

BACON'S ESSAYS

FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)

- Philosopher, scientist, and essayist
- Son of Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Seal to Elizabeth I
- Educated at Trinity College, Cambridge
- Entered Gray's Inn; practised law
- Ambitious man
- Enjoyed patronage of Earl of Essex
- Became MP in 1584
- Investigated the case against his own patron, leading to Essex's execution in 1601

BACON'S POLITICAL CAREER

- Career bloomed during the reign of James I
- Became Attorney General, Lord Keeper of the Seal, and Lord Chancellor
- Not popular among peers
- Rival Edward Coke instigated a charge of corruption
- Dismissed from office, debarred from Parliament, briefly imprisoned in the Tower
- Retired into private life, devoted subsequent life to writing
- Died of pneumonia contracted while studying use of snow in preservation of meat

ESSAYS

- The Essayes or Counsels, Civil and Moral
- 1597: 10 essays
- 1612: 38 essays
- 1625: 58 essays
- Reflections and observations in the form of advice for living a successful life
- Wide range of topics: government, architecture, human behaviour
- Essays show acute intelligence and wit
- Incorporates numerous quotations from earlier writers

THEMES OF THE ESSAYS

- Some essays: universal concepts like truth, death, love, goodness, friendship, fortune, praise
- Others: controversial matters like religion, atheism, "True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates," custom and education, usury
- Others: envy, cunning, innovations, suspicion, ambition, praise, vainglory, vicissitudes of things

FEATURES OF BACON'S ESSAYS

- Adopted the term “essai” from Montaigne (1580), who wrote essays on friendship, love, death, morality
 - Montaigne wrote informal essay, Bacon wrote formal
 - Practical everyday philosophy
 - Detached, epigrammatic style; presents finished ideas rather than exploring them
 - Later essays more expanded
 - Employs strategy of balance and opposition
 - Impersonal, objective; studies the world rather than the self
 - First writer to attend to the readers: wrote to inform young men of his class rather than for self-expression
-

FRANCIS BACON

OF STUDIES

- Education (studies) a major Renaissance concern
- Practical application of studies became recognized
- Studies became individual pursuit with rise of Protestantism

USES OF EDUCATION

- Delight: personal, private use
- Ornament: conversation with others
- Ability: judgment in business and pursuits
- Men with world experience can carry out plans, know practical circumstances
- Men who study are better able to understand political matters and assess problems' gravity

HOW NOT TO USE EDUCATION

- Too much studying leads to laziness
- Overuse of knowledge in conversation is show-off
- Letting studies guide everything is scholarly, not practical
- Moderation is key
- Education must be supplemented by experience
- Natural abilities are enhanced by education; but education alone does not guide us in the world

HOW TO USE STUDIES

- Clever (dishonest) men condemn education
- Stupid men admire it
- Wise men use education as experience dictates

- The educated man should not:
 - Argue unnecessarily
 - Assume knowledge guarantees right behavior
 - Focus only on conversation
- How to read books:
 - Some books: read only in a cursory manner
 - Some: read without much thought
 - A few: "Chewed and Digested"—understood perfectly, used to guide behaviour
 - Some books can be read by others and notes substituted—except on important subjects

EFFECTS OF EDUCATION

- Reading: makes a well-rounded man
- Conversation: makes one think quickly
- Writing: makes one think with logic and reason
- Little writing? Need good memory
- Little conversation? Need quick wit
- Little reading? Pretend to know more than one does

KINDS OF STUDIES AND THEIR USES

- History: makes men wise
- Poetry: makes men clever
- Mathematics: intellectually sharp
- Logic and rhetoric: skilled in argument
- Studies mould character
- No problem of wit that cannot be fixed by appropriate study
- As right physical exercise cures illnesses, right study cures mental weaknesses:
 - Lack concentration: study mathematics
 - Trouble distinguishing ideas: study medieval philosophers
 - Can't substantiate: study law
- Every mental defect can be cured by some study

OF TRUTH

- First essay in Bacon's Essays
- Shows Renaissance spirit, rational and scientific method, interest in morality

- Insight into human nature, political intrigues, treachery

KEY POINTS

- Arresting opening: "What is Truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer."
- Bacon uses this to discuss the charms of lying

PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TO TRUTH

- Reference to Pontius Pilate; some don't care for truth or change opinions at will
- Some want freedom to act and think
- Ancient Sceptics doubted every belief; some still do

WHY SOME DISLIKE TRUTH

- People perversely attracted to lies
- Search for truth is hard work
- Truth, once found, curtails freedom
- Lucian: reasons why men love lies
 - Poets lie for pleasure
 - Merchants for advantage
 - But why love untruth for its own sake?

