

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ETERNAL ELEGANCE IN THE ESSAYS OF SIR FRANCIS BACON: A STUDY

Dr.V.SUDHAKAR NAIDU

Asst. Professor of English, Faculty of Languages, Department of English, University of Tripoli, Libya



Article Info:

Article Received:14/02/2014

Revised on:06/3/2014

Accepted for Publication:08/03/2014

**ABSTRACT**

Francis Bacon, the father of English essay occupies a distinguished position in English literature as an essayist and a pioneer of modern science. His essays are treasure house of worldly wisdom. He wrote widely on politics, philosophy and science. They portray his intellect and practical wisdom. They have gripping plots and hidden truth of practical life. They are loaded with the ripest wisdom of experience and observation conveyed through short, compact and terse sentences. The essays have become classics of English language because of their inevitable style and fine literary touch.

The essays present all aspects of human life. They cover topics from the purely intellectual (truth, religion, beauty) to the practical / human interest (friendship, honour, marriage) to the mundane (money, architecture, gardening). They are the pearls in the golden garden of literature. An average reader of Bacon may confine on some essays. But an eminent scholar studies and digests all the essays of Bacon. The present article evaluates Bacon's place in English literature, his presentation of moral principles, use of Aphoristic style and his inductive approach in the essays.

KEY WORDS

Eternal elegance, treasure house, practical wisdom, moral principles, aphoristic style, inductive approach, compact and terse sentences.

@ Copyright KY Publications**INTRODUCTION****1.1 Greatness of Francis Bacon**

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), was a versatile genius, attorney, philosopher, historian, champion of modern science and a top government official. He used to write a terse, epigrammatic, utilitarian prose which is well-structured and prescriptive, logical and illustrative. Bacon's prose was permeated with practical wisdom, and he addressed his readers in an oracular voice. In his essays Bacon has made use of

Latin and Greek quotations. He had comprehensive knowledge of the classics. Many of his observations have become proverbial expressions in the English language. He imported a new sense of precision and clarity in English prose. Simplicity, lucidity and flexibility are the key-notes of his style. In his essays there are elevated themes such as justice and truth and trifling themes as gardens, buildings etc. In fact, Bacon's essays are the treasure house of worldly wisdom. As an essayist Bacon's fame rests in his

prose style that has been variously estimated as Addison praises his grace, Sainsbury admires his dazzling power of rhetoric. Hume calls him rather stiff and rigid.

1.2 Francis Bacon: Wisest, Brightest and Meanest

"If parts allure these think how Bacon shin'd
The wisest, brightest and meanest of mankind."
(Alexander Pope)

From the above statement it is clear that Bacon was the true child of renaissance. He was the wisest because of his worldly wisdom, he was brightest owing to his powerful intellect and the art of writing terse essays, and he was meanest due to his treacherous character. He was a man of multi-talents. His thirst for infinite knowledge and versatility was astonishing. He possessed the intellect of the highest order. He was proficient in Greek, Latin, English, Science, Philosophy, Classics and other fields of knowledge. He is regarded as the creator of the modern school of experimental research. He says, "

Man is the servant and interpreter of nature". The essays are loaded with the ripest wisdom of experience and observation conveyed through short, compact and terse sentences. Bacon was indeed an eloquent prophet of new era and the pioneer of modern science.

2-POPULARITY OF BACON'S ESSAYS

2.1 Bacon's concept of essay

The form of essay for the first time was invented by Montaigne, a French essayist. Bacon borrowed something from him and modified the concept of the essays to suit his own genius. He used it not as a vehicle of self-revelation as Montaigne did but as a "repository of dispersed meditations impersonal, practical and worldly". The popularity of Bacon's essays is shown by the fact that they were translated into French, Latin and Italian. As an essayist Bacon's fame rests in his prose style that has been variously estimated as Addison praises his grace, Sainsbury admires his dazzling power of rhetoric. Hume calls him rather stiff and rigid. But the essays have become the classics of English language due to their inevitable style and fine literary touch.

