

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

**I. A. Richards**

**His Life and Work**

**John Paul Russo**



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## Preface

The lectures I. A. Richards gave at Cambridge in the 1920s were so popular that at times they had to be held in the streets. It was said that this had not happened since the Middle Ages. I first heard Richards in the mid-1960s, speaking on the functions of language, the impact of mass media, the gulf between the rich and poor nations, and his goal of world literacy. The large hall overflowed with people. His message was tragic and urgent, nothing less than the chief obstacles to human advancement: hunger, disease, poverty, ignorance. Slides projected on a screen over him showed world maps with the size of countries drawn proportionate to their population and gross national product. Then, leaping from the globally vast to the minute and specific, Richards explored the power of language and analyzed some of the smallest and simplest words, the prepositions, the kind of words one learns early in life or early in a foreign language class or literacy program. He played on differences between something *on* the mind and something *in* the mind: in the first instance, a problem remains oppressive and importunate; in the second, placed before active consciousness, it has been set on a path towards a potential solution. The example stood for his whole approach: progress in solving major problems could be made by gaining a greater understanding of language, which in turn leads to increased awareness of the critical choices. All his examples expressed his faith in human possibility.

But he was his own best example. Richards' original achievement had been as a theorist and inventor of methods for analyzing language, especially literary language. Method in his work must be understood in its deepest sense, as in Bacon's "Method maketh man." Out of his research in philosophy, semantics, and criticism, he had found ways to break down linguistic structures into their elementary units. He then regarded these units in relation to each other and to the context of the discourse at large, including the speaker, situation, and audience. Close reading, or contextualism, as his method became known,

had its precursors in Coleridge and Ruskin. Yet no one had ever proceeded with a micrological approach to language in such a systematic manner, endowed it with such incisive theoretical depth, and applied it so broadly and with such revolutionary results. The harvest was enormous. Moreover, the method was proven able to cope with modernist texts, some of the most difficult literature ever written. Within a few decades Richards' method became the standard first-level approach to literary analysis in the English-speaking classroom, and eventually the standard elsewhere. It remains so to this day, partly because it is sufficiently flexible to admit of wide variation, individual judgment, and personal taste, without losing its essential character.

With Basic English, invented by his friend and collaborator C. K. Ogden, Richards took the micrological method into his second career. From the upper reaches of university teaching, he moved to the elementary level and investigated the processes by which one learns to read and write. Contextual strategies inform all his language-training programs and his media experiments with record, slide, tape, and film. Although his second career met with far less success than his first, he never tired of promulgating his method for learning "World English," down to his final journey to China in 1979.

This book originated as I was completing a study of Alexander Pope. Reacting to strict New Critical analysis, a direct offspring of Richards' criticism, I argued that Pope could be usefully explicated by relating his biography to his poetic choices, mainly in fashioning an ideal self-image in his poetry. My probe of the hegemonic antibiographical, antihistorical bias in New Criticism led me to one of its main sources in Richards. I intended to elucidate as systematically as possible the historical, biographical, and intellectual context of his thought. This would be to apply his principle of contextuality to a point where it would be sufficiently grounded not only in nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of criticism, but also in social reality. I came to realize the richness and complexity of Richards' intellectual achievement, and there lay a powerful story in the biography itself.

In many ways, Richards is the most representative critic in the

English-speaking world in this century. One can point to his primary focus on language (so common today we almost forget the critical practice of 1914); his systematic spirit; his concern with science, psychology, and technology; his critical and experimental interest in modern media; his interdisciplinary approach; his adoption of complementarity; his studies in translation and classical humanism; his internationalism. The contributions to education extend from the most elementary to the most sophisticated levels. In one way, he can never be representative: his comprehensiveness. His criticism covers most phases of the communication process, from the artist, to the work, to the reader's response and moral duty. There are gaps in this comprehensiveness. His break with the immediate past, characteristic of his generation, manifested itself in his writing as a harsh reaction to history and historicism; this early theoretical imperative hardened into a prejudice and carried through his work into the New Criticism. Yet if there were gaps, he showed a capacity for renewal. The second career in language training and literacy has been mentioned. Nearing sixty, he turned to poetry and eventually published four collections and three verse plays.

Richards' intellectual ancestry traces back through G. E. Moore, William James, and C. S. Peirce to Locke and Bacon, but he took seriously Mill's challenge to combine the radical insights of Bentham (as representative of the pragmatic-empirical line) with the romantic idealism and organicism of Coleridge. At the outset I refer to Richards' mixture of empiricism and idealism, a compromise in which the one corrects for the limitations of the other; it was his earliest example of complementarity. Another strong theme emerges from his essential optimism and Godwinian-Confucian belief in human perfectibility, at times lending a Utopian coloring to his program. He said he "hated the past" for its suffering and cruelty and always looked ahead, "even now" (1972). He considered the future an open possibility and took large intellectual and personal risks. These make his life an absorbing drama. He boldly courted failure and misunderstanding through much of his second career because of the humanitarian goals at stake. The themes of risk, courage, and possibility come

together and receive their finest expression in his later poetry and humanistic testament, *Beyond*. Here he explores the moments when mental acuity, strong feeling, and will power converge in a high purpose, and consciousness transforms reality in the birth of ideas. He depicts these moments of the whole self, in Platonist terms, as the mind's eye finding its focal point and turning about; or, in his own language, as being on an edge or ledge (for he was an ardent mountaineer), beyond which is the sheer incommensurate chaos of the void. "Battle beyond," he would urge in one poem ("Theodicy"). Human advancement requires daring to reach into the unknown void and create. Hence, poets in Shelley's broad definition (which included Bacon) rank among the greatest benefactors of humanity. In their supreme moments they are models of creative activity. "For those who are less creative," Richards wrote, "the answer is the same." In a late interview he expressed the sum of his hopes while directing attention to his practical goal: "I think we have a better way of teaching English, but while you're teaching beginning English, you might as well teach everything else. That is to say, a world position, what's needed for living, a philosophy religion, how to find things out, and the whole works—mental and moral seed for the planet. In this way the two-thirds of the planet that doesn't yet know how to read and write would learn in learning how to read and write English, the things that would help them in their answers to 'Where should man go?'"

In writing this book I have incurred large debts for which I should like to express gratitude. Rockefeller and Fulbright fellowships enabled me to pursue my research for extended periods in this country and abroad. The Rutgers and University of Miami libraries, and in particular their interlibrary loan departments and special collections, were always prompt and helpful. I thank the editors of the following journals in which portions of this book have appeared: *Critical Inquiry*, *Letterature d'America*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, *Shenandoah*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *PN Review*, *Harvard Studies in English*, and *Journal of Literary Criticism*. I am grateful to Patricia Stango, Ana

Miyares, and V, Bess for their expert typing. Paul Cliff Salom designed the map of Richards' fourth journey to China.

Dorothea Richards was a gracious and faithful friend in either the one or the other Cambridge and a tireless letter writer when I was away. Her achievement in high mountaineering, extensive correspondence, and immense diary (1910–86) demand that she be made the subject of a biography in her own right. Richards' older brothers George and Kenneth provided valuable notes and letters on the family background; Kenneth and Dacre Richards extended their hospitality on my visit to Salisbury for an interview. Richards' nephew Derek helped to establish the genealogy and made available family letters and pictures. Pie and Joy Richards offered further help on their stay in Florida.

My understanding of Richards' thought has been deeply enriched by the work of many scholars—among them, Max Black, Giovanni Cianci, James Dolan Colby, John Fekete, Patrizia Fusella, W. H. N. Hotoph, Chetan Karnani, John Needham, Jerome P. Schiller, Giuseppe Sertoli, Ronald Shusterman, and Anton Van der Hoven. The late Walter Hamilton, Master of Magdalene College, and Jane Hamilton were courteous hosts at Magdalene; the Master read portions of the manuscript on the Cambridge period. J. K. B. Crawford, Secretary of the Old Cliftonian Society, welcomed me to Clifton, Derek Winterbottom, archivist of Clifton College, answered further inquiries. Research on A. C. Benson was abetted by his biographer David H. Newsome, Headmaster of Christ's Hospital. I should also like to thank Richard Lockett, Fellow of Magdalene and Pepys Librarian, for his generous assistance and for making available the materials in the Richards Collection at Magdalene. John Constable responded promptly to additional requests. Thanks are also due J. William Hess, Associate Director of the Rockefeller Archive Center, for his courtesy during my visits to North Tarrytown; Glenn A. Clatworthy, Program Data Specialist at Public Broadcasting System (PBS) for his response to my search for missing files; and Robin McElheny, Curatorial Associate for Visual Collections, for locating a photograph in the Harvard University Archives.

Sir William Empson granted two interviews and commented on

my writing on Richards, Christine M. Gibson, Richards' long-time collaborator on language programs in the United States, offered her support from the beginning of the enterprise. Barbara Reutlinger, whose organization of the entire Language Research archive greatly facilitated research into that side of Richards' career, reviewed the chapter on his experiments in the United States. Herman S. Weinstein, who has served as the literary agent for Language Research for over thirty-five years, supplied books, tapes, and films as they were needed. Nelson Goodman responded to my remarks on his work in two letters which he permitted me to cite. Janel Mueller and Ian Mueller read my paragraphs on Richards and Wittgenstein. All saved me from error; what errors remain are my own. Michael Schmidt answered my inquiries on Richards in the late 1970s. I express my gratitude to the following individuals for direct help and encouragement: Uberto Limentani, Andrew Brown, Bruce A. Boucher, Judith L. Sensibar, Lorna Crowley Ferguson, Gillian Moore, Frank Rodgers. Eric Halpern, Humanities Editor, Peter Dreyer and the staff of the Johns Hopkins University Press, and Norman Franklin of Routledge and Kegan Paul have been unfailingly courteous and helpful.

Several individuals have long befriended my efforts. Coral Lansbury and W. Bruce Johnson read and improved portions of the manuscript. I have profited from many conversations on aesthetics and critical theory with Richard Shiff. Robert Ferguson subjected my prose to searching criticism and rescued me from some of my own views. My colleague Robert Casillo read the entire manuscript and its revisions, commenting on the argument with accuracy and penetration and encouraging me to broaden its scope.

