

Western Literature

The Bible: Influence on Literature

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### The Bible: Influence on Literature

The Bible, like many literary accomplishments, was not completed in a day. Composition of the Bible was accomplished over a 1500-year time span and is stated to have 40 different writers. (Why You Can Believe the Bible, n.d.). With such a long history of being in existence, there are always bound to be parallels in stories being told or works of literature throughout history. How much of an influence has the Bible played in the creation of well known literary projects? The Bible is the model and subject of more art and thought than most will ever know. (Robinson, 2011). This paper will discuss what literature is, the influence of the Bible in literature, and similarities of the Bible and literature.

In order to adequately describe the influence of the Bible on literature, literature must first be defined. So, what exactly is literature? Literature is defined as “writings in which expression and form, in connection with ideas of permanent and universal interest, are characteristic or essential features, as poetry, novels, history, biography and essays.” (Literature, n.d.). Literature can sometimes be a higher art form but it also “represents a culture and tradition of a language or a people.” (Lombardi, 2019). From generation to generation what can be considered as literature changes because it provides what would be believed as a “blueprint of human society.” (Lombardi, 2019). During each time period, the author would take what would be something of interest or use what they considered an issue to make their writing stand out. From authors such as William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Maya Angelou, just to name a few, their “works of literature give insight and context to all the world’s societies.” (Lombardi, 2019).

With literature being an important staple in society, where does the influence for the writings come from? There could be many different influences such as an author’s personal experiences, experiences of friends or family, influences from nature or even other written

works. One notable written work that literary authors seem to be influenced by is the Bible. The Bible “is a book that has had a continuously fertilizing influence on English literature.” (Hilder, 2015). According to Erin Blakemore in the article *How the King James Bible Influenced American Literature*, some works of literature seem to “draw directly from the King James Bible, using stylistic effects that echo and remix Biblical concepts and cadences to create a work that feels epic, poetic and biblical.” The authors use the stories from the Bible to address issues of morality that arise in Christianity but make it their own by making it more imaginative and even at times more dramatic.

With the many different stories in the Bible, there are different ways works of literature can be influenced. For example, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden being tempted by the snake to eat from Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Another example of a story that could be used to influence literature is when Lucifer, now known as Satan, rebelled against God and fell from grace to be condemned for all eternity to hell. Using stories such as these is a great way to help “engage with the Bible’s interpretive history and its accrual of cultural history.” (Carruthers, 2015). Other stories from the Bible that have influenced would be the story of Noah’s Ark.

Because the Bible has such an influence on literature, there are always bound to be similarities from the stories depicted in the Bible to works of literature. One story in particular seems to have been influenced by the Bible would be the story of *Paradise Lost*. This is an epic poem written by John Milton in blank verse. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014). According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, “many scholars consider *Paradise Lost* to be one of the greatest poems in the English language. It tells the biblical story of the fall from grace of Adam and Eve...” Simply knowing the story of Adam and Eve, the parallels between what are depicted

in Genesis and what was written by Milton are pretty much the same. The story of Adam and Eve, God created Adam and then created Eve from Adam's rib. God also created the Garden of Eden as their home. God had only one specific rule that could not be broken and that was that they were to never to consume the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Satan took the form of a snake and tempted Eve to eat from the tree. Eve then in turn, talked Adam into eating the forbidden fruit as well. To distinguish between the distinct theme of the Christian subject matter, Milton did use classically inspired pieces as well such as the use of the muse and the use of the epic question. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014). In Milton's literature, Satan took the form of a toad to tempt Eve into eating the fruit from the tree. With the accounts of the story in both the Bible and *Paradise Lost*, because of Adam and Eve's disobedience to the will of God, this caused their, and ultimately mankind, fall from grace.

Another piece of literature that seems to have many parallels to the Bible would be the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. "Of these, the best known is probably the Epic's flood story, which reads a lot like the biblical tale of Noah's ark (Genesis 6-9)." (McDermott, 2015). In the story of Noah's Ark, God was displeased with mankind because they were more preoccupied with themselves than with God. So, God decided to flood the earth. Before doing so, God spoke to Noah and gave specific instructions to build an ark. Noah did as God asked with building the ark and loading it with two of each creature of the earth including family and their spouses. Noah did everything that God required. After everyone was safely onboard, it began to rain. It rained for forty days and forty nights. In *Gilgamesh*, the only noticeable differences in the stories was the length of time it rained which was six days and six nights. "Each of these works reflects a profound knowledge of Scripture and tradition on the part of the writer, the kind of knowledge found only among those who take them seriously enough to probe the deepest questions in terms."

(Robinson, 2011).

In conclusion, influencers can be found in anything from hair and makeup to music artist shouting out different brands in their music helping to increase awareness and possible sales of those particular brands. For literature, research has shown that a major influencer just happens to be the Bible, although there can be many influences on what an author decides to write about in their work. Knowing what literature is and how over the years, the stories depicted in the Bible have been reimagined and dramatized to draw audiences in and at the same time teach is remarkable. Not only has the literature become teachable but it has made the audiences across the years ponder on issues of morality as well. It is safe to assume that because of the popularity of the Bible, that it will remain as an influence on literature, cultures and societies for years to come.

## Annotated Bibliography

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*Why You Can Believe the Bible*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 24, 2019, from EveryStudent.com:  
<https://www.everystudent.com/features/bible.html>

This article gives a brief history of the Bible and who wrote it, a confirmation of historical accuracy of the bible, why the gospels were written, and how even with the many different translations the Bible remains the same.