NOTE: This draft is the first draft of the final paper required for the course. I’ve decided to concentrate purely on text, which at this point employs a preliminary bibliography only. Therefore, this text will not be presented in its proper form; footnotes will be given informally in the body of the text as was done for the most part in the weekly essays assigned earlier in the semester. Exact section headings and actual organization of the sections are likewise very much subject to change.

I. OPENING REMARKS

It is self-evident but it bears repeating that all human history is characterized by sequential developments which, although they occur in real time, follow each other in ways which are not necessarily or even usually linear in a progressive sense. Historical events may or may not have connection to each other; developments of action, identity, place, body, mind or spirit of an individual or any aggregate of individuals can evince themselves in what seem to be utterly random and arbitrary ways. Even when concrete, perceptible events happen “on top of” or next to each other, how and at what rate and to
what extent the events actually evoke or provoke each other (literally or figuratively) is complex to the point of eluding any kind of truly universal comprehension. But the historian can *describe* the extent of his comprehension of events and the historian’s audience is able to understand this *description*. I take the etymologies of the italicized words to heart. Language, written or unwritten, is an essential facet of human understanding and narrative is a powerful and versatile tool of language. Human beings impart and comprehend knowledge of events naturally through the narrative process. The “content-boundaries” of narrative and variations of the form presenting that content are only as finite as the number of all humans who have ever lived and who are now living, but the essence of what narrative is does not change, has not changed and I daresay will never change: A to B to C to D, or in our Western literary terms, stasis to change of stasis from without to struggle with that change to climax of that struggle to resolution of the struggle (*denouement*). This delineation of narrative is artificial only in a strictly etymological reading of the word; I believe human beings naturally *construct*, consciously or unconsciously, linkages between events so that they can describe those events---and then, finally, they are able to grasp the meaning of the events as they have been described and by extension, put into a relatable AND comprehensible context. So the linkage-creation goes on, in fits and starts and perhaps false starts, but it goes on! This is the root of my own thinking, my “premise” as a sentient, curious human being, my mindset as a historian and my vantage point as the writer of this paper.

I am fascinated by the growth and no-growth of human development as those are actualized in the evolution or devolution of societies, cultures and bodies of human
knowledge, not mention to myriad subsets of same. I wonder what it is, what happens, to cause the flora of mankind to be planted through time, only to stunt or wilt or bud or die on the vine or “force flower” or never come up out of the ground in the first place…or, occasionally, to come up out of the ground to bear fruit which is poisonous if eaten immoderately. Gardeners laboring with what tools they have, cultivating, under rain, sun or fog…this is what I surmise, although I will not now carry this particular debate (or metaphor!) any further. To say simply that there are periods of time in history during which there are sudden quickenings, startling lurchings-forward which may or may not follow periods of relative indirection. The War of the Roses in fifteenth-century England was hardly a time of quiescence. But there was a certain floundering about in England at that time, an inertia of all but martial spirit and, ultimately, a kind of pointlessness which characterized the battles and intrigues gripping late-medieval England in the generations immediately preceding Henry Tudor’s birth in 1457. When Henry ascended the throne in 1485 and married Elizabeth of York the following year, a regrettable and chaotic era in English history had passed--barring various Yorkist uprisings early in Henry VII’s reign, among them “a rising in Yorkshire about Ripon and Middleham“ (Gairdner 45). A palpable shift had occurred; the spirit and the fact of the Renaissance ultimately transformed English life, aspirations, “self-image” and world view. Also to say, not so parenthetically, that the Renaissance arrived in England concurrently with the rise of the Tudors. And, in England, a generation or so after the rise of the Tudors, the apparent comfort provided by the appearance of a singular kind of reasoning.
A Renaissance figure, Francis Bacon, working more than a century after Henry VII’s death in 1509 wrote a compelling examination of Henry Tudor’s reign: *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* (1622). For all its flaws, conscious or unconscious, this book is still worthy of close study today.

