

The Sway of the Bible in Literature

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Abstract – This study is an exploration, attempting to highlight into how the Bible has been a permeating and permanent influence on all men of literature and especially on all English authors. The Bible is undoubtedly an unending repertoire of all genres of Literature and almost all the authors have drawn enormously from the Bible as a source book of inspiration for their creative writings. This is established through a thoroughgoing analysis of the literary works of the most prominent and famous English writers. It is sufficiently made clear that scarcely one can find an author who is not somehow or other influenced by the Bible. Under the spell of the Bible, we could find people literally drawing on the source and quoting text from the Bible, others getting inspired with themes and motifs from the Bible and still some others like John Milton and William Blake who even tried to interpret the Bible. The article concludes with the note that the influence of the Bible on men of literature cannot be crushed out.

Keywords: Bible, literature, literary genres, poetry, prose, inspiration.

I. INTRODUCTION

The best reason for viewing the Bible as Literature is that the Bible is Literature to the core. To consider the Bible as Literature is not at all to neglect, much less to deny, its sacred character. Certainly, the people who still accept the doctrine of literal inspiration of the true Bible should be the first ones to perceive that the divine method of expression would be itself divine, and it would be using the most beautiful and moving language known to the men to whom it was delivered by dint of inspiration. If this is accepted, then the study of the Bible as literature enables us, in some real measure, to understand what the Bible means. Written originally in Hebrew and Greek, painfully and sometimes inaccurately copied, doubtfully translated into Aramaic and Syriac, transmitted to us through a thousand of years and mists of doctrine and prejudice and then translated to all the languages in the world in the twentieth century, the Bible is yet infused with the poetry, the visions, the metaphor, and the folklore of the East, to all of which many of us had been alien. Therefore, the Bible, of all books, needed a commentary which it had most conspicuously lacked and which the study of it as literature alone would supply. In the words of Drinkwater (1930):

. . . to read the Bible *literally* is the way to skepticism; to read it as *literature* is the way to essential and reasonable belief (p. 74).

Any literary critic, irrespective of whether he actually believes in the language of the Bible or not, has to admit the pure literary merit of the Bible. Nor can he ignore the truth that literary men of all subsequent ages have sipped copiously from the vast ocean of literature contained by, or rather confined within the Bible. Stunned by the enormous number of literary genres

interspersed in the pages of the Bible, any true critic will have to instinctively burst out as Frye (1982) wonders:

Why does this huge, sprawling, tactless book sit there inscrutably in the midst of our cultural heritage like the ‘Great Boyg’ or Sphinx in *Peer Gynt*, frustrating all efforts to walk around it? (pp. xviii-xix).

It should be noted that Northrop Frye who raised the above riddle is not the first one trying to ‘walk around’ the Bible as literature. But no one else has posed this in such articulate and appealing a tone.

The Renaissance critics were acutely aware of the Bible’s value as Literature. Baroway (1933) has surveyed the Renaissance commentary on the poetic nature of the Bible in his article in *Journal of English & Germanic Philology* and argued that the Renaissance critics bequeathed this view-point to the later generations (pp. 447-80). In the eighteenth century Bishop Robert Lowth in his famous Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, first noted the poetic nature of much biblical writing and first identified the characteristic Hebrew use of poetic parallelism. The thirty four lectures of the Bishop on the aspects of many kinds of biblical poetry, from short odes to longer poems like the Song of Solomon and the Book of Job, are available in translation by Gregory (1971) and published in two large volumes. Drinkwater had shown in his *The Outline of Literature* (1930) that the literary merit of the Bible is not due to the English translators primarily, but due to the parallelism and realism of the Hebrew poetry and the Greek narratives (pp. 79-85). Cowley (1968) records how in the nineteenth century Walt Whitman praised the power of the Bible as literature observing that even to the men of the nineteenth century, one could find the fountain-heads of song in the Bible. In his essay, “Religion and Literature”, Eliot (1975) refers time and again to the Bible as literature and argues that while it is possible to appreciate the literary merits of the Bible, those who enjoy it solely as literature are essentially parasites (pp. 97-106, passim). Men of our own centuries will be dazzled by the immense outpour of books and articles on the theme of the Bible as literature. Even an amateur who perchance happens to glance at such a list will be promptly convinced of the validity of the Bible as literature, even without actually browsing through all of them. Gottcent’s (1979) annotated bibliography is one of the best of its kind. Of all the critics of the twentieth century, Northrop Frye has been consistently and most systematically dwelling on this theme. Long back in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) he had called for a study of the Bible as the “grammar of apocalyptic imagery”. There, in the third essay “Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths”, Frye postulates the symbolism of the Bible as our reference point for a grammar of literary archetypes, and in the section “Theory of Archetypal Meaning: Apocalyptic Imagery”, Frye considers that ‘the city’, ‘the garden’, and ‘the sheepfold’ are the

