

A Compositionist Analysis of Sir Francis Bacon's Essay "Of Studies"

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ABSTRACT:

Francis Bacon's essays are the most read in the world ascribed to the well-versed language and style. This study aims to analyze Francis Bacon's essay "Of Studies" by applying the theory of composition presented by Samuel Phillips Newman. This research also aims at proving Francis Bacon as a Compositionist. The theory of composition is a practical theory which has been deduced from the works of authentic writers. The instructions which are provided for the application of the theory are two-fold; the first one is to point out the excellence of style, and the second one is to give cautions against the most frequent faults. The theory entails four fundamental qualities of a good style they are; perspicuity, vivacity, naturalness and euphony. The researchers have analyzed the essay of Francis Bacon, in particular, "Of Studies" by applying the four qualities of a good style. The findings of the study cascade that the essay is bestowed with the elements of extensive knowledge, rich funds of thoughts, witty and weighty expression coupled with skillful language. This research study was qualitative in nature in which the theory of composition was applied. For achieving reliable results, the textual analysis was taken into consideration for the analysis of the text. The source data for the present work was an essay "Of studies" written by Francis Bacon for which the items and summary points were tabulated.

Keywords:

Euphony, Vivacity, perspicuity, naturalness, compositionist, extensive knowledge

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INTRODUCTION

Francis Bacon is undoubtedly the pioneer of the English essay who for the first time introduced it in the domain of English literature. He showed himself in his essays to be a consummate rhetorician. He made for himself a style that was unmatched for pith and density in the conveyance of his special kind of thoughts. He rejected the conceits and overcrowded imagery of the euphuists but he knew how to light up his thoughts with well-placed figures, and give to it imaginative glow and charm upon occasion.

He wrote ten essays, in 1597; thirty-eight essays, in 1612; and fifty-eight essays, in 1625. His essays have rightly been described as counsels, civil, and moral ones. These essays frequently reveal acuteness of observation, acumen of intellect and breadth of worldly sense. The stenographic and acidic style of his earlier essays was gradually elaborated into the rich discursiveness and warm color of his later ones. In these essays, Bacon examines and seeks to guide a man in his relation to Supreme Being, in his relation to himself, and his relation to society and the world. They reveal common sense, crisp suggestiveness, planned elaboration of contents, luminous wisdom, intellectual elevation, and knowledge of nature. They are also noteworthy for frequent Biblical and Classical

quotations, apt illustration, brilliant aphorisms, extreme conciseness, and well-knit structure. The "Essays" have won him a place apart and are the source of his fame with the world at large. His essays introduced a new form of composition into English literature, which was destined to have a varied and fruitful development. They are also, in a sense, a record of Bacon's outlook on the world throughout the years of his active life.

The qualities of Bacon's style vary with his work, but in all, there is unmistakable distinction and force. In the final edition (1625), the essays are enlarged beyond the earliest draft (1597). For example: "Of Simulation and Dissimulation" (1625) as compared to "Of Discourse" (1597). In the essay "Of Simulation and Dissimulation" it will be found that not only is the subject more fully illustrated, but also the general tone is changed. The sentences have acquired a good sweep and a richer cadence. They have lost something of the severe conciseness of their first form, but still retain their earlier characteristics. In short Bacon's account reminds us of modern semanticists, analyzing the sources of verbal confusion or a psychologist explaining the origins of irrational prejudice. He was not himself a great scientist or great philosopher but he was a master of prose exposition whose colorful and memorable phrases helped to popularize a new view of science.

In this connection, Palmer and Colton (2007) in their book "A History of the Modern World" say about Francis Bacon that he was the man who stood as a prophet of his time in writing essays and rejected Aristotelian philosophy. In this context, his point of view regarding truth is that it is not something that we profess or assert at the beginning and then explore its ramification but it is something which we discover at the end after a long process of investigation, experiment, or intermediate thoughts. Moreover, Malik (2012) in his critical study writes that it was Francis Bacon who was an expert in his style. He had captured the rhythm and condensed the modern style up to maximal level. He also made a plausible analysis of finding the chief defects of English prose and showed his mastery over the principles of English prose. His sentences contain weighty thoughts and can be extended into paragraphs. He achieved his terseness and brevity by avoiding superfluous epithets and leaving out conjunction and connectives.