Lastly, I express my indebtedness to Richards himself. While he had both personal and theoretical reservations on anything touching biography, he did not allow them to mar our friendship or qualify his assistance. Straight interviews he disliked, but he relished conversations, which were more natural, and he let me fill my journals with them. As acquaintance grew into friendship, he and Dorothea invited me to live in their house in the Fellows' Garden at Magdalene for several months. He encouraged me on what he, earlier than I, knew would be a long journey.

One

The Preparation of a Critic

# 1 Boyhood and Clifton

Ivor Armstrong Richards was born at Hillside in Sandbach, Cheshire, on 26 February 1893, the youngest son of William Armstrong Richards and Mary Anne Haigh. Hillside was a "fair-sized house" with a large garden and stables.<sup>1</sup> The Richards side of the family was from the Gower peninsula in South Wales. Richards' father told him that an ancestor had gone to America on the *Mayflower*, perhaps as a crew member, and returned to England. During the eighteenth century the family was probably in the business of quarrying limestone from the Welsh cliffs. Richard Richards (b. 1760) had a son Richard (1788-1856), a master builder who married Catherine Davies (1782-1858); they had three sons and two daughters. The eldest son, William (1811-73), the critic's paternal grandfather, was an architect who designed many of Swansea's public buildings; he was married to Emma Jane Armstrong (1825-83), the daughter of an army officer, also of Swansea. The second son, Richard (1817-95), was a builder and property speculator. Evan Matthew (1821-80), the third son, joined a pewter company in Birmingham, became a partner in the firm of Booth, Richards & Co., and was then involved in commercial silver smelting and steel at Landore; he was city councilor, twice mayor of Swansea, and Liberal M. P. for Cardigan (1868-74). It was altogether "a well-known and powerful Swansea family."<sup>2</sup>

The critic's father, William Armstrong, was born in Swansea on 8 July 1849. He apprenticed with Booth, Richards in Birmingham and Landore and went to the University of Edinburgh in 1868 to study chemistry under Lyon Playfair. He took a position as a chemical engineer at Landore and specialized in the production of ammonia soda, for which he patented a process. Sometime after 1882, he became plant manager of the new Brunner, Mond & Co. alkali works in the small market town of Sandbach, in the heart of the Cheshire district known since Roman times for its salt-marshes.<sup>3</sup>

The Haighs came from Yorkshire. Richards' maternal

grandfather, George Haigh, was a wool and textile merchant who operated between Halifax and Roubaix, France. He was married to Harriet Sowden. Their second daughter, Maty Anne, was born on 25 October 1859 in Under-cliffe. After Harriet's death in 1861, Haigh remarried to a Jane Jennings and they raised the family in Hipperholme. Mary Anne was twenty-seven when she married William Armstrong Richards on 7 September 1887, and she bore her husband three sons: George E. A. in 1889, William Kenneth A. in 1891, and Ivor in 1893,

His sons described William Armstrong Richards as an inquisitive, well-read, and widely traveled man. Kenneth Richards said he was a "genial man but could be severe."<sup>4</sup> He made two business trips to America in the 1890s and wrote a travelogue for the family. He liked reading aloud to his sons, was an amateur painter, and taught Ivor how to draw and paint. A Unitarian, he gravitated towards his wife's Anglicanism after marriage. He suffered from dyspepsia (and probably a gastric ulcer) and went regularly to Bad Neunahr. He died of cancer at the age of fifty-three on 6 August 1902, following an operation in Bonn. Mrs. Richards, who was with her husband at his death, wrote home the next day to her sons: "My greatest comfort is that I know he is at rest. We four will now try to live here on earth, so that we can join him. You will be brave boys & help me."<sup>5</sup> A memorial tablet was placed in the Sandbach parish church in appreciation of his activities on behalf of the district.

Shortly after her husband's death, Mrs. Richards moved south to the Bristol suburb of Clifton, and sent her young sons to Clifton College, where they spared expenses by attending as day-boys.<sup>6</sup> She did not remarry and, according to Richards, "managed very skillfully" in their straitened circumstances; she was a serene and capable woman who was "extremely devout" in her attachment to the Church of England. Kenneth Richards described her as "well-disciplined, but cheerful" and thought that his younger brother acquired his own sense of discipline from her. Cheer, too, became as strong a trait in him. The father's death made for a tightly knit family; the three brothers remained close throughout their long lives.<sup>7</sup>

In 1974 Richards was asked what books had impressed him most deeply in childhood. He listed Kipling's *Jungle Books* (recalling "The beaches of Lukkanon before the sealers came"), Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, and Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. With regard to Verne (but apropos of all three titles), he quoted Coleridge: "from my early reading . . . my mind had been habituated to *the Vast*. ... I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief."<sup>8</sup> Another book Richards read then was Homer in the Earl of Derby's verse translation, "wide and spacious pages of verse as I seem to recall them."<sup>9</sup> His brothers remembered that his hobbies were "model steam engines, submarines, ingenious games like diablo" and that his favorite boyhood reading included Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, Shelley ("Julian and Maddalo"), Swinburne, Francis Thompson, Wells, Kipling, Henty, Hilaire Belloc's travelogue *The Path to Rome*, George Meredith's Arabian tale *The Shaving of Shagpat*, mountaineering adventures, and the like.<sup>10</sup>

Richards entered the Junior School at Clifton College as a day-boy in January 1905.<sup>11</sup> Clifton was a product of that Victorian educational phenomenon, the new boarding school founded after the model of the great Anglican public schools. "Not for well over two hundred years before the creation of Cheltenham in 1841 had any school been established which either at its foundation or later became a Public School."<sup>12</sup> Then, within three decades, some thirty schools were either founded or converted from grammar schools, in direct response to the demand of the expanding upper middle class for education, social training, and status. Some of the new schools were offshoots of older ones. Clifton's first headmaster, John Percival, had taught at Rugby and made Clifton (founded 1862) an "offshoot of Rugby" and, as such, one of the more innovative schools; it was "sometimes decried as 'a Radical school.'"<sup>13</sup> He introduced a Modern Side and a Military and Engineering Side. In 1905 Clifton was also one of the larger schools, with 528 boys. As the schools grew in size, they found themselves competing for students (two earlier attempts to found a public school at Bristol had failed). Often enough "some special group was catered to or some modern need which older schools had been

too conservative to supply was served"; Clifton prided itself on "systematic scientific teaching and the cultivation of individual tastes."<sup>14</sup> But the schools still retained as their central program what had been two-thirds of the traditional education of a public school boy from the sixteenth century to the mid-Victorian period: Latin, Greek, ancient history, and ancient geography. At Clifton this was known as the Classical Side.

School records show that Richards began with a program of Latin and Greek to prepare him for the Classical Side in the Upper School; he also took English, French, and mathematics. In his first year he ranked in the middle of his class, moving up in his second year, where one term he was third of twenty. Then in the first months of 1907 he dropped to twelfth of thirteen.<sup>15</sup> He left school and did not return for a year and a half. At fourteen, Richards had come down with pulmonary tuberculosis.

The illness, according to Kenneth Richards, was "a severe and prolonged one," the first of three tubercular attacks in the next ten years. His mother took him to a private sanatorium on Dartmoor, near Yelver-ton, where he underwent the old-fashioned cold-air cure as well as treatment with "an early variety of tuberculin."<sup>16</sup> The two stayed in rented bungalows and houses for about a year. Discipline and cheer were tested to their uttermost as the boy's life hung in a balance. The combination of medical regimens worked, though in Richards' words it was "a very near squeak." His brothers, who recalled a merry boy, thought that the rigorous open-air treatments taught him early to endure hardship and solitude. Many activities were curtailed, leaving room for precocious intellectual growth. "I had unlimited leisure, I read and read," becoming "a sort of idle boy." At the sanatorium and back at home, he amused himself largely by reading. "That was what I came from. I came out of books. . . . Everything under the sun—rubbish and everything."<sup>17</sup>

One encounter with books at this time inscribed itself so deeply within Richards' imagination that ever afterwards it claimed the status of a condensed private allegory. It began with Kipling, who excited curiosity in the character of Mowgli, one of the great heroes of Richards' childhood. In the story "In the Rukh" (*rukh*, a

forest or jungle), Muller, inspector general of woods and forests in India, comes upon the adult Mowgli and is awed by his uncanny knowledge of the wilds. Later, Muller "recites to himself in a kind of German English. I was so overwhelmed by this," said Richards, "that I really set to work to find out what it was."<sup>18</sup> Muller recites from Swinburne and the lines (as Kipling writes) are "delivered with immense emphasis":

Dough we shivt und bedeck und bedrape us,  
Dou art noble und nude und andeek;  
Libidina dy moder, Briapus  
Dy fader, a god und a Greek.<sup>19</sup>

Mowgli had been a wolf-child. Muller calls him Faunus and, misquoting Swinburne, conjures up the "parents" of Dolores and fathers Mowgli on them: Libitina, the ancient Roman goddess of voluptuous delight, gardens, and vineyards, but also a death goddess (linked to both Venus and Proserpina); and Priapus, the Greek god of the creative and fructifying powers of nature. Mowgli thus shares a family resemblance to the romantic Fatal Woman, who, according to Mario Praz, is asocial or pre-social, "incarnate in all ages and all lands," demonic or supernatural, "idol-like" and sphinxlike, with the mysterious Gioconda smile.<sup>20</sup> For Muller, Mowgli is an "anachronism" in modern India, because he is "before der Iron Age, und der Stone Age," older than Adam and Eve, "shust as der *ruk* is older dan der gods." Identified with the *ruk*, accused by a servant of consorting with its "devils," Mowgli possesses its secret wisdom, its "languages"; "The jungle has many tongues," boasted Mowgli as a boy, "I know them all." This might have struck a responsive chord in young Richards. No doubt, too, part of Mowgli's appeal to children is the speed with which he outstrips his teachers. Intuitively ethical, Mowgli has "no caste," is a "jungle outcast," and moves on the margins between worlds, primeval and contemporary, natural, human, and divine, so it is fitting Muller should appoint him forest *-guard*. When, after reciting his poem, Muller concludes, "Now I know dot Bagan or Christian, I shall nefer know der inwardness of der *ruk*," he means the hidden "inwardness" of the life-force, which is unitary

and binding in nature and man (the jungle is among the commonest representations of the unconscious).