organizing metaphors of the Bible and of most Christian Symbolism, and they are brought into complete metaphorical identification in the book explicitly called the Apocalypse or Revelation, which has been carefully designed to form an undisplaced mythical conclusion for the Bible as a whole. From our point of view this means that the Biblical Apocalypse is our grammar of apocalyptic imagery (p. 141).

In *The Educated Imagination* (1964), only very sparsely does Frye refer to the Bible. But even in those references he presents a theory of the relationship between mythology and literature that elucidates the concept of the Bible as Literature. Here, Frye argued that the myth of the Bible should be the basis of all literary training. His essay “History and Myth in the Bible” (1976) can be rightly considered a defense of the Bible as a literary work that demands a literary response from our parts. Here he argued that the Bible should be considered as a pre-requisite for the study of literature because it has provided a “mythological framework” for Western Literature (pp. 1-19). Frye observed that Christian poetry had moved within the frame work of Bible considered as an encyclopedic poem starting with the beginning of time (creation) and ending with the end of time (the Last Judgment) and surveying the history of man under the symbolic names of Adam and Israel, in between. Depending on the authority of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* which John Milton himself had used for his history of Briton, Frye (1965) reasserted how English Poetry began with the poet Caedmon who was ordered by an angel to sing him something:

Being inspired by a Christian Muse, Caedmon began promptly with a paraphrase of the first verses of Genesis on the creation, worked his way down through the Exodus and the main episodes of the Old Testament to the Incarnation, and went on to the Last Judgment and the life eternal. . . . The dramatic cycles of the Middle Ages are another example of the effect of the shape of the Bible on English Literature (p. 10).

One of the later studies by Frye on this topic by name *The Great Code* (1982), is more systematic and conclusive in approach than anybody else’s or his own earlier studies, as well as being more faithful to the literary qualities. Here in this book, Frye has presented a unified structure of narrative and imagery in the Bible, thus bringing out the coherence in its shape.

II. VARIOUS LITERARY GENRES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IN BRIEF

A quick glance through the broad classification noticeable in the two books by Trawick (1963 & 1968) impels one to find in the Bible history, biography, prophetic literature, lyrical poetry, dramatic literature, short stories and tales, wisdom and apocalyptic literature. Even if Buckner Trawick intended his division ‘History & Biography’ to cover the span of history from Genesis to Nehemia (2 Esdras) excluding Leviticus and Ruth, one can find among them passages clearly belonging to other literary genres, such as Creation Myths (Genesis 1-4), stories about Noah (Genesis 6-9), dramatic story of Abraham being ready to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22), the Cinderella-like-folklore of Joseph and his rise to power in Egypt (Genesis 37-50), epic narratives of Exodus and the events on Mount Sinai, the dramatic story of the ten plagues in Egypt (Exodus 4:29-15:21), the story of the sojourn in the wilderness (Numbers 10:11 – 19:22), the stories about the 13 judges (Judges 1 – 16) which contains the tragic story of Samson (Judges 13 – 16) and the fable of Jotham (Judges 9: 7-21), the tragedy of Saul (I Samuel 9 - 31), the poems of David which are among the best poetry of the Bible (II Samuel 1: 19 – 26), the story of the sin and repentance of David (II Samuel 11 – 12), the novel like tale of Naman’s leprosy (II Kings 5) etc. The list will be unending. The literary genres are so dovetailed in each texture of the Bible that anyone attempting to compartmentalize each book or each incident to a particular genre will have necessarily to fumble.

