

Visions of the Past and Future in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*

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## Abstract

Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* is an enigmatic utopian novel published in 1627, which tells the tale of a European expeditionary crew that finds a mysterious island inhabited by the remnants of an ancient civilization. The island is home to a utopian establishment called Solomon's House, which acts as a medium for Francis Bacon's vision of an ideal society built on scientific ideals and the spirit of discovery. The novel is much more than is immediately evident, for Francis Bacon's personal life and connections to secret orders and royalty of the Renaissance likely played a key part in the genesis of this text. In this thesis, the object is to read Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* in the tradition of utopia narratives. In light of modern advancements in the fields of physics, chemistry and anthropology it is clear that *New Atlantis*, imbued with esoteric knowledge was far ahead of its time, and is still relevant for truth-seekers worldwide.

Francis Baconin *Uusi Atlantis* on enigmaattinen utopianovelli vuodelta 1627, joka kertoo tarinan Eurooppalaisesta tutkimusryhmästä joka löytää muinaisen sivilisaation selviytyjien asuttaman mystisen saaren. Saarella sijaitsee utopinen hallinto nimeltään Solomonin Talo, mikä toimii välikappaleena Francis Baconin visiolle ideaalisesta yhteiskunnasta, joka ihanoi tieteellisiä ideaaleja sekä tutkimuksen henkeä. Novelli on paljon enemmän kuin päällepäin näkyy, sillä Francis Baconin henkilökohtainen elämä, sekä yhteydet Renesanssin ajan salaseuroihin ja kuninkaallisiin vaikutti todennäköisesti tekstin syntyyn. Tämän teesin tavoite on sijoittaa Francis Baconin Uusi Atlantis utopiakertomuksien perinteeseen. Fysiikan, kemian ja antropologian modernien edistysten valossa on selkeää, että *Uusi Atlantis* esoteerisine viittauksineen oli paljon aikaansa edellä, ja on ajankohtainen vielä tänäkin päivänä totuuden etsijöille ympäri maailman.

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The Man Behind the Message.....</b>	<b>2</b>
	2.1 On the importance of historical context .....	2
	2.2 Understanding the Author.....	3
	2.3 Intertextual References in <i>New Atlantis</i> .....	4
<b>3</b>	<b>Analysis.....</b>	<b>7</b>
	3.1 Occult History Between the Lines.....	7
	3.2 Solomon’s House, a Model for the Ideal University.....	10
	3.3 Synthesizing Major Aspects of Bacon’s Utopian Vision.....	14
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>20</b>

## **1 Introduction**

The time of the renaissance saw the Indo-European civilization in a state of self-reflection. Reawakening to our deep, ancient past, societies all over Europe were entrenched in rediscovery of much, that was presumed lost. Wondrous tales of advanced civilizations in deep antiquity captured the imaginations of scholars, and explorers then, as it does now. Late renaissance secret societies such as the Rosicrucians stimulated the imaginations of novelty in England, and continental Europe alike with fables of extraordinary epochs in history. The few surviving accounts from beyond our 6000 years of recorded history, are mere echoes of advanced civilizations that met their untimely demise amidst global inundation events, floods. The antediluvian mythos that survived in the West can be attributed to the works of Greek Philosopher and statesman Plato, and his predecessor, Solon in 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, who envisioned the destruction of the fabled empire of Atlantis some 9000 years before his time. This study will examine how mythology and the memory of deep antiquity was preserved and perceived by Francis Bacon, a Renaissance England author and statesman, and how it shaped his visionary utopian society in his novel *New Atlantis, a work unfinished*.

## **2 The Man Behind the Message**

In order to understand the angle this study will adopt; it is crucial to lay the groundwork that the literary analysis will be built upon. The following chapters will briefly delineate the mythos surrounding the legend of the lost civilization of Atlantis and conclude with a brief overview of Francis Bacon's life, as well as personal motivations for choosing the topics of mythology and esoteric traditions for this candidate's thesis.

### **2.1 On the Importance of Historical Context**

So how can one best come to know oneself as an individual? We live short lives with fallible minds prone to delusion. It is very easy to deceive ourselves in regard to our true nature. We can come to identify ourselves with the things we possess, the beliefs we hold, arbitrary lines drawn on a map, or manmade political or cultural labels. When attempting to understand oneself, looking back at one's life can be informative. This, however, is a short period of time, replete with personal errors and missteps. More importantly, personal history is prone to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. This is why careful examination of historical trends and accounts left by our forefathers is of utmost importance. Our DNA has lived a thousand lives before in slightly different manifestations and projections, amidst countless environments and conditions across the span of time. Understanding our roots helps inform us of who we are, how to best be and grow. Cut off from this understanding, we cannot help but live in confusion and anxiety. There is nothing more informative than a wholistic picture of history, although a perfect understanding of all events is not possible due to the passage of time. It is not only a record of our own personal journey, but of the intersection and intertwining of all journeys in a multitude of unique circumstances. It is for this reason, that historical context is crucial, and without it we are very much unmoored beings wandering in the world in search of purpose and origin.