In terms of Bacon's style, Singh (2007) in his book History of English Literature states about Bacon that he provided such a working model which is lucid, straight forward, free from needles artifice, ornament, diffused, and used analogies, antithesis, and elevated trifle themes like justice and truth on one hand and masques and triumphs on the other hand. Ramji (2013) admired Bacon in his work Bacon's Essay, for his allusion, illustrating homely sentences which are natural and easy to understand to the reader.

Literature Review

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is commonly known as the father of English Essays. He is the man who for the first time introduced a new literary form in the field of English literature. Besides this contribution of writing essays, he is also regarded as the father of modern prose. It was Bacon, who also laid the foundations of the modern style in the writing of English Prose. According to Palmer and Colton (2007), Francis Bacon stands out as a prophet of a world reconstructed by science. He asks himself how it is possible for a human to know anything with certainty and produce a reliable, truthful, and useable knowledge of the world of nature. He shared the doubts of his time. He recognized virtually all dogmas of the preceding generation as worthless. He disrespects the tendency to put faith in ancient books to quote Aristotle or others, on questioning having to do with the working of nature. He refuses to accept the methods of the school man or scholastics.

In the same connection, probing into the medieval philosophies, first, they start with definitions and then they survey what further knowledge could be logically deduced from the definitions. On the other hand, it proceeded by confirming the nature of an object and then describing how an object of a specific nature does or behaves. These ancient ways are related to

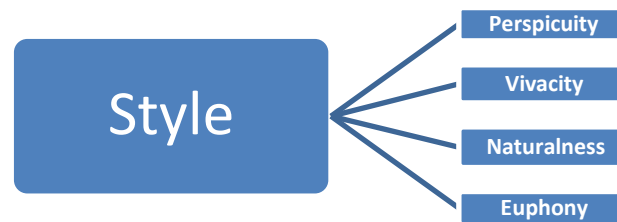
Aristotle and ancient writers ceased to be more fruitful in discovering knowledge of nature. Bacon is of opinion that medieval methods were of no use and are considered backward. He upholds that truth is not something that we profess or assert at the beginning and then explore in all its ramification but it is something which we discover at the end, after a long process of investigation, experiment, or intermediate thought.

They further said that Bacon had gone beyond plain doubt. He offered a constructive program and became foreshadow, herald and philosopher of scientific view. He wrote it with much recourse to knowledge that there was a true and reliable method of analyzing knowledge. In addition, he also said that once we understand then we would be in a position to use this knowledge for our welfare as well as for the welfare of society. It will make us create a useful invention and further improve our mechanical arts. It will result in prosperity and comfort in the world. Thus, Francis Bacon announced the advent of scientific civilization.

Methodology

In the present work, Francis Bacon has been studied kaleidoscopically by applying the practical concepts of rhetoric. *Practical System of Rhetoric or Principles and Rules of Styles* is a book on the composition of the English language, written by Samuel Newman, a professor of Rhetoric at Bowdoin College. He proposed his theory on the composition of the English language, which is basically derived from the works of different authentic writers of different ages. The instructions which are provided in his book are based on two-fold suggestions; the first one is to point out the excellences of style, and the second one is to give cautions against the most frequent faults. His purpose of writing, through his work, is to provide the learner with a regular system of study and at the same time render such explanations and reasons of the principles and rules of art as are required. He further suggests that it is the object of the writer to direct the attention to those rules and principles which are of prime practical advantage.

Composition is a broader term which means the artistic arrangement of the rules, principles, and good qualities of writing into a work of art and rhetoric. In the present work, Samuel Phillips Newman's composition theory (1854) was applied to the essay "Of Studies" written by Francis Bacon. The theory is about four qualities of a good style namely; perspicuity, vivacity, naturalness and euphony. Among these four qualities, each quality is further extended to various elements and aspects of discourse. The qualities of a good style are as followed;



The theory applies to Francis Bacon as a compositionist in writing essays. In the aspect of a good style, perspicuity means that the ideas or expressions used in a work convey the true meaning/sense of a writer. Moreover, according to Newmark, vivacity means that “the thoughts are exhibited with distinctness before the mind of the reader”. Naturalness means that the writer uses natural language which suits the situation. The writer varies his style of writing by observing circumstantial happenings or occurrences. The last one is euphony or smoothness of sounds which implies the use of words and sentences that appeal to human ears. For this purpose, the textual analysis was taken into consideration for analyzing the text of the essay by applying the qualities of style with regard to the mentioned theory. The research study was qualitative in nature in which the theory was applied. The source data for the present work is an essay “Of studies” written by Francis Bacon for which the items and summary points were tabulated.

