

**UNIT : 3****"OF LOVE"****- Francis Bacon****:: STRUCTURE ::****3.0 Objectives****3.1 Introduction****3.2 Francis Bacon: A Biographical Note****3.3 An Introduction to "Of Love"****3.3.1 Text****3.3.2 Theme****3.3.2.1 Reality of love****3.3.2.2 Let History be the Guide****3.3.2.3 Courting Womanly Affections****3.3.2.4 Conclusion****3.4 Critical Analysis****3.5 Let Us Sum Up****3.6 Key words****3.7 Suggested Reading****3.8 Check Your Progress**

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**3.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit, we will:

- define the essay as a literary form
- trace its origins and growth;
- analyse Bacon's essay "Of Great Place" with regard to its theme and prose style

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**3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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M. H . Abrams defines essay as:

“Any brief composition in prose that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, or persuade us to accept a thesis on any subject whatever”.

The Oxford Dictionary defines it as:

“A composition of moderate length on any particular subject, originally implying want of finish, but now said of a composition more or less elaborate in style, though limited in range”.

Dr Johnson defines it as:

“A loose sally of the mind, an irregular, indigested piece, not a regular and orderly performance”.

Saintsbury loosely describes it as ‘a work of prose art’.

From the above definitions, we can conclude that an essay, as a literary form, is a short prose composition, treating a subject in a general manner, so that it can be of interest to many readers. Essay is difficult to define as it is one of the most flexible and adaptable of literary genres.

The word 'essay' comes from the French word ‘**essai**’ (first used by the French writer Michel de Montaigne for his *Essais*, published in 1580), which means 'to attempt' or 'to try out'. This suggests that an essay is an individual's **attempt** to look at his/her subject in a personal way. Essays can be written in formal as well as in informal style, depending on the purpose they are meant to achieve. A formal essay tends to be serious in tone, objective in presentation, more expository in nature, giving the reader new perspectives on the subject, and even persuading him to a particular point of view. The informal essay, on the other hand, is written in a lighter tone, reading more like a conversation, affording pleasure in its reading, or at times, amusing the reader if the tone adopted by the essayist is humorous or even sarcastic.

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### **3.2 FRANCIS BACON: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is in the annals of the English essay what Euclid was in the story of Geometry, or what Homer was in the growth and development of the European epic. According to Hugh Walker,

“Bacon is the greatest English essayist of informative, impersonal or aphoristic kind, just as Charles Lamb is the best essayist of the personal kind”.

Bacon’s essays are regarded as ‘a receptacle of detached thoughts’. He is a man who teaches practical wisdom to the people. He knew very well that people do not like a lecture of morality but they like a little guidance in their practical life. His essays provide a practical everyday philosophy

of the life of his own world. A careful and candid reading of his essays show that Bacon's morality is higher than that of average humanity.

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### 3.3 AN INTRODUCTION TO "OF LOVE"

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Bacon called his essays **Counsels** and that was what they were – practical advice on a variety of subjects of general interest. They are impersonal, objective and orderly in thought and reflect a cool scientific detachment. Bacon's Essay 'Of Love' is about the evils of depraving and unchecked love, the goodness of marital love and the purity of universal love and the consequences of the three. The purpose of the essay is to explain love and the affects it has on all kinds of people. The essay informs the reader that no matter what type of person you are love will have an effect on you. One cannot escape from it.

#### 3.3.1 Text

The stage is more beholding to love than the life of man. For as to the stage, love is ever matter of comedies, and now and then of tragedies, but in life it doth much mischief, sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury. You may observe that amongst all the great and worthy persons (whereof the memory remaineth, either ancient or recent) there is not one that hath been transported to the mad degree of love: which shows that great spirits, and great business, do keep out this weak passion. You must except, nevertheless, Marcus Antonius, the half partner of the empire of Rome, and Appius Claudius, the decimvir and lawgiver; whereof the former was indeed a voluptuous man, and inordinate; but the latter was an austere and wise man: and therefore it seems (though rarely) that love can find entrance, not only into an open heart, but also into a heart well-fortified, if watch be not well kept. It is a poor saying of Epicurus, Satis magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus [One can find in one's neighbor a large theater]; as if man, made for the contemplation of heaven, and all noble objects, should do nothing but kneel before a little idol, and make himself a subject, though not of the mouth (as beasts are), yet of the eye, which was given him for higher purposes. It is a strange thing to note the excess of this passion, and how it braves the nature and value of things, by this: that the speaking in a perpetual hyperbole is comely in nothing but in love. Neither is it merely in the phrase, for whereas it hath been well said that the arch-flatterer, with whom all the petty flatterers have intelligence, is a man's self, certainly the lover is more. For there was never a proud man thought so absurdly well of himself as the lover doth of the person loved, and therefore it was well said: "That it is impossible to love, and to be wise." Neither doth this weakness appear to others only, and not to the party loved, but to the loved most of all, except the love be reciprocated. For it is a true rule that love is ever rewarded, either with reciprocation, or with an inward and secret contempt. By how much the more men ought to beware of this passion, which loseth not only other things, but itself! As for the other losses, the poet's relation doth