II. THE HISTORIAN--HIS LIFE, WRITINGS AND METHODS

Francis Bacon was one of many Renaissance figures who leave modern observers feeling as if they’ve never worn shoes. This is a prosaic way of saying that Bacon and his contemporaries were men of astonishing intellectual breadth and depth; within the context of their civilization, a civilization risen and quickened by the rediscovery of secular learning, they forged new worlds: of science and scientific inquiry, of letters, of arts, of philosophy, of statecraft. Moreover, the impact of what men of the Renaissance achieved informs virtually every thinking and creative impulse we have today: the Enlightenment may have tempered our naïve lusts and heat-seeking enthusiasms in the past few centuries but the Renaissance liberated English-speaking people and others, for good and all, from the confusion, reflexive self-distrust and even self-hatred of the God-centered Middle Ages. And while Humankind reigned in the long sixteenth century in England, many writers, rhetoricians and scientists set precedents for more than just intellectual inquiry; their lives provide, to this very day, designs for living (or at the very least, operating). The author of *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* provides so many such examples…even if, in the end, those examples add up to a cautionary tale…. 
Francis Bacon was born in 1561, near the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I. Bacon’s family was “respected and well-connected” (Bacon, Weinberger ed. 1), his father serving as the Queen’s Lord Keeper of the Seal. Bacon’s mother was the daughter of Edward VI’s tutor and the sister of Lady Burghley, the wife of Elizabeth’s chief minister and adviser, William Cecil. Because of these connections, Bacon was brought up steeped in court politics and in fact aspired to a political career. He was impeded in this, however, and remained so until the death of Elizabeth I in 1603. One serious obstacle presented itself early on: Bacon’s father had died in 1579, leaving Bacon dependent on his uncle by marriage, William Cecil, who cultivated the chances of his own son Robert and did not promote Bacon’s interests. And so Bacon at the outset of his early adult life became a barrister, an unimportant position in view of Bacon’s own aspirations, and in 1584 he began a career in Parliament, where he remained for the next thirty-six years.

As far as his political career went, Bacon could be his own worst enemy. His maneuverings within Parliament evince a cold practicality which obviously did not serve him very well. For example, Bacon in 1593 unequivocally opposed a tax-raising scheme devised by Elizabeth I which was unpopular; Bacon overestimated the “protorepublican” outcry to come and his opposition to the scheme put him in active disfavor with the Queen, his chances for advancement even more seriously impeded than they had been at the outset of his career. Having learned his lesson--at least in terms of *modus operandi*--Bacon thenceforth tried to curry favor with Elizabeth. In 1601 Bacon joined in the prosecution for treason of his former friend and patron Robert Devereau, the second earl
of Essex. Devereau had not only underwritten many of Bacon’s literary endeavors (of which more below) but had also tried to help Bacon advance in Parliament. Bacon’s disloyalty to Devereau availed him nothing in the short run; Bacon was passed over for many judicial posts and seemed locked in place--that is, until Elizabeth I died in 1603. That very year James I knighted Bacon and his star began to rise. Eventually Bacon was made, in rapid succession, a member of the Privy Council, the Lord Keeper, the Lord Chancellor and in 1621 was created viscount St. Alban. But three months after his investiture as viscount, Bacon was convicted of taking bribes in cases he had judged and was impeached forthwith. King James mitigated the most severe punishments Bacon was to have undergone, but Bacon’s public career was over and he was exiled from London, living and writing at his house at Gorhambury until his death in 1625.

I offer this glimpse into Bacon’s life and career in part to throw into sharp relief the scope and excellence of Bacon’s intellectual endeavors, especially as come down to us through his writings. I do not suggest that Bacon’s personal qualities or my perceived lack of them in any way compromised Bacon as an intellect; on the contrary, personal scruples can cramp any man, intellectual or no, who has an essentially pragmatic turn of mind. Moreover, Bacon’s mindset, which was literally and figuratively Machiavellian, enabled him to write history that--in theory--was in no wise speculative. This gave and gives Bacon’s writing an intellectual force majeure that lends at least an illusion of its being airtight. Bacon had several preoccupations as a thinker, above all inductive reasoning. The bulk of his written works reflect this preoccupation: *Proficience and Advancement of Learning*, the *Novum Organum*, his *Essays* and *New Atlantis*, as well as various works
concerned with law, natural history and science. This last was Bacon’s true obsession; the uncovering of material causes of phenomena in nature so that “…nature would be forced to serve human needs and desires.” (Bacon, Weinberger ed. 3). In the context of Bacon’s time--or any time--this obsession, this idee fixe implies--even spells out--that there are means to no less than the liberation of humankind from the vagaries of phantasmagoria, the helplessness at the hands of matters taken on faith. Man in charge of Nature, Man in charge of Himself, Man the standard-bearer, interpreter and custodian of all that is Seen.

And Unseen? Is Man in charge of all that is Unseen? Is there an Unseen? If there is no Unseen, is there simply viscera and tissue and corpuscles in the Interior of Man? Is it comforting to know that? Or is it disruptive or distracting or actually irrelevant to question that, rhetorically or otherwise? Do these questions get in the way?

Bacon, with my italics here and there:

“….I say that a complete and universal History of Learning is yet wanting. Of this therefore I will now proceed to set forth the argument, the method of construction and the use. The argument is no other than to inquire and collect out of the records of all time what particular kinds of learning and arts have flourished in what ages and regions of the world; their antiquities, their progresses, their migrations (for sciences migrate like nations) over the different parts of the globe, and again their decays, disappearances and revivals….to these should be added a history of the sects, and the principal controversies in which learned men have been engaged, the calumnies to which they have been
exposed, the praises and honors by which they have been rewarded; an account of the principal authors, books, schools, successions, academies, societies, colleges, order,---in a word, everything which relates to the state of learning…*I wish events to be coupled with their causes…*” (Bacon, cited in Kelley 401).

