

HIDDEN BARD

RICHARD LEDERER
Concord, New Hampshire

William Shakespeare, who both entered and exited the earthly stage on April 23, lurks in the most astonishing places - in the words he coined (**laughable, majestic**), his compounds (**fancy free, foregone conclusion**) and his expressions (**there's the rub, vanish into thin air**).

Some assert that Shakespeare even invented the modern knock-knock joke in his tragedy **Macbeth**. That linguistic breakthrough occurs in the famous Porter's speech in Act 2, scene 3: "Knock, knock. knock. Who's there i' th' name of Beelzebob? ... Knock, knock. Who's there in th' other devil's name? ... Knock, knock, knock. Who's there? Never at quiet!"

If you look hard, you may also spot Shakespeare peeking out even from the pages of the Bible.

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 Livingston 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 translators 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 than the greatest poet of his age to work with the greatest collection of religious literature of all ages?

But an intriguing peculiarity in the King James Bible indicates that Shakespeare was not entirely absent from the monumental project. In 1610, the year of most intensive work on the translation, Shakespeare was 46 years old. Given this clue, we turn to the 46th 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 we not 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.

No one knows who made the astonishing discovery or how on earth he or she did it. But I do know exactly how that revelation was stretched to its logological outer limits.

Recently I received a letter from Missy Clinebell and Barbie Henderson, two students in a British Literature class in Tremont High School, in western Illinois. Missy and Barbie wrote to tell me that their teacher had brought in my book, **The Miracle of Language**, as part of the class's study of Shakespeare. Intrigued, the two students re-examined the 46th psalm:

"While joking around, we thought that the name William might also be in the script - and to our surprise we found it!

"If you count down from the first word to the 14th, the word **will** appears. If you then count up from the ending, **Selah**, to the 32nd word, you land on the two words **I am**. $14+32$ equals 46, the age of the Bard at the time of the translating of the King James version."

Will I am shake spear. Whether or not William Shakespeare created the majesty of the 46th psalm, he is in it. Whether the embedded **will I am 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.