Trawick (1963; rpt 1970) deems and establishes the Book of Job as a drama of inner life and allots to it the position of supreme literary master-piece of the Bible, quoting various authorities (pp. 237-86). Considering the Song of Solomon as a wedding Idyll, Trawick avers:

As a piece of literature . . . no other composition in the world literature can surpass it as an expression of the exuberance of pure, connubial love (Ibid, p. 289).

The story of Ruth is considered to be a 'Specimen of fictional art'. In a scholarly essay by Wojick (1985), the Book of Ruth is considered to be a succinct, intricate love story powered by five intense dialogues:

a story about language and literature as well as about love, an appeal to use the imagination in all matters, including deeply religious matters, whatever the strict letter of the law may say (p. 152).

Trawick (1963; rpt 1970) presents the story of Jonah and affirms that it is unrivalled as a story of imaginative adventure with ever-popular folk elements like a realistic storm scene, and continual scene (p. 303). One would be instinctively tempted to consider Jonah as the biblical Robinson Crusoe. Regarding the Book of Ecclesiastes, Trawick establishes that poetry of great beauty and pure prose are inter-twined with each other (Ibid, pp. 346-47). We dwelt on a random survey from Buckner B Trawick's book related to the Old Testament in order to highlight on the immensity of the Bible as a repertoire of almost all the literary genres.

III. INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE ON VARIOUS AUTHORS

When we consider the permeating influence of the Bible on various authors we have to bear in mind that each and every book of the Bible has its individual influence on varied authors in various times. To delve deep into all of them is not in the scope or purview of this study. Nor does it seem necessary to go for it. A very random glance at typical examples of the books of the Bible holding their sway as the inspirational source over the cream of authors of all times, both as individuals and as a whole, will serve the purpose of this study.

As Greenwood (1967) asserts, the theme of the loss of Paradise and of its eventual restoration by some means or the other, is a very potent one in poetry of all ages, imbibing the spirit from the Fall narratives of the Genesis. Considering the influence shown by the first three chapters of Genesis and their commentaries on the hexameral epics, dramas and prose writings, one is prompted to assert with Williams (1937) that "truly these are treasure houses (p. 192)."

Edmund Spenser's allegiance to the Bible is best examined by Shahin (1976). Shahin has observed that of all the 534 clear references to the various books of the Bible in the seven books of *The Faerie Queene*, the greatest number of references are to the Genesis, Psalms, Matthew, and Revelation. Delineating norms for a text to be considered as a 'valid reference', Shahin studies the biblical allusions and references in *The Faerie Queene* under four categories: (i) the passages directly and undoubtedly alluding or referring to biblical text; (ii) passages where biblical allusions are probable or possible; (iii) passages where there is a resemblance to scripture text; and (iv) allusions to the Bible which are mostly doubtful (p.

56). For the influence of the Bible on Spenser in general, Virgil K Whitaker's study (1950) would be the best one.

The Website www.to-be-or-not-to-be.com bases their argument regarding the influence which the Bible had on Shakespeare on the primary sources Thomas Carter's *Shakespeare and Holy Scripture* and Peter Milward's *Shakespeare's Religious Background* and gives us the following averment. Shakespeare, born in 1564, probably was exposed to the Great Bible, the Bishop's Bible, and the Geneva Bible. "A close study of his use of Scripture in his work confirms that he probably learned the Bible through the Geneva version. Thomas Carter in *Shakespeare and Holy Scripture* argues that "no writer has assimilated the thoughts and reproduced the words of Holy Scripture more copiously than Shakespeare." According to another critic, Shakespeare "is saturated with the Bible story" (retrieved from: <http://www.to-be-or-not-to-be.com/william-shakespeare-and-the-bible.htm> on 13 February 2015). Again, according to Peter Milward (*Shakespeare's Religious Background*), "Shakespeare's familiarity with the Bible is extensive. There is hardly a book in the OT or NT which is not represented in his plays; this argues for his close knowledge of Scripture. The BOOKS he seems to have known most thoroughly, even in places by heart, are Genesis, Job, the Psalms, Ecclesiasticus, Matthew, Luke, and Romans" (retrieved from: <http://www.to-be-or-not-to-be.com/william-shakespeare-and-the-bible.htm> on 13 February 2015).