The Muller misquotation, the one that so "overwhelmed" the young Richards, was lifted by Kipling (with a laugh certainly) from Swinburne's "Dolores":

We shift and bedeck and bedrape us,  
Thou art noble and nude and antique;  
Libitina thy mother, Priapus  
Thy father, a Tuscan and Greek.

Richards searched for it in the family's twenty-volume *International Library of Famous Literature*. Instead of the decadent "Dolores," he found the rousing Battle Chorus from Swinburne's *Erechtheus*, a tragedy on the foundation and defense of Athens. He responded instantly to its poetic power and affirmation of heroic values. "About ten lines later I couldn't see the book. ... I had to lie down on my back on the hearth-rug with the book propped up on my chest to keep the tears out of the line of vision."<sup>21</sup>

From east to west of the south sea-line  
Glitters the lightning of spears that shine<sup>22</sup>

Richards always felt that the experience of reading the Battle Chorus brought him, after many years and many self-imposed and other obstacles, back to Homer. In particular, one passage from the chorus "stayed with me, after a very few readings. For me, it was the divine vision. I've never, therefore, been able to think critically about it—though I do recall that when I found 'Dolores,' soon after, I decided that Muller had much improved what he quoted. But the *Erechtheus* stood by me. At fearsome moments it was a talisman to restore courage":

Ill thoughts breed fear, and fear ill words; but these  
The gods turn from us that have kept their law.  
Let us lift up the strength of our hearts in song,  
And our souls to the height of the darkling day.  
If the wind in our eyes blow blood for spray,  
Be the spirit that breathes in us life more strong,  
Though the prow reel round, and the helm point wrong,

And sharp reefs whiten the shoreward way.  
For the steersman Time sits hidden astern,  
With dark hand plying the rudder of doom.

Swinburne's "pages are luminous mists of language," wrote R. H. Stoddard, "his music is never less, but often more, than his sense."<sup>23</sup> In the Battle Chorus, however, a flexible rhythm and strength of music propel the sense of the language, and the meaning is not engulfed. The chorus proposes a choice that in either case turns on a choice of language: ill thoughts, fear, and ill words; or the gods, their law, right thoughts, courage, deed, and "song." This sequence is the heroic formula. The gods protect those who obey "their law," the eternal *dikē* of Anaximander and Aeschylus. When the law directs conscience, right thoughts guide the passions, warriors are emboldened, and song streams forth containing the moods and symbols of heroic life: the call to action, an Athenian sea battle, lust of conflict (Homeric *kharmē*), Time steering destiny (one of the attributes of the goddess Tyche, or Chance, was a rudder by which she piloted destiny). The threatening reefs are a constant reminder that death lies not only towards the sea and human conflict, but towards the shore and natural disaster. The passage would send Richards back to Homer, its source: "Ah, friend," Sarpedon says to Glaucou, "if when we were through this fight we could live on getting no older forever, I would neither fight myself nor send you into battle. But death in a thousand shapes hangs over us always. So let us go forward, to win glory or give it to another" (*Iliad* 12. 387ff.; Richards' trans.).

After his father's death and his own near-fatal illness, the Battle Chorus must have had a singularly magnetic effect on young Richards. But the chorus has several points of interest in his literary career as well. It calls attention to his lifelong pleasure in the works of Swinburne, "whose prose as well as verse I was soaked with" from an early age.<sup>24</sup> He was fondest of *Atalanta in Calydon*, which he considered Swinburne's masterpiece, the "Hymn to Prosperine," and "The Last Oracle," large sections of which he knew by heart. (In his eighties he could still recite over forty lines, beginning "Dark the shrine, and dumb the fount of song thence welling.") We also observe Swinburnian themes in

Richards' criticism: the claims of the heroic self; the search for central meaning amidst the Heraclitean flux; the mutual controls between thought, will, and language; the treatment of gods as ideal or negative self-images. When Swinburne went into total eclipse, repudiated by High Modernism, New Humanism, and New Criticism, Richards came to his defense. Even so, he admitted "Swinburne wrote too much. I don't wonder. It was so much fun. It was so natural."<sup>25</sup> In the 1970s Richards thought of making an anthology of Swinburne's verse; but the project was never begun. Further, Richards believed that the psychological effect of the Battle Chorus—and, one should assume, similar sentiments from romantic poets—was the essential beginning for his translating Homer's *Iliad* so long afterwards and for his plays *The Wrath of Achilles* and *Homage to Hector*. That effect was the sublime, and the Battle Chorus has a dozen analogues in Homer that bear on our reading. One analogue, Sarpedon's speech, has been cited; another is Ajax's prayer in the "darkling day" of battle: "Destroy us, Zeus, but may it be in the light" (*Iliad* 17.648). With this passage Longinus illustrated the sublime, that strongest combination of lofty thought and emotional transport, which is like a religious "stepping outside" the self, a loss of self that results in a newly integrated and energized ego—an experience often characterizing the greatest literature and art.<sup>26</sup> The Battle Chorus conveys the heroic sublime, the intensified commitment of the will, and the courage to yield up the self to a larger purpose. Richards called it a "talisman" and a "divine vision"; it focused his feelings and character on the ideal of heroic conduct; it stood by him "at fearsome moments." This Erechtheus feeling (to give it a name) defined itself early, long before it became the motive in his practical humanism.

When Richards returned to Clifton's Upper School in fall 1908 he dropped Latin and Greek, which affirms his remark that he "never did much in classics at Clifton, unless I had to."<sup>27</sup> Latin and Greek were required to qualify for Oxford or Cambridge, as both set entrance examinations in those subjects (Cambridge kept the Greek requirement until 1919). Despite his middle-age conversion to classical Greek, which he relearned to translate Plato and

Homer, Richards never conceded the benefits of a classical education. He once spent a chapter trying to demolish the paragraph of John Stuart Mill's that begins: "Even as mere languages, no modern European language is so valuable to the intellect as those of Greece and Rome, on account of their regular and complicated structure." Mill argued that grammar was the "beginning of the analysis of the thinking process," contained the "most elementary part of logic," and was the "means by which the forms of language are made to correspond with the universal forms of thought."<sup>28</sup> Richards' whole effort went to prove that thought was "never tied to linguistic categories" and that its "attempts to picture itself did not control it." Studies in logic and language have aims that do not often coincide, and there is nothing inherent in grammar or syntax that is also "elementary" in logic. Syntax is a system of classification, not a logic: a single thought form can take different sentence forms; a sentence form can be used for widely different thought forms. Only by forced wrenching can linguistic categories can be made to correspond to the logical forms of thought, since those categories (e.g., the Latin and Greek cases) are hardly universal. For Richards—and this is one of the principal themes in his career—linguistic and extralinguistic *contexts* are far more important in determining the meaning and logic of words than their grammatical categories. Hence, the acquisition of the "strange syntax patterns" and the numerous "grammatical distinctions" of Latin and Greek, far from being "valuable initial disciplines," are for most students "actively stultifying."<sup>29</sup>

In the event, whether young Richards bolted from Latin and Greek in sheer confusion or whether he had just fallen too far behind other boys in those subjects, he decided to follow his older brothers into the Military and Engineering Side. "We were advised that it was better staffed than the others—especially in math & sciences and English & I had not then any hankering after Latin or Greek."<sup>30</sup> The boy, in delicate health, might also have desired to feel the touch of the heroic temper, to share the vision of the glittering "lightning of spears that shine." Before World War I, a boy could see a hero's life in the warlike temperament in a way

that may be lost to later generations.

In 1909–10 Richards switched again, this time to the Modern Side. His grades shot up and he was at the top of his class (r/25,1/26, 5/21). With his shifting about—he had now crossed all three fields of study—perhaps the "cultivation of individual tastes" best summarizes Richards' years at Clifton. "I was playing around, largely, at my school. They were very good to me there and let me have my own way." Because of his recent bout with tuberculosis, he was permitted to pace himself. "I was lucky in my teachers. Some of them were very, very good. They let me live in the library, where I entertained myself. They were sensible enough to realize that though I wasn't sitting listening to things being said in class, I was getting an education—which was very unusual for a school in those days."<sup>31</sup>

Of the Clifton staff Richards' most influential instructor was the head of the Modern Side, Charles Hickson Spence, known by the boys as "Cabby" Spence for his unkempt appearance. Spence was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, and an active member of the Historical Association in London and first chairman of its local branch in Bristol. He was said to have walked all over Europe. He taught history, geography, and civics, on which he wrote a manual for secondary schools. But he was "a Master of English . . . really," and his favorite subject was poetry: "Spence knew literature very, very well." Frequently he turned aside from set assignments and recited poems, choosing and commenting upon every kind, and letting the class follow along as best it could. (Spence himself published a slim volume of ninetyish verse in 1912.) Richards remembered Spence's readings of Dante's *Purgatorio* over the course of a year and William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere*.<sup>32</sup> Richards became a classroom figure when Spence asked what flowers Athens held sacred. Knowing his Swinburne, the boy chanted from *Erechtheus*:

Violet and olive leaf purple and hoary,  
Song wreath and story the fairest of fame,  
Flowers that the winter can blast not or bend,  
A Light upon earth as the sun's own flame,  
A name as his name,

Athens, a praise without end.

