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Contribution of the King James Bible to the English Language

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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: Bible, literature, language

Introduction

The greatest of all translations is the English Bible. It is even more than that: It is the greatest English book, the first of the English classics, the source of the greatest influences upon English Character and speech..... It is in a singular degree, the voice of the people.” --- George Sampson

Most common phrases derived from the Bible

For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19)

Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis 4:9) questions whether an individual is responsible for protecting his fellow man.

Put words in his mouth (Exodus 4:15) means to say what someone else should say even though it is not necessarily what they want to say.

Fell flat on his face (Numbers 22:31) Example: Although Nick tried hard, he fell flat on his face. He did not even reach the third round of the spelling bee.

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The apple of his eye (Deuteronomy 32:10) means a person who is very precious to another, normally used to describe the feeling of a parent or grandparent about a child.

Stand in awe (Psalms 4:4) Example: I stand in awe of his extraordinary strength

All these things must come to pass (Matthew 24:6) means to be patient and wait events.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41) means while someone May wish to behave one way, they actually do the opposite. Example: Although Sarah was on a diet, she ate the chocolate. Her spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

The Love of Money is the Root of All Evil.

Scapegoat

Thou shalt not bear false witness. It is better to give than to receive.

Turn to him the other [cheek]

Turned the world upside down

Two are better than one

Two-edged sword

Vengeance is mine

Wandering stars

White as snow

Woe is me

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The modern. Helpmate is a corruption of two words in Genesis: I will make him a help meet for him. Now the combined form helpmate means one's partner. Similarly, Scapegoat came from Tyndale's version of Hebrew term.

The Bible has also enriched English language with superlatives. Like: the heart of all hearts, a friend of friends, the evil of evils, a horror of horrors and so on.

Biblical names are often used to designate certain types of characters. For example:

Cain: Adam's son who murdered his brother Abel. Hence to raise Cain meaning making a determined angry fuss.

Job: a person of great patience. From The Book of Job.

Some of the words common in Bible have been archaized (obsolete) from the daily common words such as Damsel (a fair maiden), firmament (sky), apparel (dress), travail (labor) etc.

The Bible has also influenced the technical grammar of modern poetry in a considerable measure. Use of the has become more frequent: Hath, liveth, giveth, chooseth, loveth, instead of has, stead of has, lives, gives, chooses, loves, as a third person.

The English language belongs to the West Germanic branch of Indo – European family of languages. The history of English is conventionally divided into three periods usually called Old English (450 – 1100 AD), Middle English (1100 – 1500) and Modern English (1500 – 1800). Classical languages Greek (which is used by 22% people), Latin (used by 20% people), and French have helped in the development of the English language as the making of Modern English. Another aspect that has helped into Modern English is 'The Translation of Bible' (from the 13th century). Creative writers like John Milton, William Shakespeare, and G.B.Shaw has enhanced the importance of English as a Modern English by their amazing and creative writings. No work, except Shakespeare has had so much influence on the phraseology of English as the Authorized Version of the Bible."

The 'power and beauty' of the English language have been largely increased by the 'Authorized Version of the Bible 1611', which followed many earlier translations mainly of 'Wycliff', 'Tyndale' and 'Miles Coverdale'. The biblical scriptures were originally written in Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic around the 1340s. The earlier translations of the Bible belonged to the 'teething period' of the English language, which was suffering from lack of Vocabulary. One should remark that, 'the language of sacred truths should be a little archaic – a little removed from the usage of the daily round of life, a little suggestive of mystery and should use a good deal of symbolizing imagery.'

The first translator of the Holy Bible was John Wycliff (1320 -1384) – 14th century. He was a religious reformer. The Latin language is mainly divided into two parts: Sophisticated and Vulgate (i.e. colloquial). He translated the Biblical scriptures from 'Vulgate Latin'. He wrote in the dialect of the 'East Midlands'. He had a genius for language and his Bible translations were 'Landmark' in the English language. He popularized the phrase 'under the sweat of thy brow'. Over 1000 English words were first recovered in his Biblical translations. Most of these were Latin based, which entered English via French. He introduced words like 'unsatiable', 'unglorious', 'undiscreet', which were later replaced by the Latin prefix 'in-'. On the model of Wycliff, we find 'unpossible' in the Bible Version of 1611, which

was changed to 'impossible' in later editions.

Some other words used by him are listed below: 'barbarian', 'envy', 'childbearing', 'glory', 'cradle', 'multitude', 'philistine', 'zeal', 'Emperor' etc.

