

# Edward P. Morris

*October 12, 1924 — January 7, 1989*

Ted Morris joined the Cornell faculty in the Department of Romance Studies in 1961 and remained one of its most devoted teachers and citizens until his death. A man of immense culture and learning, which he shared with students and colleagues alike, he loved most what was fresh, unconventional, and unpretentious about Cornell. A man of refined taste in a great many things, he loved living on the banks of Salmon Creek in Ludlowville, New York.

Ted's teaching was legendary, and no merely "clear expository prose," as he liked to call it, would suffice to render a sense of the poetry of his teaching. There was, for example, its gentle anarchy. Co-teachers and students never knew quite what to expect. The syllabus often had to yield to what Ted had read that morning. Any text would do, because what really mattered was how that text was read and talked about. Rabelais, Freud, Montaigne, Virgil, Dante, the latest issue of *The New Yorker*, the course catalog, poetry, science fiction, Toast-R-Ovens—any text could provide something worth talking about. He could reach, or so it seemed, almost anywhere from any text. Boundaries dissolved, disciplines merged. It was the connections between things that fascinated Ted, and the kinds of systems that made these connections possible, and the theory that made these systems intelligible. And he pursued these connections in what must be the most remarkable career of interdisciplinary teaching that this University has ever seen, in courses with colleagues from half a dozen or more departments, including especially History, the History of Art, and Music. In each case the course was but the beginning of a long friendship in which those connections, systems, and theories were continually pursued.

Much of what went on inside his classroom bore a close resemblance to what went on outside it—in chats over coffee at Zeus or the Dragon, at lunch, after lectures, or just on the Quad. This is why so many of his students became his friends and why so many of his friends numbered him among their most influential teachers. His exchanges with both students and friends were marked by his genuine curiosity about their views on whatever subject was at hand. He was both a great talker and a great and generous listener.

He maintained that the principal reason for pursuing any subject or activity was the pleasure that it gave. This praise of pleasure emerged in part from his polemic against the professionalism, the specialization, and the pursuit of power that he saw as dangers to the classroom and the university. And this polemic was also expressed in his reluctance to reduce his thoughts to print in the usual academic genres, though he wrote copiously on subjects

ranging from Rabelais to John Cage. His own publications, always subtle and stimulating, whether in professional journals or the *Grapevine*, were few compared with the traces that he left in the publications of others.

Although he was a specialist in Renaissance studies, the activity that came closest to embodying the full range of his interests was his direction of more than a dozen French plays spanning the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. In this, too, he was a perfectionist who worried about every detail: costumes, music, choreography, sets, programs, posters, the very shape and color of tickets. In art nothing was indifferent. What was left after all of his own efforts and those of his collaborators in these productions was principally a memory in the mind of the spectator. But nothing pleased him more, for this was the ultimate form of creative generosity, as, in some other ways, was teaching.

A member of the Yale class of 1945, he did graduate study in the Yale French department under Henri Peyre, receiving the Ph.D. in 1954. While a graduate student, he co-founded, with Robert Greer Cohn, the journal *Yale French Studies*. In France he studied at the Faculté des Lettres in Grenoble, and in 1962 was a fellow at the Centre d'Études Supérieures Médiévales in Poitiers.

Before his appointment at Cornell, Ted taught at Bryn Mawr College from 1949 until 1952, at Wesleyan University from 1952 until 1954, and at Harvard University from 1954 until 1961. At Cornell he was honored with the Clark Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1969, and he was named a senior fellow in the Society for the Humanities for 1970-71. His steadfast devotion to the ideals of general education and to the cultural life of the campus community was reflected in his participation in the work of numerous campus committees, including the Educational Policy Committee and the Dean's Committee on General Education in the College of Arts and Sciences, the University Library Board, and the Committee on Campus Planning. In Romance Studies he served two terms as graduate field representative, presiding over a curriculum revision and many procedural innovations; for more than twenty years he directed the Honors Program in French; during the past decade he served on the editorial board of *Diacritics*; and from 1982 until 1988 he was faculty sponsor for A.D. White Professor-at-Large, Jacques Derrida. In 1982-83 he held a Fellowship for Independent Research from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

He is survived by his wife, Emoretta Yang, of Ludlowville; a son and daughter-in-law, Dr. and Mrs. Humphrey Morris, and grandson, Dylan Humphrey Morris, of Cambridge, Massachusetts; a daughter, Sylvia Mendelssohn, of Middlebury, Vermont; his first wife, Franziska Kempner Morris, of Ithaca; a sister-in-law, Janet Drake Morris, of Elk, California; and several nieces and nephews.