Richards' impressions of Spence are supported by remarks in an obituary notice in 1912, where G. H. Leonard wrote that Spence "made ancient Bristol alive with Kings and Queens, monks and merchants, and sunburnt sailors going down the Avon out to sea."<sup>33</sup>

In 1909–10, while a student at Clifton, Richards at sixteen taught his first classes. The Extension Movement (Adult School) in Bristol enlisted Ernest H. C. Wethered to lead a group of classes on major works of literature. Educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, graduated with a bachelor's and a law degree in 1899, Wethered embarked on a long and distinguished career as a barrister, county judge, and public servant; he was awarded an O.B.E. in 1920. Wethered had led a small mountaineering group that included the Richards family to Finhaut in the Alps, and Richards and he soon became friends.<sup>34</sup> The young and fatherless Richards could admire and emulate a stalwart, energetic citizen just fifteen years his senior, a model of practical involvement. "He was an important, a *very* important influence on me at one time."<sup>35</sup> Wethered, for his part, was sufficiently impressed by Richards, with his interest in books and growing maturity, to let him have a course of his own.

In the Adult School, Richards chose to teach the Book of Job, a book to which he would return again and again, notably following the reform of the undergraduate core curriculum at Harvard in 1945, when he taught Homer, the Old Testament, and Plato, and in a series of lectures and essays in the 1970s, culminating in *Beyond*. His drama *Job's Comforting* (1971) is the Book of Job versified. His mature readings mete out a stern rebuke to Jahveh—but also to the Christian godhead and Homer's gods for their treatment of humankind; Richards was nothing if not ecumenical in his denunciation of the divine. But even as a very young teacher, he said, he was "highly charged with revolutionary-atheistical sentiments by induction from Shelley and Swinburne," while Byron's *Cain*, too, "fitted in finely."<sup>36</sup> He had already refused to be confirmed; now he was making a public stand. Jahveh was "just

what I wanted" on whom to pin the world's ills. At solemn moments he would recite stanzas from *Childe Harold*:

No more—no more—Oh! never more on me  
The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,  
Which out of all the lovely things we see  
Extracts emotions beautiful and new.

[1.214]

To Richards' amazement the Bristol folk greeted his fiery attacks on Jahveh with pleasant English toleration. These classroom experiences would have their instructive effect. Richards became one of the great lecturers of his time, but later he was not interested in iconoclasm for its own sake. He reached for practical effect, not sensational response.

Although such episodes contribute to our knowledge of the formation of Richards' character and taste, one should not pigeonhole his reading of bits and pieces of information. Obviously he was moving about in a spontaneous, undirected way through literature. However, there were bonds between poetry, philosophy, romanticism, and the ancients. One of these bonds was his ardent belief in nonviolence, which he would later trace from Socrates in the *Crito* through Matthew ("Resist not evil"; 5:40), on through Shelley, "Blake, Tolstoy and the Friends."<sup>37</sup> Perhaps teaching in the Adult School and the association with the Friends strengthened this bond. Another deep current in Richards' taste was the impassioned, idealistic poetry and poetic prose of the English romantics and their successors of radical vision. Before Cambridge, Richards had "soaked" himself not only in Swinburne, but also in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Ruskin, Morris, and Yeats. "I knew Swinburne by heart—and Shelley much better."<sup>38</sup>

Of all literary figures, Shelley was the *fons et origo* of his idealism and always occupied an honored place in his private pantheon. "Mont Blanc," the "Ode to the West Wind," "Julian and Maddalo," the "Hymn of Apollo," from which he was fond of quoting

I am the eye with which the Universe

Beholds itself and knows itself divine

*Prometheus Unbound*, and *Adonais*—these poems were a continual source of inspiration. Richards absorbed Shelley's republicanism, his modified pacifism and atheism, his Platonism, his belief in the "mutual dependence"<sup>39</sup> of things. He was drawn by, even where he could not believe in, the Shelleyan-Plotinian One; as transcendent Power or its form of Intellectual Beauty, the One acts on the mind (or else the mind is a spark or fragment of the One) and leads it to truth and justice. Likewise, the politics and utopianism of *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas* engaged his moral conscience. He would look to Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* for insight into poetic organicity and universality. Richards never ceased to believe that, given the right programs and poetry, "The world's great age begins anew." In *Design for Escape: World Education through Modern Media*, published in 1968, he welcomed television, videotape, and worldwide, satellite-distributed, audio-visual programming with a line from *Prometheus Unbound*, "And arts, though unimagined, yet to be" (3.3.56); and he gave examples for using these instruments of mass technology in teaching how to read—which for Richards was always a lesson in how to think. Also, Richards said, "Yeats's *Ideas of Good and Evil* mattered a lot to me early." There, in the essay on "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," he read of Yeats's "unshakable belief": "I thought that whatever of philosophy has been made poetry is alone permanent, and that one should begin to arrange it in some regular order, rejecting nothing as the make-believe of the poets."<sup>40</sup> Richards took up this injunction concerning Shelley in three essays in the 1950s; two of them went into his testamentary *Beyond*.

Connected to the idealism of the poets was the Idealism of the philosophers that lingered on at Cambridge during Richards' undergraduate years. He rejected this uppercase Idealism and its absolutist claims under the impact of science and the new critical philosophy. The idealism of the poets remained, however, when he was ushering Cambridge Realism into semantics and literary criticism. This idealism became less visible (it was only deeper below the surface) when he was borrowing from C. S.

Sherrington's neurophysiology, from the epistemology of Russell and Moore, the experimental psychology of Pavlov and Watson, and the pragmatism of William James. Thus, W. H. N. Hothrop characterizes *Principles of Literary Criticism* as "an attempt to chisel" the doctrine of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* "into the marble of positivism."<sup>41</sup> The idealist strain emerged in Richards' *Coleridge on Imagination* and studies of Plato, with their interest in dialectical reason, and informed his poetry, drama, and *Beyond*. He had not turned his back on instrumental reason, empiricism, and science. Rather, he said, the "idealism was there from the first."<sup>42</sup> He saw himself as seeking ways of reconciling the idealism of the poets with the analytical empiricism of science, partly through a "multiple-viewpoint position." If native British philosophy gave Richards the idea that "Everything is what it is and not another thing" (Bishop Butler), the idealism of the poets gave him an equally strong belief in the relatedness of things, in principles of selection and growth, in dialectic, in organicity, in a synthesis of human purposes. "Everything is what it is," answered Richards, "through not being any other thing."<sup>43</sup> In Richards, poetic idealism and scientific progress could point towards the same Utopian goal. It was Richards' subtlety and daring that led him continually to combine and disjoin these two master concepts, liberating him from exclusive control by either. Antidogmatism and conciliation were two of his central intellectual characteristics.

If personal idealism stood out as one of the strongest traits in Richards' character, it reinforced one yet more basic, his optimism. One does not become an optimist; the quality is either rooted early or not at all. Richards' optimism was so deep it never wore thin. His mature mind offers an example of an optimism born of, and carried above, a concrete awareness of the world's difficulties and pain. The death of his father, his own severe case of tuberculosis when he was fourteen, and two more attacks and year-long convalescences within a decade were the personal traumas of his youth, while World War I was to be its great shaping public event. The war may be one of the main reasons why Richards persistently demonstrated a strong dislike of history. Not only had history led to, and been summed up by, this event, but his own

illness prevented him from participating in it, so that it remained a forever isolated and negatively idealized experience. One could say that Richards was a pessimist on the subject of history because he felt such pessimism could easily be justified and one could do nothing about it. One could only do something about the future.

Two other traits, courage and endurance, sustained this optimism. Aristotle said courage is the most important of the virtues because without it one cannot put the others into action. Richards' courage has a storybook quality. The sickly boy pulled himself together by climbing mountains, and then he kept climbing mountains through life, including what he called the "twenty-thousanders" in the Himalayas. Americans may be reminded of young Teddy Roosevelt, who overcame physical infirmity by an arduous regimen of exercise. Asked to give his recollections of Richards' traits in youth, his elder brother Kenneth listed "courage" first, then "honesty," "catholic tastes," and "puckish humor."<sup>44</sup> The same courage enabled him to enter upon a new and hazardous intellectual career in his forties, the development of Basic English and introductory reading designs, primarily in China and the United States; to turn to writing drama and poetry in his sixties; to try again in his mid eighties to promote his English language programs in China—he *had* succeeded in convincing the former Chinese government in 1937. One then recalls the boy who was moved to tears by heroic values, the Erechthean feeling, and the sublime that was the bright thread of his youth. But Richards' tough-minded qualities were tempered by extraordinary gentleness. Many have attested to this trait in their encounters with him; it also became a kind of humility before the magnitude of the work he set himself to do.

Clifton was "an extremely good school," and Richards spoke fondly of it as much for what it inadvertently did *not* do as for what it did. He left in his "eagerness to go to Cambridge, to Magdalene."<sup>45</sup> He had heard much of Cambridge through Wethered and Spence. A year ahead of time, in 1911, he took a scholarship examination in history given by Magdalene, won a £20 exhibition (25 March), and was admitted as a pensioner (24 May).<sup>46</sup> £20 was a relatively small scholarship, "not much," said his brother

Kenneth, "but [it] made the difference."<sup>47</sup> Richards was in the sixth form but skipped perhaps half of his last year and went up in October 1911.

