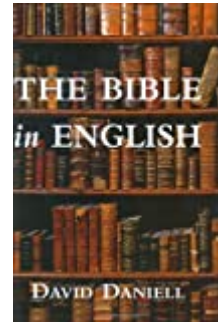




**David Daniell.** *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. xx + 899 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-09930-0.



**Reviewed by** William Gibson (Oxford Brookes University)

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Since the year 2000 there has been a boom in books about the English Bible and its history. Benson Bobrick, Alister McGrath, Brian Moynahan, Christopher de Hamel, Edwin Robertson, David Price, and David Norton have written studies on the English Bible.[1] But David Daniell, formerly professor of English at University College London and best known for his editions of Tyndale's Old and New Testaments as well as a biography of Tyndale, has written a book on an altogether larger scale. *The Bible in English* is not a slice of the history of the Bible in the English Language, or of a particular translation or translator. Rather it creates an astonishing chronicle from Aldred's Old English translation to the plethora of translations in the twentieth century. This is a story on an epic scale, and David Daniell does it justice. In his introduction Daniell establishes that the purpose of his book is fourfold. First, to celebrate the power and versatility of the English Language (or more accurately "three Englishes," p. 12); secondly to tell the story of the translation of the Bible in the face of terrible barriers; thirdly to recognize the unique multiplicity of the English Bible and finally show the way in which the Bible became accessible to all individuals and groups. Perhaps mirroring the division of the Bible, Daniell's book is divided into two sections: "before printing" and "after printing."

The Anglo-Saxon Bibles, often used as a teaching

technique to enable students to gloss the Latin Bible into Anglo-Saxon, had a number of variations, fragments of which have survived. Daniell implies that an Anglo-Saxon regime would have been sympathetic to widespread translation of the Bible, but Normans intervened. At best, after 1066 the idea of translation was set back, at worst there was no longer an English into which to translate the Bible. For three hundred years after 1066 the English Language was in flux. There were occasional attempts at translation, as, for example, the Ormulum of the late-twelfth century. But it was only in the mid-fourteenth century that a number of spluttering attempts gained momentum, with thirty surviving copies of Richard Rolle of Hampole's translation. Quite why Daniell regards this post-Conquest era as one of "Romance and Piety," as his chapter is named, remains opaque.

If printing was the main watershed in the story of the English Bible, a minor watershed was the late-fourteenth-century production of Lollard Bibles. These emerged in surprising numbers, over 250 survive, 20 from the 1380s alone. Though ascribed to John Wyclif, it is unlikely that he translated any himself. But Wyclif was "the Morning Star" of the Reformation, known across Europe for his radical views, and his followers were committed to the translation of the Bible. Daniell does not distin-

guish between the violent opposition to Wyclif's ecclesiology and liturgical views and the suppression of the Biblical translations he inspired. One of the most interesting counter-factuals is whether an English Bible untainted by Wyclif's radical theology might have found more favor. But this may be an anachronistic fancy, since, as Daniell asserts, the translation of the Bible lay at the heart of Lollardy. Either way, the repression of the Lollards was sufficient to prevent William Caxton, a thoroughly entrepreneurial printer, from attempting an English Bible. Of course the Bible had been translated into German and Dutch, and printed in Greek before the Reformation.

For Daniell the English Bible was central to the Reformation, and whilst some Reformation scholars marginalize the translation of the Bible, Daniell suggests it was a cause as much as an effect of the Reformation. Understandably for a biographer of Tyndale, Daniell regards his translations as the definitive Bible in English. Sir Thomas More might have regarded Tyndale as "a hellhound in the kennel of the devil," but, for Daniell, Tyndale's decision to pitch his translation just above the register of common speech enabled him to speak directly to the hearts of the common folk. Among a plethora of phrases and sayings that remain in everyday English are "give us this day our daily bread." Tyndale's knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and other languages gave him a precise insight into the translator's art, but his piety made him seek meaning over consistency. Daniell argues that Tyndale reached back into the Saxon roots of English to breath life into his translation. This is why so much of his Bible and most of those that came later have short, almost staccato sentences linked simply with "and." The consequence of this is that 83 percent of the King James Version of the Bible is from Tyndale's 1534 translation. The centrality of Tyndale's Bible is undeniable: it was the inspiration for the Geneva Bible as well as the King James Version, but it also attracted the licence of Henry VIII, so that seventy years before King James Version, and only months after Tyndale's martyrdom, there was a Bible in English authorized by the King and circulated to the parishes.