TRUTH AND LIES

- Truth: like bright daylight, exposes pretensions and triumphs
- Falsehood: like candlelight, makes triumphs look attractive
- Truth: like a pearl—good in daylight, not very expensive
- Falsehood: like a diamond or carbuncle—attractive, illusory, shine in changing light, more expensive
- "A mixture of lie doth ever add pleasure."
- Removing vain opinions, hopes, imaginations would make people "poor shrunken things"

POETIC UNTRUTH

- Clergymen call poetry "wine of devils"—it fills imagination with illusions
- Poetic untruth is not very harmful (only passes through mind); lies that "sink in" are harmful

THE VALUE OF TRUTH

- Only those who experience truth can value it
- Inquiry, knowledge, and belief in truth are greatest good
- Compared to stages of love: wooing, presence, enjoying

DIVINITY OF TRUTH

- God created: first senses, then reason, then spirit among mankind (truth)

- God breathed light first into matter, then into men, lastly into the chosen (truth)

LUCRETIUS QUOTE

- Pleasure in seeing errors from the "hill of Truth"
- Charity, trust in God, and Truth create heaven on earth

TRUTH AND SOCIETY

- Honest dealing denotes nobility even to liars
 - Falsehood "like an alloy"—may help but debases
 - Crooked deals: like a serpent
 - Lying: worst vice—defies God, cowardly toward men
 - Falsehood brings God's judgment
-

OF LOVE

- Bacon reflects on love, especially romantic love
- Contrasts love on stage (source of comedy, tragedy) with real life (causes mischief, harm)
- "The stage is more beholding to love than the life of man."
- Calls love weak and distracting, especially for the ambitious
- "Great spirits and great business do keep out this weak passion."
- Sometimes, even strong people fall: Marcus Antonius, Appius Claudius
- "Love can find entrance not only into an open heart, but also into a heart well fortified."

EXCESS AND IRRATIONALITY

- Love distorts judgment, causes extreme words and actions
- Lovers flatter more than the proud
- "Impossible to love and to be wise."
- Unreciprocated love leads to secret contempt from the beloved

DANGERS OF LOVE

- Those who overvalue romantic affection lose wealth and wisdom
- Love as "child of folly," often kindled in prosperity or adversity
- Should keep love separate from serious business

TYPES OF LOVE

- Nuptial (marital) love: foundation of mankind, supports society
- Friendly love: perfects mankind, adds depth and support
- Wanton (lustful) love: corrupts and debases

OF REVENGE

- Examines revenge's moral and psychological implications
- Revenge: natural but undermines justice and society
- Harms seeker, keeps wounds open, prevents healing

REVENGE AS "WILD JUSTICE"

- "Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out."
- Revenge disrupts justice by bypassing law, leads to chaos

LAW AND FORGIVENESS

- "For as for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law; but the revenge of that wrong, putteth the law out of office."
- Law's authority is undermined by revenge
- Forgiving shows moral superiority; wise leaders pardon and rise above revenge

REVENGE AS WEAKNESS

- "In taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior."
- Forgiveness elevates, revenge drags down to enemy's level
- Desire for revenge reflects lack of control; wisdom is in moving on

IMPACT OF REVENGE

- "A man that studieth revenge, keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal, and do well."
- Fixating on revenge perpetuates suffering and blocks growth

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE REVENGE

- Public revenge (e.g., for political figures): sometimes seen as just
- Private revenge: often fails, causes harm
- Public revenge may serve the greater good; private is driven by emotion, backfires