It was an auspicious year. G. E. Moore was just returning after seven years. Bertrand Russell, after a long break, was beginning a five-year fellowship at Trinity. The twenty-two-year-old Ludwig Wittgenstein, in order to study with Russell, also arrived in the fall of 1911. Richards once said that he shared in the general nostalgia for the time before the Great War. "The world seemed hopeful and solid," wrote Russell; "we all felt convinced that nineteenth-century progress would continue, and that we ourselves should be able to contribute something of value. For those who have been young since 1914 it must be difficult to imagine the happiness of those days."<sup>48</sup>

## 2 Cambridge

In 1911 Magdalene was one of Cambridge's smallest colleges; about twenty-five undergraduates entered each year. Its buildings preserved the atmosphere of the college's monastic origins; they were modest, "plain in thy neatness"—except for the Pepysian Library, with its elegant neoclassical facade. On a red cartouche over its central arch, painted in black letters on a gold ribbon, was Pepys' motto from Cicero: *Mens cujusque is est quisque* (One's mind is what one is). Richards said it was "the prime utterance point of what may well claim to be the most inexhaustibly enheartening facade in Cambridge." Pepys chose the motto for the suggestive links between Neoplatonist metaphysics, Ciceronian classicism, and St. Paul; he entered the college in 1651, "when Cambridge and Magdalene had been full of very sensible and exciting Neo-Platonists." In 1975 Richards took the Latin passage for an exercise in multiple translation. One attempt was: "Our minds are our true selves," that is, the mind is the determining factor in the personality. Each of Richards' versions drew further implications from the text, and the last placed it within Pepys' personal situation, that of a retired secretary of the Admiralty looking back upon his career. In a similar retrospective mood, Richards read his remarks in Pepys' honor at a Magdalene dinner sixty-four years after he had entered the college. For him the motto had been "an invitation to endless reflection" and still spoke to him of "what is within," the library above and behind it, and the inner life.<sup>1</sup> The bookplate that Richards designed for his personal library and donated to Magdalene bears the image of an eye and a motto from Plotinus: Look Within.<sup>2</sup>

In his first year Richards lived out of college on Castle Hill. Then he suffered his second serious attack of tuberculosis and was away from Cambridge during 1912-13. He recuperated on Dartmoor in Devonshire. When he returned in the fall of 1913, he lived on the first floor, front room, at 7 Portugal Place. Richards was already an amateur rock-climber and made successful night

climbs of the chimneys and towers of Magdalene and other colleges. In his last year he moved into rooms on the top floor over the main gate, making the roofs of Magdalene easy of access.<sup>3</sup> In a photograph journal, "Magdalene College Roofs and Climbs" (1915), he captured the mood of the suspenseful nights of 1915: "lights out everywhere in expectation of a Zeppelin raid."<sup>4</sup> He joined the Cambridge Union and passed much time in its library (which has since been removed). "A browsing room can remake an undergraduate," he said of such a room for Magdalene in 1977: "[the student] goes in and comes out another person."<sup>5</sup>

## A. C. Benson

Richards read history in his first year at Magdalene; his supervisor was the "fervent Liberal" Frank Salter,<sup>6</sup> but, as we shall see, Richards did not take to history. He received a second, extraordinary supervision in "literature and essay-writing" under Arthur Christopher Benson.

A popular Edwardian literary figure, Benson stood at the belletristic pole of the Cambridge world. At the other pole were the scholars A. W. Ward, H. M. Chadwick, and A. W. Verrall (Edward Bullough, who offered a comprehensive course on aesthetics at Cambridge in 1907, remained somewhat apart). Benson joined Arthur Quiller-Couch, Mansfield Forbes, Bullough, and Chadwick in advocating a separate field in English studies; and he spoke with prophetic clarity: "there is plenty of real unfocussed interest in literature at Cambridge."<sup>7</sup> He became president (vice-master) of Magdalene in 1912 and master in 1915. When he died in 1925, his will provided the new English Faculty Library with its core collection and Magdalene with funds for a permanent fellowship in literature, to which Richards was first elected.

Benson was the son of an archbishop of Canterbury and the nephew of the Utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick. He had been an Eton master for nineteen years before resigning to edit

Queen Victoria's letters. His attachment to Magdalene seems appropriate, because he, like Pepys, wrote a famous diary. It fills one hundred eighty notebooks and has been called "one of the most extensive and detailed private records of a man's thoughts and observations of his times that has ever been preserved."<sup>8</sup> The diary reveals a deeply torn soul. He could be the entertaining friend and, said Richards, "the most engaging conversationalist I have ever known." But Benson was also a "sorely distressed" and melancholy don who suffered periodical fits of depression.<sup>9</sup> Writing helped him through his troubles. His fifty-odd books include short stories, verse, religious reflections, literary criticism, and biographies of Tennyson, Rossetti, Fitzgerald, Ruskin, and Pater; four volumes of family reminiscences; and essays on such topics as "Books," "On Growing Older," "Charm," "Sincerity," and "The Criticism of Others." He wrote in a flaccid style, as if to dissipate an unspent tension, and he never revised. His better efforts were his literary biographies and his autobiographical sketches in *Memories and Friends* and *Leaves of the Tree*. Incredibly tedious were his familiar "story-essays" after the style of Stevenson and Lamb, though his principles were watered-down Arnold and Pater. *The Hill of Trouble*, *Beside Still Waters*, *The Altar Tire*, *Thy Rod and Thy Staff*—the titles by themselves convey the comforting religious tone of the "philosopher-and-friend of an essentially second-rate reading public."<sup>10</sup> Benson's books earned him a fortune. *Trom a College Window* sold well in England and America and attracted summer tourists to Magdalene "requesting to be shown the very college window through which the Don looked out upon the world."<sup>11</sup> But Beerbohm parodied his prose and drew a cartoon of "Mr. A. C. Benson embracing the obvious" in the form of a fat Edwardian lady, and Wyndham Lewis "blasted" him in the first issue of *Blast* (1914).<sup>12</sup>

By writing twenty letters a day, Benson gratefully nurtured his audience, his "parishioners."<sup>13</sup> He did not expect that his counsels or his criticism would be taken seriously and probably did not care. His criticism was neither Arnold's "criticism of life" nor Irving Babbitt's "Inner Check," nor even Pater's "counted number of pulses" in a "variegated, dramatic life." Despite the many books,

he did not regard himself as a critic at all. His genius was for observation and that was saved for the diary, which he could not publish.

In his reactions to Benson, Richards perhaps learned to distrust "bogus entities" (*MM*, 198), "phantom aesthetic states" (*PLC*, [chap. 2](#)), sentimentality (*PC*, [chap. 6](#)), the "personal situation of the reader" (*PLC*, 239), and the biographical part of criticism (second Clark Lecture). Still, Richards said Benson was a "godsend." Benson gave encouragement and fatherly attention, carefully correcting each weekly essay and demanding a full explanation of every opinion Richards set forth. Benson would ask "me very slowly, 'Do—you—prefer—Swinburne— to—*Shelley*?' No one ever asked me that before, *that way*."<sup>14</sup>

Benson's references to Richards in his diary are numerous and progressively positive:

Thursday, Nov. 9th, 1911. Then to Hall where as usual all spoilt by Salter's ill-tempered arguing. He is overworked, I think, and all the irritable and prejudiced part of his mind comes out. Jones was not conciliatory either. The point is that Richards an able fellow an exhibitioner freshman declares himself *an Anarchist*—he says he won't take up any profession, or accept any payment by Govt. He means to till a plot of land and preach non-resistance. He's a silly boy with a mixture of Shelley and [Edward] Carpenter [the Victorian socialist and writer on sexuality]. Meanwhile he makes no sacrifices, uses the ordinary comforts and securities, and holds these doctrines. He wants to change his Tripos: he can't bear History bee. it is the record of the Government, and that is all immoral. Salter's line is that he should be encouraged and fooled to the top of his bent.

Friday, Nov. 10th. I treated Richards respectfully and found him a sincere lover of liberty, even unreasonable liberty; and when I hinted at Swinburne's sense of liberty being a literary sense, I thought he was going to cry! He's an interesting creature, anyhow.

Monday, Nov. 20th. The odd Richards, the votary of liberty, came and talked.

"Odd" shows that Benson found something to be noticed here, and the word saves "votary of liberty," another prophetic phrase, from

being just a tutor's braying. Sometime during these years, Richards would come to discipline himself; one thinks back to his diatribes before his adult class at Bristol:

13th Feb. 1912. Tuesday. Then Lapsley lunched, with Tedder and Richards—the latter talked frankly and wisely, without any self-consciousness.

16th Oct. 1913. Richards came in and told me about his long illness—tuberculosis—he is an interesting fellow, under the shadow of invalidism at present. Very able and full of interests.

18th Feb. 1914. Brophy and Richards our two ablest men here to lunch—very pleasant.

17th March 1914. Mallory and Richards to lunch—it was curious to see Richards who is very able, well-read, thoughtful and a delightful creature too, full of modesty, showing up so feebly as regarded conversation etc. by the side of the shallow-minded, pretentious, self-assured and yet entirely pleasant and nice Mallory.

Friday 6th Nov. 1914. Men to lunch—Roxburgh and Richards—Richards said that he was tempted into philosophy by Dickinson, and found it all a sort of *algebra*.<sup>15</sup>

One time Richards had to be disciplined. Someone had scaled the Hall clocktower and suspended a dummy. Richards had a reputation for rock-climbing and "had been complained of by a policeman for climbing a chimney-stack the other day." Benson and the local constable solved the mystery easily (28 Feb. 1915). Benson wrote in his diary: "Dickens, Roxburgh,<sup>16</sup> and Richards, three intellectuals, had signalled themselves by suspending a sort of dummy from the weathercock. They would not dare do such a thing if any of the ordinary bloods were up— and it is a silly and impertinent thing for men, whose scholarships have been expressly prolonged, to do just now" (4 March 1915; Richards' £20 exhibition had been extended a year on account of his absence from Cambridge in 1912-13). "B. Dickens to lunch, gave him a piece of my mind about the Richards episode. I maintained that the men whom the College *paid* were not the men to rag" (15 March 1915). Benson quickly forgot his anger; he obviously appreciated one of

his "two ablest men." He may have related his conversations with his friend Henry James at the Athenaeum. Richards said that whenever Hardy, an honorary fellow, came to dine at Magdalene, Benson would alert him to sit forward so that he could "see Hardy close up."<sup>17</sup>

## Aesthetic Criticism

Benson's literary concepts reflected the turn-of-the-century trend in criticism, which, given certain emphases, was variously characterized as aesthetic, impressionistic, decadent, or symbolist. The "aesthetic" ideology behind these labels had its roots in the Pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne, and Pater, reached its zenith in the 1890s, and lasted, or rather developed, up to the war, when it became something else. More understood and appreciated now than several decades ago, it was a direct and powerful forerunner of modernism.<sup>18</sup> Though Richards explicitly repudiated it, aestheticism shaped certain contours in his first books, and through him, American New Criticism.<sup>19</sup>

The aesthetes rebelled against Victorian rationalism, notions of social progress, and ethical idealism; they mocked self-righteousness, complacency, and contemporary taste.<sup>20</sup> "Any man, Keats once remarked, can be torn to pieces if you take him on his weak sides; and so can any cultural milieu," comments David Perkins. "However, it was not satire that killed the Victorian consensus of ideals, but the joint effects of what might be termed cultural disappointment and the need for novelty."<sup>21</sup> The values of the new aesthetic ideology included skepticism and relativism amidst the flux of experience; a subjectivizing tendency, verging on solipsism; a premium on energy of perception and a mistrust of philosophical absolutes; the assumption of self-authority and creative freedom; aesthetic autonomy and the divorce between nature (or science) and art; formalism and craftsmanship as opposed to "genius" and "inspiration"; flight from the drab and an emphasis on the remote, the novel, the unbidden, and the

irrational, but also (as in Arthur Symonds, Benson, and many decadent writers) on the familiar seen either in its uncanny aspect or from a strongly empathic point of view.<sup>22</sup> In addition, one finds a blurring of the line between criticism and creation; the spurning of social concerns and defiance of middleclass morality (muted in Benson); faith in art; and hedonism.

