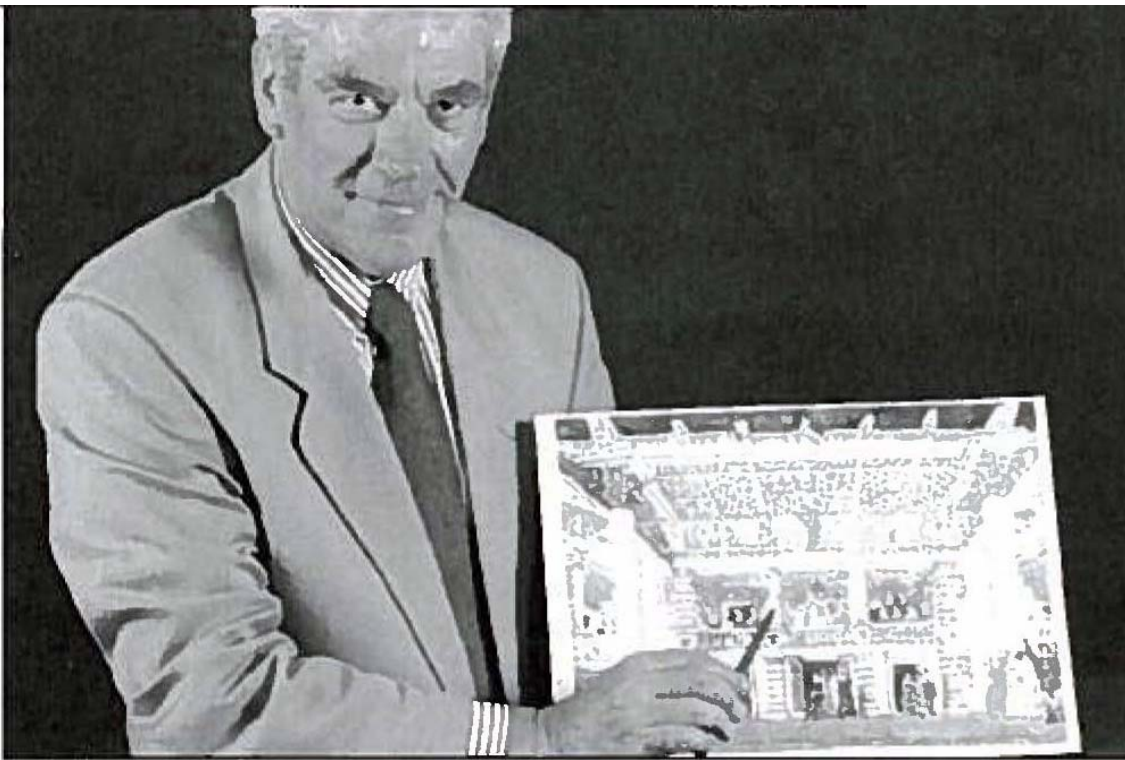


PATRICIA A. DEMERS, MSRC

John O. Orrell
1934-2003



Dr. John Orrell, B.A. and M.A. (Oxford University), M.A. and Ph.D. (University of Toronto), University Professor Emeritus of English, died on September 16, 2003 in Edmonton, Alberta, at the age of 68 years. Born on December 31, 1934, in Maidstone, Kent, he was educated at Maidstone Grammar School from 1943-1953, before his two years of National Service in the Royal Air Force. A member of the Department of English at the University of Alberta for 35 years, and one of the University's most luminous figures in literary studies, he was appointed Assistant Professor in 1961, promoted to Associate in 1967, and Professor in 1974. Inducted into RSC in 1984, John Orrell won the J. Gordin Kaplan Prize at the University of Alberta for Excellence in Research in 1989, was named University Professor in 1990, and was celebrated as one of the 100 Edmontonians of the Century by the City of Edmonton in 2004.

John Orrell was a specialist in drama, particularly in the history of theatre design. His major books with Cambridge University Press deal with the Renaissance theatre: Shakespeare's Globe, the theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb, and various forerunners of these theatres. Another dimension of John Orrell's research was his abiding interest in the theatres of Edmonton and Western Canadian phrases, subjects on which he published other books; such leaps in time, space, and culture display the elasticity of his inquiring mind. He wrote poems, plays, short stories and screenplays, and produced radio and television documentaries on Western Canada.

The impact of his work was practical in ways that the work of English professors is seldom able to be. When serving as Chairman of the Architectural Committee of the International Globe Centre in London and the principal design consultant for the reconstruction of the Globe, Orrell remarked, "There are two major routes that a Shakespeare scholar can take; he can edit the text properly, or he can try to realize the plays as Elizabethan productions." He chose the latter route. The \$27 million Globe re-construction project, opposite St. Paul's on the south bank of the Thames, occupied his passionate fervour for over two decades. Opened in 1997, significantly with a performance of *Henry V*, within the re-constructed "wooden O," this major attraction for scholars and tourists alike owes much of its authenticity to Orrell's brilliantly original, revisionary, exemplary scholarship.

The artistic implications of his work continue to be important not only to our understanding of Shakespeare and his contemporaries but also to our sense of the period in which England created the first buildings specifically designed as theatres. Questions of what these buildings were like and where they came from have great significance for the history of English drama and for present-day performances of Renaissance plays. Reviewers of *The Quest for Shakespeare's Globe* (1983) cited the book's "breakthroughs presented in an engaging, colloquial style which moves us easily but surely from Peter Street, the builder, laying out the foundations of the Fortune and the first Globe with his carpenter's rod and his surveyor's line, to the arcane mysteries of Renaissance theatre theory and Vitruvian modules, and ultimately through the trigonometry and physics which are made to yield the precise diameter of the Globe theatre and its alignment on the axis of the summer solstice in London." Another reviewer hailed it as "an entirely engaging and convincing essay of active, informed imagination." *The Times Literary Supplement* praised *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb* (1985) as a wonderfully successful bridging of "the gap between the historians of drama and the historians of architecture that makes theatre history so difficult to write." His collaborator Andrew Gurr saw John as "an artist and a playwright before he was a scholar"; Gurr realized that John "had an intense love of practical things, gardens and their design as well as buildings, especially when the design was

brought to life in the theatre.” Among my own non-Shakesporean memories of John are his playing of the trumpet and his recipe for Seville orange marmalade.

The success and rigour of John Orrell’s undergraduate and graduate classes were legendary. He brought his research interests excitingly to bear, plunging students directly into fraught questions about performance and physical space. A galvanizing speaker, John thrilled audiences at Reunion Days and Super Saturdays. Recognizing his “extraordinarily valuable contributions to this Faculty and to the scholarship it supports” at the time of his retirement, Dean of Arts Patricia Clements, FRSC, a member of the first Shakespeare class he taught at the University of Alberta, also commented on “what our students will be missing.” For his long-time colleague Juliet McMaster, FRSC, he was “the very model of a Renaissance man in the breadth of his talents and interests.” John Orrell is survived by his wife Wendy, son David, daughter Katherine, and grandson Benjamin.

Patricia Demers, MSRC
Department of English, University of Alberta
(Author's title given as of the time of writing)