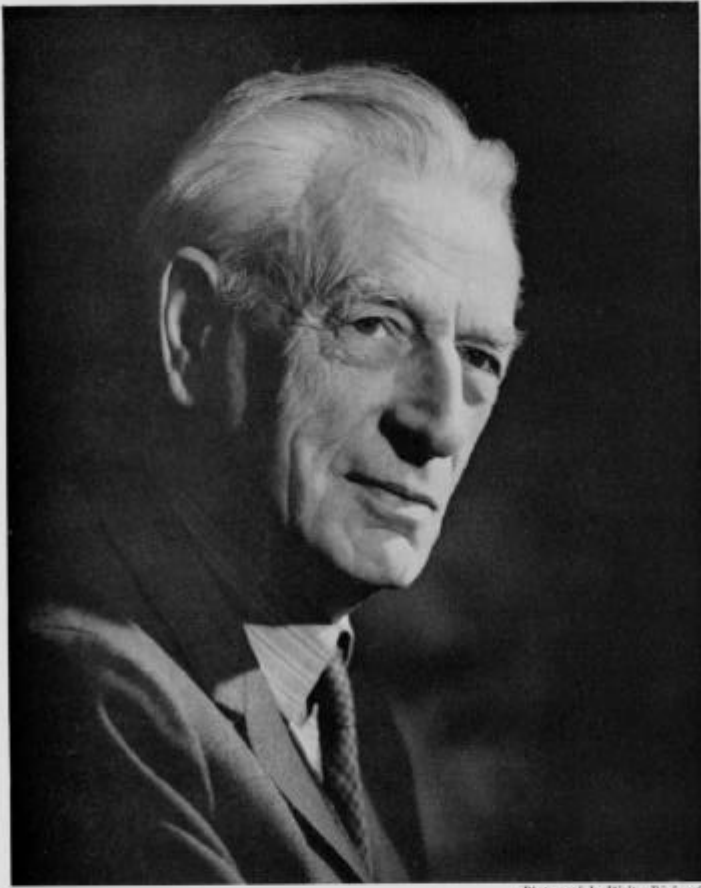


PLATE XXIX



Photograph by Walter Bidl, 1963

JOHN ORR

JOHN ORR

1885-1966

JOHN ORR was born at Egremont, Cumberland, on 4 June 1885, of Scottish parents, Peter Orr and Liliás Duncan Allan. They emigrated to Tasmania, where their son was educated at the Launceston High School and at the University of Tasmania of which he was a Classical Scholar. He was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship and came up to Balliol College in Michaelmas Term 1905. He took Classical Honour Moderations in 1907 and then read law, taking the Honour School of Jurisprudence in 1909. He led a very active life at Oxford, was President of the Arnold Society, and rowed for his College Eight and in the Torpid which went head of the river in 1907; but already he was suffering from a pulmonary weakness which necessitated a change of climate and a period of convalescence in France and Switzerland. It was at this time that he met Augusta Berthe Brisac, the daughter of French parents established in St. Petersburg, whom he married in 1910.

Orr had in the meantime begun to respond to the attraction which the language and literature of France held for him and he spent the years 1910-13 in study abroad, chiefly in France. By 1913 he had been able to satisfy the requirements for the Licence-ès-Lettres of the University of Paris and had obtained the degree of B.Litt. (Oxon.) with a critical edition of the works of Guiot de Provins (published in 1915). Already the lines of his future career as a Romance philologist were being drawn under the inspiration of the distinguished professors who at that time made Paris the undisputed centre of Romance studies. He attended lectures and seminars at the Sorbonne, the Collège de France, the École des Hautes Études, and the École des Langues Orientales. Among the professors at whose feet he sat were Joseph Bédier, Antoine Thomas, Alfred Jeanroy, and Mario Roques; but the master whose teaching and personality made the most lasting impression on him was Jules Gilliéron.