It is vital that Francis Bacon's fictional account of a Mesoamerican expedition is understood in its historical context. The novel was written during a time when most of Europe was still in the grips of oppressive religious and academic dogma and imagined an ideal society free from the limitations of 17<sup>th</sup> century taboos. It is inspiring in the sense, that it dared to boldly argue that there was

plenty of room for improvement amidst the civilization that gave birth to it, and that humanity had regressed on all fronts when compared to its achievements in prehistory. *The New Atlantis* is a testament to what was before, and what is yet to come. It is the project of a polymath that saw a world amidst rapid change and drew upon historical root sources, esoteric societies and technological advancements of his time in order to paint a picture of what the future could hold.

## 2.2 Understanding the Author

An analysis of a novel with historical, esoteric and technological undertones is better informed if the societal context of its birth is appreciated. *New Atlantis, a work unfinished* is a philosophical and historical vision that seeks to position itself with the classics of the utopian genre via reference to Plato's Atlantis account.

Francis Bacon, 1st Viscount St Alban was born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1561 to an English middle-class family. His academic career started with a tuition he received for Trinity College, Cambridge and followed the medieval Latin curriculum. Possibly by a stroke of luck, Bacon met Queen Elizabeth during his time in Cambridge, which likely cast him in a favourable light in the eyes of novelty and kickstarted his parliamentarian career (Wotton 5). After the reign of Queen Elizabeth ended, Bacon went on to serve under King James, whose court knighted him in 1603 (Wotton 5). Studying Bacon, one quickly runs into rumours about his affiliations with a group called the Rosicrucians, which affiliates itself with esoteric traditions and wisdom teachings from the ancient world. The origins of the order, are described by a classic of Western occult study, Arthur Edward Waite as follows:

It is the aim of the Society to afford mutual aid and encouragement in working out the great problems of life and in searching out the secrets of nature; to facilitate the study of philosophy founded upon the Kabbalah and the doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus, which was inculcated by the original Fratres Roseae Crucis of Germany A.D. 1450; and to investigate the meaning and symbolism of all that now remains of the wisdom, art and literature of the ancient world. (Waite 3-4)

Were this to be the case, Bacon's affiliation with the order would broaden the range of plausible motives for his novel. Having access to rare documents and literature that survived the Middle Ages and the inquisition, as well as holding a prestigious position in the society of his time allows for some unique ethical dilemmas. Some historians have postulated that Bacon, being the initiate he was, sought to reintroduce ancient wisdom and information for his countrymen in his works. In her book, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, renaissance historian Frances Yates remarks the following:

There were, however, other trumpet sounds, making a striking announcement, not with the Rosicrucian wild excitement but in measured and reasonable terms. These were the manifestos concerning the advancement of learning issued by Francis Bacon. These manifestos were dedicated to James I, the same monarch as he to whom the Rosicrucian movement in Germany so vainly pinned its hopes. (Yates 118)

There are even rumours of Bacon having authored works under the ever so famous Shakespeare-alias, metaphorically shaking his spear at ignorance in the footsteps of the Greek deity of wisdom, Athena (Gibson ch. 3). These rumours, however, are hard to validate due to the division of Shakespearean investigators to schools advocating for a variety of possibilities. One thing is evident for students of Baconian philosophy though. He was very aware of the importance of historical context and it seemed to have shaped his writings and pursuits in life.

### **2.3 Intertextual References in *New Atlantis***

Plato's *Timaeus & Critias* is without a doubt the most significant intertextual reference Bacon puts forth, making it a key text for interpretation of *New Atlantis* to its full extent. The Western philosophic tradition was described by A.N. Whitehead as "a series of footnotes to Plato" (39). This study does not beg to differ in this regard. Plato's account of the empire of Atlantis, as it was handed down to his forefather Solon by Ancient Egyptian priesthood is recorded as a historical account given by Critias:

Let's recall, first, that in all 9,000 years have passed since war was declared between those who lived beyond and those who lived within the Pillars of Heracles. This is the war whose course I shall now describe. It is said that one side was led right through to the

end of the fighting by Athens, while the other side was commanded by the kings of Atlantis — an island which, as we said, was once larger than Libya and Asia, though by now earthquakes have caused it to sink and it has left behind unnavigable mud. (Plato 105)

This account is the only surviving one that provides a timeline for the erasure civilization and memory in prehistory and could well be the same one that was rediscovered during renaissance and captured Bacon's imagination originally. By adopting the Atlantean mythos and its adjacent Greek political works such as *The Republic*, Bacon positions his work among the oldest of Western literary traditions. Plato's account has a tendency to put into perspective the fragility of human civilization, and the heights that it can reach, which can help catalyse utopian thinking. It is important to note, that information about the Atlantean culture was not limited to Plato's account, and the Renaissance is maybe best described as the re-emergence of ancient schools of thought with its multitude of ripple-effects in the rest of society.