There were two groups of translators: one was mentors and another one language masters. 'King James' Bible' was the most significant translation. Bible's influence on literature: English literature teems with Biblical expressions-

1. 'The Voice of the Turtle' (Title of an American play)
2. 'Come the four corners of the world' (Shakespeare in 'King John')
3. 'The rain is over and gone' (Wordsworth in 'Lines Written in March')

The '-the' forms of verbs used with third person singular show the influence of the Bible. The second person pronouns '-thou', '-thee', '-thy' are widely used in the Bible. According to Dryden, it is a "Perpetual Fountain", from which people and movements draw inspiration. The Bible of 1611 is "a Milestone" in the making and enriching of Modern English.

There were some writers and poets, whose literary works conduct direct influence of Bible: 'John Milton', 'Coleridge', 'Wordsworth', 'Hemingway', 'John Ruskin' and 'T.S.Eliot'.

Another phrases/words list that is the translation from the Bible:

"The end of the period of English and the beginning of Modern English, coincides with the appearance of the Authorized Version of the English Bible".

The English language has been in constant transition throughout its history, but the most significant transformation in modern English can be credited to William Shakespeare. Shakespeare has enriched the English language because, for him, the language was like a magician's trick. The influence of Shakespeare as a 'Maker of English Language' can easily be compared with that of Bible Translations. With his invention of 'commonly used expressions and creation of new words', he was able to affect the language in a way that no person since has.

His contribution to the enrichment of the English language is immense. He was an embodiment of the genius of the language itself. He is the 'most quoted writer' in the English speaking world. Many of his quotations and neologisms have passed into everyday usage in English and other languages.

He experimented with all kinds of linguistic innovations, dialectical adaptations, and archaisms. His syntax, multiple negations, subject-verb agreement, word- formation, rhetoric, linguistics variety – develops his solid contribution to the enrichment of English. Thus he became an 'Undying Source' of inspiration to many writers.

One of his biggest contribution to the English language is the "Introduction of Vocabulary and Phrases, which enriched the language by making it colorful and expressive. Many of his phrases like "All's well that ends well", "To be or not to be" etc. have become an inseparable part of English. Some of the most popular phrases given by him are as follows: 'A laughing stock', 'A sorry sight', 'Cruel, only to be kind', 'Green-eyed monster', 'More sinned against than sinning', 'Method in madness', 'What's there in a name?', 'Milk of human kindness'. Some of Shakespeare's sentences have become a part of daily life:

'Brevity is the soul of Wit', 'All the world's a stage', 'Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold', 'Better a witty fool than a foolish wit'.

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He also invented many phrases, that are still in common usage today: 'Brave new world', 'Break the ice', 'Come what may', 'Heart of gold', 'In my mind's eye', 'Kill with kindness', 'Spotless reputation'. Shakespeare's coinage of single words and phrases show his resourcefulness. With the help of the French prefixes like 'em' and 'en', he coined many words that proved handy and forceful:

'En-' 'Em-'

Enact - Empower

Enroot - Empoison

Enfree - Embattle

Enkindle - Enlink

Endearment

Using the prefix 'un-' he, showed the way of a different method of using the language from its conventional method: Many proverbs and phrases, which are in common use in modern English, are the gifts of the Bible. Quotations from the Bible are given profusely. English language has been enriched by the Bible so much that a proper assessment is practically impossible.

The impact of the King James Bible, which was published 400 years ago, is still being felt in the way we speak and write, says Stephen Tomkins.

No other book, or indeed any piece of culture, seems to have influenced the English language as much as the King James Bible. Its turns of phrase have permeated the everyday language of English speakers, whether or not they've ever opened a copy.

The Sun says Aston Villa "refused to give up the ghost". Wendy Richard calls her EastEnders character Pauline Fowler "the salt of the earth". The England cricket coach tells reporters, "You can't put words in my mouth." Daily Mirror fashion pages call Tilda Swinton "a law unto herself".

Examples of Hebrew idiom that have become English via the Bible include: "to set one's teeth on edge", "by the skin of one's teeth", "the land of the living" and "from strength to strength".

The Bible contains many expressions that are still commonly used today, such as "a fly in the ointment", "thorn in the side", and "Do we see eye to eye".

England has two books, the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England."

