most definitely necessary in regard to grand things but especially when the mind is swayed to some action<sup>26</sup>.

Augustine had based much of the fourth book of *On Christian Doctrine* on the distinctions of the three levels of style, a scheme inherited from Roman rhetoric<sup>27</sup>, assigning to each its own role in Christian discourse. He gave a particular highlight to the grand style for its ability to persuade, to inspire love in the auditor and to express and magnify a passionate love of God. But Augustine argues the necessity of mixing styles, using the grand for emphasis when the occasion calls for it. The teacher cannot constantly speak in the mode of emphatic persuasion (DDC 4. 22. 51, pp. 266-268). Not so Bacon. Defining the poetic argument as the

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<sup>24</sup> Longinus, *On the Sublime* 1. 4, trans. W.H. Fyfe, Loeb Classical Library 199, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1999, p. 163.

<sup>25</sup> R. Bacon, *Op. Tert.*, ch. 73, p. 298-9: «Mira enim musicae super omnes scientias est et spectanda potestas ... Haec [scientia] ... naturam permutat universam. Mores enim reformat ... ».

<sup>26</sup> Id., *MorPhil.* 5. 3. 11, p. 256: «Hoc argumentum semper utitur grandi stilo, quia semper de grandibus eloquitur et magnificis rebus, et ideo sermo grandisonus requiritur; set hoc maxime est cum flectitur animus ad agendum».

<sup>27</sup> F. Quadlbauer, *Die antike Theorie der genera dicendi im lateinischen Mittelalter*, Böhlau, Vienna 1962; D. Shuger, *Grand style and the 'genera dicendi' in Ancient Rhetoric*, in "Traditio", XL, 1984, pp. 1-42.

pinnacle of learning and expression, he relegates the other levels of style to the periphery: «To teach is the least of these; to give pleasure has a middle rank; but to persuade is the highest»<sup>28</sup>. And it is Bacon speaking rather than Augustine, when he writes, «He [Augustine] says therefore that the humble and the middle style have their place in everyday matters, but not in sacred, these being the highest, except to the extent that the grand style requires that the others be intermixed»<sup>29</sup>.

The grand style persuades the reader/listener by the power and beauty of its speech. It is «forceful with emotions of the spirit», says Augustine («violentum animi affectionibus» – DDC 4. 20. 42, p. 250). And Bacon also calls for emotional force. A speaker's urging to action requires «passionate discourse, which magnificently transforms passion into action. In this the grand style is the more effective»<sup>30</sup>.

Bacon uses the language of the sublime to describe the poetic argument. That quality of speech and writing is what is lost because of the contemporary ignorance of Aristotle and the Arabs: «In those works is taught how sublime sermons/speeches [*sermones sublimes*] are made, by voice and by sentiment, according to all the ornaments of language»<sup>31</sup>. Bacon lists among the failings of the present generation the neglect of *sublimitas sermonis* in preaching. He attacks the present day prelates for being so ignorant of the art of preaching that they must cobble together trivialities and eccentric bits of learning «in which there is neither sublimity of speech nor grandeur of wisdom [*nec sublimitas sermonis, nec sapientiae magnitudo*]»<sup>32</sup>.

### **Music**

A powerful effect of grand style is its ability to «snatch up the mind» and transport it to love of virtue and the good. In a later work Bacon summarizes the interrelatedness of music, rhetoric and *raptus* of the hearers, extending it to areas more familiarly occupied by mystical

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<sup>28</sup> R. Bacon, *MorPhil.* 5. 2, p. 253: «Docere igitur est minimum inter hec, delectare mediocre, set flectere est maximum».

<sup>29</sup> Id., *MorPhil.* 5. 4. 2-3, p. 259: «Dicit igitur quod stilus humilis et mediocris in rebus temporalibus locum habent, set in divinis non, quia maxima sunt, nisi in quantum sermo grandis requirit intermixtionem aliorum».

<sup>30</sup> Id., *MorPhil*, 5. 2. 16, p. 253: «flexus magnifico indiget eloquio ... Quae ad agendum proponuntur, indigent sermonibus affectuosis, qui magnifice inmutant affectum in opus: in hiis stat grandis stilus magis».