While it may be impossible to determine if Atlantis refers to a genuine historical location, one thing can be ascertained. The Atlantean civilization symbolizes a state of higher consciousness humanity reached in prehistory and for this reason both Plato and Bacon dedicated a significant amount of their time to the study of this past golden age of humanity. Most of the history that is widely discussed in modern times is characterized by the fall and deterioration of civilizations. Among all historical accounts from all over the earth, it is commonplace that the origins of highly advanced societies and cultures have faded into obscurity, owing to the notion that these origins date back so far into prehistory that almost no detailed accounts have stood the test of time. Critias then goes on to elaborate on the cultural decline of the Atlanteans as follows:

They saw clearly that even prosperity is enhanced by the combination of mutual friendship and virtue — and that wealth declines and friendship is destroyed by materialistic goals and ambitions. As a result of this kind of reasoning and of the persistence of the divine nature within them, they thrived in all the ways I've described. But when the divine portion within them began to fade, as a result of constantly being diluted by large measures of mortality, and their mortal nature began to pre- dominate, they became incapable of bearing their prosperity and grew corrupt. (Plato 121)



Civilizational decline can be brought about by the degradation of the state of collective consciousness, a theme that is common in religious moralism universally. It could be argued, that “the fall of man” and exile from Eden is a symbolic notion, describing the regression of consciousness from higher metaphysical ideals to materiality, bringing with it civilizational decline on a global scale. On a more physical note, Critias outlines another important contributing factor to the decline of civilizations through time, cataclysms. “Those who survived on each occasion were illiterate mountain-dwellers, who had heard only the names of the rulers of the land and knew hardly anything about their achievements” (Plato 107). This thought-provoking line is very similar to the euphemism “The meek shall inherit the Earth”, which could be interpreted to mean that the most likely survivors of a natural upheaval have been mountain dwelling hunter-gatherer societies. Such societies had, and still have very little capability or motivation to preserve the technological and philosophical insights of coastal societies such as our own. Naturally some small groups survived the Atlantean deluge, which in part explains the similarities in architectural style and mythology amongst stone-age societies on all continents. With the aforementioned considerations in mind, Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* can be interpreted in a new light due to 21<sup>st</sup> century discoveries and resources.

An understanding of mythology as distant history, that has been twisted over time is a key notion present in the following analysis, and in the interest of building the case of mythology as lost history, an examination of the Greek mythical tale of Troy is a brilliant example. A set of texts called *Iliad* and *Odyssey* made their way to us from the ancient Greek civilization. These texts are considered central to the ancient Greek literary tradition, and multiple parts of this tale have survived in the lexicons and phrases of languages still spoken today. Some of the more notable examples include Achilles’ heel and the Trojan horse. The legend of the city of Troy describes the 10-year siege that the city of Troy suffered under neighbouring Kingdoms, with the focus on the heroic story of the warrior Achilles. After centuries upon centuries, these events faded into obscurity and were reduced to folklore and fantastical tales, that were often regarded only legends with symbolical meaning. In the aftermath of the Renaissance, students of history re-examined old legends in hopes of uncovering references to places long forgotten about. It wasn’t until 1868, that a German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann would excavate the ruins of the besieged city in modern Anatolia, bringing Troy back from the realm of mythology, into the fields of history and archaeology after the passage of thousands of years. On top of being a story of deception, heroism and war, the story of Troy had become a story about the futility of history, a story about the effects of the passage of time on our collective memory. In light of the lessons

learned from these Greek classics, the example of Troy is a relevant consideration in the study of other works dealing with historical topics as well. Often found in works of the genre, are overlooked bits of knowledge and locations that can lead to rediscoveries with the passage of time.

### **3. Analysis**

The novel includes several highly compelling parts that can be subjected to further examination. Firstly, Francis Bacon's extraordinary knowledge of historical epochs and details is evident due to his references to historical locations and peoples. Secondly, Francis Bacon expresses his hopes and aspirations for the future that will be brought about by the emergence of high technology. The detailing of these technologies, as well as philosophical and cultural developments brought about by the spirit of scientific discovery is done by Bacon via a fictional establishment present in the book, Solomon's House. The analysis will conclude with a selection of notable aspects and qualities of Bacon's utopian vision.

