

Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is regarded as the father of English essays. He sealed his reputation as an essayist in the glorious days of Shakespeare when theatre reigned. He was the ultimate practitioner of prose in the era of poetry and drama. Bacon introduced this new literary form with the publication of his ten essays in 1597. It rose to 38 in the edition of 1612 and 58 in the final issue of 1625.

Bacon borrowed the essay form from the French essayist Montaigne. Despite the fact that both practised essay form, they varied greatly in terms of their style. While Montaigne is familiar, personal and prolific; Bacon is formal, direct and impersonal. Bacon's essays are full of worldly wisdom conveyed in his concise style. They may not give immediate pleasure but give lasting guidance. They are objective and logically constructed. Bacon does not familiarise with the reader but has nuggets of advice as a wise man will all the same. Pope writes appraising Bacon:

If parts allure thee, think how Bacon shined,
The wisest, the brightest, the meanest of mankind.

Bacon wrote on a variety of topics, ranging from goodness to gardens, to mosques and buildings. His essays are remarkable for its lucidity, economy, precision, directness and pithy epigrams. Bacon's style is called aphoristic and suitable for the spirit of enquiry.

Bacon's literary legacy stands intact to this day. Legouis has rightly remarked, "These essays are the classics of English prose".