<sup>31</sup> Id., *OpTert*, ch. 75, p. 304-5. Persuasive speeches, says Bacon supposedly quoting Aristotle, must be *decori et sublimes* (*Ibid.*, ch. 75, p. 306-7).

<sup>32</sup> Id., *OpTert*. ch. 75, p. 309.

contemplation. Music is profoundly capable of stirring the listener: «For above all arts, music exercises a miraculous power ... As Boethius says, this art ... transforms all of nature and it reforms manners ...»<sup>33</sup>.

Music is one of the modes of expression that reaches over into others and intensifies aesthetic response. The reach in this case is deep. Music joins poetic language to realize the goal of «moving the listener». Music is deeply rooted in the fabric and functioning of the human body. The pulse beat is the body's form of rhythm<sup>34</sup>. The link between music and poetics is vital both in composing *sermones* and in the aesthetic response to them. Without good knowledge of the art of music, no one can compose sublime speech.

Music made its alliance with poetry and truth early in the history of the world, says Bacon. That alliance reaches from patristic times to the early thirteenth century<sup>35</sup>. In a later passage he declares logic (and now he uses the term to mean the *argumentum poeticum* in the general sense of the language arts) subordinate to music, because «logic cannot be understood without the benefit of music, which is responsible for explaining the causes and the roots of [prose or] metrics and rhythms»<sup>36</sup>. A remarkable idea, that the significant impact of the poetic discourse is in its musicality. Music can have a force to move the mind and soul equal to or above speech: exposition in words however beautiful lags behind its musical quality. It suggests the effect still experienced when a text is composed to be sung or performed with music; the music in its power to move and inspire overwhelms the text.

This train of thought leads to Bacon's criticism of contemporary church music.

In the present age music has lost all gravity and authority, he claims. Music capable of inspiring and conveying wisdom has disappeared. Contemporary music is a grotesque distortion; he denounces it in trenchant terms: «Everything that has been done in the past

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<sup>33</sup> Id., *Op.Tert.*, ch. 73, p. 298-9 (n. 22 above).

<sup>34</sup> It follows that no doctor can judge the condition of the body without instruction in prosody. It is no exaggeration to call Bacon's exposition of the two "arguments" a treatise, or at least a set of reflections, on the grand style. Fredborg calls the grand style the "central issue" of Bacon's poetical and rhetorical writing (K.M. Fredborg, *Rhetoric and Dialectic*, cit., p. 186). The «poetic argument» operates musical proportions. R. Bacon, *OpTert.* ch. 59, p. 232. See N. Van Deusen, *Roger Bacon on Music*, in J. Hackett (ed. by), *Roger Bacon and the Sciences*, cit., (note 4 above), pp. 223-242; and M. Formarier, *Entre rhétorique et musique: essai sur le rythme latin antique et médiéval*, Brepols, Turnhout 2014.

<sup>35</sup> R. Bacon, *OpTert.*, ch. 73, p. 298-299.

<sup>36</sup> Also Id. *OpTert.*, ch. 75, p. 307: «musica quaedam est prosaica, quaedam metrica, quaedam rhythmica; et hae dant omnes causas et rationes ornatus et decoris sermonis».

thirty years is a mockery of the divine office, contrary to the art and contrary to the truth [of music] ... For that reason, it is a mockery before God and the holy angels and all men who are wise in this art»<sup>37</sup>.

The loss of this capacity in music is a betrayal of a vital functioning of music that goes back to the ancients. There was a *prisca musica*, back in time in an age when music and poetry/poetics/rhetoric once were able to stimulate devotion: «The ancients knew that the entire structure of our soul and our body is conjoined by musical arrangement»<sup>38</sup>. The citation of Boethius evokes the musical education of antiquity, the ancient Greek *studia priscae philosophiae*, which from the most ancient of times knew and taught the power inherent in the art of music<sup>39</sup>. The power of music to inculcate virtue and morals was known and cited in writings on education into the twelfth century. The idea, no doubt actually put into practice in musical education, followed a humanistic tradition of what Boethius calls *musica humana*<sup>40</sup>. And Bacon could have called on any number of twelfth-century philosophers on the same topic<sup>41</sup>.

The culture of *prisca musica* as passed on from ancient philosophers by Boethius survived into the twelfth century. That survival highlights Bacon's claim that the decline of music began a half century before he wrote. Christianity lost that art around the time of Bacon's birth. Likewise, the culture of preaching declined at the same time.