2.2-Bacon's essays are a treasure house of worldly wisdom

It is fair to state that Bacon's essays are a treasure house of worldly wisdom. The term worldly wisdom means a wisdom which is necessary for worldly success. Bacon was a man of high wisdom, as he himself pronounced, "I have taken all knowledge to be my province". His essays are rich with the art which a man should employ for achieving success in his life, such as shrewdness, tact, foresight, judgment of character and so on. The renowned and marvellous poet, Alexander Pope made a wonderful remark on Bacon: "The wisest, brightest and meanest of mankind".

Bacon was the wisest because of his worldly wisdom, he was brightest owing to his powerful intellect and the art of writing terse essays, and he was meanest due to his treacherous character. He was truly of Renaissance; the age of accumulating knowledge, wealth and power. Being a true follower of Machiavellian principles, he led his life for worldly success. He was a man of shrewd and sagacious intellect with his eyes fixed on the main chance. And what he preached in his essays was also the Knowledge, needed for worldly success.

2.3 Evergreen themes

The subject of Bacon in his essays is the man who needs prosperity in worldly terms. Bacon's essays bring men to 'come home to men's business and bosoms'. He teaches them, how to exercise one's authority and much more. When he condemns cunning, it is not because of a hateful and vile thing, but because it is unwise. That is why the wisdom in his essay is considered a 'cynical' kind of wisdom. He describes his essays as 'Counsels - civil and moral'.

Of Truth: In his essay "Of Truth", Bacon appreciates truth and wishes people to speak the truth. He says: "A lie faces God and shrinks from man." He warns human beings against the punishment for the liar on the doomsday. But at the same time, he considers a lie as an 'alloy' which increases the strength of gold and feels it necessary for the survival on earth. He says: "A lie doth ever add pleasure". This is purely a statement of a "worldly wise man".

Of Great Places: The essay "Of Great Places" though contains a large number of moral precepts yet in this very same essay he also preaches worldly success. He says, "It is a strange desire to seek power and to lose liberty; By pains men come to greater pains". And, "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown."

Bacon suggests that men in authority should work not only for the betterment of public but also for their own status: "All rising to great place is by a winding stair; and if there be factions, it is good to side a man's self whilst he is rising and to behave himself when he is placed." It is purely a utilitarian advice and it surely holds a compromise between morality and worldly success. Even when Bacon urges a man not to speak ill of his predecessor, it is not because of high morality but because of the fact that the man who does not follow advice would suffer with unpleasant consequences.

Of Studies: Bacon's approach towards studies is also purely utilitarian. In his essay "Of Studies", he does not emphasize on study for its own sake, but for the benefit which it can provide to man to be supplemented by practical experience. Bacon says, "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man." And then he says: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." Bacon also points out the effects of different branches of studies on a man's mind and thinks it helpful in the cure of different mental ailments and follies.

Of Suitors : In his essay "Of Suitors" Bacon reveals his shrewd insight. Although he suggests that a suitor should not be disloyal towards his petition and should tell him the truth about the chances of winning the suit without leaving him wandering in false hopes. Bacon suggests that a patron should not charge extensive amounts for a small case. But then he dilutes all this by saying if the patron wants to support the non-deserving party, he should make a compromise between both of them, so that the deserving party would bear not great loss. This is a purely utilitarian approach and it shows what Bacon himself had been in his career, for it was his own profession.

Of Revenge: In the essay "Of Revenge" Bacon shows a certain high morality by saying that: "Revenge is a kind of wild justice; One who studieth revenge, keeps his own wounds green." He feels dignity in forgiving ones enemy. But then he says that even revenge is just in the cases when one can save one's skin from the hands of law.

2.4 Themes of utilitarianism

Bacon showed a certain incapacity for emotions. He took the relation of friendship for its benefit and made a purely worldly approach to the subject which intimately deals between two persons. He gave us the uses and abused of friendship. He says: "Those that want friends to open themselves unto, are cannibals of their own hearts." This essay clearly shows Bacon's cynical wisdom and that his morality is stuffed with purely utilitarian considerations.