Over regard to the martialing of sources, specifically Bacon’s methods of employing antiquities and “remnants of history”:

“….yet acute and industrious persons, by a certain perseverance and scrupulous diligence, contrive out of genealogies, annals, titles, monuments, coins, proper names and styles, etymologies of words, proverbs, traditions, archives and instruments as well public as private, fragments of histories scattered about in books not historical,--contrive, I say, from all these things or some of them, to recover somewhat from the deluge of time; a work laborious indeed, but agreeable to men, and joined with a kind of reverence; and well worthy to *supercede the fabulous accounts of the origins of nations, and to be substituted for fictions of that kind….*” (Bacon, cited in Kelley 404).

Finally, some words that serve in this paper as a means to introduce specific discussion of *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh*:

“….there is a memorable period of a much smaller compass of time, as to the history of England; that is to say from the Union of the Roses to the Union of the Kingdoms….for it begins with the mixed obtaining of a crown, partly by arms, partly by title; an entry by
battle, an establishment by marriage; and therefore times corresponding to these
beginnings, like waters after a tempest, full of working and swelling, though without
extremity of storm; but well passed through by the wisdom of the pilot, who was the most
conspicuous for policy of all the kings who preceded him….(then followed a king) in
whose reign began that great alteration in the State Ecclesiastical, an action which seldom
comes upon the stage. Then the reign of a minor. Then an attempt at a usurpation, though
it was but a diary ague. Then the reign of a queen matched with a foreigner; then of a
queen that lived solitary and unmarried. And now, last, this most happy and glorious
event, that this island of Britain, divided from all the world, should be united in itself, and
that old oracle given to Aeneus (Antiquam exquisite matrem), which foreshowed the rest
in store for him, should be performed and fulfilled upon the most renowned nations of
England and Scotland; being now reunited in the ancient mother name of Britain….so it
seems to have been ordained by the providence of God that this monarchy, before it was
settled and confirmed in your Majesty and your royal generations (in which I hope it is
now established for ever)…” (Bacon, cited in Kelley 406-407).

What of this tone? What of the language to James I in the last quote?

Francis Bacon wrote *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* in the period
following his ouster from public life in January 1621, finishing the book in the fall of
1622. James I had ascended the throne nineteen years earlier and in the years between
James’ accession and Bacon’s fall, James had fostered Bacon’s public career. Moreover,
James’ (more than?) benevolent consideration of Bacon protected the latter from the
machinations of old enemies; after many years of bitter rivalry and toxic personal enmity between Bacon and Sir Edward Coke, who had been appointed attorney general by Elizabeth I, Bacon was finally free to settle scores. Using Coke’s opposition to royal prerogative against him, Bacon was able to dislodge Coke from all the judicial posts Coke had held. Other enemies also fell by the wayside, all of them--especially Coke--to gloat at Bacon’s bribery conviction and subsequent banishment from public life.

*The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* is, on the surface, a straightforward account of the reign of the first Tudor on the English throne (a Tudor to whom James I was related through his descent from Henry VII’s grandfather, Owen Tudor. This relation as pointed up in *The History* offers continuity which could not have done a Stuart on the English throne any harm). The narrative is of a piece rather than a *mise en scene* collage; Bacon relates Henry’s story as incontrovertible fact, which is not surprising considering Bacon’s self-touted bent toward hard knowledge and away from speculation. Henry’s travails and triumphs are laid out like equations; the battle at Bosworth Field and its aftermath, Henry’s troubles abroad with Brittany and France, the matter of Lambert Symnell, enactment of laws which foreshadow (thus Bacon, in a bit of speculation!) representative government, et al. But the language in *The History* is nonetheless oddly elevated, even by the standards of the long sixteenth century. In his excellent reference-biography of Henry VII, S.B. Chrimes cautions readers: “If we wish to get as near as we can to the real man, we must avoid being mesmerized by seductive Baconian phrases and beautifully rounded sentences. The imaginative power of Francis Bacon, splendid as it was, must not be allowed to get between us and the contemporary evidence” (Chrimes
298). That evidence suggests that Henry was actually a very shortsighted ruler, unimaginative and terribly suspicious of his subjects. By Chrimes’ account and also according to *Henry VII’s Relations with Scotland and Ireland* by Agnes Conway, Henry was decidedly harsh and overcautious in his position as ruler of a nation: “..Henry VII adopted Richard III’s policy of dividing the Marches of Scotland from Yorkshire and governing them himself through the King’s Lieutenant in the Northern Parts” (Conway 32). This is not the action of a visionary ruler to whom Bacon attributes (by implication) Machiavellian insight and tactics in building a independent yeomanry with which to build English military strength. And yet: “…the King thought he had not remunerated his people sufficiently with good laws, (which evermore was his retribution for treasure) and finding by the insurrection in the north….he thought it good for to give his subjects yet further contentment and comfort in that kind” (Bacon, Weinberger ed. 82-83).

FURTHER DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY TO FOLLOW