### ***Preaching***

After rejecting every aspect of contemporary practice in church music, he moves on to the art of preaching. This art, Bacon fretted, has declined into useless sophisms; scholastic

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<sup>37</sup> Id. *OpTert.*, ch. 74, p. 302-303.

<sup>38</sup> Boethius, *De institutione musica, Proem. 1*, p. 186: «tota nostrae animae corporisque compago musica coaptatione conjuncta [est]».

<sup>39</sup> Ivi, *Proem. 1*, p. 185: «In tantum priscae philosophiae studiis vis musicae artis innotuit, ut Pythagorici ... quibusdam cantilenis uterentur, ut eis lenis quietus sopor irrepereret».

<sup>40</sup> R. Bacon, *OpTert.* ch. 73, p. 298. It is curious that elsewhere Bacon flat out denies that either *musica mundana* or *musica humana* really exist: *Communia Mathematica*, ed. Steele, pp. 52-54.

<sup>41</sup> On these ancient/Boethian ideas of «human music», see C.S. Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe 950-1250*, Philadelphia, Penn Press 1994, pp. 165-172; Id., *The Music of Mankind (Musica Humana) and its Place in Medieval Education* [https://www.academia.edu/27013571/The\\_Music\\_of\\_Mankind\\_musica\\_humana\\_and\\_its\\_Place\\_in\\_Early\\_Medieval\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/27013571/The_Music_of_Mankind_musica_humana_and_its_Place_in_Early_Medieval_Education)

method saturated and dried out an art that required passion, spontaneity, rhetorical effectiveness. His purpose in castigating the present generation of preachers is to cut through the “spider webs” of scholastic demonstration and restore some level of passion and eloquence. No art is more necessary to the church than the art of preaching, because «the principal intention of the church and its ultimate goal is the work of preaching [*principalis intentio ecclesiae et ultimus finis est opus praedicationis*], to convert infidels to the faith and to hold the faithful firm in their faith and morals»<sup>42</sup>. We should take this instance of Bacon shooting over the mark (the ultimate end of the church is preaching?) as an indication how important the subject was to him; he made it the end point of his major work and the high point of moral philosophy<sup>43</sup>. There is no contradiction between his comment that no art has a more powerful effect than music and this placement of preaching at the pinnacle of modes of eloquence<sup>44</sup>. The prophetic sermon is, in Bacon’s view, as close as human language can come to revelation and to speaking like the holy spirit with the ability to enrapture and inspire. The prophetic orator configures the «marvelous enigmas» (*mira enigmata*) of Christianity to human understanding in a way more direct than the mystic contemplating mysteries in his cell. *Sermones prophetici* are the mediating force between our limited minds and things too great for them:

The highest divine truths, which are incommensurate with our minds, are made conformable to the human condition through prophetic utterances of this sort [*sermones propheticos*]<sup>45</sup>.

Without such a force of the human voice we are cut off from the voice of God<sup>46</sup>, a condition created by the ruin of preaching in Bacon’s contemporaries. The new preachers may spin

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<sup>42</sup> R. Bacon, *OpTert.*, ch. 75, p. 304. On Bacon’s views on preaching, see T. Johnson, *Roger Bacon’s Critique of Franciscan Preaching*, cit., pp. 541-548.

<sup>43</sup> See B. Roest, *A History of Franciscan Education (c. 1210-1517)*, Leiden, Brill 2000, pp. 272-324, on preaching in the Franciscan order.

<sup>44</sup> A clear logic connects polemics on music with polemics on preaching. See N. Van Deusen, *Roger Bacon on Music*, in *RB and the Sciences*, cit., pp. 223-242. And T. Johnson, *Roger Bacon’s Critique of Franciscan Preaching*, cit., p. 542.

<sup>45</sup> R. Bacon, *MorPhil.*, 5. 4. 13, p. 261: «Sic enim altissime veritates divine, nostris mentibus inproporcionales, flunt per huiusmodi sermones propheticos nobis conformes». On «prophetic speech» see C.S. Jaeger, *Sermo propheticus*, cit., and Id., *The Sense of the Sublime*, cit., ch. 9.

