
DAVID MARTIN BEVINGTON

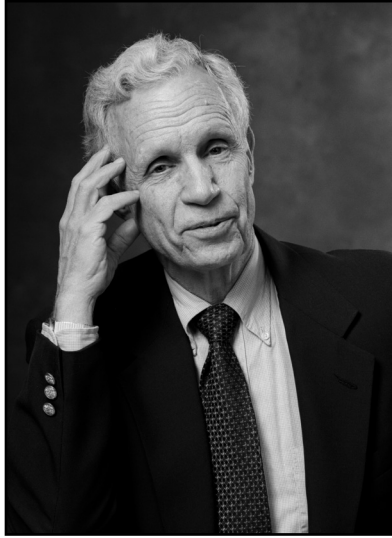


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David Martin Bevington, eminent Shakespeare scholar at the University of Chicago, died of natural causes at his home in Hyde Park on August 2, 2019. He was born on May 13, 1931, in New York City, where his parents, Merle and Helen Bevington, lived. When both of his parents were appointed to the faculty of Duke University, David attended Durham High School but finished his secondary schooling at Phillips Exeter Academy in 1948. He was admitted to Harvard University, where he was awarded a B.A. in 1952. After a stint as an officer in the United States Navy, Bevington returned to Harvard and completed his Ph.D. in 1957 under the direction of Alfred Harbage.

Bevington thoroughly revised his doctoral thesis and published it with Harvard University Press in 1962. In this book, titled *From Mankind to Marlowe*, Bevington showed that the structure of English plays written in the early 16th century was influenced by the way professional performance troupes were composed, as they made their living by touring the countryside with a repertory of one or two plays. Led by one strong actor, a typical group of five performers featured their star as a failing sinner who succumbed to vicious influence but was restored in the end by virtuous agency. Bevington showed that this common pattern persisted for decades and influenced the plays of Christopher Marlowe at the end of the century.

When Bevington published his first book he was teaching at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, where he was mentored by Fredson Bowers and Lester Beaurline. In 1967 he accepted a visiting appointment at the University of Chicago, leading soon to a full-time position and eventually, in 1985, to an endowed chair, the Phyllis Fay Horton Professorship in English.

As it turned out, David and I arrived at the University of Chicago together—he as a newly appointed assistant professor and I as a beginning graduate student. Without knowing anything about him, I signed up for his course on Shakespeare’s predecessors, a decision that for me turned out to be life-changing. He was a brilliant teacher, and we took to each other at once. I met Peggy and the children, and at their invitation I joined the family on a 400-mile weekend drive (one way) to London, Ontario, to see English plays from the Middle Ages in performance. We traveled in a 1955 Nash Rambler Coupe with David behind the wheel. David’s colleague, Alan Nelson, was in the front passenger seat, and Peggy and I were in the back with three children, aged five, four, and three.

When David’s appointment at the University of Chicago was made permanent, the Bevingtons bought a big house, with seven bedrooms and five bathrooms, on South Blackstone Avenue. They were living in a

rental apartment at the time, and they invited me to stay in their newly purchased house, rent-free, in exchange for helping to redecorate it before the family moved in. Four other graduate students joined me, and when we weren't writing papers or studying for exams, we stripped wallpaper, painted walls and woodwork, and hung new wallpaper.

At the end of his first year at Chicago, Bevington published his second book, again with Harvard University Press, called *Tudor Drama and Politics*. In this book, he showed that playwrights responded deliberately and often forcefully to events in 16th-century English political life. They seldom made the connection between politics and drama obvious because England was ruled by a succession of absolute monarchs who did not welcome public scrutiny, much less criticism, of their policies and decisions. Bevington showed how insightful playwrights were in their judgments, as well as careful.

A succession of remarkable books followed, including the one for which Bevington is most widely known: his edition of the complete works of Shakespeare. This included introductions to the plays, copious notes, and appendices on Shakespeare's language, life in Shakespeare's England, Shakespeare's own life, and similar topics to help undergraduate students better understand the plays and poems and their context. The commentary notes to this edition are particularly valuable, informed by years of teaching introductory undergraduate courses in Shakespeare, in addition to directing doctoral dissertations. Bevington's edition competes for market share with several other single-volume complete works of Shakespeare, but his is the only one edited entirely by one person, from establishing the text of each play and poem to compiling bibliographies for them. The book went into its seventh edition by 2014, all scrupulously undertaken by the same conscientious editor, who never failed to meet a deadline.

After completing my M.A. at the University of Chicago in 1968, I was compelled to leave graduate school for two years in order to avoid being drafted to fight in Vietnam. During the last six months of this hiatus I enlisted with the Marine Corps Reserves, so I could resume my studies. In 1970 I was admitted to the doctoral program at Chicago, and I immediately reestablished contact with David Bevington. He directed my doctoral thesis and he wrote supportively and promptly when I sought an academic job. He also wrote in support of my successful application for a Mellon Faculty Fellowship at Harvard in 1978–1979, enabling me to study and teach at the same university that had been strongly formative in his own life.

In 1979 I accepted a tenure track teaching position at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, which made it possible for me to return to the

greater Chicago area. David and Peggy always welcomed me and my family to the big house on South Blackstone. We visited them not only there but also at their farm in Ohio, northeast of Cleveland. This was untilled acreage that Peggy's father, John Brown, had purchased and eventually deeded to Peggy. The Bevingtons loaded up a utility trailer every spring (much of it consisting of books and papers for David) and drove with it to the farm, where they stayed for four or five months. The house had electricity but no running water and therefore no flush toilet. The family went from a big house in Chicago with five bathrooms to a two-seat pit toilet and a pond for swimming, which stood them in place of a shower. But David loved the isolation, the quiet, and the opportunity for hard physical labor. He and Peggy spent their last summer at the farm in 2018.

Wide as David Bevington's reputation was for scholarship and editing, what he valued most was helping students. When he retired from the Department of English in Hyde Park, he took the train downtown to teach at the University of Chicago extension campus, where his students were full-time workers during the day and degree-seekers in the evening. They were fortunate, because he was a masterful teacher. Even when he lectured publicly, he kept a keen eye on his audience, always ready to acknowledge a raised hand and to interrupt his own script to answer a question or respond helpfully to a comment. His openness to students is the reason they loved him, and those who missed being taught by him know only a fraction of what he had to offer.

Elected 1986

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