John Milton's reputation as an epic poet cannot be considered apart from the fall narratives of Genesis and the last judgment in Apocalypse or Revelation. Any serious reader of literature is bound to come across innumerable articles on Milton's indebtedness to the Bible. For example: Bowers' "Adam, Eve and the Fall in *Paradise Lost*" (1969), Pecheux's "Abraham, Adam and the theme of Exile in *Paradise Lost*" (1965), McManus' "The Pre-existent Humanity of Christ in *Paradise Lost*" (1980), McQueen's "*Paradise Lost* V, VI: The War In Heaven" (1974), Stollman's "Milton's Understanding of the 'Hebraic' in *Samson Agonistes*" (1972), Whiting & Gossman's "Siloa's Brook, the Pool of Siloam, and Milton's Muse" (1961), Knott's "The Biblical Matrix of Milton's 'On the Late Massacre in Piedmont'" (1983), and MacCallum's "Milton and Figurative Interpretation of the Bible" (1962) are only a few.

Williams (1937) remarked that like Raleigh and Browne, Milton too might have not only drawn from the first three chapters of the Genesis but also used the commentaries for these chapters as well (pp. 207-8). Talking about Milton's sources for *Paradise Lost*, Hanford (1926; rpt 1954) observed:

The biblical references he considered solely authoritative. . . . The foundation passage in the Scripture for the fall of men is Genesis ii, for the war in heaven and the fall of satan (the Dragon) it is Revelation, xii. But Milton has employed in one place or another every relevant biblical text and the student who would examine in full the basis of the legend in its larger outline should consult a concordance under the heads of Adam, Eve, Satan, Lucifer etc. Scripture is also used for the subsidiary elements of the story . . . Milton's poem is, as he doubtless expected it to be, an invitation to read and re-read the Bible, and many an Old or New

Testament passage which has been perhaps passed by unnoticed acquires force and meaning when we return to it from Milton's poetic interpretation (pp. 242-43).

Considering the last two books of the epic, Frye (1965) has affirmed that "the speech of Michael, which takes up most of the last two books of *Paradise Lost*, is a summary of the Bible from the murder of Abel to the vision of John in Patmos in which the biblical myth takes the form of a miniature epic or epyllion, and as such pulls together and restates all the major themes of the poem, like a stretto in a fugue" (pp.10-11).

In the preface to *Samson Agonistes*, Milton admits the influence on him not only of the Judges but also of Revelation. Quoting the authority of David Pereus, Milton considers Revelation as one of the models for tragedy. Lewalski (1970) quotes Milton's observation that commenting on Revelation, David Pereus divided "the whole book as a Tragedy, into Acts distinguish't each by a chorus of Heavenly Harpings and Songs between" (p. 1050). Lewalski (1970) affirms again: Milton subscribes to Pereus's view and though he cites as his models as to style and plot the examples of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides,

when it comes to the prior question of dignity and gravity of Tragedy he cites the biblical precedent of the Book of Revelation (p. 1050).

What concerns us the most is that Milton took Revelation for a grand tragedy and himself fashioned *Samson Agonistes* after it. Even in Milton's prose writings we can find that he is repeatedly drawing on the Bible. Milton's use of the Bible in all his Prose Works is discussed by Fletcher (1929) in 4 full chapters and is followed by an appendix listing the complete Biblical quotations and citations in Milton's prose.