Bible is a literary masterpiece of the first order, a triumph of both prose and verse. If the year 1611 coincided with the beginnings of the British Empire, it also marked the high

point of the English Renaissance. The new Bible translation appeared within a couple of years of the first performance of some of the greatest plays in English -- William Shakespeare's "The Tempest" and "The Winter's Tale," John Webster's "The White Devil" and "The Duchess of Malfi," Ben Jonson's "The Alchemist" -- and at the time of John Donne's poetry, and the philosophy and science of Sir Francis Bacon. (Even this list does not begin to mention the contemporary achievements

In a secular age where ignorance of religion goes from strength to strength (Psalms 84:7) among lovers of filthy lucre (1 Timothy 3:8) who only want to eat, drink and be merry (Luke 12:19), we know for a certainty (Joshua 23:13) that these resonant words endure as a fly in the ointment (Ecclesiastes 10:1) and a thorn in the flesh

(2 Corinthians 12:7) of the powers that be (Romans 13:1). They can still set the teeth on edge (Jeremiah 31:29) of those who try to worship God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24). But does this ancient book, proof that there is no new thing under the sun (Ecclesiastes

1:9), now cast its pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6), and act as a voice crying in the wilderness (Luke 3:4) -- a drop in a bucket (Isaiah 40:15) of unbelief, no longer a sign of the times (Matthew 16:3) but a verbal stumbling-block (Leviticus 19:14)?"

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In Begat, David Crystal sets out to prove that the King James Bible has contributed more to the English language than any other literary source.

If you've ever "fought the good fight" or chuckled at "what comes out of the mouths of babes," you just might agree with him.

Phrases with roots in the King James Bible are everywhere. Crystal tells NPR's Neal Conan that writing Begat began with his curiosity about a simple question: Many English language idioms come from the King James Bible.

The eminent Victorian critic John Ruskin was deeply familiar with the King James Bible; he began reading it with his mother daily at the age of three. Ruskin's controversial first work of art criticism, *Modern Painters*, draws upon the rhetorical power of Biblical language to describe the works of English Romantic painter J. M. W. Turner.

William Butler Yeats. "Sailing to Byzantium." In *The Tower*.

London: Macmillan and Co., 1928 (First edition).

Yeats's use of phrases from the King James Version can be ironic and unorthodox. In "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats evokes passages from Genesis, Daniel, the Psalms, New Testament epistles, and Revelations. The poem alludes to the story in Daniel 3, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are thrown into a fiery furnace because they will not worship a golden image. Ironically, the speaker calls the

sages out of the fire, but wishes to become the golden image itself, to be resurrected from "a natural body" (1 Cor. 15:44) into a graven image.

Herman Melville. *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*.

Melville's writings—even his journals and correspondence—show his familiarity with the stories and language of the King James Bible. The influence of the King James Version on *Moby-Dick* goes beyond allusions and quotations; Melville's imagery and idioms also imitate the language of the King James Version, and he often tries to adopt its structure. One critic calls *Moby-Dick* "a book of Biblical proportions," in that it is Melville's "homage to the Bible's own attempt to capture every shade of human experience and every imaginable mode of discourse."

John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath*.

New York: Viking Press, 1939 (First edition).

The Grapes of Wrath contains numerous Biblical allusions, but Steinbeck specifically models the language of the King James Version in the interchapters of his novel.

The influence of the Bible on Shakespeare's writing runs so deep that it's sometimes hard to say where the Bible's language ends and Shakespeare's begins. Shakespeare sometimes quotes the text of the Bible directly, but more often he includes a partial quote, an allusion, or a parody. A typical example of the way Shakespeare draws on the Bible is the title of the play *Measure for Measure*. This title isn't a direct quote from the Bible, but it is based on a biblical passage: "with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). Similarly, when Iago says "I am not what I am", Shakespeare's audience would have understood that Othello's villain is inverting what God tells Moses: "I am that I am" (Exodus 3:14). To take a comedic example, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Bottom declares, "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen" (IV.i). These words humorously garble another famous biblical passage: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

It's probably not surprising to anyone that the Bible has a large influence on our society; it is, after all, the most important book of the World.

Perhaps the most obvious way that the Bible has inspired writers can be seen in the ways that works of literature actually retell stories found in the Bible. John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, retells the biblical fall of man in a long, epic poem, including Satan's rebellion against God and Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden.

Similarly, John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* is roughly structured around the biblical story of Cain and Abel. Another example can be seen in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Following the biblical story of God as the all-powerful savior, Lewis uses the Bible to create parts of his plot, especially with the return of King Aslan, which parallels Jesus's return.

Other writers take images in the Bible and expand on them or use them as a setting, such as Dante, who used the Bible's description of the afterlife to create an epic 3-volume poem that explores Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, titled the *Divine Comedy*.

Conclusion

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.

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