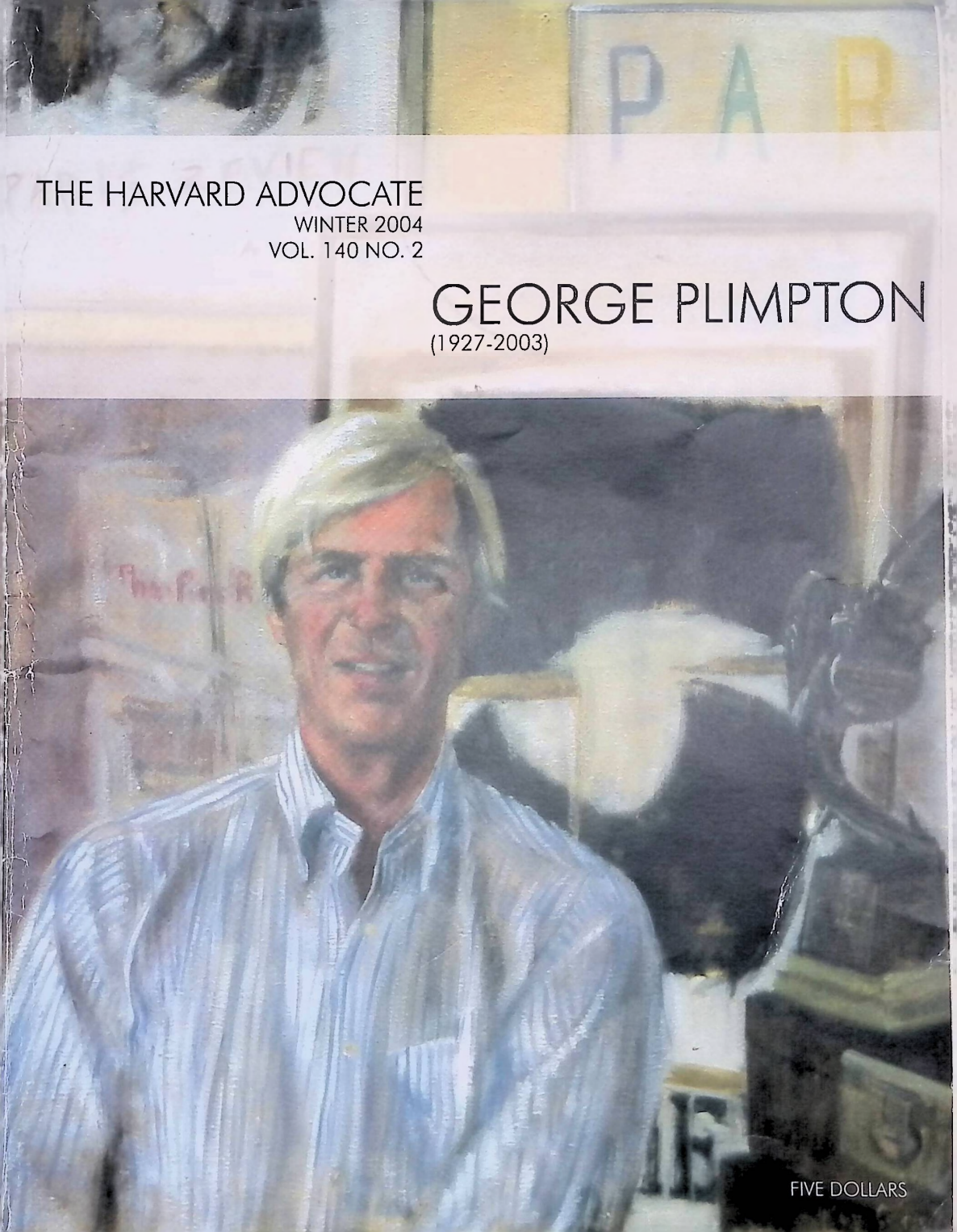




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GEORGE PLIMPTON

(1927-2003)

FIVE DOLLARS

NORMAN MAILER '43

The Memorial Service for George Plimpton at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine proved memorable. There were something like ten speakers and most of us - I do include myself - were good. It was all George's fault. He was one man it was easy to talk about, and we had known him for decades. If the best speech of all was given by his son Taylor, that was as it should have been - a father would want and expect just that while listening from the other side. If there is anything to such a notion, I am sure George had his ear well-cocked.

When it came my turn - I confess to being surprised by what I said. It was as if my voice was leading my thoughts. Obviously, since I had not put it on paper, there is no written record, but I believe I can recall most of what I said. It centered on the notion that George had represented a part of New York which many in the audience knew well. There were few people, after all, who were acquainted with that many large and small figures in the city. Moreover, given the several generations at *Paris Review* alone, George was on good terms with the old, the young, and every variety in between. So this became the core of what I discovered myself saying. I declared that there may have been no one in the city who was loved so much by so many people. I spoke then of the shock when Sarah Plimpton called on the morning following the night of George's end to tell us the news. My wife and I felt close to Sarah, perhaps closer than we felt to George. Ergo, I was stunned by the pain I felt. By God, I realized, I loved George, I really did.

So many such reactions are only felt after the fact. That opened a perception for me. I began to think of how we love each other in New York. Over the years, there are so many people with whom we have social relations, hundreds, certainly, over the decades, and for some we do feel a kind of love, a limited love that I would call New York love. Yes, exactly. It is there as a full sentiment of love yet it is wholly circumscribed. Which is to say that when we encounter this kind of old friend or acquaintance, the moment can feel as good, pure and sweet as love, we are so pleased to be with them. Yet it is a love without a present history. Nothing further is given to it, nothing exceptional comes out of it, we are just happy to see that person again and know that they are there. I repeat: It is New York love. In this city, we all know so many people that it is impossi-

ble to have deep relations with more than a few. So we love in capsule a good fifty or a hundred of our friends, and that even becomes one more nourishment one can offer and receive from love.

George must have inspired that kind of feeling in countless people. How we all felt good on running into George, so many of us, and the best is that he was worthy of it, for he never took anything from anyone I know without giving back more with his charm, his exceptionally good and subtle manners, his anecdotes, his brio, his verve, and his rare talent - there was so much in life he was able to enjoy. More than anyone I knew. So, yes, three cheers. Maybe in the old rich sense of the word, he was a gentleman, the best gentleman most of us ever got to know. [A]

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