<sup>46</sup> See C.S. Jaeger, *The Sense of the Sublime*, cit., ch. 4.

their spiderwebs of proofs, but they fail in their duty to give God a human voice. Bacon did not invent the connection between preaching, mystical insight and *raptus mentis*. Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167) not only wrote a series of sermons reflecting on the genre of *sermo propheticus*<sup>47</sup>. He was credited by a friend and fellow Cistercian, Gilbert of Hoyland with exercising prophetic effects in his own sermons:

Though his speech was simple, it regularly happened that he subtly snatched away the mind of the auditor into an ecstatic rapture of the mind. You could feel the vehemence of intoxicating grace in his words. His thought was straightforward but his emotions vehement<sup>48</sup>.

### ***Rhetoric***

Important as are rhythm and metre, other techniques of poetic composition communicate the holy spirit's message. Bacon briefly summarizes the main points of his comments in *Opus tertium*, Ch. 75 and *Opus majus* Bk. 7: the preacher evokes the sacred teaching and the holy spirit by beauty of language, grandeur of divine wisdom, emotions and gestures consonant with the grandeur of the topic, posture of the arms and body, and shedding abundant tears – are elements of the art of persuasion. He mentions also the terms rooted in the classical tradition: the rhetorical colors and ornaments of speech, but sets sacred rhetoric above them. Everywhere in Scripture, says Bacon, esp. the Psalms and prophets, in the fathers, Ambrose, Augustine and Cassiodorus, down to voices of the twelfth century (Alanus), Christian orators, preachers, writers, poets have access to the entire panoply of rhetorical techniques, surpassing in eloquence and power anything in the classical tradition. Those writings are a complete course of studies in rhetoric, an unformulated, only exemplified, curriculum of eloquence and wisdom; they make Cicero and the tradition of classical rhetoric irrelevant: «Because of this [i.e. the effect of Christian eloquence] neither Cicero nor Seneca nor any of the philosophers could attain to the dignity of eloquence to be found in sacred writings, as

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<sup>47</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Homeliae de Oneribus Propheticis Isaiae*, G. Raciti (ed. by), CCCM 2D, vol. 5, Brepols, Turnhout 2005. An English translation by Lewis White appeared recently: *Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah*, L. White (trans. by), Cistercian Publications Collegeville (MN) 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Gilbert of Hoyland, sermo 41 in *Cant. Cant.*, on Aelred, PL 184, 218A: «Simplex ejus institutio et sermo lacteus animum auditoris in quemdam inebriantem alienatae mentis excessum furtim arripere consuevit ... Vehementiam inebriantis gratiae sentires in verbis. Facilis inerat ei intellectus, sed affectio vehemens».

Augustine teaches»<sup>49</sup>. The idea of the plenary rhetoric of the Bible was passed down to the twelfth century: all rhetorical strategies, figures and patterns of expression are fully present in sacred writings<sup>50</sup>.

The term that Augustine used for Christian eloquence was *nostra eloquentia*. He made a trenchant distinction between Christian eloquence and classical tradition. Augustine's detailed analysis of St. Paul and the prophet Amos (DDC 4. 7. 11-21) aim at acquitting even the most highly rhetorically composed Scriptural writings of any taint and suggestion of appropriating or adapting classical Roman rhetoric. The rhetoric of the Bible is archetypical language from which systems of rhetoric derive. What Paul and Amos spoke was originary language. Christian men of genius speak and write an alternate eloquence (*altera eloquentia*)<sup>51</sup>, from which Christian eloquence derives. They incorporate in their writings not-yet-organized rhetorical systems to exemplify the modes of eloquence. Christian writings have an endless supply of the fuel that ignites emotion and drives impetus; the whole range of utterance is there available to astonish the speaker by its high content of truth, transforming emotion into eloquence, turning speech, impetuous, forceful as a powerful river, into action. Speech of this sort represents the mystical union of eloquence and wisdom (DDC 4. 6. 10, ed. Green, pp. 206-208). These ideas are developed throughout DDC Book 4. Bacon appropriated this basic line of thought in his discussion of prophetic language<sup>52</sup>.

The supremacy of rhetoric and poetry is an acknowledgment of the way God communicates with the world. It is only logical that poetic composition should be supreme in the human “sciences”; it is the goal and end point of the study of language (the *finalis*

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<sup>49</sup> R. Bacon, *MorPhil*. 5. 4. 2-3, p. 259: «Unde nec Tullius nec Seneca nec aliquis philosophorum potuit attingere ad dignitatem eloquencie, quam Augustinus docet in sacris sententiis reperiri».

