

- Annotate by writing summaries in the margin
- Write a 1-3 paragraph response, typed in MLA format.

Could William Shakespeare Be Hiding In The Bible?

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I invite you to join me next Saturday, April 25, at the 10th annual San Diego Student Shakespeare Festival at the Prado in Balboa Park, where, starting at 1 p.m., casts of local students will perform excerpts from the Bard's plays on four stages. I'll be emceeing the Rose stage, and I'd love to meet you there.

William Shakespeare won't be hiding in San Diego a week from today, but he may be hiding in another location that you'd not expect.

The most famous of all biblical translations is the King James Version, the brainchild of James I, who fancied himself a scholar and theologian. The king decided to assure his immortality by sponsoring a new Bible worthy of the splendor of his kingdom. To this end, James appointed a commission of 54 learned clerical and lay scholars, divided into three groups in Cambridge, Westminster and Oxford. Three years of loving labor, 1608-1611, produced what John Livingstone Lowes called "the noblest monument of English prose." Few readers would dissent from that verdict.

Among the many wonders of the King James Bible is that it stands as one of the few great accomplishments achieved by a committee. At the same time, some commentators have wondered why William Shakespeare was apparently not included among the 54 chosen. After all, Shakespeare had already written "Macbeth" in honor of King James (who also fancied himself an expert on witchcraft), and what better committee member could one ask for to work with the greatest collection of religious literature of all ages than the age's greatest poet?

But an intriguing peculiarity in the King James Bible indicates that Shakespeare was not entirely absent from the monumental project. No one knows who made the astonishing discovery or how on earth he or she did it.

In 1610, the year of the most intensive work on the translation, Shakespeare was 46 years old. Given this clue, we turn to the Forty-Sixth Psalm as it appears in the King James Bible. Count down to the 46th word from the beginning and then count up to the 46th word from the end, excluding the cadential Selah:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed,
 and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,
 though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.
 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God,
 the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.
 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved:
 God shall help her, and that right early.
 The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved:
 he uttered his voice, the earth melted.
 The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.
 Come, behold the works of the Lord,
 what desolations he hath made on earth;
 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth;

he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder;
he burneth the chariot in the fire.
Be still, and know that I am God:
I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

If you counted accurately, your finger eventually lit upon the two words shake and spear. Shakespeare. Whether or not he created the majesty of the Forty-Sixth Psalm, he is in it. Whether the embedded shake spear is a purposeful plant or the product of happy chance, the name of the world's most famous poet reposes cunningly in the text of the world's most famous translation.

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