

Reynolds Price Doctor of Letters

Reynolds Price is James B. Duke Professor of English at Duke University. He is a pre-eminent man of letters not only in the United States but throughout the world. His work has been published in seventeen languages. At one time Price was most widely known as a novelist, but it is now recognized that he excels as well in short stories, poetry, essays, plays, and translations. His two volumes of memoir are models of that genre. Thousands of readers have taken particular solace and inspiration from *A Whole New Life* (1994), an account of his determined struggle with the ravages of spinal cancer. His volumes, numbering thirty-five and counting, include *A Palpable God* (1978), a translation of thirty stories from the Bible; and *Three Gospels* (1996), a translation of the Gospels of Mark and John as well as "a modern apocryphal gospel" by Professor Price. When his *Collected Poems* appeared in 1997 it became clear that he is a poet of the first rank. In addition, this native of North Carolina has had his work performed on "American Playhouse" and at the Cleveland Playhouse, and he has served as host for a PBS documentary about the ninth Van Cliburn International Competition.

Professor Price has had numerous stints as a writer in residence. One of those was at Chapel Hill in 1965-1966, when he taught in the University's Creative Writing Program. By then he had already gained a significant reputation, having published the novel *A Long and Happy Life* in 1962, for which he won the William Faulkner Award. That same year his first collection of short stories, *The Names and Faces of Heroes*, was published. Our students found him to be not only a major literary presence but an inspiring teacher as well.

Reynolds Price attended public school in North Carolina. He entered Duke University where he graduated first in his class in 1955. Price won a coveted and prestigious Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford University and received his Bachelor of Literature degree from Merton College. In 1958 he returned to Duke to join the faculty of the Department of English.

This proud, dignified man has written again and again about survival, endurance, and perseverance. His characters are mostly ordinary people existing in extraordinary moments. In an essay published in 1964 entitled "Country Mouse, City Mouse" he declared that writers "must live their lives in the places they know, probing those lives and homes in the hope of comprehending and controlling them, ordering their vision however narrow into art which is true enough to be a world, as though one county of North Carolina, say, (red dirt, green pines, black men white men scratching out lives, occasionally standing into them) were as perfect a mirror of man's estate as all the boroughs of New York put together, all the cities and wastes of Russia. Which of course it is."

Through his twelve novels and other work, Reynolds Price has enriched our understanding of humankind. His many honors include the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Kate Vaiden*, his sixth novel. He is a member of the Academy of Arts and Letters. It is with great pleasure that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill confers upon Reynolds Price the degree of Doctor of Letters the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is recognition of his extraordinary contributions to the literary tradition of North Carolina, the South, and the nation.