Orr began his teaching career as a Lecturer at Manchester University in 1913, and in 1915 he was appointed Lecturer at East London (now Queen Mary) College; but his tenure was interrupted by service with the Naval Intelligence Division and

the Intelligence Corps (1916-18). In 1919 he was appointed Professor of French Language at Manchester and held the chair for fourteen years, during which time he took an active part in the administration of the university, acting as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1924-6) and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (1931-3). In 1933 he accepted an invitation to fill the Chair of French at Edinburgh, and there too his services to the university went far beyond the strict terms of his appointment: he served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1951-4) and on various committees within the university and in the wider sphere of the city and Scottish education in general. It was on his initiative that a second chair of French was created in 1951, while his own chair became the Chair of French Language and Romance Philology.

After his retirement in 1955 he continued to live in Edinburgh but travelled extensively in France and Spain, renewing long-established friendships, lecturing at the universities of Lyon, Strasbourg, Liège, Barcelona, and elsewhere, and attending learned congresses. He maintained his scholarly activity unabated to the end and bore with great fortitude the loss of his wife, who died in 1961. Their son and only child had been killed while serving with the Royal Air Force in the Second World War. Few would have surmised from his demeanour that, earlier in his career, he had twice passed through the darkest shadows of a nervous breakdown.

Orr's best and most characteristic work is contained in articles, to the number of some fifty, published at frequent intervals between 1920 and 1966. Most of these were assembled and republished by him in two volumes: *Words and Sounds in English and French* (1953: twenty-three articles together with his Taylorian Lecture, *The Impact of French upon English*), and *Essais d'étymologie et de philologie françaises* (1963: seventeen articles). Other articles, together with a long list of his more important reviews, are enumerated in *Studies in Romance Philology and French Literature presented to John Orr by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends* (1953).¹

¹ It may be of interest to list here the articles and major reviews not mentioned in these three volumes: 'Songer, penser et soigner, d'après l'Atlas Linguistique de la France', *RLiR*, xxvi, 1962, pp. 395-402; 'Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain', *Bull. des Jeunes Romanistes*, v, 1962, pp. 3-7; 'Je pense, donc je suis. Essai d'un commentaire linguistique', *Journal de Psychologie*, 1963, pp. 263-9; 'La poupée: étude de géographie linguistique', *RLiR*, xxvii, 1963, pp. 295-321; 'Le français vu d'Outre-Manche', *RLiR*, xxviii, 1964, pp. 177-89; 'Pompon et Pompette', *RLiR*, xxix, 1965, pp.

These articles are remarkable, not only for their careful and copious documentation based on observation of French and English daily speech and on reading in all periods of French literature, but also for their quite exceptional readability, whether written in French or English. In presentation and argument they bear the mark of Orr's legal training, and they show a penchant for the use of dialogue of which a striking example is the forty-three-page article, 'On Homonymics', in the form of a continuous series of exchanges between one 'Orthos' and one 'Rectus', contributed by him to the *Studies presented to Professor Mildred K. Pope* (1939). The dialogue could upon occasion take a dramatic form, as when (in the amusing article 'Les œufs de Pâques...et d'été') the question of the pronunciation of *neuf œufs* is debated in a witty exchange between Orr himself (barely disguised as 'un professeur de français en Écosse') and his wife, with the French grocer called in as an expert witness. Such imaginative presentations came naturally from Orr's pen and are in line with the pedagogic methods which made him such an inspiring teacher and a model to emulate.

In his younger days Orr may have seemed to share the exaggerated contempt exhibited by Gilliéron for the Young Grammatarians and for the very idea of a regular and predictable development of language capable of being reduced to phonetic laws. This jars at times in the otherwise admirably fair account of Romance linguistics he gave in his translation of I. Jordan's book, revised and considerably enlarged, which appeared in 1937 under the title *An Introduction to Romance Linguistics*.