Findings and Discussion

Summary

In the essay “Of Studies” Francis Bacon throws light on studies by saying that studies are a source of pleasure. They can be used for ornamental value and can be a supporter to one’s ability. Further, he says that pleasure which comes as a result of studies can be enjoyed by those who are living a life of aloofness and retirement. Due to the ornamental value of study, a person is enabled to be a good speaker.

A well-read man gets successfully the ability to handle business matters. Francis Bacon further says that those who spend too much time in studies are temperamentally lazy. Those who make too much reading in order to converse, are trying to make a vain display of their learning. If a man’s judgments are served completely by the rules he has achieved from books, it shows the eccentricity of a scholar.

Studies improve a man’s natural ability to perfection. Then one should use them in his/her practical experiences because it will give value to his/her studies. Studies by themselves provide guidance that is too vague and abstract. Experience is also essential to make the knowledge derived from books useful in practical life. Those men who are cunning do not approve of

studies. Those who are simple-minded, show admiration for studies, but those who are wise, make practical use of their studies. The purpose of studies is not to read books only and thus to be able to contradict others, nor should books be read to believe whatever one finds there, neither to obtain material to converse, but a man should read them to be able to ponder over and judge the value of what the books contain.

Bacon categorizes reading different kinds of books; some books may be read quickly and hastily, some are to be read in parts only, and only there are a small number of books that are worth a close and thorough reading. Reading develops the personality of a man, conversation makes a man quick-witted. If a man is habitual of taking points from books, he will become exact and precise in his thinking and talking alike.

He says that History makes a man wise, Poetry makes him imaginative, Mathematics develops subtlety in him, Natural Philosophy enables a man to go deep into things, and Logic and Rhetoric polishes one’s debating power. He also proposed appropriate exercise to remedy various mental defects; if a man’s mind wanders, he should practice mathematics if a man is unable to make distinctions between things, he should study the writing of philosophers of the Middle Ages. If a man is unable to examine a subject carefully from point to point, he should study lawyers’ cases.

Findings

The theory of composition by Samuel Phillip Newman presents a vast array of elements and essentials steps for interpretation under the ambit of four major qualities. The qualities of a good style of composition fall under the domain of this theory. The findings of the present study have been mentioned below:

**Francis Bacon's Essay
'Of Studies'**

Item

Summary Points

1. Extensive Knowledge

“Bowling is good for stones and reins, shooting for lungs and breast, gentle walking for stomach, riding for the head, and the like; so if a man’s wit be wandering, let him study mathematics:”

2. Richness of Thought

“To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use there too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humor of scholar”

3. Expertise of Elaboration

“They perfect nature, and are perfected by nature, and are perfected by experience; for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need proying, by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience.”

4. Witty Remarks

“To spend too much time in studies, is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humor of a scholar”.

5. Transition of Style

“Bowling is good for stones and reins, shooting for lungs and breast, gentle walking for the stomach, riding for head, and the like, so if a man’s wits be wandering, let him study mathematics”.

6. Latinize Version

“Abeunt studia”, “Cymini sectores”

7. Perspicuity of style

“Some books are to be tasted, others to swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested”

8. Natural Tendency

“History make man wise; poets witty; the mathematic subtle and natural philosophy deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend;”

Table 1: Findings of Bacon's Essay "Of Studies"

In order to apply the theory of composition by Samuel Phillips Newman, he presents the first essential step for a compositionist which is 'extensive knowledge' of a writer. It falls under the domain of perspicuity of a good style. In point no. 1 the composition of this essay reflects the extensive knowledge of Bacon, for the reason, that he brings us illustrations from every field of knowledge. Even in point no. 6 he uses Latin words in his essay which was the universal language for all the knowledge like, "Abeunt studia in mores" This means that studies pass into character. Samuel believes that abstract reasoning is necessary for a writer. In abstract reasoning there are all pure reasons, nothing to divert the attention, nothing to bias the mind, which may fortify the intellectual power.