well figure them: that he that preferred Helena, quitted the gifts of Juno and Pallas [in The Judgment of Paris]. For whosoever esteemeth too much of amorous affection, quitteth both riches and wisdom. This passion hath his floods in the very times of weakness, which are great prosperity and great adversity, though this latter hath been less observed: both which times kindle love, and make it more fervent, and therefore show it to be the child of folly. They do best who, if they cannot but admit love, yet make it keep quarter, and sever it wholly from their serious affairs and actions of life; for if it check once with business, it troubleth men's fortunes, and maketh men so that they can no ways be true to their own ends. I know not how, but martial men are given to love. I think it is as they are given to wine; for perils commonly ask to be paid in pleasures. There is in man's nature a secret inclination and motion towards love of others, which, if it be not spent upon someone or a few, doth naturally spread itself towards many, and maketh men become humane and charitable, as it is seen sometime in friars. Nuptial love maketh mankind, friendly love perfecteth it, but wanton love corrupteth and embaseth it.

### **3.3.2 Theme**

#### **3.3.2.1 Reality of love**

Bacon begins the essay by comparing love to the stage. Love mirrors the stage because it is filled with comedy, tragedy, mischief and fury. It is unrealistic as it is often filled with ecstasy and triumph. It is shown to be noble and in a lot of ways easy to understand.

But in real life, love is far more mischievous and difficult to understand. It demands sacrifices, compromises and offers a lot more sorrow and torment than shown on the stage. Life of love can have a catastrophic end.

Perhaps the most thought provoking statement that Bacon makes in this essay is- "It is impossible to love and to be wise". This forces one to think that to be in love makes them stupid.

The present age is full of examples of great men meeting tragic circumstances in their pursuit of love. [History and the past](#) are full of stories of men of great substance and stature being swept to their utter ruins by the storm of love.

They have been entranced by the madness of romance. On the flipside, there have been wise people who have refused to be conquered by the allurements of love and used their intellect and wits to remain to the snares and tricks of flirtation and temptation.

#### **3.3.2.2 Let History be the Guide**

Bacon gives some historical examples to buttress his notion. He reminds us of Marcus Antonius who was a forthright and ambitious man and was given the reigns of a powerful empire like Rome.

Another man of the fabled triumvirate was Claudius who was also given the reign of one-third of Rome. While Antonius was impulsive and easily swayed by the desires of the heart, Claudius was wise, content and showed restraint.

Consequently, Antonius chased temptation and strayed into disrepute, Claudius gained praise for his unerring resolution, sagacity and influence. Bacon then introduces the lessons of Greek philosopher Epicurus who was a proponent of exercising restraint and self-control. In his works, he extolled and encouraged a life of austerity and the dangers of pleasure seeking.

For him, great warriors enslaved to the wiles of their paramour and object of desires are an abomination. The sight of a strong man dancing to the whims of his beloved woman is an unfortunate reality.

In a sense, it is disregard and derogation of the great gifts and talents that those men would have otherwise used for great feats and achievements.

In Bacon's opinion, untrammelled and unrestrained love only brings discomfiture to men. Such impassioned desires for someone can only lead to emotional and reckless judgments and causes men to err terribly.

It devalues their standing and importance. People who are love-struck glorify in exaggeration about the beauty and qualities of their beloved and such heady praise only cloud their sanity and rationality.

It reduces their ability to think clearly and often leads to the destruction of the inner balance or fortitude of men. Such undeserved and unwarranted praise is unbecoming of a man of substance and value and such man compromise their wisdom to earn the approval of their women.

### **3.3.2.3 Courting Womanly Affections**

Such men suffer from a weakness of character; such weak characters are easily discernible in society. Such contests of love and dotage only ever have two outcomes.

Firstly, in case the woman does not reciprocate the feelings, she labels the man as pathetic and spineless being and treats him with sheer contempt. Another outcome is that she reciprocates it and he becomes imprisoned by her beauty and affection.

Bacon warns the men who have such romantic ambitions to be aware of such consequences of amorous pursuits. It can lead to complete devastation and ruin.

He reminds them of the fateful demise of a man infatuated by a woman named Helena. In his mad pursuit for her affections, he sacrificed and lost the love of two other beautiful women, Juno and Pallas.

He goes on to admonish men who are chasing wild pleasures of the senses and womanly courtship. In their craving for carnal gratification, they end up sacrificing their wealth, health and sanity.

In moments of vulnerability when men pull their guards down, they are inundated by such passions and desires and it leads to further misery. In moments of adversity and drudgery, such desires are rare and infrequent.

In times of comfort and abundance and in times of sadness and distress, those men yearn for carnal and sensual pleasures. Both circumstances heighten the man's desire for amorous engagements.

It is compared to childish folly. Such follies if unchecked can turn into capitulation of health, riches, professional accomplishments etc. It can distract men from going after the truly great and noble endeavours in life.

Now, Bacon compares the weakness of men for women to that of wine. Be it brave warriors or might statesmen, all men are susceptible to the allure of a fine wine and beautiful woman.