In an earlier paper ('*f* > *h*, phénomène ibère ou roman?') presented to the 4th International Congress of Romance Linguistics, in 1934, and first published in the *Revue de Linguistique romane*, xii (1936), pp. 10-35, Orr had shown convincingly that the change *f*- > *h*- which is characteristic of Castilian (e.g. FERRUM > *hierro*) and Gascon (e.g. FESTA > *hërto*) was formerly much more widespread than was supposed by proponents of the theory of Iberian origin, that it represents the result of a conflict between two alternative pronunciations dating back to Vulgar Latin. This he did by a rigorous examination of place-

1-14; 'Hein! essai d'une étymologie', *RLiR*, xxix, 1965, pp. 275-88; rev. of *Etymologica*. Walther von Wartburg zum 70. Geburtstag, in *ZrPh*, Bd. 79, 1963, pp. 1-22; rev. of Jean Michel: *Le Mystère de la Passion*, ed. O. Jodogne, in *Romance Philology*, xix, 1965, pp. 372-80; rev. of *Language and Style*. *Collected Papers by Stephen Ullmann*, in *Forum*, 1965, pp. 282-90.

names, chiefly French, and of more general topographical conditions. Such scattered place-names he showed to be in the nature of outcrops serving, incidentally, to underline the importance of linguistic stratification, which had emerged as one of the major lessons taught by linguistic geography. His argumentation compelled a large measure of assent and would perhaps have been even more persuasive without the barely relevant outburst, in the manner of Gilliéron, against the older order of philologists, found guilty of 'tant d'ouvrages prétendus scientifiques où il n'y a de la science que le nom, et dont l'inutilité parfaite n'est égalée que par les flots d'ennui qui s'en dégagent'.

However, in later life Orr was led to qualify his admiration for the founder of linguistic geography to the extent of conceding that his attitude to philology of the traditional type was not only 'irreverent' and 'disdainful', but 'at times even contemptuous, frequently unjustly so'. It is significant that, whereas Gilliéron's somewhat ill-tempered monograph was entitled *La Faillite de l'étymologie phonétique*, Orr's balanced and persuasive paper read to the Philological Society in 1948 bore the title *Linguistic Geography as a corrective to etymology*. Yet, equally significant is the fact that his 1953 collection of studies is dedicated to the memory of Jules Gilliéron.

Orr rendered a signal service to Romance philology and to the study of language in general by his interpretation of the aims and methods of linguistic geography. He demonstrated in a most convincing way how a properly compiled linguistic map enables the investigator to follow the evolution of language in its most 'illogical' or 'irregular' and yet 'organic' processes. This he did in general articles, such as that on Linguistic Geography contributed to the *Times Literary Supplement* of 21 March 1929, in the chapter on linguistic geography in the *Introduction* already referred to, in his searching and informative reviews of the successive instalments of the *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz* by K. Jaberg and J. Jud, *MLR*, 1930-6, but above all in the series of articles which exploit the findings of linguistic geography and serve as models of their kind. Of such are the articles on: 'Mensonge "copeau de rabot"' (1955); 'Songer, penser et soigner, d'après l'Atlas Linguistique de la France' (1962); and 'La poupée: étude de géographie linguistique' (1963).

Like Gilliéron, Orr was led to regard language as in a state of perpetual contention between competing forms of expression.

He was less interested, one might say, in the survival of the fittest than in the disabilities which caused the less fit to succumb, in the loss or semantic debilitation and contamination of words and locutions—in a word, in verbal pathology and in the therapeutic measures and devices to which speakers of a language resort quite naturally and spontaneously. Hence, a preoccupation with ‘exceptions’ or ‘deviations’ and a more than passing interest in what may be called sports or freaks or pariahs, as evinced in his articles on the etymology or development of euphemisms, swear-words, expletives, and words labelled by dictionaries as ‘not in decent use’.