#### **3.1 Occult History between the lines**

The novel is characterized by the combination of fiction with detailed historical facts, that are recited by the fictional inhabitants of the fabled island of Bensalem. The novel begins with a very short exposition of the expedition the protagonists have undertaken. "We sailed from Peru, (where we had continued for the space of one whole year) for China and Japan, by the South Sea; taking with us victuals for twelve months; and had good winds from the east, though soft and weak, for five months space, and more" (Bacon 6). Although a minute expository detail, it is unlikely that the location Bacon chose to start the journey from was chosen at random. The Peruvian Andes happen to be the location of some of the most highly compelling megalithic architecture and mummies in modern anthropology, as well as the enigmatic Paracas culture which has become famous everywhere but the academic circles. Among experts in the field, as well as among esoteric traditions it is often postulated that the Mesoamerican and Egyptian cultures share common cultural heritage due to their similar styles in architecture, art and historical accounts. It is easy to see how the Atlantean civilization fits here as

the most plausible candidate for the role of such a “mother culture” from which these two branches descended after the rapid end of the latest ice-age. What little can be said of the utopian aspect of the Islands location, is the relative isolation of the Island from the rest of the world. Perhaps Bacon thought it was crucial for the long-term survival of a society to be situated far from continental nations, for history is filled with conflict between neighbours. Bacon positions the fictional Island nation of Bensalem in the Pacific Ocean, between America’s Western coast and Asia, which seems like an area large enough to possess a mystique of sorts. The vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, dotted with numerous Islands provides ample food for imagination even today, let alone in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is also plausible that Bacon paid little attention to the geographical aspect of his utopian vision, and instead opted to make it an island nation simply to preserve parallels to Plato’s Atlantis account.

Adding further evidence to the claim about Bacon’s prestige among secret societies, masonic author Manly P. Hall notes in his book *Secret Teachings of all Ages*:

Masonic emblems are to be observed also upon the title pages of nearly every book Published by Bacon. Sir Francis Bacon considered himself as a living sacrifice upon the altar of human need; he was obviously cut down in the midst of his labours, and no student of his New Atlantis can fail to recognize the Masonic Symbolism contained therein. (Hall 210)

Bacon’s connection to the Masonic order adds yet another layer of interpretation that could be performed on New Atlantis, and if anything, it strengthens the notion of New Atlantis’ intimate connection with secret societies, although freemasonry doesn’t enjoy the level of secrecy it once did. This layer of analysis, however, deals in cyphers, numerology and symbolism, all fields that are too extensive for the purposes of this study. One conclusion however can be drawn; the connection and mentions by masonic circles is relevant for the study of Bacon’s work, for it increases the likelihood of hidden motives and messages within the text.

Further proof of the notion that Bacon had access to historical materials and intended his work to be interpreted with these themes in mind, is provided in the following lines through a fictional inhabitant of the Island nation:

Yet so much is true, that the said country of Atlantis, as well that of Peru, then called Coya, as that of Mexico, then named Tyrambel, were mighty and proud kingdoms in arms, shipping and riches: so mighty, as at one time (or at least within the space of ten years) they both made two great expeditions; they of Tyrambel through the Atlantic to the Mediterrane Sea; and they of Coya through the South Sea upon this our island: and for the former of these, which was into Europe, the same author amongst you (as it seemeth) had some relation from the Egyptian priest whom he cited. (Bacon 27)

At first glance details like these could seem like a tool used for exposition of events, but their historical context makes them noteworthy. What makes lines like these curious, is that they contain very detailed accounts of Peruvian and Mexican history, most of which was not available to the 17th century public at large. One can speculate about the origins of such detailed accounts, and the reasons for the secrecy surrounding them. Whatever the truth of the matter may be, the fact that Bacon had somehow come to possess the fact that Mesoamerica once harboured these advanced cultural foundations is very peculiar.

The last sentence likely refers to the Greek statesman Solon, from whom Critias and Plato received the original Atlantis account. Bacon proceeds to further the notion of advanced civilizations in antiquity through the Solomon's initiates dialogue: "You shall understand (that which perhaps you will scarce think credible) that about three thousand years ago, or somewhat more, the navigation of the world, (especially for remote voyages,) was greater than at this day" (Bacon 25). These words are spoken to the stranded European ship crew by the initiated elder of Solomon's house. The fact that the fictional elder refers to ancient navigation and seafaring having been more advanced further builds up the notion of history having experienced cyclical highs and lows. This in turn helps build up the impression that Bacon is merely using fictional characters to bring forth historic truths that were lost among the common folk of his time. Delving deeper into religious and mythological tradition, the elder figure explains more of the history that was preserved by Solomon's House:

The example of the ark, that saved the remnant of men from the universal deluge, gave men confidence to adventure upon the waters; or what it was; but such is the truth. The Phoenicians, and especially the Tyrians, had great fleets. So had the Carthaginians their colony, which is yet further west. Toward the east the shipping of Egypt and of Palestine was likewise great. China also, and the great Atlantis, (that you call America,) which have now but junks and canoes, abounded then in tall ships. (Bacon 25)

First noteworthy thing here is the mentioning of the ark and universal deluge. Having established that the novel features significant historical and mythological themes, it is probable that Bacon deemed it important to establish a historical chronology using the flood archetype found at the foundation of most accounts of the past. Much like the Trojan example, this represented a similar inclusion of historical events that were remembered mostly as fantastical tales in later times, if remembered at all. The most significant event implied within the passage, however, is that the American continent served as a place of refuge for the survivors of the Atlantean collapse. The inclusion of the comparison between the seafaring capabilities of the ancients vs. modernity serves as further evidence for Bacon's historical motivations for writing the novel.

