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Though It Glitter, It May Not Be Gold

Ken Briggs | Jan. 30, 2012 NCR Today

Many news operations have had a habit of separating the staff into "reporters" and "writers" in an unofficial and often misleading way.

Most staffers aspired to be considered writers because that had a hue of glamor about it. "Reporters" were usually regarded as better diggers of fact, but they hadn't been touched by that proverbial angel of literary divinity.

But being a digger also implied greater trust. The writers were more readable, perhaps, but the smooth sailing could also be accomplished by removing inconvenient obstales like facts. The digger's product might be bumpier because accuracy sometimes involved things that got in the way of telling a good story.

I thought of this while reading a piece in the *New York Review of Books regarding the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible.*

The erudite review by Robert Pogue Harrison of a raft of books coinciding the with the anniversary (in 2011) reflected the reverence shown by a host of American scholars toward the book that reshaped the English language along with its contemporary contributor, William Shakespeare.

Harrison also echoed the widespread scholarly lament that the KJB was disappearing from modern consciousness, "rapidly becoming *terra incognita*, virtually unknown to the 21st century world.

The KJB is an undisputed thing of beauty. Its cadances ring though the history of the English speaking world. Abraham Lincoln would have been lost without it and all that.

The celebration of its glories can drown out a sober reality, however. The KJB, which was actually the third English version heavily indebted to its predecessors, achieved elegance at the expense of accuracy. While it was a spectacular accomplishment, the team of translators used flawed documents to do so.

There was a need, therefore, for revision of the revisions up to our times. Scores of efforts have been published to do a more accurate reading, with mixed results.

For most of the scholarly defenders of the KJB, a majority, perhaps, agnostics and atheists, beauty means more than truth. As a work of literature, it deserves our gratitude and dedication, but doesn't command allegiance as the source of our origins and destinies.

Fair enough. For believers, the devotion from learned professors and writers is both an affirmation of a treasure and a reminder that the composers of the KJB may have, with every good intention, obscured the truth in favor of making a verse "sing."

The beauty-and-truth debate is ancient, of course. Sometimes beauty conveys truth; sometimes it hides it. As a Protestant, I have been wary of liturgical church rites that seem to be too self-referential, too proud of

themselves as ends in themselves. We Protestants often headed in the opposite direction, of course, insisting that our own worship become so staid and empty that no one would mistake it for even the tiniest aesthetic element. And so it goes.

Reading something other than the KJB may be a more exacting task but it may be delivered by a reporter who is trying harder to get it right.

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