

Harvey Scott McMillin, Jr.

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Scott McMillin was a native of Pittsburgh, which made him a lifelong fan of teams that lost often—the Pirates and the Steelers. His grandfather, a steelworker, was killed in an accident on the job; his father had to go to work early as an office boy, though he ended up president of a wholesale hardware firm. Though raised in comfortable circumstances, Scott retained a passion for social justice.

In 1956, while in his senior year at Princeton, he met Sally Ann Hyde on a blind date for a football game; it rained hard, and they didn't attend. "I fell for Sally because she could write a good letter," he recalled years later, in his trademark deadpan. "I tried my best to write a good letter in return, and we got married soon after graduation." The couple spent their first year together in New York City, where Scott worked as a banker. The banking career was short-lived, but his love of the Broadway musical lasted a lifetime. (Once he and Sally spent the night on the sidewalk to get tickets for *My Fair Lady* and ended up standing for the matinee.) He joined the Navy the following year, but because of his eyesight, he was not on active duty; instead he founded and managed a bookstore at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C., while earning a Bachelor's degree at Georgetown University. He completed his graduate work at Stanford in 1963, where he received the Ph.D. degree in English Literature, and the following year he was hired as Assistant Professor of English at Cornell, specializing in Shakespeare and Renaissance drama. He never left. His and Sally's first son, David, was born in Palo Alto in 1961; their next two sons, Paul and Andy, were born in Ithaca.

From the beginning of his scholarly career, Scott was interested in the production conditions of Shakespeare's plays—including staging, actors, finances, and the social context of the performances—at a time when most scholars still focused on the texts. His first book, *The Elizabethan Theater and the Book of Sir Thomas More*, concerned the editing and production of a play written jointly by Shakespeare and five others. Through a detailed examination of the original manuscript, he was also able to show that the play was neither slapdash nor incomplete but "a careful piece of theatrical dovetailing and revision."

Scott's major scholarly project is a study of the Queen's Men, the most popular troupe in England in the years before the rise of the Globe. In 1983, while delivering a paper in Canada, he met Sally-Beth MacLean, a young scholar at work on the records of provincial theatrical performances in Elizabethan England, and decided to shelve his project until MacLean's records were completed. Seven years later, in an act of characteristic generosity, he

suggested that the two collaborate on a joint project, which resulted in his major work, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* (1998). In this book, Scott and Sally-Beth argue that the visually spectacular style of the Queen's Men gave way to the rhetorically spectacular style of the younger playwrights—Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe—whose emphasis on spare sets and extended verbal descriptions represented a revolution in dramaturgy. Since the plots of six Shakespeare plays closely resemble the plots of six probably antecedent plays in the repertory of the Queen's Men, Scott speculates not just that Shakespeare knew well the plays he “lifted” but may have toured with the Queen's Men—the most likely solution to the mystery of what Shakespeare was doing during the famous “missing years” of his young manhood (1584-1592).

In 1999, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* won the Sohmer-Hall Prize for the best book on theater history, and the two authors read their prize lecture antiphonally at the new Globe in London. (They were amused to learn that librarians had classified their book next to a history of the Monty Python troupe.)

At Princeton, Scott had been the pianist for parties, always playing by ear, and in later years, he worked his way through the Gershwin Songbook as a student of Ithaca's legendary teacher, the late Alton Heinz. He didn't just play piano, he thought piano, and the pianists he admired were thoughtful, all-around piano players—Hank Jones, Jess Stacy, Barry Harris, Dave McKenna, Oscar Peterson. His love of the American musical eventually became a scholarly interest. At Cornell, he developed a winter-session course in which students traveled to New York to take in Broadway productions as part of their coursework.

In fall of 2006, Princeton University Press brought out posthumously *The Musical as Drama*. The American musical, now the country's most popular form of theater, is derived from vaudeville, burlesque, revue, and operetta. By offering a theory of the musical as a form, using Rodgers and Hammerstein, Sondheim, Bernstein, Kern, and others as examples, Scott treats seriously an underrated genre whose success, he argues, lies “not in the smoothness of unity but in the crackle of difference.”

Other publications include *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry IV Part One* (1991), *The First Quarto of Othello* (2001), a Norton Critical Edition of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century comedies, numerous articles on English and European drama, and a manuscript, completed just before his death, on the editing of Shakespearean texts. In the words of the theater historian Marvin Carlson,

“His wide-ranging interests, vast range of knowledge, and deep commitment to teaching and to the society around him made him a truly distinguished member of the academic community.”

Scott's passion for social justice was implicit, unqualified, and permanent. In 1990, he co-founded, with Joseph Holland, the Harlem Literacy Project, in which Cornell undergraduates met with youngsters and families in Harlem over the summer in order to build an interest in reading. In an early report he implicitly defined the aims of the project:

"By their willingness to work in Harlem all summer, [the students] were showing that a Cornell education can lead to real connections with the inner city. And they were learning how Harlem works—the education went two ways in this project."

Scott was also a faculty fellow of Ujamaa Residential College for many years, as well as an active participant in the movements of 1969 that led to the founding of the Africana Studies Program, the anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s, and the movement in the summer of 2005 to save the (former) Redbud Woods.

Scott was a superb teacher—an unsurprising early winner of the Clark Outstanding Teaching Award (1972). In the classroom, he preferred to listen, question, and gently challenge rather than hold forth, a practice that Pete Wetherbee has captured from the point of view of a colleague. "When I think of Scott," Pete recalled recently,

"he is always on the point of smiling—not smiling yet, but ready to. His bright eyes are in sharp focus—I didn't know what the phrase 'a level gaze' meant until I met Scott—watching and waiting for what I will say. . . He was one of those blessed scholars for whom everybody is a potential colleague, to be heard respectfully, answered honestly, never patronized or talked down to."

Sally-Beth MacLean's recollections of their collaboration strike a similar note:

"He wore his learning lightly, responsive to the young as much as to the elder statesmen, a gentle man who knew how to enjoy himself and others. . . what a delight it was to see Scott at work, using meticulous scholarship and an unfettered mind to challenge old pundits with fresh insights, shaping his ideas in finely tuned prose, enlivened by a deft, sometimes playful touch all too rare in academic publications."

At Scott's Memorial Service, Reeve Parker illustrated his legendary punctiliousness as a scholar by quoting from his work on the *Othello* texts:

"Finding . . . the Quarto 1 punctuation to be full of interest and more systematic than is assumed, I propose to advance upon the textual problem by way of the comma, the semi-colon, the colon and—best of all—the period."

Reeve then juxtaposed this quotation with a memory of accompanying Scott to a London production in 1993, a play titled *Not Fade Away*. His concluding sentence speaks all for the countless friends, colleagues and students who bear Scott's loss and honor his memory: "Four loving words end what I have to say about Scott: NOT FADE AWAY . . . PERIOD."