Bacon considers love as a 'child of folly'. In his essay "Of Love" he says: "It is impossible to love and to be wise." He considers wife and children as hindrance in the way of success and progress. He says: "He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune." Afterwards in his essay "Of Marriage and Single Life" he tells the 'benefits' of a wife. "Wives are young men's mistresses, companion to middle age and old man's nurse." In his essay "Of Parents and Children" Bacon puts: "Children sweeten labour, but they make misfortune more bitter."

2.5 Compactness of thought and conciseness of expression

Bacon's brightness is best illustrated in the way in which he clothes his wisdom into brevity and lends the readers a great pleasure. The compactness of thought and conciseness of expression was a virtue in an age when looseness in thought and language was the rule. The essays are enriched with maxims and proverbs. He supports his ideas and arguments with innumerable quotations, allusions and analogies which prove his wide knowledge and learning. The aptness of the similes, the witty turn of phrases and the compact expression of weighty thoughts are evidence enough of the brightness of his intellect:

"Suspicions among thoughts are like bats among birds,"

"Money is like much, except it be spread."

"Virtue is like precious adours --- most fragrant, when they are incensed or crushed."

Thus with the tool of antithesis, Bacon made his argument many times stronger and influential than a simple sentence. He created so much wit and strength in such precise writings that they are still valid and famous. No man individually did provide such strength and simplicity to the English language than Bacon. Bacon tried to reach the reader's mind

by a series of aphoristic attacks. Therefore he is considered as the pioneer of modern prose. There is hardly any equal of him for clear, terse and compact writing.

2.6 Critical appreciation

Macaulay says "though Bacon did not arm his philosophy with the weapons of logic, he adorned her profusely with all decoration of rhetoric. His eloquence would have entitled him to a high place". In his essays Bacon had taken ample resort to certain rhetorical devices in order to establish his points. Of these devices, similes, metaphors and climaxes abound in his texts. In *Of Studies* he compares our natural abilities to the growth of a plant. As a plant need pruning, our natural qualities are to be decorated by studies. In *Of Discourse* the talkative 'posers' are beautifully compared to the tedious gay dancers. Such examples can easily be multiplied.

Saintsbury is rather critical on Bacon and says, "that he dazzles, amuses, half-delusively suggests, stimulates, provokes, lures on, much more than he proves, edifies, instructs, satisfies, is indeed perfectly true". L.C. Knights also finds fault with Bacon for his allegedly stolid unimaginative use of the English language. Basically, no doubt, Bacon evolves an expansive style because his purpose requires it; but he can also use ampler structure to display the finer beauties of the English language. Thus, such aphorism is the result of Bacon's brevity which meant to create a clarifying, penetrating impact upon the readers.

3-MORAL PRINCIPLES IN THE ESSAYS OF BACON

3.1 Bacon as a moralist

Bacon is a moralist-cum-worldly wise man. It is reflected in his essays where he preaches high moral principles and valuable guidelines for human conduct. For instance, in "Of Envy", he puts: "A man that hath no virtue in himself, ever envieth virtue in others." Then, in his essay "Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature" he says: "But in charity there is no excess; neither can angel or man come in danger by it." Again, he appears to be a lover of justice in his essay "Of Judicature". Bacon says, "The principal duty of a judge is to suppress force and fraud".

3.2 Bacon: A Man of Renaissance

In spite of all given examples, one cannot deny the fact that Bacon was a "Man of Renaissance". He had

a deep insight into human nature. He knew that man is naturally more prone to evil than good. On one hand, he preached high moral principles and on the other hand, he also expressed a mean capacity by compromising upon those morals for the sake of worldly success. For this reason, William Blake, a spiritual poet says about his essays: "Good advice for Satan's Kingdom." In his essay "Of Great Places" Bacon shows a high morality when he condemns the practice of 'wrongs' on the part of high officials. He says, "In place there is license to do good and evil; where of the latter is a curse." Afterwards, he appreciates the power of doing good. He says, "But power to do good, is true and lawful end of aspiring".

