

Syracuse Scholar (1979-1991)

Volume 1
Issue 2 *Syracuse Scholar Fall 1980*

Article 2

1980

Editor's Note

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Recommended Citation

Archambault, Paul (1980) "Editor's Note," *Syracuse Scholar (1979-1991)*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://surface.syr.edu/suscholar/vol1/iss2/2>

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Editor's Note

On Saturday, May 3rd, I received a letter from a friend in Massachusetts, telling me how pleased he had been with the first number of the *Scholar*. But he added a suggestion, with his customary tact: "It seems to lack the literature and criticism that your house of intellect must surely contain."

I was pleased to reflect that the present number would compensate for that lack. This time the *Scholar* is almost overly weighted in favor of literature and criticism, though we had not intended it that way. At its center of gravity, I reflected, was an interview with George P. Elliott, which had been taped on January 28, 1980, in the editorial office.

While I was reading the letter from Massachusetts, I did not yet know that George Elliott had died in New York just a few hours before.

It will take months, perhaps years, for some of us to realize the full impact of George's death. His friends knew and respected his need for privacy and silence. One felt reassured in knowing that he sometimes needed to be alone. One felt a sense of cooperation, almost of complicity, in never calling him in the morning. For some of us it was a modest way of contributing to the piece he might be working on. One didn't see or talk to him every day, but somehow the university community was different and better for his just being around. How many times it occurred to me to ask myself, I wonder what he is working on at this moment. Or, I wonder what he thinks of this or that question, this or that piece of news. George's being there made a difference.

In the light of his unexpected death, the interview contained in this issue might risk appearing as a final utterance, which George Elliott would not have wanted it to be. Despite his strong convictions, his was one of the least dogmatic, one of the most playful minds I have ever encountered. I still remember the faint gleam in his pale blue eyes as he looked out the window into the January sun and responded to my questions about the meaning of light in the *Paradiso*. Was he being serious? Was this tongue in cheek? My own feeling is that he approached matters of the mind with the serious intentness of a child at play. Such, if I remember correctly, was the way Heraclitus described the game of philosophy . . . and of life.

A few days before George's death, as we were about to deliver the copy for this issue, we were still debating what the interview should be called. "An Hour of Last Things," the title of one of George Elliott's best collections of short stories, then seemed inappropriately solemn and foreboding. Again, we didn't want George's responses — precisely because he was to retire in May — to seem like "final" pronouncements engraved in bronze. When I heard the news of his death, a real sense of the title's appropriateness entered into me; especially when I remembered the ambiguous meaning which the word last always held for him: last as final, last as ultimate and most important. In a sense, he always put last things first.

—Paul Archambault