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Correspondences Five Broadside opinions and conversations al fresco

Dear Reader,

With *Correspondences Five*, we come to Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Kenneth Burke. We begin with what I hope will set off an on-going exchange on method with some ground-clearing by Paul Kameen, who reminds us that Coleridge is not, as some Rhetoricians aver, part of our problem; he's part of a solution to all kinds of problems. (After reading Paul's article, you'll see why I'll call my seminar next spring "Composing and the Forethoughtful Query.")

Next, Robert Garlitz (with the help of Howard Nemerov) shows how starting anywhere leads everywhere, and if that makes you dizzy, hold on and enjoy the ride. People who tirelessly intone *The Pentad* (which was never intended as a "heuristic") seldom show any appreciation for the Kenneth Burke poets and students of literature admire, for what Marianne Moore affectionately called his "acute and raccoon-like intelligence." Bob's essay will be followed next fall by one on Burke's Prefaces, by Bill Covino.

It was a conversation with Gary Lindberg which led to *Correspondences One*. At a memorial service for Gary, who died last February of leukemia, David Levin paid tribute to his friend and former student. We publish excerpts, with Dave's kind permission.

Send me your responses to Coleridge and Burke, your thoughts on method, at the address below:

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Coleridge: On Method

Paul Kameen
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Vitalist assumptions, which have dominated our thinking about the composing process since Coleridge, appear to be inconsistent with the rational processes and formal procedures required by an art of invention. Vitalism leads to a view of writing ability as a knack and to a repudiation of the possibility of teaching the composing process; composition tends to dwindle into an art of editing.

Richard E. Young

It is our belief that the mystery and magic of language are, in large part, the mystery and magic of the process of the imagination. For too long the assumption has been made that language used by an individual originated in the orderly processes of a rational mind... The result... has too often been not good writing but dead writing, inhibited and restrained, and frequently dehumanized and unreadable.

James E. Miller and Stephen N. Judy

It is most often in the context of disagreements of this sort that Coleridge—usually via interpretations of his theory of imagination—appears in contemporary rhetoric. At one extreme, his advocates cast him as a prophet of innate verbal creativity. If only, the argument runs, we would release our students from the fetters of formats and facts, allow them to delve into the recesses of their authentic selves, they would tap their repressed verbal resources and become better writers. The effect of this approach is often little more than the surface prettification, usually through

the insertion of poetic-sounding adjectives, of otherwise banal confessional narratives. At the other extreme, Coleridge's detractors, perceiving the same image and deploying the same contraries, castigate him as a muddle-headed purveyor of ego-babble. If only, their argument runs, we could wean our students from their verbal narcissism and turn their heads toward the structures of their essays and the expectations of their readers, they could learn to write in a manner more appropriate to academic and professional contexts. The effect of this approach is

often the gradual draining off of individuality, in either substance or voice, until a student's prose is palatably generic, i.e., adaptable to any assigned format or audience.

That Coleridge has become one of the emblems for this dispute is both unfortunate and ironic: these caricatures bear only the most superficial resemblance to the figure that emerges from his texts, when they are actually read.

I will focus here on the "Essay on Method" (from *The Friend*) because it is in his conception of method that Coleridge draws into unison the various rhetorical polarities that his theory of imagination has been, inappropriately, associated with. Moreover, I think that developing our pedagogies along the lines of Coleridge's "science of method" will enable us to abandon the practice of requiring students to choose between "expression" or "communication" as the primary purpose of writing, between "self" or "audience" as the primary locus for invention.

Coleridge opens his argument with a characteristic *tour-de-force*. "Method," he says, "becomes natural to the mind which has been accustomed to contemplate not *things* only, or for their own sake alone, but likewise and chiefly the *relations* of things, either their relations to each other, or to the observer, or to the state and apprehension of the hearers. To enumerate and analyze these relations, with the conditions under which alone they are discoverable, is to teach the science of method." (451) Thus, for Coleridge, the science of method is consonant with, and applicable to, not simply the various distinguishable aspects of the rhetorical event—subject, writer, audience—but the relationships through which they become inextricably interdependent. Method, deployed in this sense, has little to do with procedures and techniques; it is a way of thinking with and through a voice that speaks both for itself and to its hearers. The question, then, is not so much what method is, but how it is enacted.

