



Preface

While the retirement in 1979 of Professor Geoffrey Durrant from the English Department of the University of British Columbia represents a considerable loss to the intellectual life of that department, it is an event of much more than local interest or passing regret. For the influence of his vigorous talents upon the academic life of this country—through his writings, his lectures and his contributions to public debate—has been profound.

It is for these reasons that the Editorial Board of *Mosaic* readily agreed to the suggestion to honor him with a collection of essays. Though he is a leading Wordsworthian scholar, it was decided to avoid the narrowly specialized theme of the typical *festschrift* and to seek a variety more in keeping with his own broad intellectual curiosity. The numbers of those contributing to this volume are necessarily limited by the exigencies of space, but many former colleagues and also students, of whom a fair number are now teachers in universities throughout the world, will wish to associate themselves with this tribute to a good friend and a fine teacher. All will share in my own sense of indebtedness to Geoffrey Durrant, for it has been exhilarating to work alongside him, to be stirred by his insights, roused by his intellectual vigor, and encouraged by his humane example.

At a time when the division between teaching and scholarship has itself been the subject of divisive argument, Geoffrey Durrant has been the teacher-scholar *par excellence*, and the public honors which acknowledge these mutual strengths have not been lacking. To those who knew him or his

reputation as a brilliant lecturer, it seemed merely fitting when in 1973 he was named Master Teacher at his present university, and that his scholarship should have been recognized by the award of Killam Senior Fellowships and his election, in 1977, to the Royal Society of Canada.

From the time he graduated with first class honors in English from Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1935, he has contributed impressively to academic life in a number of countries, not least as a visiting lecturer at, among other places, York, Reading, Teubingen, Buffalo, Waterloo, Cape Town, and the Australian National University. Shortly after graduation he was briefly Acting Head of the English Department at Stellenbosch University in South Africa until he went on active service with South African forces in the western desert. At the war's end he shaped a strong and lively center for English studies at the University of Natal, while as a popular broadcaster, founder of the South African Association of University Teachers, a moderator of the Joint Matriculation Board and a writer on adult education, he took the many issues facing academic life into the larger social arena. In Canada, as Head of the English Department of the University of Manitoba and of the University of British Columbia, as one of the original members of the Advisory Board of *Mosaic*, and as executive officer of a number of associations connected with the profession, he has continued to pursue the ideals of humane literacy and of civilizing literary values.

It is time I am sure to halt this brief and somewhat stilted listing of his manifold achievements. His own strict reticence inhibits even the secret encomiast, and in any event such "dry-as-dust" facts miss the particular flavor of the man. To those who have been lucky enough to know him, he may best be recognized in the light of a few old-fashioned epithets like magnanimity, courage, integrity, and decency. Along with these signal virtues his piercing clarity of mind and his passionate commitment to principle have, through a long and distinguished career, impressed themselves on those with whom he has come into contact.

This brief sketch is no hagiography, though in speaking of one who deserves the highest praise there is always the danger of it seeming to be so. Nor, through sad incompetence of human speech, is it a true portrait. I realized increasingly as I prepared my own slight contribution to this collection, how difficult a problem the true living portrait presents to the painter, historian, writer or editor. And somewhat like the persona in Yeats' *The Fisherman*: "Suddenly I began, / . . . Imagining a man / . . . Climbing up to a place / Where stone is dark under froth, / And the down-turn of his wrist / When the flies drop in the stream: / . . . And cried, 'Before I am old, / I shall have written him one / Poem maybe as cold / And passionate as the dawn.'"

In lieu of such a poem, may we offer you Geoffrey Durrant, in friendship, respect and gratitude, these essays.