<sup>50</sup> The entirety of wisdom and eloquence is accessible by deep absorption in Scripture. Memorizing Scripture is like implanting an archetypal language, one which constantly informs and nourishes understanding and expression. Scripture and lived experience provide an entire rhetorical schooling, a nowhere-theorized curriculum of eloquence and wisdom: *nostra eloquentia*. Far from deriving from the rules of rhetoric, Scripture, thanks to the “genius” of Christian orators, speaks the language from which systems of rhetoric derive. (Cf. DDC 4. 7. 21).

<sup>51</sup> On the higher eloquence (*altera eloquentia*) where eloquence and wisdom are joined, DDC 4. 6. 10, ed. Green, p. 206. On the genius of the prophets, DDC 4. 7. 21, ed. Green, pp. 220-222.

<sup>52</sup> Most strikingly in a passage proclaiming the union of words and things, words and meaning, in prophetic language. R. Bacon, *MorPhil* 5. 4. 13-14, p. 261. See C.S. Jaeger, *Sense of the Sublime*, cit., ch. 4, pp. 17-19.

*logicae*), because it teaches the ultimate genus of argument. It gives God a voice and leads to and fashions the perfection of man in the good.

### ***Poetry, Language of the Holy Spirit***

The models of the *argumentum poeticum* are in Scripture – in the ancient language, he emphasizes, Hebrew. The Latin sources he commends are Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Alanus *The Complaint of Nature*, Horace, *Poetics*. And most strikingly, church hymns and the liturgy. These provide the style, tone and rhythm, language and poetic forms by which «the mind will be roused/snatched up by the beauty and sweetness of speech swiftly and powerfully» (above, p. 8).

The importance of prosody for Bacon is hard to overestimate. Much of the Old Testament is unintelligible without understanding of the laws of metre and rhythm in ancient Hebrew<sup>53</sup>. That aspect of the psalms and prophetic poetry is an indicator of the ultimate source of poetic technique: the holy spirit communicates in poetry. It is the Christian inspirer of poetry and the divine force invoked to help the poet compose. Bacon confidently makes this claim – the holy spirit spoke poetry:

It was not for nothing that the holy spirit sent forth its wisdom in poetic form [poetry of the Old Testament] enfolded [*comprehensam*] in the laws of metre and rhythm. By expressing wisdom in the most exquisite sweetness, the holy spirit's intention was to draw us into the depths of divine wisdom so that through these sensual, musical qualities, we would be transported to the invisible things of God [*quatenus per haec musicalia sensibilia raperemur ad invisibilia Dei*]”<sup>54</sup>.

A striking formulation making the reading of the Bible into not just a literary experience but an immersion in the very language spoken by the holy spirit. Biblical verse can enrapture us by its poetry and by its anagogic effect, draw us upward from the *sensibilia* to the *invisibilia Dei*. It is the intention of its “author”, the holy spirit, that it do so. Whether preformed and

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<sup>53</sup> R. Bacon, *OpTert.*, ch. 64, pp. 265-266: «...Scriptura sciri non potest nisi homo sciat legere et intelligere eam in Hebraeo et Graeco».

<sup>54</sup> Id., *OpTert*, ch. 64, p. 266. Poetry is present in the primal elements of wisdom, whether spoken or inspired. The holy spirit also “arranges” the “enharmonic” mode of church song: «Et ideo Spiritus Sanctus, qui est Magister ecclesiae, et per omnia membra se suaviter infundit, ordinavit genus cantus enharmonicum ...» (Id., *OpTert*, ch. 72, p. 297).

spoken as poetry, or part of an inchoate gift of God which humans must resolve by their own skill, whether inborn or given, into poetry, the implication is clear: OT verse and metre are the form in which a primal originary wisdom is revealed. If the translator and interpreter does not understand the prosody of Hebrew verse, they cannot understand the message of God. Revelation was, in its primal and divine source, poetry. We are to receive scripture not as experts in prosody, but rather as readers open and sensitive to the meaning hidden deep in the words but intimated by its beauty. The passage states that the wisdom of the spirit comes bound and interpreted (*comprehensam*) in language not just poetical but of the highest beauty (*summam suavitatem exprimens*). A holy spirit that speaks poetry was necessary, because God realized the force of poetry – the more beautiful, the more effective – to lure the human recipient into the deepest depths of divine wisdom. The psalms, prophets, the wisdom literature, speak their own form of poetry, the form in which wisdom was originally revealed to humans. Ancient Hebrew poetry is as close as humans can get to the holy spirit, the authentic voice of God.