Coleridge begins his answer with an etymological definition: "Method implies a *progressive transition*, and it is the meaning of the word in the original language. The Greek *methodos* is literally *a way, or path of transit*. . . . The term, method, cannot therefore, otherwise than by abuse, be applied to a mere dead arrangement, containing in itself no principle of progression." (457) The metaphor of the "way or path" is at the core of Coleridge's conception of method; and to miss the implications of that metaphor is to miss his point. As I.A. Richards noted, the key to understanding Coleridge lies more in seeing how he thinks—the "way or path" his mind is tracing—than in what he says. And it is just such a conception of thinking, made evident through the verbal enactment of thought, that Coleridge means by method.

In this respect, Coleridge is far more closely allied to more recent phenomenological philosophers than he is to his self-acknowledged classical predecessors. I am reminded, for example, less of Descartes—who renders his conception of

method in terms of precepts of partition, ordering, and enumeration independent from "any particular subject matter"—than of Hegel—who attends to "the way things are worked out in detail"—or even Heidegger, for whom the way or path becomes a grounding metaphor for his explorations of poetry and thinking.

Coleridge goes on to distinguish between two essentially different modes of thought: when thinking is guided by method, the movement is a kind of "self-unraveling clue" (511), the mind following what it knows toward what it can, but does not yet, know; whereas, if thinking is "mere dead arrangement," there is little if any movement, for the mind has adapted itself to a preconceived form for repeating or reporting what it already knows. In short, methodological thinking is an act of imagination; non-methodological thinking is an act of fancy.

Thus, as Coleridge makes clear in his discussion of Plato, who he rightly felt was a master of "the art of method":

The purpose of the writer is not so much to establish any particular truth, as to remove the obstacles, the continuance of which is preclusive of all truth; . . . not (so much) to assist in storing the passive mind with the various sorts of knowledge most in request, as if the human soul were a mere repository or banqueting-room, but to place it in such relations of circumstance as should gradually excite the germinal power that craves no knowledge but what it can take up into itself, what it can appropriate, and reproduce in fruits of its own. (473)



The striking wood engravings of Hudson River and other scenes in this and previous issues of Correspondences are the work of Vic Schwarz, Cold Spring, NY, who designs Correspondences and all Boynton/Cook books.

The principal instrument by which knowledge can be thus "appropriated" and made fruitful is what Coleridge calls, in his discussion of Lord Bacon, "the forethoughtful query." "An idea is an experiment proposed, an experiment is an idea realized," Coleridge suggests, going on to characterize "the forethoughtful query" as both the "motive and guide of every philosophical experiment." (489) This double function suggests the rich metaphoric significance of the word "forethoughtful" here: *motive* suggests a translation of forethoughtful into *before thought*, a kind of urgency towards truth that both initiates thinking and draws it purposefully along; *guide* suggests a carefully constituted point of departure—what Coleridge calls a "starting post"—a question which results from thoughtful activity and creates the context and the occasion for subsequent inquiry.

The "forethoughtful query" is the *sine qua non* for methodological thinking, for it provides both the initiative (a word which Coleridge earlier appropriates from the "nomenclature of legislation") for thinking and, simultaneously, what he later calls the "self-unravelling clue," which thinking investigates. The forethoughtful writer is always engaged in a process of interpretation, always reading his writing while it is being written to be read. Though method guides thinking along its way, that way cannot be prescribed; it must be discovered as it is traversed, disclosed through the language that constitutes its "horizons." The writer arrives at, and passes beyond, a series of such horizons, at each of which a new vista of language and, of course, insight, becomes available. A text is, in some sense, always being forethought while it is never foreseen.

Here we see both the conclusion of Coleridge's argument and the closure of his path of inquiry:

To this principle we referred the choice of the final object, the control over time—or, to comprize all in one, the METHOD of the will. From this we started (or rather seemed to start: for it still moved before us, as an invisible guardian and guide), and it is this whose reappearance announces the conclusion of our circuit, and welcomes us at the goal. (523)

The forethoughtful query, as Coleridge promised, has taken him along a "circuit" from where he "seemed to start" back again to that same starting point, transformed into a new beginning by the meditation that has intervened. Method has been enacted, not by tracing a "vicious circle" of self-collapsing thoughts, but by venturing through the circuit of meaning that the "self-unravelling clue" has allowed thinking to disclose.