John Bunyan derived his thought and style from the English Bible. Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678; rpt. 1929) lead us to the well-springs of undefiled English. No other man has known the Authorized Version of the English Bible as perhaps Bunyan had mastered it. Truly, one could say of Bunyan: The Bible's language became his breath. In passage after passage of *The Pilgrim's Progress* we feel like reading the Bible through the medium of Bunyan's words. One can find Bunyan's own providing the text with Biblical references in the margin (passim), which range from the first to the last books of the Bible, (not in the same order, indeed). Consider, for example, these words of Mr. Greatheart in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, in Part II of the Book, which was added in 1685 to the 1678 edition:

This is like doing business in great Waters, or like going down into the deep; this is like being in the heart of the sea, and like going down to the bottoms of the Mountains: Now it seems as if the Earth with its bars were about us fore ever. But let them that walk in darkness and have no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God. For my Part, as I have told you already, I have gone often through this Valley, and have been much harder put to it than now I am, and yet you see I am alive. I would not boast, for that I am not mine own savior. But I trust we shall have a good deliverance. Come let us pray for light to Him that can lighten our darkness, and that can rebuke, not only these, but all the Satans in Hell (p. 257).

The first part of this passage is evidently modeled upon the Hebraic parallelism and imageries of the Bible. In “But let them that walk in darkness and have no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God”, one can easily hear St. John speaking about Christ. The simplicity of style and cadence in the above passage is remarkable. In the above quoted passage or in any other passage of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* the common people found no word or sentence they did not understand. As John Drinkwater (1930; rpt. 1967) has affirmed, truly, if the language of the Bible shaped the speech of England, it was Bunyan, who “learned to use that language better than anyone else” (p. 76). Stranahan (1982) has discussed the influence of The Epistle to the Hebrews on Bunyan as his source for the idea of pilgrimage in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (pp.279-96).

The Metaphysical poets directly came under the sway of Biblical mysticism. John Donne, the poet and preacher, has been considered to be a mystic, lonely ascetic, a secret Catholic and a medieavalist. Donne’s favourite sermon themes were sin, death and the grave. “One must say of him,” as Rowe (1964) observes, “what he so often said of the scriptures ... is meat for all tastes” (p. 220). This remark alone would be sufficient to prove the permeating influence of the Bible on Donne, which is especially noticeable in the “Holy Sonnets”, “The Litanie”, and “The Progresse of the Soule”, etc., all of which are commonly understood as Divine Poems. Gardner (1912) deemed *The Second Anniversary* [of 1612] as “one poem of Donne’s, and a great one, . . . built on the belief that at death the righteous soul is immediately in heaven;” and “this doctrine is given long and splendid poetic expression at the heart of *The Second Anniversary*” (p. 326).

In the Holy Sonnet X beginning with “Death be not proud,” Donne has epitomized his attitude to death in the last two lines, which we quote from Grierson (1912):

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death thou shalt die (Vol. I. p. 326).

These two lines clearly echo the Pauline letter to the Corinthians, explaining the resurrection of the body, and especially I Cor. 15: 54-55 where Paul challenges:

Death is swallowed up in victory.
O death, where is thy victory?
O death, where is thy sting?

The subject of Holy Sonnet 7 beginning with “At the round earth’s imagin’d Corners”, is again that of general Resurrection. Or let us consider the lines of Sonnet 2, as quoted from Grierson’s edition of Donne’s poems:

I am thy sonne, made with thy selfe to shine,
Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid,
Thy sheepe, thine image, and, till I betray’d
My selfe, a temple of thy spirit divine (Vol I. p. 322).

As Sanders (1971) has observed, “It is all impeccably orthodox, paraphrased from the purest Scriptural Sources” (p. 125).

Rowe (1964) among many others, has already pointed out the importance to Donne of the practice of meditation:

His *Holy Sonnets*, Essays in divinity, Devotions, Prebend Sermons and reflection on the story of Creation, are evidences of a habitually contemplative nature. This deeply personal religion made him, what the stanzas from 'Metempsychosis, The Progress of the Soule', demonstrate him to be, a prophet, with intensely prophetic powers, at the heart of whose verse was an insight into religious realism as the creature's return to his Creator (p. 221).

It is important to note that such a mystical union or intimacy with the Creator in everything he did was obtained by Donne through his perennial adherence to meditations.

The whole range of "Temple" poems by the great mystical poet George Herbert is replete with verses influenced by or interpreting the Bible. For Herbert, the Bible was "infinite sweetness". As we quote from Hutchinson's edition (1941) of his poems, in his poem "The Holy Scriptures - I" he sang:

Oh Book! Infinite sweetness! Let my heart
Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain,
Precious for any grief in any part;
To cleare the breast, to mollifie all pain.
Thou art all health, health thriving till it make
A full eternitie: thou art a masse
Of strange delights, where we may wish and take (p. 58).