For a good writer, it is necessary that he must possess a rich fund of thoughts. It is mentioned in point no. 2 which comes under the quality of vivacity. This essay supports the view of Samuel as the storehouse of knowledge that Bacon keeps is above board. Each sentence is beautified from his treasure of mind. In this essay, according to the applied theory, we can also find the discipline of the mind which is vitally necessary to a good writer. Bacon has fluently arranged his thoughts and is easy to be remembered. Here Bacon has classified his essay under three heads; the use of studies for delight; the use of studies for ornament; and, the use of studies for abilities. Then he discusses various mental disorders and diseases and also how to cure oneself of these remedies. In nutshell, he expressed his opinion of his mind in a connected train of thoughts, with a sound sense, to his readers. Samuel states that we should not attempt to write on those subjects which are beyond the reach of our intellect. But we should write on those subjects for which we have enough power of reasoning in order to satisfy the reader. He has shown his expertise of elaboration on the subject of studies. In point no.3 he has justified every object with his knowledge of reasoning.

Further, he comments that one should never attempt to write on any subject until one fully understands it. In this essay, Bacon has shown his command over his subject and then has composed the essay afterward. He expresses it for the reason that he has reflected his opinion on every aspect of studies; he throws light on each type, practical usage, merits and demerits. However, he has provided us with his cure for the certain disease in his essay like "if one's wits be wandering, let him study mathematics" and so many are also provided to us which show the acumen on the subject.

In addition, Samuel suggests that it is essential for a writer to direct his thought to some definite object and finds out all that may be made object and find out that

may be made useful or advantageous. For this reason, he compares and contrasts the subject (Of Studies) and has fully imported his province of the knowledge which was related to the subject. As a result, readers are satisfied with his treatment of the subject. He presents all these ideas in a digestible manner through which the readers are attracted to the subject. Samuel Newman's opinion is that when we read the works of others, novel ideas and views are brought before the mind, or some aid is derived for illustrating. "Cymini Sectors" These words are used in the essay which shows an aid to his subject and derived from the middle ages. They were the people who were experts in hairsplitting; those who make fine distinctions. Newman says that after the attainment of patient reflection and valuable thoughts on the subject one should direct his attention to their arrangement of the correct sequence of the thoughts. It will play a vital role in effective communication with readers.

Bacon has practically shown us the usage of the above-mentioned rule in the essay "Of Studies". He has artistically arranged his thoughts into such a sequence that influences and pleases the readers that can be studied in point no. 4. He has classified studies into three main categories; studies for delight, ornament and ability. Then he has explained its effects, merit and demerit, and its usage in our daily life—which shows us a sequence of wise arrangement of thoughts. His essay shows that he had created outlines for the thoughts to knit them in a sequential chain along with implicit connecting to the subject of the essay "Of Studies". In their design for division of the subject, there is not a single unnecessary illustration or reference which is to be found in the essay. Samuel says that a formal introduction must be determined by the good sense of a writer.

Finally, in this essay "Of Studies, Bacon jumps into the essay with an appropriate sentence: "Studies serve for delight, for ornament and for ability" in the mid of the introductory paragraph he introduces a happy turn of expression. According to Newman, one should show a natural transition in the discourse from one part to another. In transition, allusion may be to some specific or particular point. In point no. 5, the statement is about the transition of style in combination with naturalness which is also discussed in point no. 8. In the mentioned statements, transitions are quite natural and also appealing to the reader. Samuel considers correctness as a good quality of a style, there should be the use of words that are purely English and proper attention should be to the syntax, with due care of grammatical aspect.

In the essay, Bacon has used English words but sometimes few words of Latin are also used by him.

Because, at that time i.e., in 17 century, Latin Language was considered to be a Universal languageⁱ that is why there are words like; “Abeunt studia” “Cymini sectores”. Sentences are grammatically loose but free from ambiguity. Many sentences are long, and within each sentence, every clause can stand alone which is considered to be a loose arrangement of sentences by Newman.

