SOME NOTES ON A NON-ENGLISH SOUND
IN CONTINENTAL ENGLISH

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It is today a phonetic commonplace that "each apperceives the unknown sounds by means of the sounds of his own language" (Boas). When English sounds came into Romanian, however, both in loan words and as English sounds proper in the teaching of the language they came over through the medium of French or German. In these languages the above mentioned rule held good for both the French and the Germans replaced English vowels no. 10 and 11, i.e. the vowel sounds in _but_ and _bird_ by their own front rounded vowel ō as in Fr. _deux_ and Germ. _schön_. The Nouveau Petit Larousse Illustré (1935) records the pronunciation of _trust_ as _treust_; _plum-cake_ is _pleum-kêke_, while _club_ may be either _klub_ or _kleub_.

The relationship between the respective English, French, and German sounds has been adequately dealt with by Wilhelm Horn and Martin Lehnert.2

Conversely the French eu becomes English _ir_ as in _amateur_, while the German names _Röntgen_ and _Goethe_ become _Runtyen_ and _Gîte_ respectively.

On the more restricted plane of language teaching and learning the same habits prevail and French and German students often pronounce _bôt_ for _but_, _bôrd_ for _bird_, etc.

The French and German rendering of the vowels under discussion have a justification: a non-French and a non-German sound was replaced by a native one. And since English was first taught in Romania through the medium of French and German these "second-best" vowels were adopted when the Romanian language had within its own vowel system more suitable sounds: a for the vowel in _but_ and a lengthened variety of ā for that of _bird_. It may be noted that the pronunciation of ō was, and is, actually difficult for Romanians.

There are two reasons why this vowel was so readily adopted by the Romanian student of English. First, his French and German teachers and text-books taught him so. In the northwestern part of the country the tendency was helped along by Hungarian-English text-books and dictionaries especially as regards the vowel in

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Secondly, the inconsistencies of English spelling may have caused a frame of mind which made the Romanian student look upon English pronunciation as an insurmountable difficulty and the ö-sound being non-Romanian helped the student to believe that he was nearer to English the farther he went away from his mother tongue.

A book revealing this frame of mind is Limba engleză fără profesor, editată practică pentru încurajarea limbii engleze de toate zilele cu pronunțarea exactă (English without a teacher, a practical guide to everyday English with the exact pronunciation) by W. Payne and St. G. Gorjan, in the introduction of which the authors speak of the ö-sound (giving Fr. liqueur and Germ. schön as examples) as an English vowel.

Likewise in L. Duncan’s Gramatica limbii engleze (English Grammar) we learn (p. 8) that the phonetic symbol (a:) represents the long German ö. In his classifications of vowels (p. 12) the author again identifies (a:) with the long German ö and French eu.

The ö-sound was commonly so much associated with English that, at a time, it was thought fashionable to pronounce the name of a brand of cigarettes Plugar as plô’gâ’r in a manner considered “à l’anglaise”. It must be noted that English words are frequently pronounced with the ö-sound when the Romanian speaker is especially aware that these words are English. Thus Puccini’s opera Madame Butterfly is commonly Madame Bötmfl und, rummy is tooth, rugby is often rb’gby. However, some words borrowed from English and which one might expect to be pronounced with an ö, and which have become part and parcel of our language, are given spelling pronunciations and we find the Romanian phonetic value of the English spelling in trust and club which are pronounced tronst and kloob respectively.

It is true that of recent years, with the spreading of the study of foreign languages, the ö-sound is losing ground and Romanian vowels closer to the English are making more and more headway i.e. a and ö. The use of plain Romanian a in bat is so much the more recommendable since English vowel No. 10 has moved towards a more advanced and lower position. While some linguists have long marked it in phonetic transcription with a simple (a).