For Herbert the Bible is a panacea. Sucking every letter of the Bible, Herbert's heart yearns to get that divine honey which will smoothen any grief in any part. Compared to the strange delights in the Bible where one takes from as he wishes, what are the delights that nature could offer us! Richard Strier (1983) suggested that the lines "Thy delight / Passeth tongue to taste or tell" ("The Banquet", lines 5-6) imply another "strange delight even though Herbert does not mention the phrase" (pp. 135-36).

In Richard Crashaw's poem "A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Theresa", he emphasizes Christ's presence in man's life, Christ of the Incarnation and the Passion. Consider the following lines for example, which are quoted from Tutin's edition of Crashaw's poems (n.d.):

His is the dart must make the death
Whose stroke shall taste thy hallowed breath;
A dark thrice dipped in that rich flame
Which writes thy Spouse's radiant name
Upon the roof of heaven, . . . (lines 79 – 83).

Or again:

O how oft shalt thou complain

Of a sweet and subtle pain!
Of intolerable joys!
Of a death in which He who dies
Loves his death, and dies again
And would forever so be slain.
And lives, and dies; and knows not why
To live, but that he thus may never leave to die.
How kindly will thy gentle heart
Kiss the sweetly-killing dart.
And close in his embraces keep (lines 97-107).

Crashaw's inspiration was the deeply Biblical mysticism of St. Theresa. As Peterson (1970) asserts: whether it is for "The Flaming Heart" or "The Hymn to Theresa", the inspiration for Crashaw unfailingly came from 'those rare works' and that 'bright book' of Theresa. Peterson then avers: "The flame I took from thee' is his [Crashaw's] burning inspiration" (p. 108). Poems of Crashaw from his "Divine Epigrams," such as "Why are ye afraid, O ye of little Faith? – Mark IV," "Upon the Ass that Bore Our Saviour," "Give to Caesar – And to God – Mark XII," "Easter Day," "Psalm XXIII," and the poems in "Sacred Poems" such as "To the Name Above Every Name, the Name of Jesus: A Hymn," and "The Glorious Epiphany of Our Lord: Hymn sung by the Three Kings" are all biblical to the core both in content and in style.

Henry Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* is an excellent collection of Biblical poems. Like Herbert, he too found delight and comfort in the Scriptures. We quote from Martin's edition (1963), his lines in the poem entitled "To the Holy Bible":

Living, thou wert my souls sure ease,
And dying mak'st me go in peace.
Thy next *Effects* no tongue can tell;
Farewel O book of God! Farewell (p. 379).

How much the Bible meant for Vaughan is evident from these lines, He firmly believed that all truths are contained in the Bible. Nowhere else can the human soul and body find comfort. A note of sadness is implied in the last line, taking leave of the Bible. Even the first poem "Regeneration" is deeply influenced by Christ's words, "verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3: 3)." In the words of Durr (1962):

it is the truth of this teaching that informs 'Regeneration' and that lies at the heart of Vaughan's whole work (p. 82).

Bible permeated his whole life, and graced with the intimations of Reality, Vaughan possessed both the genius and the training that enabled him to formulate his vision in words of poetic effect.

Martz (1964) has traced Vaughan's mystical poetry devolving round his oft-dwelt-upon triad, the Bible, Nature and the self, to the idea of the 'three books' cultivated by the medieval Augustinian Monks and especially by St. Bonaventura – the Book of Scripture, the Book of Nature, and the Book of the Soul:

The three books are essentially one: the revelation given in the Bible shows man how to read, first nature and then his own soul (p. 67).

The whole range of Vaughan's poetry is, in fact, his attempt to reach the Creator through the Created Nature.