To them, the perils and horrors of war and politics are offset through the pleasures in the company of attractive women.

#### **3.3.2.4 Conclusion**

According to Bacon, men are innately designed to satiate the need to love. They are born with the instincts to seek and spread the love. But if this love is generalized and spread universally instead of being reserved for one person (or a small group), it can be truly noble.

It can become a force for good. Such unfettered love for the whole humanity can lead to philanthropy and charitable endeavours. [Love in marriages](#) is the force for the creation of life, love in the form of friendships honours such life.

However, unrestrained love of debasing and deprave desires is ruinous, unsavoury and unworthy.

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### **3.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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The essay "*Of Love*" is an argumentative essay written by Sir Francis Bacon. Bacon in this essay argues about the various ills of falling in love. He particularly argues about the carnal pleasures and its consequences.

Sir Francis Bacon is a well-known English Essayist and philosopher. He devoted himself to writing along with scientific work and wrote sixty essays. This essay, *Of Love*, is regarding the love. Love, in today's world,

have influenced a large number of people. The objective of Bacon in this essay is to demonstrate the effect of love on all kinds of people. No matter who you are, you will fall in love with somebody and this love will definitely have an effect on you, and sometimes love makes one do senseless things.

Bacon then talks about the sensual love that drains one's intelligence. For some people, love is nothing but a source of Carnal pleasure. However, such love if lasted long has hard consequences.

Bacon then talks about the noble and kind love the spiritual people possess. They don't love a single person or group of people but the entire universe. They are more inclined towards every creation in the universe. Another kind of noble love that Bacon argues about is the love between husband and wife. This love is further dignified with the love of friends.

Conciseness, straightforwardness, wittiness, and compact opinions are the merits that Bacon's essay cover. The methodical way of inscription makes his essay logical and rational. The subject matter that he argues about is taken from real life experiences and is a hot topic of discussion in every time. The readers find his essay more welcoming and pleasurable. The use of the Latin proverb in his essay shows his high knowledge regarding the Latin language.

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### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have learnt that an essay is a short prose composition dealing with a subject in a general manner so as to interest many readers. The essay began with Montaigne in France in the sixteenth century. Francis Bacon is called the father of the English essay. Bacon's essays reflect his practical wisdom. In 'Of Love' Bacon says that the love that arises from marriage is the root cause of mankind's creation, while love in friendship makes it perfect but lust corrupts it and embarrass it.

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### 3.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Decimvir</b>	a member of any <a href="#">authoritative</a> group of ten person
<b>Voluptuous and inordinate</b>	given to excess
<b>Austere</b>	Serious
<b>Well- fortified</b>	strengthened
<b>Satis magnum alteri alteri theatrum sumus</b>	One can find in one's neighbour a large theatre
<b>Contemplation</b>	Examination
<b>Little idol</b>	(her) woman
<b>Perpetual</b>	Continuous
<b>Arch flatterer</b>	the principal flatterer

<b>Perils</b>	dangers
<b>Nuptial love</b>	marital love
<b>Wanton</b>	spoiled, malicious

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### **3.7 SUGGESTED READING**

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You would benefit by reading the following essays of Bacon:

- Of Religion
- Of Truth
- Of Virtue
- Of Studies
- Of Friendship
- Of Parents and Children
- Of Marriage and Single Life
- Of Plantations

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What is an essay?

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2. What is the difference between formal and informal essay.

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3. "It is impossible to love, and to be wise"- Elaborate.

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4. Discuss the various ills of falling in love, according to Bacon.

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### MCQs

- (1) The word 'essay' comes from the \_\_\_\_\_ word  
(a) **French** (b) Latin (c) Greek (d) None of the above
- (2) The word 'essay' comes from the French word 'essai' which means \_\_\_\_\_  
(a) **to attempt** (b) to ruin (c) to abandon (d) None of the above
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ defines essay as "A loose sally of the mind"  
(a) **Dr Johnson** (b) Francis Bacon (c) Charles Lamb (d) Richard Steele
- (4) Bacon is the greatest English essayist of \_\_\_\_\_ kind  
(a) **Informative and impersonal** (c) informative and personal  
(b) Aphoristic and personal (d) uncommunicative and impersonal
- (5) Bacon called his essays \_\_\_\_\_  
(a) **Counsels** (b) Euphemism (c) Statements (d) None of the above
- (6) Bacon begins the essay by comparing love to the \_\_\_\_\_  
(a) **Stage** (b) music (c) fantasy (d) martyrdom
- (7) According to Bacon "\_\_\_\_\_ love maketh mankind"  
(a) **Nuptial** (b) friendly (c) wanton (d) erotic
- (8) According to Bacon, Love is the \_\_\_\_\_  
(a) **child's folly** (b) parent's folly (c) all pervasive (d) supreme authority
- (9) Love of \_\_\_\_\_ is great  
(a) **Friends** (b) beloved (c) children (d) parents
- (10) Immortal love only \_\_\_\_\_ human value  
(a) **Debases** (b) purifies (c) elevates (d) distils

**[Note: Correct option- A]**