Daniell argues that Tyndale altered the topography of religion. But it was difficult terrain to clamber through in the next fifty years. There were a host of competitors and emulators, who found themselves on one side or the other of royal policy during the switchbacks of Henry VIII's, Edward VI's, Mary I's, and Elizabeth's reigns. Coverdale's Bible of 1535, the Great Bible of 1539, the Geneva Bible of 1560, the Bishops Bible of 1568, and the Rheims New Testament of 1582 all owed a debt to Tyndale.

These Bibles coincided with the emergence of English as a developed and sophisticated language, which was replacing Latin in formal documents. While Tyndale's plain style remained the weft and waft of these translations, the texture was gradually refined. The language, further refined by the Elizabethan literary renaissance of Spence and Shakespeare, reached its zenith in the translation of King James's Bible, or—as it is known in England—the Authorized Version. It was perhaps the only successful book written by a committee, or six of them in fact. Unlike some writers, Daniell is not sentimental about the King James Version (KJV). Equally he acknowledges its command of England language and culture for the next four hundred years.

From 1611 Daniell's focus shifts from translation and language to the Bible's impact on literature and culture. Daniell shows the intimate connection between the KJV and, among others, Milton, Bunyan, and Dryden. He also explores the variety of the forms of the Bibles, from the Roundhead's pocket bible to the great bibles that can best be described as furniture in the eighteenth century. In eighteenth-century England the Bible was both a redoubt around which Anglicans re-grouped to oppose Deism and Catholicism and a taproot of profoundly English culture in the form of, among others, Handel and Pope. In America the KJV, though an example of Erastianism explicitly rejected in the separation of Church and State, stimulated the "Great Awakening." In both England and America "AV-ology" (the veneration of the Authorized Version or KJV) did not prevent a torrent of translations. This "Bible Flood" achieved little in Daniell's view, other than tinkering with the KJV.

Daniell also identifies the English Bible as the touchstone of Victorian culture in both England and America. Its presence in almost every home and school, its influence on literature and its inspiration for phenomena as varied as abstinence, pre-Raphaelite art and poetry. In America it was also quoted by both sides in the slavery debate and remained so throughout the Civil War. Nevertheless in 1881 a Revised Version of the Bible was produced in London which enjoyed huge sales and attracted equal amounts of criticism.

From 1881 Daniell's book becomes a chronicle of almost contemporary history with the Revised Standard Version in England in 1952 and the New English Bible of 1976 and a rash of American and International translations. Throughout this declension Daniell is admirably restrained. But no admirer of Tyndale or the KJV could be other than despairing at the turgidity and prosaicism of

these later twentieth-century translations. As Daniell's conclusion indicates, Bibles are no longer bought by "believers" but by "consumers" (p. 772). Textual analysis has often replaced private reading.

Characterizing Daniell's book is difficult; it is in equal parts a work of theology, history, literature, economics, sociology, typology, and cultural studies. In this sense it transcends a single discipline and elevates the Bible in English into a cultural artefact that can be viewed from a wide range of viewpoints. Inevitably in such an epic work, conceived on such a large canvass, there are aspects of the interpretation with which specialists in the separate disciplines and eras will take issue. This reviewer found Daniell's view of the Church of England in the "long eighteenth century" as over-reliant on a relatively traditional historical view. But this does not blemish Daniell's work. Moreover throughout this volume, all 899 pages, Daniell's authorial voice is heard. But this is not a criticism. Daniell uses his vast knowledge of Biblical scholarship, literature, and history to correct errors and to respond to other scholars. The effect is of a descendant of scholarly dialogue in the margins of the book. But in all cases Daniell connects this to the central narrative of the Bible in English.

The size of this book will make it less "popular" than Bobrick's or McGrath's books. Nevertheless it is an altogether more broadly-conceived work, and one that will be of interest to a wide range of scholars and readers.

Daniell's synthesis of such a wide range of scholarship will make this book a standard work, and deservedly so. There can be few scholars whose intellectual reach enables them to bridge the two thousand years and diverse themes that this book contains. And in stark contrast with the translations that Daniell's book closes with, it is well-written.

#### Note

[1]. Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution it Inspired* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Brian Moynhan, *God's Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible—A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2003, released in the United Kingdom as *William Tyndale: If God Spare My Life*); David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Edwin Robertson, *Makers of the English Bible* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2000); David Price and Charles C. Ryrie, *Let It Go among Our People: An Illustrated History of the English Bible from John Wyclif to the King James Version* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2004); Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002); and Christopher De Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (Boston and London: Phaidon Press, 2001).

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