3.3 Bacon's ethical codes

He expressed that there is no place of revenge in high society and it is a high quality to forgive an enemy. Hereafter, Bacon spoils the effects by putting that in some cases man is justified in taking revenge, if the avenger can save his skin from the eyes of the law. He says: "But then let a man take heed the revenge be such as there is now law to punish; else a man's enemy is still forehead".

In his essay "Of Suitors" Bacon says that a man should refuse to undertake a suit if it is by giving a false hope to the petitioner and that one should not demand undue reward for his services. Those who employ crooked methods to win suits are the worst offenders of society. But he also says that if a patron wants to favour the undeserving party, he should bring both the parties to a compromise for this would be less dangerous for him. So, to Bacon, morality and ethical codes seem inferior to worldly considerations.

"Of Simulation and Dissimulation" is another example of the strange mixture of morality and prudence. "The best position and temperature is; to have openness in fame and opinion; secrecy in habits; dissimulation in seasonal use; and power to feign, if there be no remedy." Bacon's morality has also been described as a cynical kind of wisdom. This impression is confirmed by even those essays which deal with strong private relations between men. "Of Friendship", "Of Parents and Children", "Of Marriage and Single life" and "Of Love", all depict a certain kind of utilitarianism and worldly benefit. Here Bacon expresses a definite

failure of emotions, for he takes the matters of heart in terms of their uses and abuses.

4-APHORISTIC STYLE IN THE ESSAYS OF BACON

4.1 Common features of Bacon's prose style

Bacon's prose style has the common features of Elizabethans and the Jacobean. He preferred a probative authenticity of an aphoristic prose style. His prose is characterized by brief, pithy sentence units. The two important characteristics of Bacon's style are the terseness of expression and epigrammatic brevity. In fact, the essays of Bacon have to be read slowly because of the compact and condensed thought. Bacon's essays have simplicity, naturalness and straight forwardness in expression. Bacon was a noted innovator who liked other prose writers of his time because he was writing in reaction to earlier prose style which was highly organised and ornamented, that kind of style known – Ciceronian prose style of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors.

The aphoristic style of Bacon always depends on the device of balance and antithesis. In the essay *Of Studies*. Bacon says, "Studies serve for ornament and for ability". Further in the same essay he says, "Read not to contradict, nor to believe, but to weigh and consider." He scrupulously presents the advantages and the disadvantages of a particular issue. In the essay *Of Marriage and Single life*, Bacon says that an unmarried man is a good friend, good master and good servant, but he is unreliable as a good citizen. In *Of Parents and Children* Bacon says that children sweeten labour and they make misfortune more bitter; they increase the care of life but they mitigate the remembrance of death. This sort of weighing and balancing makes his style antithetical.

4.2 The adaptability to the subject matter

Bacon's style is compact yet polished and indeed some of its conciseness is due to the skillful adaptation of Latin idiom and phrase. But its wealth of metaphor is characteristically Elizabethan and reflects the exuberance of the Renaissance. No man in English literature is so fertile in pithy comparisons. Bacon set up a new method of prose writing, which was at once easy, simple, graceful, rhetorical, musical and condensed. Bacon's style was suited for all occasions. His prose style was eminently fitted for dignified subjects such as Truth, Atheism and Love

and also ordinary subjects such as 'Marriage and single life' and gardening.' The adaptability to the subject matter was a characteristic quality of his writings.

4.3 Constant use of figurative language

Another favourite style with Bacon is to begin an essay with some times a definition or a catching phrase or a jolting question as in *Of Honour and reputation* : " The winning of honour is but the revealing of a man's virtue and worth without disadvantage ". Or *Of Truth* : " What is truth? Said jesting pilate ; and would not stay for an answer ". Another striking feature of Bacon's style is his constant use of figurative language. His similes and metaphors are apt, vivid and suggestive such as: " Learning is both the lark that soars and sings and the hawk that soars and swoops." Bacon studied the impressions of men and women and wrote in aphoristic saying, part of Bacon's influence is due to the charm of his style, his sentences are loosely constructed but they are generally clear and intelligible. He is always interesting because his own interest in the subject never flags. No language is too homely, no example too simple which will serve to drive home the truth.