Thomas Traherne and William Habington continued this strain of mystical poetry depending mainly on the Bible as a fountain of literary springs. Traherne's appreciation of the Book found poetic expression in his poem "The Bible" which we quote from Margoliouth's edition of his poems:

That! That! There I was told
That I the *Son of God* was made,
His Image. O Divine! And that fine Gold,
With all the joys here do fade,
Are but a Toy, compared to the Bliss
Which Hev'nly, God-like, and Eternal is.
That we on earth are Kings;
And tho were cloth'd with mortal skin,
Are Inward Cherubims; hav Angels Wings;
Affections, Thoughts, and Minds within,
Can soar throu all the Coasts of Hev'n and Earth;
And shall be sated with Celestial Mirth (II, p. 106).

Or consider his poem "On the Bible", explaining how to approach the Bible:

When thou dost take
This Sacred Book into thy hand;
Think not that Thou
th' included sence dost understand.
It is a signe
thou wantest Sound Intelligence;
If that Thou think
thy selfe to understand the sence.
Bee not deceived
Thou then on it in vain mayst gaze
The way is intricate

that leads into a Maze.
Heer's nought whats Mysterious
to understanding Eyes:
Where Reverence alone stands Ope,
And sence stands By.

Almost all the poems including those of *Christian Ethicks*, and *Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation* reveal Traherne's indebtedness to the Bible and his exposition of the human predicament depending on the Word of God.

Traherne's union with God through the Created World is expressed resolutely in the 62nd Meditation of Traherne's Third Century:

Every Thing being Sublimely Rich and Great
And Glorious. Every Spire of Grass is the
Work of His Hand: And I in a World
Where every Thing is mine.

As Martz (1964) has ascertained: Traherne had indeed found "the Inward Paradise: the Similitude and Presence of God in the whole Creation (p. 93)," Precisely due to this realization, one can notice that when he read the book of Psalms with this new understanding of Communion with God in everything, Traherne could write in his sixty sixth meditation in the Third Century: "Methouhts a New Light Darded into all his Psalmes, and finally spread abroad over the hwole Bible".

William Habington, though not as famous and as widely-read as the previous metaphysical poets, continued the dependence on the Bible especially in his sacred poems. His most famous work is *Castara* which, in fact, extolled his wife. But in its 1640 edition Habington included a number of additional poems, many of which are Sacred poems directly influenced by the Bible.

Francis Quarles in his *Emblems* provides quotations from the Bible to explicate the poems. For example, the theme of Emblem No 1 is the temptation of Eve by the Serpent. For its motto Quarles selects a passage from the Epistle of St. James: "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed (James 1:14). As has been highlighted by Gilfallan (1857), the illustration to this poem by Herman Hugo shows Eve talking to the Serpent beside the Tree of Knowledge (pp. 203-205). By quoting James 1: 14 as the motto, Quarles maintains that Eve's temptation is not at all a 'once-for-all-finished' reality.

Traherne, Habington and Quarles are not the last links of this chain. It was continued in Dryden, Dr. Johnson and Pope, and in William Blake we find the exuberance of Biblical verse and vision, to elucidate which a separate study would be aptly needed. The chain was kept unbroken by Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Carlyle, G.M. Hopkins, T.S. Eliot, Bertolt Brecht and Ted Hughes, among others, of the 20th century. We may highlight into the influence of one or the other book of the Bible on these later poets very briefly, to show this chain of drawing from the Bible almost acted like a tradition of its own among the English poets.

Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* cannot be considered apart from the Old Testament story of Absalom's revolt against King David (II Samuel 15-18). Dryden allegorically interpreted his contemporary political events in this political satire, drawing King Charles II and Lord Monmouth and others on the same moulds as David, Absalom and others. Dryden's Achitophel (Earl of Shaftesbury) modelled upon the Biblical Ahithophel and his Zimri (Lord Buckingham) are the most memorable characters in this political satire.