Among such verbal disabilities the one which continued to intrigue and absorb Orr throughout his career was homonymy, the clash between homophones and its effects on the fortunes of words. He found an instructive example in the clash between Old French *esmer* (AESTIMARE) and *aimer* (AMARE), first treated by him in his article ‘On Homonymics’ and taken up again in his contribution to the *Mélanges Roques*. He traces with great subtlety and a wealth of apposite examples the semantic interpenetration of these two verbs to the disadvantage of *esmer* and shows how ‘*estimer*, *priser*, and, perhaps most interesting of all, *viser*, must be called in to take increasingly the place of the languishing *esmer*, which is about to pay the price of its excessive semantic productivity, an early death, though not total obliteration, and a sickly offspring’.

Other articles show a skilful combination of the synchronistic and diachronistic methods, such as those concerned with the etymology of isolated words (*patois*, *hein!*, *bougre* as expletive, etc.) or the explanation of locutions (*s’en passer*, *avoir beau faire*, *des fois*, *savoir gré à*, Old French *à petit vous soit*, etc.) or syntactic and morphological phenomena (verbal flexions in French and English, etc.).

Some of his most instructive and readable articles in this kind concern English, and particularly the impact of French on English (which was the theme of his Taylorian Lecture of 1948), or they illumine otherwise inexplicable developments in one language by reference to the other: the competition between ‘to fly’, ‘to flee’, ‘to fleet’ in the article ‘The Flea and the Fly’; the unexpected connexion between ‘to prune’ and ‘to preen’, ‘to fare’ and Fr. ‘faire’. Other articles deal with lexical borrowings, with sound-values, vowel symbolism, and the fondness for vowel antiphony in English. His more general comparisons of French and English reduce to their proper value and

perspective the facile generalizations of some of his predecessors in this field.

Orr's linguistic curiosity was insatiable: a chance remark casually overheard was often the starting-point of a searching investigation or furnished the clue to a problem which was exercising his mind. A linguistic atlas was for him a storehouse of data, a presentation of language observed in the raw. He described his own articles as 'attempting to view language as an essentially human activity, complex, purposeful and gratuitous, fumbling and ingenious, practical and playful, serious and whimsical'. He was concerned to 'mitigate as far as possible the unavoidable danger that besets all study of language, namely, that of doing violence to, if not destroying, the very object of study by isolating its closely integrated elements, sound and sense, form and content'. His work will continue to live, not as the expression of any one doctrine but as a continuing vindication of this programme. Inspired by the findings of linguistic geography and the onomasiological approach of the 'word-and-thing' method, he was distrustful of what he called the 'pseudo-mathematics' of the Structuralists and the 'Linguisticians' and in general deprecated their tendency to abstraction; and, on the other hand, he reacted against the 'pseudo-science of the Neo-Grammarians', although he possessed and used the results achieved by the latter. He was no 'stylistician' but he practised stylistics in the best sense of that ambiguous term; he was no structuralist, but an unsystematized structuralism was inherent in much of his analysis of French linguistic usage; and such statistics as he used were never raw.

Orr's edition of the works of Guiot de Provins was followed in 1947 by an edition of the *Boucher d'Abbeville* by Eustache d'Amiens, a mid thirteenth-century fabliau, furnished with an excellent literary introduction and a translation into modern French which is an admirable example of Orr's talents as a translator and his command of French idiom. The edition (1948) of Jehan Renart's *Lai de l'Ombre* is, in spite of Orr's modest disclaimer, 'critical' in the best if not the strictly conventional sense. It marks a distinct advance on Bédier's famous edition, and Orr's discernment and ingenuity enabled him to resolve many difficulties and uncertainties which had defied his distinguished predecessor. In general, however, Orr shared Bédier's views on the art of editing texts, preferring the authentic text to the reconstruction of a hypothetical archetype and concentrating his attention upon elucidation. His literary

appreciation of these texts reveals the same penetration and feeling for the language as the articles devoted more particularly to words and sounds, and they found a congenial subject in the *Contes et poèmes* of Jules Supervielle of which he published an edition in 1950.