"Beauty" (1906) contains the matrix of Benson's literary values and illustrates the aesthetic ideology. Beauty is an "emotion," the "sense of wonder," which "arouses a strange yearning for we know not what."<sup>23</sup> Not in the object but in the mood, the beautiful comes and goes "with a whimsical determination of its own" and "contradicts all material laws." It interrupts daily life and work, with which it is contrasted. Since the appreciation of beauty requires a special temperament, "many tranquil, wholesome, equable natures" do not feel it. This is the decadent strain, which also betrays itself in Benson's fascination with beauty linked to suffering, masochistic pleasure ("delightful pain"), and death. He stands beside the grave of a loved one and is entranced by a "strange spirit," so that "the delicate petals of the very funeral wreaths should draw me into a rapturous contemplation of their fresh curves, their lovely intricacy, their penetrating fragrance." Benson recommends nature as beauty's likeliest retreat, but no, in moments of sorrow, even "the smile on the face of nature has something poisonous, almost maddening about it"; nature is indifferent and "tends to replace rather than to heal." Woe to the person who pursues the life of aesthetic perceptions for their own sake—Rossetti, Pater, J. A. Symonds dared—because the mind becomes surfeited, perception dulled, and the result is "loss of balance and proportion" and "pessimism." Benson characterizes beauty as a kind of religious "rapture," a "call to the spirit to come forth, like the voice which summoned Lazarus from the rock-hewn sepulchre," a bold image of the impounded sensibility: from one "death" beauty reconciles us to another "death," which is only the first in self-transcendence. Its "secret" is compared to a religious "mystery" and its emotions are like "direct messages from God." Beauty redeems the soul from isolation and earthly bondage; it is "a beckoning."

The weekly tutorial with Benson may serve as a reminder that, however much Richards owed to modernism and helped explicate its masterworks, his taste had not been formed by the great modernist writers. He was barely a student generation behind them—eight years younger than Pound, only five years younger than Eliot. Like them, his taste was essentially formed in the late Victorian-Edwardian era. Anti-biographical in spirit, Richards responded only briefly and evasively to a question on his "early critical reading": Yeats's *Ideas of Good and Evil*, "and earlier still Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge but I hadn't occasion to *write* about them or about Swinburne ... (I had done most of my literary critical reading at school: Ruskin, Morris, Saintsbury . . . etc.)."<sup>24</sup> School would mean Clifton. He had not occasion to *write* because he did not think seriously of entering criticism until 1918-19, and, by that time, it was through the doors of philosophy.

Richards' list does not give prominence to aesthetic writers and critics. His scope of interest was always broader than would fit comfortably within the aestheticist program. Before searching into his immediate critical background and the aesthetic ideology, then, we should stress his deep kinship with the mid-Victorian generation, with Ruskin, Morris, and Arnold, who, though unmentioned here, figures in positions of strength in *Science and Poetry*. With these critics, Richards believed that great art should be, and could be, for everyone to understand and appreciate, that a purely elitist culture must prove disastrous in modern society. Ruskin said that he was "not engaged in the selfish cultivation of critical acumen, but in ardent endeavor to spread the love and knowledge of art among all classes." Arnold urged that culture "seeks to do away with classes."<sup>25</sup> In like spirit, Richards wanted to raise the level of reading so that works of art might exert their formative influence on character. The "decline of speech," skill in communication as preparation for participatory democracy, the effect of modern media on mass society, these were among his earliest social themes. He has been labeled both a formalist and a psychological critic, but he said in *Principles* that the moral theory of art "has the most great minds behind it," and he professed his belief in a liberal, rationalist humanism.<sup>26</sup> Richards shared Arnold's

vision of the power of art to refine one's perception of what is lasting and profound in human life, to liberate potentialities within the self, and to put oneself at the service of the perfection of culture. We note a biographical parallel too, for, like Ruskin and Morris (and many highly creative individuals), Richards underwent a dramatic shift in self-orientation in his forties. In a kind of global crusade he devoted the second half of his life to elementary and foreign language training, believing that without literacy people were condemned to social and economic misery, while foreign language training would promote international communication and understanding. There are moments of moral compassion, urgency of tone, and prophecy in Richards' social and educational criticism that resemble the pages of *Unto This Last*. The fact that Richards invents his own system and language to convey certain mid-Victorian values should not conceal his deep indebtedness. If one of his mottos was "Look Within," he said his other was "Wither Man?" Together—the inward-searching and the outward-doing—together they "sum it up."<sup>27</sup>

To return to Richards' immediate critical background and the aesthetic ideology, many of its fundamental tenets were articulated by Walter Pater—Benson wrote his biography.<sup>28</sup> Pater identified the modern with the "relative spirit," which was the offspring of the "sciences of observation." Arnold, among others, had said as much, but Pater's reasoning led to skeptical, personalist conclusions:

What the moralist asks is, Shall we gain or lose by surrendering human life to the relative spirit? Experience answers that the dominant tendency of life is to turn ascertained truth into a dead letter, to make us all the phlegmatic servants of routine. The relative spirit, by its constant dwelling on the more fugitive conditions or circumstances of things, breaking through a thousand rough and brutal classifications, and giving elasticity to inflexible principles, begets an intellectual *finesse* of which the ethical result is a delicate and tender justice in the criticism of human life.<sup>29</sup>

The absolute spirit is embodied in "ancient" thought (classicism), the "necessary formula" (reifications), a "correct abstract definition of beauty," and belief in "[h]ard and abstract moralities" (e.g., the

Ten Commandments).<sup>30</sup> It abstracts from the vital ground of experience and freezes particular, partial truths "once for all," whereas the modern or relative spirit is directed close to the flux of experience, is forever discovering new truths, and its investigative faculty possesses the "power of distinguishing and fixing delicate and fugitive detail." Whereas Arnold spoke of the Grand Style before which other styles give place, Pater argues for aesthetic pluralism: "beauty exists in many forms ... all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal." Under the aspect of science, the relative spirit has entered moral philosophy; it has shown that character "merges into temperament" and that man's "physical organism" is not simply conditioned by the present, but "by remote laws of inheritance," and further, by the "mind of the race" and "character of the age," which "sway him this way or that through the medium of language and current ideas"—the latter point is stressed by Yeats in a transcendentalist vocabulary in *Ideas of Good and Evil*.<sup>31</sup> Arnold's moral definition of poetry as a "criticism of life" is turned about into a defense of relativism and loses its bite; "for Pater all moral problems tended to become special cases."<sup>32</sup> Among conflicting codes, the relative-minded person acts with a "delicate and tender justice." Delicacy and "elasticity" are akin to Arnold's harmony and flexibility, virtues he associated with Hellenism. But Hellenism is the necessary balance to Hebraism, the residual puritanism overly weighted in modern English character. Pater's appeal is made not on behalf of balance, but on behalf of Hellenism.

These aesthetic and moral issues were not Pater's only departures from Arnold. In *The Renaissance* Pater begins by citing Arnold's first principle, objectivity, "to see the object as in itself it really is," and then withdraws from it. The preliminary step must be to "know one's own impression as it really is." The relative spirit has revealed that objects are not invested with mass and volume; they dissolve into impressions that are "unstable, flickering, inconsistent, [and] which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them." Nothing stays, and yet one should recognize the advantage in the predicament; nature itself provides the clue to an indwelling relativism. Consciousness is

likened to a "solitary prisoner," but also to a "tremulous wisp" of vapor "constantly re-forming itself" over an ever-flowing stream<sup>33</sup> Pater's first principle is the phenomenology of the impression in all its fragile beauty.

Pater defended the epistemological gap on neo-Kantian and Hegelian grounds, placing himself among the idealists of the late nineteenth century (soon to be repudiated by Moore and Russell). Yet he is equally capable of being interpreted as a Pyrrhonist. It seems to depend on whether one stresses the conclusion to *The Renaissance* or its preface, which was written some four years later.<sup>34</sup> The former, especially when detached from the book preceding it, is radically skeptical and hedonist in outlook and became the aesthete's manifesto; the latter gives scope to history, analysis, and method, not as ends in themselves, but as means of developing the sensibility, the better to engage experience.

The method begins with the individual temperament: "What is this song or picture, the engaging personality in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?"<sup>35</sup> These various "responses" become the "original facts" with which to commence the formal analysis. When the critic knows the "defined feeling," he disengages it from its origins in the work of art. Pater clearly recognized the aesthetic object; one must define beauty "in the most concrete terms possible" and discover the artist's "active principle," "*une vraie verite*," as it were, a crystallographic "*virtue*." Pater means an informing essence, the expressive standpoint, the style of vision that balances all the component parts. As Saintsbury interpreted the method, the critic should expose mind and sense like a camera plate, then "assist the reception of the impression by cunning lenses of comparison and history, and hypothesis; shelter it with a cabinet of remembered reading and corroborative imagination; develop it by meditation, and print it off with the light of style."<sup>36</sup> The critic attains his immediate end when he discloses the "formula" manifesting itself throughout an artist's works, a school of artists, or an entire age like the Renaissance.