### **3.2 Solomon's House, a Model for the Ideal University**

One of the most enigmatic portions of Bacon's novel is the description of the scientific governing body of the mythical island of Bensalem. "The society of Salomon's House; which house, or college (my good brethren) is the very eye of this kingdom" (Bacon 20). The institution consists of chemists, physicists, biologists, philosophers and ethical panellists among a myriad of other scientific disciplines. The most obvious contrast to the governing bodies that have dictated European history, is that the most powerful political body of Bensalem has no politicians at all, and it exists above the state. The agenda of Solomon's House is explained by a mysterious elder figure, that meets selected individuals of the stranded European ship crew. "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (Bacon 51). This quote outlines growth and knowledge as the core values of Bacon's utopia. Being described throughout the text is a society that places science and the search for universal truth as its central virtue. This motto of Solomon's House is a scientific proclamation true to its era, and one of the better peeks into Bacon's psyche. It is so true to the spirit of scientific discovery, that it could be included in any science book today. The enlargement of humanity's reach could be interpreted as growth in both the realms of physical existence, and metaphysical existence, for all things possible consist of these two domains. Physical enlargement can be interpreted as the process of becoming an interplanetary species, and eventually an intergalactic one. Metaphysical enlargement of humanity on the other hand could include areas such as spiritual and, ideological growth. The phrase "secret

motions” sounds a lot like the laws of physics as we know them today, and as they were pioneered by Isaac Newton and the likes. They are secret in the sense that these fundamental rules of reality do not reveal themselves to human senses and are only translatable to humans with the help of mathematics, scientific symbology and equations.

The elder of Solomon’s House then starts to list the different scientific disciplines, equipment and proficiencies they possess. Among the awe-inspiring predictions are sky-scraping buildings and observatories that were beyond the material sciences of Bacon’s day:

We have high towers; the highest about half a mile in height; and some of them likewise set upon high mountains; so that the vantage of the hill with the tower is in the highest of them three miles at least. And these places we call the Upper Region; accounting the air between the high places and the low, as a middle region (Bacon 52).

Ancient tales such as the Tower of Babel recount a time in the past, when all nations and peoples spoke a common language. With the combined intellect of all the nations of the world, humanity undertook an ambitious project to build a tower so high, that it would scrape the sky, and mankind could join the gods. However, this is not all there is to the story of the fabled Tower of Babel. A key theme in the biblical story is the dissatisfaction of god due to the cooperative efforts of humans, which is followed by the destruction of the tower and the confusion of mankind’s languages in order to prevent future cooperation. The elder recounts New Testament scriptures that Bensalem came to possess through their continental infiltration programs.

There was also in both these writings, as well the Book, as the Letter, wrought a great miracle, conform to that of the Apostles, in the original Gift of Tongues. For there being at that time in this land Hebrews, Persians, and Indians, besides the natives, every one read upon the Book, and Letter, as if they had been written in his own language. (Bacon 22)

The idea of a universal tongue can be interpreted in a myriad of ways, and there certainly has to be a reason for why Bacon saw it necessary to include it as a cornerstone of the literary heritage preserved by the Island of Bensalem. A scientific language of symbols, variables and their relations to each other has become a sort of global language in the time following the scientific revolution and

industrialization. Although the Tower of Babel is not explicitly referred to in the novel, it is quite likely Bacon drew inspiration from the ancient tale when he was imagining what the future would look like. The elder describes the uses for their tower of Babel-like sky-scraping buildings: “We use these towers, according to their several heights, and situations, for insolation, refrigeration, conservation; and for the view of divers meteors; as winds, rain, snow, hail; and some of the fiery meteors also” (Bacon 52). Notable here is the emphasis placed on astronomy and meteorology. Although it is not stated whether Solomon’s House is able to predict weather and cosmic impacts, they are obviously classified as phenomena that can be predicted. It could be argued that the underlying notion here is the placement of monitoring platform high above ground level, which is done with low-orbit satellites in the 21st century. Description of planetary monitoring devices follows; “And we do also declare natural divinations of diseases, plagues, swarms-of hurtful creatures, scarcity, tempests, earthquakes, great inundations, comets, temperature of the year, and divers other things; and we give counsel thereupon, what the people shall do for the prevention and remedy of them” (Bacon 66). Considering the mythology surrounding the distant history of planet Earth and Atlantis in particular, it is no wonder that Bacon envisioned future humanity undertaking collective efforts to monitor and predict natural disasters, pandemics and the likes. Modern examples of groups like these are CDC as well as organizations such as USGS (United States Geological Survey), which monitors, records and displays geological activity in real time. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is well known for their work in monitoring oceanic anomalies and issuing tsunami warnings to prevent large scale loss of coastal life during inundation events. Bacon’s reference to “comets, temperature of the year” could easily be interpreted as cosmic and solar activity monitoring conducted today by multiple space agencies globally. All of the aforementioned undertakings are unprecedented in human history, and there is much to be said about the underlying concern for cyclical cataclysmic processes that are evident from Earth’s history. Recent years have seen a steady growth of the body of evidence in support of cataclysmic events in our recent past. The most notable hypothesis is the Younger Dryas climate catastrophe as presented by the geological community, which coincides with Plato’s timeline of Atlantis’ destruction. It is quite feasible that a fear of mother nature’s wrath has such a strong hold on the subconscious of humanity for historical reasons.

