



S. Cushing Strout

April 19, 1923 – November 21, 2013

Cushing Strout taught at Cornell for over thirty years until his retirement in 1989. In the fall of 1943, he left Williams College to serve in the army as an enlisted man in the 87th Infantry Division of the Third Army. He survived the Battle of the Bulge, an experience that generated many stories he would retell to friends and family.

After graduating from Williams College in 1947, he received a 1952 Ph.D. from Harvard in American studies, and then taught at Williams College, Yale University and the California Institute of Technology, before he came to Cornell, first as a visiting professor in 1962 and then as member of the tenured faculty in the English Department.

A member of the faculty since 1964, he held the Ernest I. White Chair of American Studies and Humane Letters from 1975 until his retirement. He wrote many scholarly essays and books on American intellectual and literary history, including *The Pragmatic Revolt in American History: Carl L. Becker and Charles A. Beard* (1958), a pioneering study on Becker and Beard's economic readings of constitutional history, and *Making American Tradition: Visions & Revisions from Ben Franklin to Alice Walker* (1990).

“Cush” was a keen minded and engaging conversationalist; a principled, wide ranging scholar; a supportive colleague; and a stimulating teacher and a valued friend.

Cushing wrote five books, edited five others, and published scores of articles and reviews on the philosophy of history, the American image of Europe, the interplay of American religion and politics, and many other aspects of American literature and history. He was also co-editor with David Grossvogel of a book on the political crisis at Cornell in 1969.

Respected as one of the luminaries of the Cornell Faculty and, throughout the world and as a significant figure in the field of American studies, Professor Strout achieved distinction in many ways. He was a Fulbright Fellow at the Center for American Studies in Rome, a resident scholar at the Rockefeller Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy, and a Senior Fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina.

A brilliant, innovative, and important scholar in American Literature and American Studies, Cushing was a paradigm of personal and intellectual integrity. He was admired by his peers for his knowledge, curiosity, brilliance, articulateness, and fervent belief in both reason and the life of the mind. Young scholars regarded him as a generous mentor from whom they could always get sound advice.

Cushing often acknowledged many teachers who had been important to his intellectual development. These include William (Bill) Miller who taught American History and Literature at Williams College; Perry Miller at Harvard; R.G. Collingwood, the Oxford philosopher who stimulated his interest in the philosophy of history; and in later years Erik Erikson who pioneered in the application of Ego Psychology to the humanities.

As a scholar, Cushing was a man of remarkable erudition. His range of reading, understanding, and recalling seemed to span any topic remotely related to the sprawling and burgeoning discipline of American Studies.

He was equally well informed and passionate about magic. Not only was he able to perform multiple tricks, but he also knew the history of each one, and the best way to perform it according to books written by professional magicians. Ever the scholar even while pursuing his hobbies, he published a book on close-up card magic in 2005.

Similarly, Cushing was not content to be a gifted and enthusiastic tennis player. He knew the history of the game and studied the strokes and tactics of those who dominated the sport in different eras.

He was enthusiastic about movies and his memory was remarkable. He could recall where and when and with whom he had seen films no matter how long in the past. He loved detective fiction, but he was not fond of the most recent film adaptations on PBS of Sherlock Holmes. His last published work was a review of a book about Sherlock Holmes in the Summer 2013 *Sewanee Review*.

To those who came to know him in a scholastic setting, Cushing was the paradigmatic academic: knowledgeable, clever, and above all, as objective as possible and open-minded. In any discussion, his arguments were always crafted by reason, based on thoughtful sifting of information, and rarely colored by emotion. On rare occasions, however his close friends became aware of deeply-felt and passionate emotions.

In academic arguments, he fought like a fencing master and gave no quarter but he always relied on his belief in logic, knowledge, and truth. To the entire world outside of academia, he was always gracious and never domineering, a gentle person, and a gentleman.

Jean and Cushing raised three sons: Nathaniel, Benjamin and Nicholas. Cushing loved his dogs and his family summers in Maine. He thought of himself first and foremost as a family man, father of

three sons and wife of Jean with whom he shared more than sixty- five years of marriage. Their first date, by Jean's bemused recollection, was "a romantic moonlit night" sitting on a rocky shore where they discussed the problem of free will and determinism. Thus began a conversation that continued through 65 years of marriage. His beloved Jean remained steadily at his side until the end.

He was also a loyal and valued friend. Even in his final months, which were so hard, he responded to those who visited him with graciousness and good humor. Throughout the progression of his illnesses, he welcomed visitors, greeting them with a characteristic grin and soon launching into a discussion of the books he was reading or the reviews he was writing.

Cushing's life was celebrated at a touching memorial service March 2, 2014 at Kendal Auditorium, which hundreds attended. Friends and family spoke eloquently about this man who was a wonderful parent, teacher, scholar, colleague, and human being.

Daniel R. Schwarz, Chair; Howard Feinstein; Peter D. McClelland