Samuel Newman gives priority to perspicuity in style. Bacon’s style of the essay is free from ambiguity and obscurity. Each idea is expressed with distinctness from other ideas. Then he united all the ideas with skill in the use of language into the whole one.

In addition to correctness and perspicuity, a good style can be characterized by vivacity. Those terms should be used which are more specific. Vivacity can be brought by unnecessary words; by a departure from common arrangements of words in the sentence, sometimes omission of conjunction or it may be in the form of a short sentence structure. The essay of studies is the complete replica of the above qualities which are considered to be good style. Bacon used short sentences, by the omission of an extra word. He has also avoided the conjunction and connectivity. For example; “Some books are to be tasted, others to swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested” In this sentence, each clause can be extended to a paragraph. Specific words are used to express the specific type of reading by “tasted” “swallowed” and “digested”.

Samuel Newman also gives due attention to naturalness in one’s writing style; in choice of words, in the form of sentences, in the ornament, his uses of thought and expression. In this essay, Bacon communicated to the reader in his natural way. He does not use sublime language like his other rivals of his time. He inherently expresses his thoughts. We read:

“History maketh man wise; poets witty; the mathematic subtle and natural philosophy deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend;”

His form of sentence is natural. Even his thoughts are also common to be understood and not superficial like the writers of the Neo-Classical period. In short, this essay of Francis Bacon is a receptacle of Samuel Newman’s theory, which is inferred from authentic writers.

Discussion

The important element in writing essays is the element of writing style or expression for what it deals with the personality of a writer. It shows the mindset and point of view expressed by the writer through the use of language. The personality of a writer can be properly analyzed from the style being followed, the choice of words, the shift of sentences, the turn of phrases and the individualistic touch of knowledge. Style is not only “the dress of thought” but it cascades the inner self-expression of a writer. Style is such a product through

which one can explore and analyze the author’s mind, character, life and point of view (Henry, 2002).

According to (Sinha, 2006), Bacon has used such a prose style for which he is praised by Sainsbury and Addison. He has been extolled due to his worldly wisdom, intellect, bright vision and the art of terseness in writing essays. Bacon has made use of lofty and loaded sentences in his essays by employing terseness in his style which exhibits his eloquence. For this reason, he has been called “the pioneer of modern science” (Sultan, 1984). His essays portray the classical appeal of the English language owing to the grandeur of style and a fine touch of literature (Fred, 1989).

The works of Francis Bacon are known for the artistic value of beauty that shows a compact and skillful utilization of language. The use of language in Bacon’s essays is more often adapted of Latin idioms and phrases. The sentences being used in the essays can be extended to larger paragraphs. In other words, it can be said that he was the master of explicating maximum into minimum words and phrases (Sahibzada, J., et al., (2020). It can be deduced from the use of his artistic style that he proves to be more provoking, dazzling and stimulating rather than edifying, instructing and satisfying. He gives a universal appeal to all the readers which confer on him the grip of successful style (Jerry, 1985).

Conclusion

The study was coupled with the textual analysis of Bacon’s essay “Of Studies”. The researchers treated the essay with an applied theory which has been taken from the book *Practical system of Rhetoric or Principles or Rules of Style* by Samuel Phillips Newman. In the theory, four major qualities of a good style namely; perspicuity, vivacity, naturalness and euphony were considered. Then, their further elements and aspects of each quality were reviewed. The other elements bear the necessary rules and principles which are regarded to be essential on behalf of a “Compositionist” or good writer, which are; extensive knowledge, reasoning power, rich fund of thoughts, the discipline of the mind, control of intellect and correctness of language. In the light of these qualities and elements, the researchers executed “Francis Bacon as a Compositionist” and they found those qualities which were regarded essential for a good writer.

The study concludes that the essay “Of Study” has been designed in order to supply the accompaniment by which Francis Bacon’s versatile genius can be made more apprehensible and pertinent to the readers. Critical opinions and assumptions about him as an essayist have been brought into the domain of the present work. In nutshell, Francis Bacon is a writer who embedded his essay with those rules and principles which are now regarded as authentic and reliable for a genuine writer in this Post-Modern era of the 21st century. Still, readers

are eager to absorb the quality of his style which he introduced in the domain of the English language.

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