

## **B.A. First**

### **The prose style of Francis Bacon**

In the history of English literature, Francis Bacon is one of the most familiar names. His writing has been admired for various reasons. Some admire his dazzling power of rhetoric, others, his grace, and yet others find him too stiff and rigid. But all admit that he is one of the greatest writers of English prose of his age. In Bacon's writing we find a style which is distinct and at the same time characteristic of his age.

The style of Bacon remains for the main part aphoristic. There is a terseness of expression and epigrammatic brevity in the essays of Bacon. His sentences are brief and rapid but they are also forceful. "They come down like the strokes of a hammer", says Dean Church. This terseness is often achieved by leaving out superfluous epithets and conjunctions and connectives. It is seldom carried to the extent of causing obscurity, though one or two instances do exist where this extreme condensation has caused great difficulty in understanding the meaning. This is a remarkable power of compressing into a few words an idea which other writers may express in several sentences. There are several sentences which are read like proverbs. Examples easily jump to one's mind:

"A lie faces God and shrinks from man."

Of Truth

"A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure"

Of Truth

"He that hath wife and child hath given hostages to fortune"

Of Marriage and Single Life

There is not one essay which does not contain such capsules of common wisdom. The sentences are pregnant with meaning.

The force of the aphoristic statements depend upon other stylistic devices which supplement them. Such devices are the 'balance' and 'antithesis' which mark the structure of most of his sentences. They range from simple two-pronged structure to the multi-pronged ones:

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

Of Marriage and Single Life

Bacon has the habit of weighing the pros and cons of every questions that he deals with. When he makes a statement, he almost immediately counter balances it. He scrupulously presents the advantages and the disadvantages of a particular issue. Sometimes he draws

definite conclusions but most of the time the reader is left to draw his own conclusion. In the essay "Of Marriage and Single Life" Bacon weighs the advantages of both the states in a cool and rational fashion. Thus, single men are good friends, good masters and good servants but they are unreliable as good citizens. Such weighing and balancing makes his style antithetical. Each sententious statement is balanced by an opposite statement.

Bacon's style is also rhetorical. He has great powers of attracting, and persuading his readers even though he may not convince them. Besides, there is a constant use of imagery and figurative language in Bacon, specially in his later essays. The apt and extensive use of metaphors, images and analogies are regarded as functional or an integral part of the main object to persuade, move and inform the reader.

Use of allusions and quotations is another notable feature of Bacon's prose style. The extensive use of allusions and quotations is drawn from various sources, classical fables, the Bible, History, and the familiar collection of proverbs.

Then, though Bacon's style is heavy with learning, yet it is more flexible than any of his predecessors and contemporaries. The sentences are short and with this shortness came lucidity. The grammatical structure is sometimes loose, but the sense is rarely ambiguous.

However, there is no humor in Bacon's essays, but there is ample of wit. He is a master of the skillful use of words. Apart from this, on the whole he is not difficult to understand, though his condensed style demands greater attention and more time on the readers' part.

To sum up, the style of Bacon is not personal and chatty style of the subjective essayist like Montaigne or Lamb. It is dignified and aphoristic, full of learned quotations, and allusions. The most remarkable feature of this style is its terseness and brevity. He was indeed a consummate artist who polished and chiseled his expressions and who could change his style to suit his subject. With him, English prose definitely took a long leap forward.

**Dr Rajdhan**  
**Assistant Professor-English**