Alexander Pope in the advertisement to "Messiah: A Sacred Eclogue, in Imitation of Virgil's *Pollio*" observes the parity between the thoughts of Isaiah's prophecies and those in the *Pollio* of Virgil. Pope does not venture to improve upon the sheer literary superiority of the Biblical passages. His passage describing the triumph of vice in the Dialogue I of *Epilogue to the Satires* (lines 141-70), produces on the reader an overall effect of classical Biblical prophecy. Boswell's comment in his *Life of Johnson* that *Rasselas* echoes the *Vanitas Vanitatum* theme of Ecclesiastes, is very much justifiable. Wordsworth esteemed the Holy Scriptures reverentially and Abrams (1953; rpt. 1958) quotes Wordsworth admitting that the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Bible together with the Works of Milton and Spenser, were for him the "grand store house of poetical imagination" (p. 295). Abrams (1954; rpt. 1958) quotes also Coleridge who described the symbols of the Hebrew Bible as "living educts of the imagination" (p. 295). Coleridge (1898-1904) testified that in his preface to *Cain*, Lord Byron admitted that his poem is exclusively derived from the Genesis text, in spite of his acknowledged indebtedness to Milton (p. 208). Terrien (1954) asserts that Tennyson considered the Book of Job as "the greatest poem of ancient and modern times" and how, speaking of the Book of Job, Carlyle astonishingly remarked: "A noble book; all men's Book! . . . There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit" (p. 877). Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" is undoubtedly a symbolic expression of Man's yearning to return to the Creator. G.M. Hopkins in one of his last poems "Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord" quotes the Latin translation of Jeremiah 12:1 and uses the latter parts of chapter 12 in the rest of the sonnet. As Frank Kermode and John Hollander (1973) point out, the poem's first three lines themselves are a translation of this epigraph (p. 1474)

T.S. Eliot could eclectically relate himself to various mythologies including the Bible stories, as is especially revealed in his master-piece work *The Wasteland*. But Kermode and Hollander (1973) have pointed out the poignancy and beauty of his condensed expression of the Nativity of Jesus, in the following lines of his poem "Gerontion":

Signs are taken for wonders, 'We would see a sign!
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness (p. 1977).

" , , , Unable to speak a word, swaddled with darkness" are pregnant with meaning when read in the light of the I Chapter of John, when the Word in whom was the life and light of men, became flesh and dwelt among us, and the darkness of the world neither knew nor received Him. Even Bertolt Brecht could not deny the impact of the Bible on him. Brandt (1964) asserts that, in reply to a query made by the German Newspaper *Die Dame* for their column about the deepest influences on the authors, Bertolt Brecht precisely answered in a single sentence article, which ran like this: "*Sie werden lachen: die Bibel* [You might laugh: The Bible]" (p. 171-76; [translation mine]). Ted Hughes's indebtedness to the Bible is acknowledged by him in the Faas Interview, "Ted Hughes and *Crow* (An Interview)" (1971):

“you spend a life time learning how to write verse when it’s been clear from your earliest days that the greatest poetry is in the prose of the Bible” (p. 10). Commenting on this praise of the Bible by a poet in the late 20th century, Hahn (1977) observes that “it is not just the style, it is also the content of the Bible – particularly the creation narratives of the Old Testament – that Hughes takes as his model for the sequence of poems which compose *Crow*” (p. 43).

CONCLUSION

The long discussion above clearly points out to the conclusion that the Bible has been the permanent mainspring of all literature and especially of the English literature. And it seems that literary men of all ages to come in future will go on sipping from the living waters of the Biblical Muse. Frye (1982) explains this predicament ingeniously when he admits, that the Bible “is a book that has had a continuously fertilizing influence on English Literature from Anglo-Saxon writers to poets younger than me [Frye himself]” (p. xvi). In a more convincing and clarion call Frye asserts: there is no excuse “today for Scholars who, in discussing cultural issues originally raised by the Bible and still largely informed by it, proceed as though the Bible did not exist. It seems to me that some one not a specialist in the Biblical field needs to call attention to the Bible’s existence and relevance” (p. xix). Isolating Milton and Blake as poets ‘exceptionally biblical even by the standards of English Literature’, Frye observed that a student of English Literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads, and even the most conscientious students will be continually misconstruing the implications, even the meaning.

Concluding his understanding of the Bible as a Library of Literature, Frye categorically pronounces that the influence of the Bible can never be crushed out. The last two sentences of his book stand out as the last word on this point: “The normal reaction to a great cultural achievement like the Bible is to do with it what the Philistines did to Samson: reduce it to impotence, then lock it in a mill to grind our aggressions and prejudices. But perhaps its hair, like Samson’s, could grow again even there” (p. 133).

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