Methodological thinking is by no means, then, merely a matter of employing proper "techniques" or "strategies" or "processes," as they are termed in contemporary rhetorical theory. The principal features of these "heur-

istics" are their hierarchical structure—i.e., their capacity to be framed and prescribed as unchanging series of stages or steps, usually with recursive loops for partial repetition; and their site-independence—i.e., their applicability, *per se*, and without significant alteration, to any subject, situation, or set of circumstances. In contrast, methodological thinking is dialectical in its operations—i.e., the specific route that inquiry will follow cannot be mapped *a priori*; it reveals its pattern as exploration proceeds, each step preparing the ground for its (often unanticipated) successor; and because methodological thinking is spontaneously self-questioning, it is more nearly subversive than recursive in its capacity to adjust to the unexpected. Methodological thinking is site-dependent—i.e., the subject or situation or set of circumstances will inscribe the limits within which thought can and should proceed; and the structure of thought will change or vary as one changes or varies the subject, situation, or circumstances. Method, in short, is not the form of, or for, thoughts; it is the texture of thinking. Any heuristic can, of course, become its instrument; method is, in fact, the engine that makes heuristics work.

These may seem like arcane speculations with little obvious relevance to anyone, including myself, who must stand in front of a composition class three times a week and try to make better writers out of students who are neither dedicated metaphysicians nor inspired poets. But Coleridge does, I think, have a very functional contribution to make to the pedagogy of composition. His conception of method suggests, for example, that the primary role of the writing teacher (perhaps any teacher) is not to transfer information about how to write, but to demonstrate and encourage various ways of thinking about and through the discourse(s) one must deploy to write, or read, meaningfully. Methodological thinking is learned not by imitating proffered forms or models, but through the repeated enactment of inquiry guided by the questions one is urged to pose *along the way*. Thus, frequent exploratory assignments are more useful than occasional highly-structured assignments. Such assignments can, in themselves, function as "forethoughtful queries," "experiments proposed," ways of opening up a "field" for thinking so that twenty minds can traverse the circuit in twenty different, equally valid, ways. Ideally, such assignments should also be sequenced—not from "less difficult" to "more difficult," nor from "personal experience" to "logical argument," nor according to any externally imposed hierarchy; but simply in a manner that allows all of a student's essays over the course of the term to function, in one respect, as a single, gradually unfolding, meditative text, a text always open to, and in the process of, re-negotiation, re-vision.

All references are to *The Friend: Section the Second*, "Essays on the Principles of Method," *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Volume 4, ed., Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).

Teaching Everything, Preferably All at Once

Robert Garlitz
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Teaching anything can be approached as the art of teaching Everything. Certainly on the worst days and on the best days, this is how it feels to teach composition. I particularly like this title because it sums up what comes to mind when I think about how Kenneth Burke's work can help us. I've adapted the title of my favorite essay on Burke, Howard Nemerov's "Everything, Preferably All at Once: Coming to Terms with Kenneth Burke."

Nemerov formed *his* title by adding "everything" to a phrase of Burke's. He wanted to use it "as an instance of Burke's excessiveness about terms and of one's appreciation of his rightness if one would only think about it (as I.A. Richards said, a book is a machine for thinking with)." Burke's phrase appears near the end of *A Rhetoric of Motives* in a passage called "Rhetorical Names for God." Burke compiles a long list going from "ground of all possibility" to "nothing" and gathering up terms along the way from real estate, money, sleep, excrement, and death, but Nemerov especially notes "center, circumference, apex, base (preferably all at once)." "When you speak of the writers you care most for," he explains, "you not only speak about them—you also speak them." Learning to speak a writer or a subject as we learn to care about it might be one good way to sum up the purpose of learning the composing process.

Nemerov gives us another such summation when he tells us how he came to read Burke.

It was during the normal confusions of sophomore year that a friend gave me a copy of *Attitudes Toward History*— "two mouse-grey volumes," he said, "containing all knowledge." And I could see what he meant. The two things in especial that Burke said to a young man of eighteen were "Everything is interesting" and "Everything is a language."

