



# The Shadow of a Great Rock: A Literary Appreciation of the King James Bible

*By Harold Bloom*

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## The Shadow of a Great Rock: A Literary Appreciation of the King James Bible By Harold Bloom

The King James Bible stands at "the sublime summit of literature in English," sharing the honor only with Shakespeare, Harold Bloom contends in the opening pages of this illuminating literary tour. Distilling the insights acquired from a significant portion of his career as a brilliant critic and teacher, he offers readers at last the book he has been writing "all my long life," a magisterial and intimately perceptive reading of the King James Bible as a literary masterpiece.

Bloom calls it an "inexplicable wonder" that a rather undistinguished group of writers could bring forth such a magnificent work of literature, and he credits William Tyndale as their fountainhead. Reading the King James Bible alongside Tyndale's Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the original Hebrew and Greek texts, Bloom highlights how the translators and editors improved upon—or, in some cases, diminished—the earlier versions. He invites readers to hear the baroque inventiveness in such sublime books as the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, and alerts us to the echoes of the King James Bible in works from the Romantic period to the present day. Throughout, Bloom makes an impassioned and convincing case for reading the King James Bible as literature, free from dogma and with an appreciation of its enduring aesthetic value.

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## **The Shadow of a Great Rock: A Literary Appreciation of the King James Bible By Harold Bloom Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“A fascinating, intellectually nimble tour de force.”—Yvonne Zipp, *Washington Post* (Yvonne Zipp *Washington Post*)

Booklist, named A Top 10 Book in Religion and Spirituality, 11/15/2011  
(*Booklist*)

“Bloom yields to the KJB’s literary splendor—and invites readers to join in his surrender.”—*Booklist*,  
starred review  
(*Booklist*)

“Just fascinating, brilliant, and reliably Bloomsian.”— Mark Sarvas, *The Elegant Variation*  
(*Elegant Variation*)

"Bloom . . . has many arresting things to say and says them, often, with exquisite precision. He is, by any reckoning, one of the most stimulating literary presences of the last half-century - and one of the most protean, a singular breed of scholar-teacher-critic-prose-poet-pamphleteer."—Sam Tanenhaus, *New York Times Book Review*  
(Sam Tanenhaus *New York Times Book Review* 2011-05-23)

“Bloom reveals his own magisterial, sometimes mischievous, self in his meditations on the masters with whom he connects.”—Iain Finlayson, *The Times*  
(Iain Finlayson 2011-05-23)

“Ah, then there’s Harold Bloom, America’s giant of a literary critic. . . . In *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*, Bloom pulls off a masterly connecting of the dots through the literary canon and his own life with his usual breathtaking eloquence.”—*Publishers Weekly*  
(*Publishers Weekly* 2011-05-23)

"Bloom’s erudite mix of acerbic judgments (e.g., the New Testament’s literary ugliness) and awed delight ('the biblical David is an incarnate poem') offers readers a fresh take on an old book."—*Publishers Weekly*  
(*Publishers Weekly*)

“The greatest strength of Bloom’s volume comes in helping the reader navigate to, and through, the finest literary passages of the Bible; explaining how the ancient verses have influenced the past four centuries of Western literature.”—*Deseret News*  
(*Deseret News*)

“Exhilarating, provocative. . . . Bloom [enriches] his remarks with lively associations and frequent references to his beloved Shakespeare (did you know that Hamlet’s divided personality has much in common with King David’s?). . . . When [Bloom] praises the English translators of John’s Gospel, he calls their interpretation ‘dazzling in its audacity.’ The same, of course, can be said of this book.”—Nick Owchar, *Los Angeles Times*  
(Nick Owchar *Los Angeles Times*)

“Bloom celebrates King James not for anything so pedestrian as ‘accuracy’ but for what he himself has championed during his long and distinguished career as a literary critic: creative misreading.”—Edward Alexander, *Chicago Jewish Star* (Edward Alexander *Chicago Jewish Star*)

"Distilling the insights acquired from his long career as a brilliant critic and teacher, Harold Bloom offers . . . a magisterial and intimately perceptive reading of the King James Bible as a literary masterpiece."—Bible Review Journal  
(*Bible Review Journal*)

From the Author

From the Introduction:

The largest aesthetic paradox of the KJB is its gorgeous exfoliation of the Hebrew original. Evidently the KJB men knew just enough Hebrew to catch the words but not the original music. Their relative ignorance transmuted into splendor because they shared a sense of literary decorum that all subsequent translators seem to lack. Miles Coverdale, bare both of Hebrew and of Greek, set a pattern that Miles Smith perfected. It is another of the many paradoxes of the KJB that its elaborate prose harmonies essentially were inaugurated by Coverdale's intuitive journey into the poems and prophecies his master Tyndale did not live to translate. We have Tyndale's Jonah and a medley of prophetic passages, eleven from Isaiah, in the *Epistle Taken out of the Old Testament*. How wonderful it would be to have Job, Ecclesiastes, and Jeremiah from the hand of Tyndale, though probably that would have prevented Coverdale's astonishing flair for style and rhythm from manifesting itself. This flair was unsteady, yet at its best it gave us something of the sonority we associate with KJB.

Tyndale, Coverdale, and the Geneva translators (including their best Hebraist, Gilby) all possessed the gift of literary authority. Their revisionist, Miles Smith, explicitly displays his sense of style in the 1611 preface, "The Translators to the Reader," and implicitly stands forth by his editorial responsibility for the ways in which the KJB men handle their inheritance from previous English Bibles. Again paradox intervenes: from Tyndale through KJB the quest is to get closer to the literal sense of the Hebrew, while the consequence is to increase a cognitive music farther and farther away in regard to the Hebrew Bible's relative freedom from metaphors. Since all metaphor is a kind of mistake anyway, even the plain errors of the KJB sometimes add to the resultant splendor.

About the Author

**Harold Bloom** is Sterling Professor of the Humanities at Yale University. He lives in New Haven, CT.

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**From reader reviews:**

**Ethel Fung:**

Now a day people that Living in the era wherever everything reachable by match the internet and the resources in it can be true or not involve people to be aware of each details they get. How many people to be smart in obtaining any information nowadays? Of course the answer then is reading a book. Looking at a book can help individuals out of this uncertainty Information specifically this The Shadow of a Great Rock: A Literary Appreciation of the King James Bible book because book offers you rich details and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred % guarantees there is no doubt in it as you know.

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**Jan Dixon:**

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