4.4 The extensive use of quotations, allusions and references

Another important feature of Bacon's style is the extensive use of quotations, allusions and references. His style thus becomes a " mosaic of quotations and allusions". It may also be noted that Bacon was in the habit of weighing and judging the pros and cons of a question. When he makes some particular statement, he at once counter balances it. In *Of Revenge*, Bacon says, " Revenge is a kind of wild justice". There are two ways of communication with the reader according to Bacon (1) Magisterial and (2) Probative. Aphoristic methods promotes inquiry that is knowledge impart where as magisterial carries a knowledge which is total. Anne Righten says there are three styles in Bacon's essays. (1) Where he gives some straight forward advice in a compact language. Bacon says, " To spend too much time in studies humour of scholar". (2) He doesn't give any advice; it is left to the reader in the conclusion. (3) Bacon studies the impression of men and women and made the usage of aphorisms and proverbs; his essays are very practical which come

home to business and bosom. Bacon's writings lacked ornamentation but his most elemental quality is simplicity and homeliness. He is at certain places extremely simple, easy and graceful. Bacon remains unrivalled in the combination of picturesqueness with weight of all the essayists of his time; his essays alone have a grip on the readers; and their success is partly due to their style.

4.5 Bacon had two styles of writing

Macaulay says that Bacon had not one but two styles. To illustrate the first style, Macaulay quoted the passage from the essay *Of Studies*: "Crafty men condemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them". To illustrate Bacon's second style, Macaulay quoted from *Of Adversity*: "Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without com-forts and hopes".

A comparison of these two passages reveals a striking change; the style of the first is entirely different from that of the second. In the first passage there are no connective conjunctions but Bacon finds room for them in the second. The later style has warmth, colour and imagination. Here Hugh Walker differs from Macaulay; he states that Bacon suited his style to the subject. There is no doubt that the style of the essay *Of Adversity* is more ornate than that of the essay *Of Studies*. But while reading *Advancement of Learning*, readers adore his passages too. So the change in his style appears unconvincing and unrealistic.

4.6 Impact of scientific and philosophical contributions

Bacon's contributions were majorly philosophical. But he helped to change the direction of scientific advances. The scientific and philosophical contributions that Francis Bacon gave, would impact the world today. The scientific method, in that time, was a new way to reach a conclusion about anything. It is a five step method: (1) The inquiry, (2) initial hypothesis, (3) Action of investigation, (4) Results, and (5) Conclusion. The scientific method, however, doesn't only aid the processes of scientific experiments. It also refers to the way one should acquire knowledge, or investigate phenomena, or to correct and refine previous unproven knowledge.

4.7 Popularity of aphorisms

Bacon's aphorisms are the most quotable among the English writers. A large number of his observations have become proverbial and popular household commonplaces. "Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; writing an exact man," and "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested". (Of Studies). In *Of Praise* Bacon says in a neatly compressed sentence: "Praise is the reflection of the virtue. But it is the reflection glass or body which giveth the reflection".

Bacon's use of aphoristic style enables him to express maximum sense in minimum words. In Bacon's essays, most of the sentences are terse and have aphoristic quality. Also Bacon's essays are full of great ideas of universal importance expressed in proverbial statements composed in aphoristic style. For instance,

"Revenge is a kind of wild justice."

"Crafty men condemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them."

"Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability."

: "Praise is the reflection of the virtue. But it is the reflection glass or body which giveth the reflection".