Marking the start of a series of predictions relating to high technology, Bacon touches on the subject of renewable energy sources and their enslavement for the benefit of man.” We have

likewise violent streams and cataracts, which serve us for many motions: and likewise engines for multiplying and enforcing of winds, to set also on going diverse motions” (Bacon 53). Implied here, is the potential energy generated by Earth’s moving liquid mediums, which are in turn powered by the sun. Hydroelectric power, and windmills are modern examples of the harnessing of such diverse natural motions. This futuristic vision is in the tame end of the spectrum, for humanity has been able to spectate mother nature’s endless movement from the dawn of time. Water wheels are a great example of an archaic version of hydroelectric power.

The elder continues with the description of futuristic medical technology:” We have little wells for infusions of many things, where the waters take the virtue quicker and better, than in vessels or basins. And amongst them we have a water which we call Water of Paradise, being, by that we do to it made very sovereign for health, and prolongation of life” (Bacon 53). Besides its obvious reference to the fabled fountain of youth, which has been sought after for as long as humans have aged, this portion hides within it serious philosophical and ethical considerations. In particular the “prolongation of life” via chemical methods is a curious prediction Bacon makes. The notion of anti-aging technology was the stuff of science fiction until fairly recently. Innovations in the fields of anti-aging open a door to whole new realm of human experience, as well as a whole new field of philosophical and ethical dilemmas. The technologies possessed by the house of Solomon are further described: ” We have also fair and large baths, of several mixtures, for the cure of diseases, and the restoring of man's body from arefaction: and others for the confirming of it in strength of sinewes, vital parts, and the very juice and substance of the body” (Bacon 54). The technologies operated by Solomon’s House have various similarities with modern medical technologies and were way beyond the capabilities of 17th century England. The ability to restore vital parts, and the very juice and substance of the body has striking similarities with blood transfusions, organ transplants and stem cell treatment, which are unbelievably beneficial technologies for the preservation of human life and would have likely sounded like witchcraft to the 17th century world at large.

Bacon then describes agricultural methods that diverge from natural selection: “We have also means to make divers plants rise by mixtures of earths without seeds; and likewise to make divers new plants, differing from the vulgar; and to make one tree or plant turn into another” (55). Although artificial selection via traditional breeding methods has been practised from the dawn of time, the fact that Bacon implies the ability to create new types of plants, as well as the ability to turn one planet



another sounds a lot like genetic engineering. A modern example of genetical food engineering in our time comes in the form of the pharmaceutical giant Monsanto, that has created crops with DNA splicing methods, giving them among other things the capability to produce their own insecticides. The world that arrived after Bacon's departure chose the doctrine of control, although Monsanto would fit better in a dystopian narrative given their carcinogenic explorations in a field with implications on a global scale.

A depiction of photon technologies follows:

We have also perspective-houses, where we make demonstrations of all lights and radiations; and of all colours: and out of things uncoloured and transparent, we can represent unto you all several colours; not in rain-bows, (as it is in gems, and prisms,) but of themselves single. We represent also all multiplications of light, which we carry to great distance, and make so sharp as to discern small points and lines. (Bacon 59)

Easily among his most futuristic predictions, Bacon describes the diffraction of white light and its dissection into distinct visible wavelengths. Practical experiments with prisms were available in Bacon's time, but this displays a deep understanding of the potential uses of visible light. Bacon's description of what can only be interpreted as laser devices further adds to the mystique of his forward-thinking mind. Focusing light precisely enough to a far-reaching beam with discernible small points and lines requires industrial levels of manufacturing precision and energy. Whatever and wherever it was that Bacon drew inspiration for this prediction, it was far ahead of his time. Continuing with the theme of futuristic predictions: "We imitate also flights of birds; we have some degrees of flying in the air. We have ships and boats for going under water, and brooking of seas" (Bacon 62). Being described here are airplanes and submarines, which would have been reasonable deductions from natural examples like birds and marine life. Funnily enough, Bacon's tone in regard to human flight seems a bit doubtful. Maybe it was thought that prolonged flight was something entirely out of the reach of humanity.

As an overarching note, such focus on technological marvels suggests a vision of an exponentially advancing civilization striving to be the ruler of nature and reality itself. Humanity was to take control of nature and harness it for its own gain. This among other themes, end up being the

defining features of Bacon's utopia, and a major part of his contribution to the Western philosophical tradition.

