The University of Tennessee Libraries holds a collection of more than 300 early printed Bibles and other rare books from the collection of the late Naseeb Shaheen, noted Shakespeare scholar and professor of English at the University of Memphis for forty years.

The centerpiece of the Shaheen Antiquarian Bible Collection is a group of about 100 English Bibles dating from the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century when the Christian scriptures were first translated into the vernacular languages of Europe. These early printed Bibles, along with psalters, prayer books and homilies; Greek and Latin Bibles; and early editions of literary works dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, form the core of the collection used by Dr. Naseeb Shaheen in his studies of the Bible in literature.

Shaheen was an internationally known authority on Shakespeare's use of the Bible. His definitive series on biblical allusions in Shakespeare's plays, collected in his almost 900-page Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays, compares apparent biblical references against all literary sources and versions of Scripture that would have been known to the Bard.

His collection of pre-King James Bibles was one of the largest in the world. The Shaheen Antiquarian Bible Collection includes more than 60 examples of the Geneva Bible, the Scripture most often referenced in Shakespeare, as well as early printings of the so-called Great Bible, Bishops' Bible, Matthew's Bible, the Douay-Rheims Version, and the King James Bible.

In addition to Bibles, the collection includes works by Milton, Dryden, Spenser, Jonson, and Plutarch.
Selections from the Shaheen Antiquarian Bible Collection


29. [Bible in English (Matthew's Version)] At London: Imprinted by John Daye, dwelling at Aldersgate, and William Seres, dwelling in Peter College, xvii day of August M.D. XLXIX. BS1501549


82. Marcus Tullius Cicero, his three books of duties: to Marcus his sonne by Nicholas Grimalde. London: Printed by Thomas Este, [1600?] PA6308.D5G6 1600

99. Marcus Tullius Ciceroes three books of duties: to Marcus his sonne by Nicholas Grimalde; London in Fleete Street within Temple barre at the signe of the hande and starre: by Richard Tottill., 1558. PA6308.D5G6 1558


244. The works of Benjamin Jonson. London, Printed by Richard Bishop, and are to be sold by Andrew Crooke in St. Pauls Church-yard, 1640. PR2600 1640

258. Comedies and tragedies by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. London: Printed for Humphrey Robinson at the three Pidgeons and for Humphrey Moseley at the Princes Armes in St Pauls Churchyard, 1647. PR2420 1647


271. Orlando furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto; In Viniega: Appresso Gabriel Giulito de'Ferrari et fratelli, 1555. PQ4567.A2 1555