For Pater, the final end returns to the aesthetic temperament,

where again there is unresolved tension. On the side of the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, the value of any single impression is measured by its capacity to intensify consciousness; Pater is "obsessed by metaphors of 'focus' and 'convergence' and the momentary concentration of vital energies."<sup>37</sup> The object makes less difference than the intensity by which it is captured and embraced: "any exquisite passion," "any contribution to knowledge," "any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours." Pater speaks of the refining fire of experience, not the recollected and assimilated "fruit of experience": "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."<sup>38</sup> Yet this famous sentence might equally present the goal of the book's preface, where the influence of Burckhardt shows both in methodology and in standard. Pater calls for the "charm of *ascesis*" (severe training, self-limitation, aesthetic economy of means) and champions the Renaissance personality, "many-sided, centralised, complete."<sup>39</sup> It is largely the spirit behind the preface to *The Renaissance* that brings Richards to include Pater with Arnold among the moral critics in *Principles*, though admitting that Pater is a "somewhat unexpected adherent." Richards belauds the final paragraph of Pater's essay on "Style" (where Pater distinguishes good from great art on moral grounds): "No better brief emotive account of the conditions under which an experience has value could be desired."<sup>40</sup>

Whatever side of Pater one stresses—and the opposition should not be exaggerated—he was an artist at the same time as he was a critic; and his criticism everywhere expressed a unique temperament, a "formula" Saintsbury defined as "a passion of pleasure, passing into an action of inquiry."<sup>41</sup> If he was no constant guide to method, his influence on criticism was hardly deleterious. A writer responding to a work of art and gifted with style might create another work of art, something far better than routine technical criticism. However, the virtue could be pushed to extremes. If criticism was art, then like art it might not need any subject other than itself. This was the paradox in Wilde's *The Critic as Artist*. In lesser hands, the object of critical analysis might be merely a pretext for an expressive outpouring. Pater warned

against lopsided subjectivism, just as he warned against positing abstract notions of beauty. These warnings went unheeded by many of his imitators, including Arthur Christopher Benson.<sup>42</sup>

Benson was not Richards' only teacher to be influenced by the aesthetic ideology: G. E. Moore, who is discussed in [chapters 4](#) and [5](#), made aestheticism philosophically respectable by attaching it to an ethical theory. Four writers of the Edwardian period illustrate the twists and turns of aestheticism: the psychologist and theorist Edward Bullough, the philosopher and prime minister A. J. Balfour, and the literary critics George Saintsbury and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Richards said that he "did know Bullough quite well and was much interested in his suggestion about psychical distance" and that he also read Saintsbury.<sup>43</sup> Quiller-Couch was a long-time colleague in Cambridge English.

From 1905 to 1908 at Cambridge, employing a method of introspective psychology, Edward Bullough conducted experiments on human response to color values. His "Modern Conception of Aesthetics," a series of lectures given in 1907, "breathe[s] the fresh optimism which the new science of psychology brought into this as into other fields at the turn of the century."<sup>44</sup> Acknowledging Pater's critique of abstract notions of beauty, Bullough attempts to circumvent it by showing that aesthetics had made great strides in the previous half-century and that Pater had confused aesthetics and criticism, the one a "science" of the aesthetic experience, the other an "art" that helped to evoke aesthetic experiences "in duller and less appreciative minds." Like Pater, he finds evidence of aesthetic qualities "as much, nay even more, in the subjective attitude of the recipient as in the objective features of the thing itself."<sup>45</sup> He is best known for his idea of "psychical distance," by which he explored what would become one of Richards' key problems, namely, the apparently contradictory relations between personal empathy and impersonality in artistic creation and aesthetic reception. The idea of distance goes back through Paterian asceticism and Schiller to Aristotle on tragedy. In Bullough's theory, an appropriately involved response cannot explain away the personal element through detachment; a proper response must give full play to

feeling while curtailing the presence of overly personal feelings, practical considerations, and what Coleridge called the "agreeable" as opposed to the "beautiful." To this ideal mental condition Bullough gave the name "distance" and admitted degrees of it. Broadly speaking, distance applies to any type of response to art, from idealism to realism. Overdistancing the aesthetic object on the part of the artist might lead to "improbability," "artificiality," and "emptiness," and may be illustrated by highly allegorized art, abstract formalism, or general truths without sufficient concreteness in presentation. Underdistancing shows up in expository, illustrative, ecclesiastical art, literature with too much practical appeal (or where the author shows special pleading), crude naturalism, and the bald sentimentality of show tunes. Bullough's "antinomy of Distance" argues for "utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance," and thus has a "knife-edge character."<sup>46</sup> Art is successful when the artist risks the most minimal distance without losing it altogether. The world in all its sensuousness requires but the thinnest veil of illusion. Style is the weaving of the veil of illusion. Bullough emphasizes style in the creation of art, in appreciation, and in analytical criticism. He pays much less attention to content; the nature and status of a specific literary work receives little systematic treatment.

Bullough's psychological distance is a primary attribute of what he termed "aesthetic consciousness." He replaced the ancient tripartite division of willing, thinking, and feeling, which was a "psychological monstrosity," and distinguished four modes of consciousness: the practical, scientific, ethical, and aesthetic. He further distinguished four aesthetic attitudes, each based on its own premise: objective qualities, physiological effects, association of ideas, and "suggested or projected character qualities."<sup>47</sup> But the effect of the schema was to seal the work of art within its own quadrant, a proposition against which Richards would rebel violently. The aesthetic mode "cannot get beyond its own confines," writes Bullough, "and ceases to be aesthetic as soon as it attempts to do so: the contact with realities degrades it almost at once into sheer sensationalism and moral paganism of a peculiarly perverse kind." The aesthetic mode has no practical utility, does

not deal in "knowledge," is anticomunal, is "essentially *individual*" Repudiating the "weak, effeminate, morbid" side of aestheticism, Bullough endorses its "fundamental standpoint": the absolute autonomousness of art, the mirroring isolation of aesthetic consciousness.<sup>48</sup> The solipsistic, resigned theme in Bullough has a clear affinity with Pater:

we are all shut in within the narrow, but impenetrable walls of our own self. It is impossible for us to merge ourselves, even temporarily, into the personality even of those we know best and most intimately. However closely it may touch us, however much practical and emotional concern it may give us, the form of their experience still remains outside of ourselves and inaccessible to our direct perception.<sup>49</sup>

And Pater:

Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.<sup>50</sup>

For Pater, however, art (and science and philosophy) function to direct the individual back into engagement with the world. Bullough's quadrants of consciousness permit no unifying center; the mind's principle of integration is not to be found among the modes, but in religious grace. For Bullough, the purpose of art is to elevate the soul above everyday life and enlarge its awareness of its spiritual plight. In his later years he became a Dominican tertiary.

A. J. Balfour, delivering the Romanes Lecture at Oxford in 1909, presented a stronger case for aestheticism than had many an aesthete. It is ironic to find the prime minister-philosopher, who wrote several studies on religious belief, removing art and literature from the realm of ethics. For Balfour, aesthetic emotions are the "highest members of a great class whose common characteristic is that they do not lead to action." These emotions "have nothing to do with business, with the adaptation of means to

ends, with the bustle and the dust of life. They are impractical and purposeless. They serve no interest, and further no cause." Moreover, there is no universal standard of taste or durable aesthetic theory: "We can appeal neither to reason, nor experience, nor authority." Like Pater, Balfour finds in music an ideal art form: music "makes no assertions," so it cannot have anything to do with truth or falsehood; it "serves no purpose," so there need be no relation between art and utilitarian goals; it "copies nothing," so a mimetic relation cannot be introduced.<sup>51</sup> The sweep of these negations is breathtaking. Balfour's ideal is a "pure art" that produces pleasure and serves no interests other than its own; but these interests have shrunk to such a degree that Balfour himself must have wondered what he was left with. At the last moment he concedes that his theory is "not tolerable, even provisionally," without "some mystical reference to first and final causes."<sup>52</sup> Balfour does not pursue the reference, and leaves off with the idealist beckoning from beyond. The impression is that of a handkerchief waved by an unseen hand from a passing train.

Historical critics do not escape the history of their times. Exacting literary scholars, philologists, editors, and historians often turned leisurely and self-indulgent in expressions of personal taste. There was much "display of bravado in enthusiastic celebration of the uplifting delights of literature," David Lodge writes, "in elaborate flights of rhetorical fancy that lifted opinions beyond the range of rational inquiry."<sup>53</sup> In his presidential address to the English Association in 1910, George Saintsbury grew ecstatic over the Grand Style: "But the grandeur of its grandeur when it is grand!" The Grand Style "makes its appearance when it is wanted, and when the hour is come; at other times it abides apart, and possesses its strength in quietness and in confidence, not frittering it away";

It is not easily tracked or discovered by observation, unless you give yourself up primarily to the *feeling* of it. You cannot tell how it arises, and you will often have some difficulty in deciding why it goes. It is the truest, precisely because it is the most irresponsible, of the winds of the spirit—no trade wind or Etesian gale, but a breeze that rises and falls, if not exactly as *it* listeth—as the genius of the poet and the occasions of

the subject list.<sup>54</sup>

Saintsbury did not agree with Arnold, the "founder or re-founder of all recent discussion on the present subject." Arnold, following Longinus and Reynolds, treated the Grand Style in terms of high thought, noble passions, and classical restraint; the artist did not substitute manner for matter or part for whole. Arnold did not find the Style in any nineteenth-century writer and thereby read the lesson. Saintsbury is probably right in arguing that Arnold had narrowed the Longinian Sublime on the basis of "high seriousness" and antiromanticism; but when Saintsbury says that the term might be applied to any "transcendent" poetry and concentrates on "perfection of expression," he goes too far the other way. His examples show that his version of the Style resembles Benson on "beauty." Both share the "characteristic criteria" of turn-of-the-century aestheticism: "the passive, purely contemplative attitude to life, the transitoriness and non-committing quality of experience," if not the "hedonistic sensualism."<sup>55</sup> While Richards did not employ the categories of the Sublime and the Grand Style, he strongly believed in the experiences they named and sought in his own vocabulary a more precise formulation of them..

