

THE INFUENCE OF THE BIBLE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The Bible being the **Holy Words of God** is the sacred book of the Christians. The literary influence of the Bible has been tremendous, all pervasive and perennial. In fact **the** Bible has been providing the English men of letters spiritual themes and also modulated their literary style. It has gifted ample vocabulary, most beautiful quotations, maxims and phrases. The whole range of English language and literature is much indebted to **the Bible** for its dignity and richness.

Keywords: Christians, narrative history, Old Testament, English literature Characters, Narrtive structure

INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament consists of 39 books and the New Testament 27, making in all 66 in the entire Bible. The Old Testament deals with the narrative history of Jewish civilization and the primeval history of Creation. The New Testament with the Gospel of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John glorifies the life and preaching of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew language while the New in Greek language.

It was St. Jerome who made the first translation of Bible in the 4th century A.D. This was in Latin and called 'vulgate'. During the O.E. Period Bede had translated a portion of the gospel of St John. Wycliffe (1320-84) took a great initiative in completing two versions of Bible. William Tyndale, the Reformation leader made a wholesome attempt at this task and translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek originals and not from the Latin 'vulgate'. Subsequently Miles Coverdale brought a complete English Bible which was printed in 1535. After Tyndale, attempts were made at numerous translations, the chief of them being Cranmer's Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1556), and the Bishop's Bible (1568).

The Bible carried new coined expressions to all the strata of society: 'tender mercy', 'loving kindness', 'peace maker', 'glad tidings', 'scape goat' and so on. Many Biblical phrases are now used as idioms, 'to hope against hope', 'olive branches', 'to cast pearl before swine', 'the eleventh hour', 'wash one's hands of', 'to kill the flatted calf', 'a howling wilderness', 'a broken reed', 'a good Samaritan', 'swear of the brow', and so on.

The influence of the Bible spreads all over **English literature**, particularly the thought and style of great English prose writers. This Holy book ignited Bunyan a lot

to pen down his magnum opus, **Pilgrim's Progress**. The historian Clarendon and Fuller, catch some measure of the stately rhetoric of the Old Testament. While Sir Thomas Browne in his quaint **Religio Medici**, Robert Burton in his **Anatomy of Melancholy** and Jeremy Taylor in a varying ways testify to its influence.

The Book That Shaped Our Words: The Bible's Enduring Influence on English Literature

From Shakespeare's tragedies to Tolkien's epic fantasy, the Bible's influence on English literature is undeniable. Its timeless narratives, profound themes, and rich language have shaped the very fabric of our literary heritage, resonating through centuries of storytelling.

The Bible's central themes, deeply embedded in the human experience, form the bedrock of countless English literary works. The struggle between good and evil, as seen in the Garden of Eden, echoes in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The quest for redemption and salvation, a central tenet of Christianity, finds expression in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Bunyan's allegorical journey in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

From Adam and Eve's fall to David's rise and fall, biblical figures transcend their historical context, becoming archetypes that resonate with readers across cultures and time. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for instance, draws heavily on the biblical figure of Hamlet, mirroring themes of vengeance, betrayal, and the struggle for justice.

The King James Bible, with its poetic prose and majestic language, profoundly impacted the English language itself. Phrases like "a chosen people," "a land flowing with milk and honey," and "the prodigal son" became ingrained in our cultural lexicon. The Bible's metaphorical language, often imbued with symbolism, enriched the literary imagination, inspiring writers to create vivid imagery and convey complex ideas. The Bible's narrative structure, filled with parables, prophecies, and epic journeys, provided a framework for many literary works. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, with its allegorical journey, mirrors the biblical structure, while Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* borrows from biblical themes of good vs. evil and the journey of redemption. The Bible's influence extends beyond literary works to shape cultural attitudes, moral frameworks, and social discourse. Even in contemporary literature, where the explicit influence of the Bible might seem less obvious, its underlying themes of love, sacrifice, justice, and human nature continue to resonate.

CONCLUSION

The Bible's influence on English literature is undeniable. Its stories, themes, characters, language, and structure have been woven into the fabric of our literary heritage. It continues to inspire and inform writers to this day, reminding us of the enduring power of its timeless narratives and profound insights into the human condition.

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