These two lessons are at the heart of all assignments. I recently asked students, for example, if they saw their own writing process as a matter of cooking, mining, gardening, or hunting (see Barbara Tomlinson's article). The power of the metaphoric name for their experience led them into wonderful explorations of their composing practices. Had I made more explicit the power of the metaphor as a name, I would have helped them see their writing as not only interesting but as a language. Nemerov says it has taken him more than thirty years to learn to put the two lessons together. Will our students see over the next thirty years that this precisely is their assignment?

The generative power of the word to make the world is Burke's starting point for joining these two lessons. To

"have an idea" is to give a name. The effect of that naming, Nemerov explains, "is to say to the phenomenon, 'Be thou other than art.'" It challenges, and upon the challenge it moves into a combat with 'the world' which at its best it both wins and loses." The whole drama of the dialectic is at work in every act of naming. Burke charted the cathartic features of this drama in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, where he studies the naming act as ritual death and rebirth. In his next two books, he launched what he called the *Motivorum: The Grammar of Motives* works out the logics possible in the cycle of terms for ACT. (Burke now sees this grammar, named Dramatism, as his terministic version of ontology.) In the work that followed, *The Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke studies the ways the act-word always both wins and loses.

It wins, as Nemerov explains, in that a "range of particular appearances is brought into patterned clarity." The name becomes a god-term for the realms of discourse it orders. But the victory of an idea, a concept, an act of naming, a god-term is temporary at best and it becomes as Burke says, "rotten with perfection." (Nemerov glosses the phrase in two ways: "Every One, in becoming many, attempts to become All and falls abroad into chaos, nothingness, the abyss. Or else: every idea, at the end of the line, loses all content and meaning other than itself; it reaches redundancy, tautology, pleonasm, and at last says, uninformatively enough: I am that I am. These two ways of losing may be regarded as the damned and redeemed forms of one single but unsayable thing.")

Burke perfects his meditations on the ways god-terms win and lose in *The Rhetoric of Religion*. He argues that religious discourse studied for its forms, not for the truth or falsity of its claims, magnifies the motives at work in all terminologies. He shows how the sacrificial relation between the tautological character of logic and the linear qualities of narrative create the drama of the logos: circle and line are thus the two figures which "may stand for the base of all thought." Nemerov further observes that "line and circle, and the spiral compounded of their motion, make up our ways of thinking about time." Burke likes two other figures for these patterns: from music we can use the chord-arpeggio relation to talk about the idea or the essence temporized into the arpeggio of discourse; the second figure is from Augustine: we utter the words of a sentence in time and it is only when we reach the last word of the temporal sequence the our listener grasps—all at once—our timeless or logical meaning.



Burke uses *Logology* as the proper name for his approach to epistemology through the study of these patterns of meaning, but Logology does not propose specific answers to specific questions. After a lecture in which Burke "had been talking about the generative power of any dialectical term to spawn a terminology," Nemerov heard him tell the class: "Any term will lead you to the others. There's no place to start." If there is no starting—and, as Nemerov notes, no stopping either—where then, as Burke likes to ask, are we? And, in particular (on the first or the fifteenth day of class), what are we to do? Nemerov argues that Burke's practice offers great encouragement, building toward aphoristic recapitulations of the paradoxes involved, aphorisms we recognize as familiar advice to teachers.

Among the most appealing things about Burke, to my mind, is the sense he has, the sense I get from reading him, that thought, if it is to matter at all, must be both obsessive and obsessively thorough, that thinking, if it is to salvage anything worth having from chaos, must adventure into the midst of madness and build its city there. Also that this action never really ends until the thinker does; everything is always to be done again. Also this: that system begins in inspiration, order in improvisation, method in heuristic.

Nemerov then gives one of Burke's own "somewhat breathless descriptions" of what we are to do. Burke speaks about his job as a critic, but what he says describes as well the job of the composer.

So, we must keep trying anything and everything, improvising, borrowing from others, developing from others, dialectically using one text to comment upon another, schematizing, using the incentive to new wanderings, returning from these excursions to schematize again, being oversubtle where the training seems to promise some further glimpse, and making amends by reduction to very simple anecdotes.