### ***Rapture, Ecstasy and Mind Control***

The language of rapture and ecstasy, snatching away, transporting, is clearly at the core of Bacon's aesthetic<sup>55</sup>. In the passage from *Opus Tertium*, quoted above, he explains the motive of beautiful speech enfolded in music: «Speeches (*sermones*) should be ultimately decorous and sublime ... so that the mind will be snatched up into love of the good and hate of evil so that without any foreknowledge the person is carried away and elevated above himself, and so that he no longer has his mind in his own control»<sup>56</sup>. Consistent also with other descriptions of rapture and ecstasy is the comment that this effect comes «suddenly and swiftly», «unforeseen». It is a form of inspiration, not an effect of reasoning and thinking.

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<sup>55</sup> Id., *MorPhil*, 5. 2. 9, p. 252, speaking of *captatio benevolentiae*: «ille sermo rapit animum, qui tollit fastidium, difficultatem excludit et utilitatem promittit, et tunc flectitur animus ad opera prius tacta». Classical rhetoric does not associate *capt. ben.* with *raptus animi*. Again on the power of music, Id., *OpTert.* ch. 73, p. 300: «hominum animi in quemlibet gradum devotionis raperentur, et in plenum cujuslibet virtutis amorem excitarentur, et in omnem sanitatem at vigorem».

<sup>56</sup> Id., *OpTert.* ch. 75, p. 307-8: «sermones debent esse in fine decori et sublimes ... ut animus subito rapiatur in amorem boni et odium mali, quatenus homo totus sine praevisione rapiatur et elevetur supra se, et non habeat mentem in sua potestate»,

The sermon can be fashioned into a poetic and musical form, and that form invests it with the power to transport the mind. Rhetoric assimilates to wisdom, wisdom to mystical insight. This is the formula of spiritual persuasion. Rhetoric and poetics in the service of moral philosophy possess a unique power to persuade; they bend the mind to virtue and good action; they override false opinion and they convert the non-Christian. Their power surpasses any other human art because they combine beauty with truth.

This force of persuasion as a spiritual goal is in stark contrast to the raw, agonistic, bare-knuckle rhetoric of the kind practiced in Roman judicial courts<sup>57</sup>, though the two forms share the idea of a compulsive eloquence. Spiritual persuasion does not by any means divorce speech from truth, just the opposite. The compulsive force comes from the meeting of eloquence with truth which Augustine had noted as a quality of the *altera eloquentia* of inspired speakers.

Placed in such an unconditionally favored position as an agent of *flexus animae* (mind-bending persuasion), rhetoric returns to its elemental grounding in power and force. This is rhetoric at its most primal. The facility to win over the mind and soul of the listener by speech, to take control of another person's dispositions and convictions and reshape them, can be used for good or evil. Both Cicero and Augustine stressed these two faces of rhetoric. A comment by Paul Ricoeur puts us in mind of this aspect of composed speech: «Before it became futile, rhetoric was dangerous»<sup>58</sup>. This divide, says Ricoeur, parallels the entire history of human discourse. The power to persuade is the power to manipulate: a fascinating voice imposes itself on another human being, asserting control. When persuasion frees itself from truth, it becomes seduction. Rhetoric grounded in personal motives becomes stealth invasion of the mind. Style becomes a deceptive ornament, not the face of truth.

However, rhetoric grounded in truth is the agent of spiritual persuasion. In the service of truth *argumentum poeticum* works at a level of force in language that places it on nearly the same footing as magic. Bacon's conviction that words could have magical power is surely

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<sup>57</sup> Quintilian's much cited comparison of grand rhetoric to a raging river: Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria: The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. by D. Russell, Loeb Classical Library 494, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2002, 12. 10. 60-62, p. 314. See D. Shuger, *Grand Style and 'genera dicendi' in Ancient Rhetoric*, cit., *passim*. C.S. Jaeger, *Sense of the Sublime*, cit., ch. 3, pp. 2-6.