### **3.3 Synthesizing Major Aspects of Bacon's Utopian Vision**

The novel presents a multi-disciplinary and rather comprehensive look into Francis Bacon's inner world. Historically, the bane of utopian visions has been their neglect of the anarchist side of human nature, and its relationship to authority, ethereal or physical. This is to say, that no perfectly harmonious societies that would fit the description of a utopia are known to have manifested in recorded history. On a more philosophical note, perhaps the utopian genre is a by-product humanity's tendency to self-reflect and place under the spotlight areas of reality, such as governance, family relations and learning which are often not considered to be in need of renovation to begin with. Conceivably the purpose of such an archetypal human expression is to catalyse growth even when times are relatively good. In his mission to outline the main areas of societal development Bacon proposes changes at the level of the family unit, the basic building block of any society.

One day there were two of our company bidden to a Feast of the Family, as they call it. A most natural, pious, and reverend custom it is, shewing that nation to be compounded of all goodness. This is the manner of it. It is granted to any man that shall live to see thirty persons descended of his body alive together, and all above three years old, to make this feast which is done at the cost of the state. (Bacon 36)

Perhaps the most striking contrast to continental European societies of Bacon's time, is the proposition of unconventional family relations. Although a single woman giving birth to 30 children is within the realm of possibilities, it is far more likely that the thirty descendants could span multiple generations. This interpretation would make the Feast of the Family an event dedicated to the efforts and knowledge of the elders. It is feasible that Bacon considered a growing or stable population pyramid a prerequisite of a prospering civilization. A significant aspect of Bacon's utopian vision is the role of the state as a facilitator of family relations, and that special recognition should be given to men that branch out the family tree. Bacon doesn't further specify the role of the state in bringing men and women together, however nature has a way of arranging communities, whether human or animal into mating hierarchies.

Those at the top of society's respective hierarchies would naturally get more chances at pair bonding, and this could very well be the underlying process implied by Bacon. Inherently intertwined in Bacon's social order, are reproductive success and contributions to the college, which symbolizes the furthest reaches of human knowledge. This idea of "the rule of the deserving" is echoed in Plato's works also, adding further parallels between the works of Plato and Bacon.

Another interesting aspect of Bensalem's societal order is explained by a Jewish inhabitant of the island:

As for masculine love, they have no touch of it; and yet there are not so faithful and inviolate friendships in the world again as are there; and to speak generally, (as I said before,) I have not read of any such chastity, in any people as theirs. And their usual saying is, That whosoever is unchaste cannot reverence himself; and they say, That the reverence of a man's self, is, next to religion, the chiefest bridle of all vices. (Bacon 46)

What exactly Bacon means with the Inhabitants of the Island of Bensalem having no touch of masculine love, is very hard to pin down. Some researchers have posited that Bacon's use of the terms "masculine love" refers to a peer relationship instead of a romantic one (Summers 24). The use of the term chastity hints at a complete withholding from lustful pursuits that is expected from the society at large, and this makes the most sense considering the Jew comments on the corruption of the European marriage and relations between man and woman. Interestingly in Plato's philosophical works it is often echoed that channelling one's sexual energy towards long term study and discovery is highly virtuous. It could therefore be synthesized, that monogamy, dedication to an enlarged family collective and lifelong study are some of the main aspects of Bacon's ideal society.

Another key aspect of Bacon's vision revolves around the preservation and careful interpretation of ancient knowledge, in order to benefit the society at large. Implied by the nomenclature, history and behaviour of the Island's habitants, Bacon's utopian society would give history the respect it deserves. It is plausible, that Bacon wanted to stress the inherent value of being historically informed, and the effects it can have on the understanding of oneself in terms of the historical continuum. It is often said, that a people who don't examine history, are prone to repeat their mistakes again and again, which often has the unfortunate side-effect of stalling societal progress. Bacon places emphasis on this kind of societal orientation as a cornerstone of a civilization in search of prosperity, and lasting cohesion. The novel *New Atlantis* in itself seems to be an attempt at combining a

stimulating view of the future informed by historical trends rediscovered by enlightenment scholars. Intimately related to Bacon's occupation and societal role in 1600's Europe, are his characterizations of Bensalem's scientific and academic elite.

The ruling caste of the island of Bensalem, consists of scientists, philosophers and academics from the college of six days work. Bacon's utopian vision includes a type of intellectual elite that is tasked with weighing the benefits and dangers of new innovations born domestically or brought from the outside world, and whether they should be released to the general populace or kept a secret.

