

# Bacon's Moralism Engraved in Pithiness

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## Abstract:

Bacon, the Elizabethan essayist, sets himself apart from his contemporaries owing to his peculiar traits, including his worldly wisdom and his utilitarian attitude towards life. He calls his essays as "Council, civil and moral." Terseness of expression and epigrammatic brevity is the part and parcel of his style. Bacon's genius lies in his "encyclopaedic range of subjects." All his essays have variety of moods. Some of his essays deal with man in his relation to society such as "Of Great Place", "Of Friendship", "Of Parents and Children", "Of Suitors" and "Of Seditious and Troubles". Some deal with man in his relations to himself such as "Of Studies", "Of Ambition" and "Of Revenge". And some others deal with man in his relation to his Maker, such as "Of Death", "Of Unity in Religion", "Of Goodness and Goodness in Nature".

**Keywords:** Utilitarian, brevity, worldly wisdom, contemporaries, encyclopedia.

## INTRODUCTION

Bacon called his essays as the "Dispersed Meditations", "as brief notes set down rather significantly than curiously." Though, there is no digression from the central subject but these essays are not "well-knit" compositions and one idea does not produce the other. As Hugh Walker remarks each sentence reads like running analysis of paragraphs i.e. it contains matter that could be elaborated into a paragraph. The essay "Of Studies" reads like a string of aphorisms and maxims. It begins as,

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

Next he says that to spend too much time in studies is "sloth", and also

"Crafty men condemn studies,

simple men admire them,

and wise men use them."

Of course there is no digression from central subject. Similarly in "Of Suitors", the terse ideas are expressed in aphoristic condensed sentences which has led to obscurity —

"He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune."

He calls wife and children as "bills of charges", so some people prefer to remain single.

Next he tells that out of churchmen, judges and soldiers who should marry. He then describes wife and children as "discipline of humanity." In "Of Revenge" he says,

"Revenge is a kind of wild justice."

His later essays are meditations. In "Of Friendship" he starts with Aristotle's words,

"Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or god."

Bacon's essays are a handbook of practical knowledge. His worldly wisdom lies in the fact that he brought the cindrella of modern science out of her partial obscurity, and enthroned her as queen of the world. Further he says life is terrible "without false hopes, false impressions and vanities" to sustain them. He says,

"a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure."

In "Of Friendship" he advises that one should not take "Counsel in pieces" from all and sundry, he says, "man's greatest flatterer is himself."

Love, according to him is a mere "Child of folly" and considers it fit for theatre

"Nuptial love maketh mankind; friendly love perfecteth it, but wanton love corrupt and embaseth it."

Once again the subject of marriage and single life are treated unemotionally when he calls wife and children as "impediments to great enterprise." The best composition and temperature is to have openness

in fame and opinion, secrecy in habit; "dissimulation in seasonable use; and a power to feign, if there be no remedy."

In "Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms", he comments that a country should be ready to meet any incoming military emergency.

In "Of Seditious and Troubles", he says that money should not accumulate in few hands, but must be distributed,

"Money is like much, not good except it be spread".

Blake called that Bacon's essays are a

"Good Advice for Satan's kingdom."

This means that he counsels expediency at the expense of ethical standards.

In "Of Truth" he says,

"It is heaven upon earth, to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth."

In "Of Goodness", he says —

"power to do good is the true and lawful end of aspiring."

Bacon is the father of modern English prose. His essays have become a classic of the English language not so much due to this inimitable style and literary flavor. Terseness of expression and epigrammatic brevity is the part and parcel of his style. The aphorisms give to his essays singular force and weight. His sentences are brief, rapid, forceful and "they come down like strokes of hammer." He says,

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." – Of Studies

"Suspicious among thoughts are like bats among birds." – Of Suspicion

In "Of Truth" he says, –

"The ways to enrich are many and most of them foul."

Another important quality of Bacon's style is his recurrent use of figurative language in the form of similes and metaphors. In "Of Truth", he compares truth to a naked "open daylight which does not show the masques and mummeries and triumphs of the world." He compares falsehood to an alloy, which can make the metal work more better, but it lowers its value. In "Of Marriage and Single Life," he tells us that some men so much exaggerate the value of freedom that they,

"Will go near to think their girdles and garters to be, bonds and shackles."

Further he says,

"What is truth? said jesting Pilate and would not stay for an answer."

In "Of Friendship", while talking of need of a friend; he remarks –

"For a crowd is not a company, and faces are but gallery of pictures."

In "OF Studies", he compares "distilled books" to "Common distilled water."

His essays are full of illustrations, allusions and latin quotations which show his love for learning and truly as a man of Renaissance. In "OF Truth" he gives allusions to Pilate, Lucian, Lucretins and Montaigne.

In "OF Marriage and Single Life" he makes reference to Ulysses. In "OF Friendship" he quotes Aristotle:

"Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god."

These allusions lend to his ideas greater weight and serve to his scholarly style.

Bacon was also called "meanest" by Pope because he had nearly all the unworthy traits of a Renaissance Politician – greed, lax and hard hearted selfishness which is vivid in some of his essays.

Despite his faults, Bacon composed his essays with a serious aim. He was zeroing in on and was guiding his readers in the matters of civil and moral importance, with practical advice for worldly success. Moreover we cannot ignore his contribution to the English prose style to impart it the marvelous, terse and epigrammatic brevity which was continued in the style of Addison, Steele and Swift. Though unlike Lamb, Bacon lacks gentle humour, privacy and touching pathos in his essays, but there is the day light

of reason that Bacon's short, crisp and pithy sentences. Hudson was very well upto the mark when he said about his essays –

“Beyond any other book of the same size in any literature they are loaded with ripest wisdom of experience.”

Bacon is full of worldly wisdom when he says,

“Cog, lie, flatter and face

Four ways in court to win thee place.”

He is full of aphorisms.

Despite his faults, Bacon composed his essays with a serious declared aim. He was zeroing in on the matters of civil and moral importance, in order to guide his readers in conduct for worldly success.

“Moreover we cannot ignore his contribution to the English prose style,” to which he has imparted the marvellous terse and epigrammatic brevity which was later continued in the style of Addison, Steele and Swift also.

Though unlike Lamb, Bacon lacks, in his essays, gentle humour, privacy and touching pathos.

But there is dry light of reason that illuminates his short crisp and pithy sentences.

Hudson was very well upto the mark, when he stated about his essays—

“Beyond any other book of the same size in any literature, they are loaded with ripest wisdom of experience.”

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