



## IN MEMORIAM

John Lewis Traugott  
Professor of English, Emeritus  
Berkeley  
1921–2004

John Lewis Traugott was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on November 20, 1921. After graduating from Indianapolis Shortridge High School, he studied at Purdue University, where, in 1942, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa, with a B.S. degree in aeronautical engineering. After wartime service in the U.S. Navy, and work as an engineer, he radically switched his field of interest to English literature, completing a Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley under the direction of the great eighteenth century scholar Bertrand Bronson, before taking a position at the University of Connecticut. After a Ford Fellowship in France (a sojourn that left an enduring mark on his intellectual, and cultural, orientation) he published his revised dissertation study of Sterne in 1955 with the University of California Press as *Tristram Shandy's World*. In 1956 he returned to Berkeley as an assistant professor and continued there throughout his subsequent career, with further service in France as a Fulbright Lecturer and then as director of the Education Abroad Program at Bordeaux.

The Sterne book was marked by Traugott's mature, powerfully intricate and idiosyncratic style, here as always, lasered in on the imaginative realities of the text. His choice of a work of complex ironic interplay between author and projected personae was to be characteristic, manifesting itself first in a series of brilliant essays on Swift, and in further collateral work on Nabokov, Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, and finally Samuel Richardson. Writing of this varied body of work, which included a quite original essay on *Much Ado About Nothing*, then-Chairman Paul Alpers concluded that "there is no one in the department with a more interesting and original critical intelligence than Traugott's."

Traugott's 55-page essay on "Clarissa's Richardson" is a penetrating and intricate study of the relations between Richardson's psychology and that of his characters, particularly the novelist's striking identification-in-rejection with his mythic antihero Lovelace. Traugott's successor in the department, James Grantham Turner (in agreement with other expert readers) called it "the most suggestive and agile exploration of that novel."

Traugott's teaching over a wide range of courses, undergraduate and graduate, unfailingly displayed his concern for effective education. "This was probably the most productive learning experience of my academic career," wrote one graduate student, "Traugott could not be a better facilitator in eliciting a joy in drama, in Shakespeare, and in learning." An undergraduate writes that "the class was by far the best I have yet taken. The professor was by far the best I have yet had." Yet such positive judgments were not completely unanimous. A number of students complained of the mercurial course of the instructor's thoughts, one noting that they were "about two levels above the norm of the class." Others were simply discouraged at their inability to grasp what Traugott was saying, or thought it too complex. Traugott could not easily descend nor adjust his thinking easily to minds less complexly organized than his own. Thus, while he offered all his students, as they mostly realized, a notably valuable encounter with a subtle and richly civilized intelligence, he was an intellectual aristocrat who was, as a teacher, caviar to the general.

As already indicated, Traugott was deeply invested in his scholarly work, as well as his teaching, and gave himself wholeheartedly to both, but he was a man of such various interests and talents that they required — and found — harmonious outlets on many fronts of his unified spirit. He was, as all his friends know, a remarkable oenophile, gourmet and cook. One of us remembers learning from him early on how to dress and toss a green salad, and make a proper omelet. And many remember splendid meals he prepared with expert and always fastidious care. More surprising in an English professor was his skill as a carpenter: he built a 17-foot sailboat (christened the Chimera) with his own hands, and after that a well- finished detached outdoor study. (He was, after all, trained as an engineer and once took a year off in an attempt to design and build a private airplane.) He was deeply engaged in the art of gardening, for which he had a wonderful facility, and architecture — capabilities that were unexpectedly put to a stringent test when he and his wife Elizabeth had to completely rebuild their Alvarado Road house and restore its lovingly landscaped grounds after the devastating Oakland Hills fire of October 1991. Traugott lost his books, manuscripts, and computer in the fire, along with his files of work in progress, including an extensive new joint study of Richardson's *Clarissa* and Choderlos de Laclos's *Liaisons Dangereuses*.

There were other mishaps in John's mostly very happy and always engaged life — a heart valve infection in 1983-84, which was really threatening, along with a more recent fall when he was out jogging (he was always athletically active — hiking, mountain- climbing, sailing). In these dire situations, as in his final illness, he was of course steadily buoyed by his wife Elizabeth's unwavering support. "Elizabeth is a brick," Traugott remarked to one of us during one of those illnesses.

It's hard to believe we won't see him again, this proud, handsome, elegant, brilliant, multitalented man, so full of life and wit. He stands vivid and vital in memory.

Traugott died on March 10, 2004, after a lengthy final illness. A celebration of his life was held on August 12, 2004 in the English department's Maude Fife Room. He is survived by his wife of 36 years, the distinguished linguist Elizabeth Closs Traugott (now retired from Stanford University but resident in Palo Alto); their daughter Isabel Bjork of York, England; his three children by his first wife Maureen — Ruth Traugott of London, England; Elizabeth Browne of Evran, France; and Jonathan Traugott of Oakland, California; and seven grandchildren.

Ralph Rader  
George Starr  
Robert Tracy