DAVID MARCUS DIED in St. James Hospital, Dublin, on May 9th last. He would have been 85 in August. Born in Cork in 1924, the proud but not unconflicted son of that city's Jewish community, David read law at the King's Inns, Dublin, and although he never practiced, something of that professional training left a trace in his judicious demeanor. In many ways he was the very model of a civilized person--polished, adroit, balanced, companionable, thoughtful, discreet; a man of whom nobody had a bad word to say, almost unheard of in Dublin. He had his passions, needless to say. In his twenties he was a table-tennis player of international caliber. And he was known to enjoy a flutter on the horses, every now and then. But first, last and always, he was a person of the word. So, it comes as something of a surprise to learn from his Oughtobiography that while "my literary life ... occupied more of my waking hours than any other activity, it never reflected the real me. That inner me was formed by two things--music, and the ongoing trauma of having to juggle a hyphenated heritage of being both Irish and Jewish."

David was a first-class pianist, true, and the accounts of growing up Jewish that occur throughout his fiction pay handsome tribute to that religion's rich ritual and to the challenge of its complex principles and transnational cultural heritage, echoing and providing valuable grounds for comparison with other authors' representations of the Catholic experience. Of course we would not know of the impact of those two foundational influences had David not written about them. So, with all due respect to the formative power of both music and religion, it's David's contributions to Irish literature that made him such a noteworthy and memorable figure.

His contributions were many and varied--poet, short-story writer, novelist, autobiographer, publisher (he and Philip McDermott founded Poolbeg Press in 1976), translator, anthologist, literary editor of a national daily, dramatist (a stage adaptation of his translation of The Midnight Court, co-written with Sean McCann, had a healthy run at the Gate in the summer of 1968). Yet, if it's not too Irish to say so--David gained greatest visibility from his most unobtrusive work. His editing. Although "editing" seems quite an inadequate term for the generosity with which he attended to even the most callow effusion, as I can attest from personal experience.

Indeed, few postwar writers have not been indebted to David's editorial openness, tact and encouragement. He published Toibin and Enright as well as O'Connor and O'Faolain, James Stephens and Mary Lavin as well as Ellis Ni Dhuibhne and John Banville. More importantly, perhaps, or at least more in keeping with David's editorial outlook, scores upon scores of others appeared in his pages whose talent might never otherwise have seen the light of day. The "mute, inglorious Milton" was not a type for which he had much time. The writer was, by definition, not mute; the activity of writing was...