As a reviewer Orr was a stern and demanding critic, but he was never content with destructive criticism, and many of his reviews were substantial contributions in their own right. Thus his masterly twelve-page review of A. Dauzat's *Le Génie de la langue française* (in *French Studies*, i, pp. 45-56) became an illuminating comparison of French and English, solidly based on compelling instances. An outstanding example of Orr's quality is the elaborate review (listed above) of the miscellany presented in 1958 to his friend of student days, Walther von Wartburg.

As a lecturer and supervisor of research students, Orr inspired by example rather than by precept. Hence the diversity of the lines followed by his pupils in their subsequent careers. Austin Gill, a pupil and later a colleague, recalls (in an appreciation published in *The Scotsman* for 13 August 1966) how 'in the lecture-room the learning was impressive, the method masterly and the linguistic problems investigated absorbingly interesting. But our minds would not have responded as they did if other, more personal qualities had not been active too—in particular, the deep, thoughtful voice that also made one obscurely aware of an unusually interesting combination of strength and sensibility'. A certain aloofness and severity of manner and expression tended to overawe as well as to impress undergraduates in those early days, and he was at his best in seminars, where he was able to share his researches with selected students and communicate to them the excitement of discovery. With the passage of the years Orr seemed to shed some of his native austerity and give freer play to the sympathetic understanding of the young, the friendliness, wit, and humour which those who knew him well had long regarded as characteristic. As a supervisor of advanced students he was content to guide rather than to instruct or indoctrinate. He was inclined to play down the claims of philology to be a science and had a special predilection and gift for the art of persuasion. It was evident to his pupils that he not only analysed and described with striking perceptiveness and lucidity all aspects of the French language, he possessed and handled it, in speech and in writing, with rare propriety and distinction.

Orr's interest in the arts was reflected in his membership of the Committee of the Manchester Art Gallery and later of the Board of Management of the Edinburgh College of Art, and he was an Honorary Vice-President of the Society of Scottish Artists. He was himself a discerning collector, with an early preference for the Impressionists, but latterly favouring contemporary painters and particularly younger Scottish artists.

His devotion to France and its civilization found expression in many practical ways. Towards the end of the Second World War he organized the Edinburgh-Caen Fellowship and became its President. The funds he collected in that capacity and the assistance he was able to render in other ways made a timely contribution to the reconstruction of the University of Caen, and his services were recognized by the municipality in the naming of one of its streets 'rue du Professeur Orr'. He was also closely associated with the creation of the Institut Français d'Écosse, served for a number of years on the Mixed Commission set up under the Franco-British Cultural Convention, and took an active part in the founding and editing of the quarterly *French Studies*. Nor was his appreciation of things French confined to academic pursuits: we may be sure that not the least appreciated recognition came to him in the form of his election (in 1961) as Vigneron d'Honneur et Bourgeois de St. Émilion.

Orr was elected President of the Modern Humanities Research Association in 1954 and was from 1948 to 1957 Romance editor of the *Modern Language Review*. He had also been President of the Association internationale des Études françaises (1955-7) and was at the time of his death President of the Société de Linguistique romane and of the Fédération internationale des Langues et Littératures modernes over whose Tenth International Congress he was to have presided in August 1966. His distinction was recognized by the conferment of honorary doctorates of the universities of Manchester, Caen, Paris, and St. Andrews. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1952. He was Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur and Knight Commander of the Orden Civil de Alfonso X el Sabio.

Orr's commanding presence was a feature of many learned congresses, to which he made notable contributions in the form of papers or by timely intervention in discussions. He could be trenchant, but his straightforward manner and genuine sociability made him many friends without distinction of race or

creed or allegiance. He was frequently called upon to preside and never failed to set the tone of the proceedings with a felicitous address of welcome and to conclude them with a valediction marked by elegance of expression and manner. To be associated with him on such occasions was to recognize a well-rounded personality, dignified yet friendly, forceful yet sympathetic, and endowed with a saving grace of humour.

A. EWERT