But this is Burke the rhapsodist. What is more difficult to quote and even more difficult to convey is the rigorous, ascetic Burke who fully submits his thought to the discipline of the logos. Honoring equally improvisation and method becomes the demanding dialectical quest. We can see this in the ways he places his texts on the page. In the early books, the footnotes, quips Nemerov, "marched along for pages under a few-homeless-looking lines of text; like giant dogs leashed to dwarfish masters." In *Grammar and Rhetoric*, these commentaries become series of appendices ("the dogs get bigger, but are kept in their own kennels"); in *Language as Symbolic Action* the leashes, kennels, dogs and masters have a celebration—texts are prefaced, footnoted, afterworded and postscripted; since then, while Burke has continued to publish much, there remains much that is uncollected, a

mimeographed Poetics or Symbolic and untold notes, letters, handouts, and drafts ("the dogs are beginning to wag their kennels?"). Burke satirizes his own perpetual motion question in the last piece of *The Rhetoric of Religion*, a serio-comic dialogue in which The Lord and Satan survey the whole of creation under the title "Epilogue: Prologue in Heaven."

But, again, what of earth? If there is no place to start and no place to stop, can we find comfort as we look at our conflicting and competing schools of composition theory, research, and practice? I once heard some students question Burke about how to improve their writing. He advised them to imitate models, classic authors and writers they admired. I was disappointed, maybe shocked, and probably even a bit scandalized. Burke wasn't up-to-date, didn't talk about process, didn't know about the latest research, was giving rather old-fashioned advice, advice that didn't seem to go with his exciting theories of language as symbolic action. But if there is no place to start, it would indeed seem that one could start with any "god-term" from the textbooks and proceed from there to teach the whole of composing. Given the right imagination and attention to the full dialectic, one could start with Style and arrive at Concept, or begin with Forms and arrive at Free-Writing, or focus on Narrative and incorporate Research. Our errors arise when we permit any term to command dogmatic allegiance at the expense of the whole development.

With allegiance and error we arrive at Judgment. Burke's emphasis has been on teaching us Grammar, on seeing how terms imply one another. Every course we teach is a course in the structure of terms, in the *lexicon* of a discipline. Walker Gibson recently urged this view: "Let us be grammarians, helping our students gain some confidence in the structuring of terms." He then adds a note of hesitation Burke would not add. "Let us remind them that it's only terms they are structuring: there are limits to education. It *may* be that such a procedure can encourage 'a style and a certain bravery in the presence of the uncertain and the unknown.' But no one can be sure of even that, and no one should promise that." Here Burke would part company with Gibson. Terms are not "only terms" for Burke: Learning the creative power of terms and learning how to structure them in a properly dramatic, logological grammar—a grammar in which the word is an act—does indeed school us in judgment.

In one postscript to an essay in *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke considers the proposition that Grammar is indifferent to truth. In his ambivalence we can hear his piety. First he concedes the point:

There is certainly a sense in which this statement is irrefutable. Yet, Dramatism would contend: Whatever the complications and paradoxes, we must keep asking always about actives, passives, and middles (reflexives)—or, if you will, effectors, receptors, and feedback (for argument's sake, I here concede to the lowest kind of

reduction)... So I have sought [to describe the debate in which the indifference of Grammar to truth is presupposed] to indicate why (when we think of symbolicity as existing in its own right though variously modified by animality) the Dramatistic grammar possesses at least a kind of *moral absolute*... "Man" is "active" except when he is "passive" (suffering, in bondage even to his own stupidities). And the more I puzzle over the reflexive, the more convinced I become that all of us, in pious terror, should be on guard regarding the role of the reflexive in our ideas of identity.

Burke does not take up questions of evaluative or ethical criticism in dealing with specific literary works. He has untiringly battled Scientism and its legions for the ways they would deny freedom by reducing purposes and motives to mechanisms (as in skill-building drills). We forget that when Burke launched his *Motivorum*, it was to have consisted of a Grammar, a Rhetoric, a Symbolic, and an Ethics of motives. The Ethics, like the written but unpublished Symbolic, runs throughout the work he has published since the *Grammar*. We can see it in the myth he uses to explain the creation of the word.