<sup>58</sup> P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. R. Czerny, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1977, pp. 10-11.

related<sup>59</sup>. The line between language that persuades and language that compels is thin, as we see in metaphors of the grand style as a raging river, lightning and thunder, a powerful wind (note 54 above). And compulsion that leaves the listener without control of his/her will necessarily appears magical. Bacon was very aware of the dark and dangerous side of persuasive rhetoric and shows this awareness in a context very different from conversion and moral improvement – eschatology. The end of the world will be, among other forces, a product of satanic rhetoric. Wisdom, philosophy and theology will be weapons of the Antichrist by which he will persuade and win over the masses and convert them to evil, fascinating them «like ensnared birds»<sup>60</sup>.

For Bacon, powerful speech of a «sanctified soul», used to convert and to strengthen the faith, overrides any misgivings. In the context of preaching Bacon recognizes no higher religious force than spiritual persuasion; its dangers are obviated by its higher purpose.

### ***Aesthetic Values: Inspiration, Passion, Beauty, Sublimity***

The values that emerge from Bacon's writings clash head-on with the dominant understanding of medieval aesthetics in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, given a rather extreme expression by Umberto Eco: «Art was a knowledge of the rules for making things ... Art was not expression, but construction ... [The Middle Age's] theory of art was first and foremost a theory of craftsmanship»<sup>61</sup>. That is a good description of the corrupting ideas that replaced true “art” in music, philosophy/theology, poetry and preaching, in Bacon's view; it is the opposite of the poetics that he advocates.

Bacon's aesthetic thought is borne by concepts like beauty, elegance, force (*impetus*), and sublimity, the ability to enrapture and transform. Pursuing his ideas into their sources reveals a Christian aesthetic at the opposite end of the scale which leads from *sermo humilis* to *sermo*

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<sup>59</sup> See A.G. Little, *Introduction on Roger Bacon's Life and Works*, in *Roger Bacon Essays*, cit., p. 25 on «the wonderful power of words», citing Bacon: «All the miracles since the world began, almost, have been wrought by words». R. Bacon, *OpTert.*, ch. 26, ed. Brewer, pp. 96-99; Id., *De Potestate Artis et Naturae*, ed Brewer, pp. 523ff. On the «power of letters and words», I. Rosier-Catach, *Roger Bacon and Grammar*, in *RB and the Sciences*, cit., ed. Hackett, p. 77f.

<sup>60</sup> R. Bacon, *OpMaj* 4. 4. 16, 1. 399. Cited in Power, *Defense of Christendom*, cit., p. 174 and pp. 202ff.

<sup>61</sup> U. Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, eng. trans. by H. Bredin, Yale University Press, New Haven (CT) 1986, pp. 92-93.

*affectuosus* and *sermo propheticus*<sup>62</sup>. Contrary to virtually any current concepts of medieval aesthetics, Bacon shows a profound sensitivity to the expressiveness and «miraculous power» of music and language. He advocates teaching which manifests the mode of speech of the holy spirit: beauty of language, grandeur of divine wisdom, emotions and gestures consonant with the grandeur of the topic. He often sounds like a Christianized Longinus defining the Sublime in the sacred eloquence of Christianity.

Alongside Augustine, Bacon is the architect and at the same time the historian of the grand style in Christian writings. He looks back to past modalities but proposes them to the future. He can assign the poetic argument exclusively to the grand style and define it as a mode of representation which operates by emotional force, a «passionate discourse, which magnificently transforms passion into action». And finally, the most salient characteristic of Bacon's aesthetic thought is aesthetic experience which initiates the ascent of thought to inspired, mystical understanding of Christian truth and which facilitates its effectiveness in spiritual persuasion.

I would suggest that Bacon be rescued from the position to which he has been assigned in history of rhetoric and aesthetics – marginal and eccentric – and given a place closer to his real significance.

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<sup>62</sup> See C. Casagrande, *Sermo affectuosus: Passions et éloquence*, cit.; Ead., *Sermo potens: Rhétorique, grace et passions dans la prédication médiévale*, cit.; C.S. Jaeger, *Sermo propheticus: The Grand Style in the Medieval Sermon from John the Evangelist to Aelred of Rievaulx*, cit.