5-INDUCTIVE APPROACH IN THE ESSAYS OF BACON

5.1 The inductive approach to science

Bacon is most commonly known for advocating the inductive approach to science. He argued that there had been limited progress over the ages due to the fact that scholastic philosophers altered their findings on nature to meet the requirements of scripture. Bacon delineated the principles of the inductive thinking method, while the term "method" goes back to the times of Aristotle, Bacon constituted a breakthrough in the approach to science. He denounced the scholastic thinkers for their attachment to Aristotelian doctrines, which he felt prevented independent thinking and the acquisition of new ideas regarding nature. He argued that to improve the quality of human life, the advancement of science should not depend on ancient texts, and that old authorities should be considered redundant and unnecessary. He believed that knowledge should be pursued in a new and organized way.

5.2 Systematic accumulation of data

His idea of an inductive approach included the careful observation of nature with a systematic accumulation of data to draw upon. New laws were soon created based on the knowledge of particular findings through testing and experimentation. Any natural philosopher who subscribed to this method did not base their findings on out-dated myths, but would instead base their results on observable facts. It was this kind of materialist theory that brought about the great discoveries by Copernicus and Galileo. Bacon could see that the only knowledge of importance to humanity was empirically rooted in the natural world; and that a clear system of scientific inquiry would assure mastery over the material world.

Bacon was among the first to appreciate the value of the new science for human life. He stated that knowledge should help utilize nature for human advantage and should improve the quality of life by advancing commerce, industry and agriculture. He believed that knowledge is power and he urged the government to create scientific institutions to praise the progress in technology and the mechanical arts.

5.3 Proposal of inductive empirical experimentation

In his book *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon proposed a scientific method using inductive empirical experimentation. He believed that experiments should be carefully recorded so that results were reliable and could be repeated. He advocated the world of science over the secret and mysterious world of magic. He stressed the practical impact that scientific discovery encompassed and even wrote a utopian work in which science was the savior for the future of humanity. Although Bacon was not a scientific investigator himself, he used political influence to support the scientific projects with the use of inductive reasoning, in England.

6-FRANCIS BACON VS SHAKESPEARE

A theory in the mid-19th century suggests that sir Francis Bacon was the real author of the plays that most of us believe were written by William Shakespeare. Many of the expressions, metaphors and ideas used by Bacon appear in the Plays. Many of the identical characteristics of the writing style of Shakespeare can be seen in the writings of Bacon. The popular phrases used in the essays are

appeared in the plays. Bacon left a manuscript with a list of works he had produced and some of the "Shakespeare" works are on this list. Also both writings have possessed an immense vocabulary and constantly coined new words.

7-CONCLUSION

Bacon's rich vocabulary, numerous quotations, modern sentences, wonderful paragraphs, marvellous use of figures of speech, strength, clarity, precision and so on make his style the most effective. Buffon says, "style is the man himself". Longinus says, "Evaluation of style is the echo of great soul". All these statements show his essentially mean and benefit seeking attitude, even in the matters of heart. In short, Bacon's essays are a "hand book" of practical wisdom enriched with maxims which are very helpful for worldly wisdom and success.

REFERENCES

- A. Spiers and Basi Montagu, *Bacon's Essays and Wisdom of the Ancients*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co; 1884)
- Edwin A. Abbott, *Essays with introduction, notes and index*, (Longmans, London, 1876).
- John Buchan(Ed), *Essays and apothegms of Francis Lord Bacon*, (W. Scott, London, 1894).
- Landry, Peter, *Francis Bacon: The Secretary of Nature Biographies*. Blupete, 2010.
- Taylor, Michael. *Francis Bacon Secret Societies The Secret Bard*. The Designer's Bureau, 2004.
- W. Addis Wright, *Bacon's Essays and Colours of good and evil*, (Macmillan and co., 1887).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. V. Sudhakar Naidu is currently working as Asst. Professor of English at Faculty of Languages, Department of English, University of Tripoli, Libya. Academically he is a Doctorate in English (Ph.D) from S.V.University, Tirupati, A.P – India. Besides, he has possessed M.Phil in English, and M.Ed. He is a highly accomplished professional with an abundant research skills and an extensive teaching experience in India and abroad. His research articles in English Language and Literature are published in various reputed International journals and magazines and won appreciation from publishers and readers.