We have also, as you must think, novices and apprentices, that the succession of the former employed men do not fail; besides, a great number of servants and attendants, men and women. And this we do also: we have consultations, which of the inventions and experiences which we have discovered shall be published, and which not: and take all an oath of secrecy, for the concealing of those which we think fit to keep secret: though some of those we do reveal sometimes to the state and some not. (Bacon 65)

Found within the most enigmatic paragraph of the novel are multiple aspects of Bacon's forward oriented thinking. Women are enlisted in highly influential positions of the scientific hierarchy and take part in the ethical considerations of the institution's scientific pursuits. Much like modern academic societies, Bacon stressed the role of women in decision making, for an empathetic approach is a key part of responsible scientific development. Furthermore, found within the paragraph is the idea of a technologically advanced breakaway civilization, that limits contact with the outside world and waits for its ethical development to reach its technological advancements. This view is especially clear in the quote: "By means of our solitary situation; and of the laws of secrecy, which we have for our travellers, and our rare admission of strangers; we know well most part of the habitable world, and are ourselves unknown" (Bacon 18). The notion of a governmental entity that operates in relative secrecy seems like a Freudian slip on Bacon's part, given that he was affiliated with secretive groups in his day. The implications of such a closed intellectual group are rather far reaching. Embedded in such a notion is a deep-seated belief in natural hierarchies, differences in individual ability. Included also is a ruling caste of aristocratic elites, individuals of a priestly elite. In layman's terms, the Island of Bensalem is not a society where people are equal at birth in every respect, and equity is not enforced by the island's

institutions either. Bensalem is rather a society ruled by a scientific elite, who climb their respective hierarchy based on their intellectual ability and efforts in furthering the college's work.

Some scholars are given the responsibility of travel and compilation of innovations and events from the outside world:

Every twelve years there should be set forth out of this kingdom, two ships, appointed to several voyages; that in either of these ships there should be a mission of three of the fellows or brethren of Saloman's House, whose errand was only to give us knowledge of the affairs and state of those countries to which they were designed; and especially of the sciences, arts, manufactures, and inventions of all the world; and withal to bring unto us books, instruments, and patterns in every kind. (Bacon 34)

Through a 21<sup>st</sup> century lens the activities described above could be described as espionage, especially when practiced by a governmental entity. Such infiltration of countries worldwide, without the agents disclosing their true identity is an intriguing part of Bacon's vision and is hard to imagine being ethically sound and consensual in today's geopolitical climate. Underlying this global information sharing aspect of Bacon's utopia is the presumption of global co-operation brought about by the scientific revolution. Although the scientific community has shared inventions and research in the time since the scientific revolution, such complete innovative transparency remains a utopian notion to the 21<sup>st</sup> century world at large.

The most overarching aspect of the utopia as presented by *New Atlantis* has to do with the spirit of scientific pursuit. This mentality is best represented by the quote: "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (Bacon 51). What passes as scientific research today is seldom representative of Bacon's noble search for truth, free of institutional dogma. It can be argued that one of the main things required for the Baconian scientific philosophy to manifest is a small scale high-trust society, free from corrupting motives and outside influences. This stands in stark contrast to the "publish or perish" attitudes rampant in higher learning institutions worldwide today, which often prioritize quantity over the quality of research.

### 3. Conclusion

New Atlantis is best described as a historically informed utopia. Francis Bacon's widespread use of little-known historical truths aids in creating a sense of mystique and makes the genre of the novel hard to pin down. In order for the work to be classified as solely fiction, locations and historical insight would have to be omitted. All things considered the book fits the criteria of a utopia better, for it details a society that possesses highly desirable qualities for its inhabitants and seems free of corrupting influences. Bacon is often credited as one of the founding figures of empiricism due to his emphasis on sensory experience as a method of information collection. The novel is oddly divided in the sense that most of it is made up of rather traditional storytelling with minimal exposition, and the end seems to consist of an unfinished list of societal and technological advancements that Bacon envisioned were to be made within the following centuries.

Perhaps the most timeless question Bacon leaves his audience with, is how much of the novel is based on real events and sources. The novel reads like a diary of someone who actually made the journey to an island inhabited by the remnants of some advanced civilization from deep antiquity. Knowing that Bacon was affiliated with the Rosicrucian order and a shadow-authoring group called "Knights of the Helmet" it is plausible that he was involved in a soft-disclosure effort of sorts. Simply put, Bacon seemed interested in catalysing interest in deep history among the common folk in the spirit of the renaissance. Hence, it is not out of the realm of possibilities that Bacon sought to embed long lost occult knowledge into works he was involved with, in order to popularize some of the mind-expanding discussions the Renaissance brought to the forefront. Whether or not Bacon had access to exclusive historical root sources and friends in high places, and what prompted him to do the work he did remain the greatest mysteries of his legacy. With the aforementioned factors in mind, the full scope of the novel can be appreciated. Was Bacon well informed about the cyclical nature of civilizational decline? Did he believe that humanity had passed its golden age, and yet was inevitably heading for the next one? This type of worldview differs greatly from the linear concept of time popularized by the authoritative institutions of Bacon's time, and *New Atlantis* could have very well have been his attempt at initiating into the school of truth those among the masses, who had the eyes to see between the lines.

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