

Of Great Place Literary Device

Writer: Francis Bacon | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Figures of Speech

Personification

- **Definition:** When non-human ideas or abstract concepts are given human qualities or actions.
- **Example:** "Power to do good is the true and lawful end of aspiring."
- **Explanation:** Here, power and ambition are personified as if they have human purpose and moral intention. Bacon treats them like living forces that can choose to do good or evil.
- **Effect:** This personification gives abstract ideas emotional depth. It makes the moral message stronger. It shows that power behaves like a person. Power is capable of virtue or corruption. It depends on one's use of it.

Simile

- **Definition:** A figure of speech comparing two different things using "as" or "like."
- **Example:** "Like old townsmen, that will be still sitting at their street door."
- **Explanation:** Bacon compares old men who cannot retire from power to aged townsmen sitting at their doors. They cling to visibility and refuse rest even when time demands retreat.
- **Effect:** The simile helps readers visualize the foolish attachment of men to public life. It adds irony and moral criticism to Bacon's message about the vanity of ambition.

Imagery

- **Definition:** The use of descriptive or figurative language to create a clear picture in the reader's mind.
- **Example:** "The standing is slippery, and the regress is either a downfall, or at least an eclipse."
- **Explanation:** Bacon uses visual images of "slippery ground," "downfall," and "eclipse" to describe the insecurity of power. These words appeal to sight and feeling.

- **Effect:** The imagery creates a vivid sense of instability and danger. It helps the reader feel that a person in power stands on unsafe ground, where even one misstep can lead to ruin.

Antithesis

- **Definition:** A contrast of ideas expressed in balanced phrases or sentences.
- **Example:** "It is a strange desire, to seek power and to lose liberty."
- **Explanation:** Bacon contrasts two opposite ideas. Gaining power and losing freedom. The sentence structure emphasizes the irony of ambition.
- **Effect:** This antithesis makes the thought sharp and memorable. It reveals the contradiction within human desire that seeking greatness often means sacrificing inner peace.

Epigram / Aphorism

- **Definition:** A short, wise, and memorable statement expressing a universal truth.
- **Example:** "A place showeth the man."
- **Explanation:** Bacon expresses a deep truth in a few words that power reveals one's real character.
- **Effect:** This aphorism adds moral strength and clarity. It captures the whole message of the essay, authority tests, and exposes human nature.

Symbolism / Symbols

- **Definition:** A symbol is a literary device in which an object, condition, or action represents a deeper moral or philosophical meaning beyond its literal sense. In "Of Great Place", Francis Bacon uses symbolic language to explore power, ambition, corruption, virtue, and human limitation. His symbols reveal the moral truths hidden within political life and personal ambition.
- **The Throne or "Great Place":** The "great place" itself is the central symbol of the essay. It represents power, responsibility, and moral testing. The throne or high position seems glorious from the outside, but Bacon shows it as a burden. It symbolizes both honor and servitude, a place that can elevate or destroy a person. For Bacon, this "great place" is not only a physical position of authority but a spiritual trial of character. It reminds readers that true greatness lies not in status, but in virtue.
- **The Winding Stair:** Bacon writes, "All rising to great place is by a winding stair." The winding stair symbolizes the slow, difficult, and often uncertain journey to power. It is not

straight, but full of turns and obstacles. It reflects the moral compromises and struggles that come with ambition. It also suggests that success never comes easily or honestly. The symbol teaches that the climb to power is complex and dangerous, requiring patience, wisdom, and self-control.

- **The Slippery Standing:** Bacon describes that “the standing is slippery.” This slippery ground symbolizes insecurity and instability in positions of power. The higher one stands, the greater the risk of falling. Power is shown as a dangerous height, where one wrong move can cause ruin. This symbol reveals that worldly success is fragile and temporary, and that no one in authority is safe from downfall or disgrace.
- **The Eclipse and Downfall:** When Bacon says, “The regress is either a downfall, or at least an eclipse,” he uses astronomical imagery symbolically. The eclipse represents loss of fame, power, or reputation. Just as the sun’s light fades during an eclipse, the brightness of authority fades when a man loses favor or strength. The downfall symbolizes total ruin, both moral and political. Together, these symbols express how power, like sunlight, is never permanent; it can vanish suddenly. It leaves darkness behind.
- **The Servant Chains (Servitude):** When Bacon says that “men in great place are thrice servants,” he uses the idea of servitude as a symbol of bondage within power. The chains of service, to the sovereign, to fame, and to business. It represents the limits placed on every powerful person. This symbol shows the irony of authority: those who appear to rule are themselves bound and controlled by their duties and desires.
- **The Vices of Authority (Delays, Corruption, Roughness, Facility):** These four vices are symbols of moral weakness in leadership.
 - Delays symbolize inefficiency and indecision.
 - Corruption stands for greed and dishonesty.
 - Roughness represents cruelty and arrogance.
 - Facility (too much ease or leniency) symbolizes weakness of judgment.

Together, they portray the moral dangers that surround power and the ways it can be misused.