Surrounding us wordy animals there is the infinite wordless universe out of which we have been gradually carving our universes of discourse since the time when our primordial ancestors added to their sensations *words* for sensations. When they could duplicate the taste of an orange by *saying* "the taste of any orange," that's when STORY was born, since words *tell about* sensations. Whereas Nature can do no wrong (whatever it does is Nature), when STORY comes into the world there enters the realms of the true, false, honest, mistaken, the downright lie, the imaginative, the visionary, the sublime, the ridiculous, the eschatological...the satirical, every single detail of every single science or speculation, even every bit of gossip—for although all animals in their way communicate, only our kind of animal can gossip. There was no story before we came, and when we're gone the universe will go sans story.

Burke published this version of his creation myth in a letter to *TLS* in which he summed up his life's work in three paragraphs—"making amends by reductions to very simple anecdotes."

In the same letter Burke emphasizes the importance for his work of the last footnote of Chapter IV in the *Biographia Literaria* where Coleridge notes that after a new word enters general currency, the initial distinction it bore becomes so naturalized that "the language itself does as it were *think* for us...we then say, that it is evident to *common sense*."

Common sense, therefore, differs in different ages." "Surely," notes Burke, "among the most notable of Coleridge's many notable footnotes."

Burke's career has been an extraordinary reflection on the ways language thinks for us and on the ways we need to constantly exercise our power of naming anew. In teaching our students how to compose, how to form meaning, we engage them in thought about the structure of their terms and about the history of their thinking. Thus, revision could be viewed as a microcosmic exercise of what John Lukacs calls *historical consciousness*, as we invite students to think about their thinking. Since he needed the new names of *Dramatism* and *Logology* to entitle what he was after, I think Burke would agree with Owen Barfield in seeing this sort of thinking as a new kind of discipline: "the habit of thinking actively; of choosing to think, instead of just letting our thoughts happen." To help them begin to master this discipline, we must help students engage their powers of attention and imagination. As Caryl Johnston observes "Perhaps the quality of attention is what distinguishes the good and right use of imagination from base or irresponsible uses of it. (Truly attentive people are imaginative, but not all imaginative people are attentive. Our century unfortunately offers many, many examples of the latter type.)" And teaching imagination and attention means teaching Everything.

Charles Williams gives a fine logological recapitulation of how to do this when he has a character in *The Greater Trumps* say:



All things are held together by correspondence, image with image, movement with movement [term with term]: without that there could be no relation and therefore no truth. It is our business—especially yours and mine—to take up the power of relation. Do you know what I mean?

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Gary Lindberg: Character in Conversation

David Levin
University of Virginia

In our last conversation, on the day before he died, Gary Lindberg said that the hardest thing about meeting his classes in recent weeks was getting from the car to the classroom. When I asked whether the teaching itself wasn't exhausting, he replied that the class was too exhilarating for him to notice how weary he was until he had to make his way back to the car. "One of the things I love best," he said, "is to sit around and talk, and I'm going to continue as long as I can."...

We have sat around and talked over a picnic in Golders Green, on a canal barge in London, in restaurants during MLA conventions in New York and Chicago, and in summertime visits to Dover, New Hampshire, and Duxbury, Massachusetts. Of course, we exchanged drafts of manuscripts, too, and I learned from his original written work as well as from his generous criticism of my own. But the special quality of his presence and his character about which I wish to testify here came through in conversation.

Throughout his professional career Gary was interested in manners, human rituals, games, role-playing, deceptions. He had an insatiable curiosity about human behavior, at high levels and low. He taught me much about Edith Wharton and the novel of manners, about a great variety of confidence-men in American literature, and also about J.R. Ewing in Dallas and Richard Nixon in San Clemente and Washington. In our conversations during the last ten or fifteen years, this instruction often followed a clear pattern. My inclination to moralize would be straightened out by the seemingly tolerant, comic attitude with which Gary observed his gallery of rogues. My inexhaustible capacity to be surprised would be stretched not only by the enormity we were discussing but also by Gary's amused, almost cynical expectation of iniquity or folly.

These dialogues revealed Gary's character by showing that he was not cynical at all. He managed somehow to see the depths of human fallibility without losing his affectionate delight in human nature. And in all his amused talk about the malfeasance of wicked and foolish characters in fiction and the real world, I never heard one hint of Gary's awareness that he himself was a man of extraordinary virtue, one of the most thoroughly decent people I have ever known.

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