In 1913 the new King Edward VII professor of English literature at Cambridge, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, pronounced his version of the aesthetic ideology with typical rodomontade: "As we dwell here between two mysteries, of a soul within and an ordered Universe without, so among us are granted to dwell certain men of more delicate intellectual fibre than their fellows—men whose minds have, as it were, filaments to intercept, apprehend, conduct, translate home to us stray messages between these two mysteries." The Happy Few, as in Pater, have the peculiar mental apparatus; the metaphor of delicate fibres echoes Pater in the conclusion to *The Renaissance* describing perception by the physical organism made up of "phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres." Not Paterian is the belief in an "ordered Universe without," which is Quiller-Couch's Anglican orthodoxy speaking, as well as the presidency of his yacht club at Fowey. On the Grand Style he writes: "when I open on a page of William Watson and read:

O ancient streams, O far descended woods,  
Full of the fluttering of melodious souls! . . .

'why then (will say the initiated one), why worry me with any definition of the Grand Style in English, when here, and here, and again here—in all these lines, simple or intense or exquisite or solemn—I recognize and feel the *thing*?'<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere, misreading Pater on the relative spirit, Quiller-Coch turns a defense of taste into an abrogation of critical intelligence: he asks us to

cast back on our memories and to think that next to spring hats and parlour games, systems of philosophy are perhaps the most fugacious of all human toys? To those who listened once and eagerly, how far and faint already sound the echoes of Mansel, and Hegel plus Lewes plus T. H. Green; counterchiming against Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and Comte as interpreted by the Positivists; Nietzsche, Bergson, James have followed; and have passed, or are passing; even Croce they tell me is in the process of being supplanted—'where are the snows of yesteryear'?<sup>57</sup>

Richards was still trouncing on this passage in 1978. Once, in *Coleridge on Imagination*, he rebuked his Cambridge colleague sternly:

we may regard philosophers in another way; and then they will not seem so fugacious. No careful, acute and resolute piece of thinking ever loses its value—its power to be of use to mankind. (It is the same with poetry; a good poem may lose its public for generations—they being interested other-wise—but not its value for readers with the relevant equipment.) It will perhaps have been noticed that Sir Arthur did not mention Plato and Aristotle among his fugacious philosophers. But every good philosopher stands with Plato and Aristotle; his work remains permanently as an aid in exploring the possibilities of our meanings. And often the very mistakes he made will be a large part of his value.<sup>58</sup>

While "bad" aestheticism permeated the schools, it must not be forgotten that Wilde himself, the leader of the Aesthetic Movement, had pressed the doctrine far enough to make art comment upon, challenge, even judge human standards. Art or Style was contrasted with Nature or Life but, every Wildean knew,

a paradoxical relation was implied. Artists were, like criminals, the antagonists of contemporary mores. Also, Nietzsche, whom Richards studied "in the early 1920s," exposed the underpinnings of the aesthetic doctrine in two important works, *The Case of Wagner* (1888) and *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1889).<sup>59</sup>

## Escaping the Nineteenth Century

The foregoing examples justify Pound's claim that the "general tendency of British criticism at the time [1910-14] was toward utter petrification or vitrification."<sup>60</sup> Did such criticism represent anything more than an already mined-out doctrine, against which Richards campaigned in his first books? Nothing appears more distant from Benson's vague longings for the beautiful or Saintsbury and Quiller-Couch on the Grand Style than Richards' Benthamite utilitarianism, psychological models, and technical procedures for close reading, not to mention the intellectual rigor and professionalism that he exemplified. As Richards saw it, the situation required strong medicine. To escape the vagaries of aestheticism, he needed linguistics, neurophysiology, behaviorist psychology, and a micrological method of analysis, while also turning back to the more broadly based principles of the mid-Victorians and romantics.

Although Richards' departure from aestheticism was radical, some connections between Pater (and Pater-inspired criticism) and Richards do hold. Most obviously, Richards shares Pater's relativism and pluralist approach to the beautiful, and both believe in the power of poetry to illuminate, to deepen, to guide consciousness up and down dangerous slopes. Pater's "quickened, multiplied consciousness" and ideal of the Renaissance personality have their counterpart in Richards' integrated consciousness and complementarity.<sup>61</sup> With regard to psychology, Pater argued against abstract notions of beauty and did not investigate the process of reception; still, he focused on the process sufficiently to encourage others (e.g., Bullough) to do so. If Richards went much

further in this direction, his analysis of stock responses and irrelevant associations has its parallel in Pater's attacks on routine and habit-clogged perception. The larger significance of theory is another matter and, according to Richard Wollheim, might depend on where one looks in Pater.<sup>62</sup> On the whole, though, Pater can hardly be said to have inspired the systematic spirit. He felt the poet Coleridge ran aground in his search for a philosophical Absolute, whereas Richards wrote one of his finest books on how Coleridge took up one theory after another to investigate the mind and the poem—which is a fair description of Richards' theory-soaked criticism. (Richards' harsh critique of Pater came in his defense of Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination, which he felt Pater to have obfuscated.)<sup>63</sup> Richards championed theory and method. He knew that a rejection of theory must be founded, consciously or not, upon another theory; that "we shall in any case use theories"; that "good theories will protect us from worse"; and that theory and method are a training-ground in "careful and sometimes arduous thinking." At the same time, Richards never ceased warning against the limitations of theory, specifically against thinking that theory could substitute for that wholeness of mind in the judgment of significant poetry: the "more refined and discriminating our preconception of poetry is, the more impossible any *direct* application [of a theory] becomes."<sup>64</sup> We should deploy theory to get beyond theory—to a maturer intuited starting point ("preconception"). Here Richards joins company with Pater, for whom the aesthetic experience must be prized in all its uniqueness, massive concreteness, and untranslatability—though again Richards pursued the investigation of the aesthetic object in a spirit far removed from Pater's.

Richards has been linked to aesthetic criticism for lowering the importance of subject matter in poetry and for greatly expanding the study of form. Pater and his followers likened the arts to antimimetic musical form; music was the ideal art. In a key explanation of "emotive language," Richards adopted this metaphor: "Many arrangements of words evoke attitudes without any reference being required *en route*. They operate like musical phrases."<sup>65</sup> Although "many" is far from "most," let alone "all," and

"arrangement" does not exclude other properties, these sentences and others like them seemed to place Richards on the side of aesthetic formalism, once his psychological machinery could be disposed of. In 1934 Wyndham Lewis accused Eliot and Richards of disguising their aestheticism behind religion and science respectively. Richards' pluralism, historical relativism, impersonality, his ideal of sincerity with its appeal to esoteric sources, the critique of reference or "message" in poetry, all led back to the wicked nineties.<sup>66</sup> Lewis's complex argument is not without some historical validity— obviously Richards did not spring up full-grown in 1914.<sup>67</sup> Yet he was no crypto-aesthete either: he repudiated "message-hunting" not because he thought there was no paraphrasable meaning, but to offset its powerful role in criticism and education at that time. His methodological attention to formal qualities somehow made him appear to be overstating the case for them and, as Empson said, although Richards was "by nature a negotiator," "his analytic power always made people regard him as an extremist."<sup>68</sup> Actually he wanted to expunge from criticism the notion that a poem could be split up between form and content—though to go to the other extreme and say that they were *identical* was also wrong: there is nearly always some slippage between the two, some inequality or disharmony. Richards' analysis of the form-content problem was a clear warning to both form-oriented and message-oriented critics. The lessons of Coleridge had been forgotten; form and content were interactive constituents. In his practical essays, Richards came to dwell even more on a poem's "sense" or reference than on its formal qualities. How else could doctrine, allusion, and sincerity be dealt with? He even regretted that he had pressed his original case against "sense" so far as to be misunderstood by later generations of formalists, who had absorbed his correctives all too well.

Another point of contact between Richards and aestheticism is the principle of continuity: the beautiful might be aroused by life or art, by a landscape or a landscape painting. To the aesthetes, the essential dichotomy was not between life and art but between the beautiful and the non-beautiful (or the ugly). Following C. S.

Peirce and John Dewey, Richards formulates this position on pragmatic grounds: "When we look at a picture, or read a poem, or listen to music, we are not doing something quite unlike what we were doing on our way to the Gallery or when we dressed in the morning. The fashion in which the experience is caused in us is different, and as a rule the experience is more complex and, if we are successful, more unified. But our activity is not of a fundamentally different kind."<sup>69</sup> However, Richards turned the continuity principle against the aesthetes: there is no special "aesthetic emotion," "aesthetic consciousness" or "phantom aesthetic states." Only extraordinary combinations of ordinary experiences. The immediate effect of this injunction was to keep open the range of possible aesthetic experiences and maintain their connection to other experiences. The continuity principle similarly inspired Richards' pragmatic justification of poetry, enabling him to break out of the closure implicated by the aesthetic sensibility.

In this regard, Richards may be said to have brought criticism back to judgment not only on contextual wholeness, but on psychological coherence, pragmatism, and ethical action. More than his excursions into modern science and psychology, it was this fundamental realism of Richards' approach that lay behind his extraordinary personal success among students of the war generation. Literature was not "cut off from life"; it was neither refined "play" nor the expense of "superfluous energy," an idea of the Social Darwinists, who in some respects were at no great distance from the aesthetes. "Until Whistler came to start the critical movements of the last half-century," explained Richards, "few poets, artists or critics had ever doubted that the value of art experiences was to be judged as other values are." Then critics perpetrated the great refusal and left the reading public without guides better than the popular press. For this reason, Richards devoted the first hundred pages in *Principles* to the subject of value. He walked the fine line between aesthetic consciousness and ethical action: his concept of attitudes as "tendencies" to action, but not action itself, and his definition of the "best aesthetic responses" as those leading to an "equilibrium of opposed impulses" were not meant to bottle up a person. They were meant to enlarge the

mental space in which the person could maneuver before proceeding to judgment and action. Cruder moral theories of art forced the reader's hand. Aesthetic theories gave up on the problem entirely. As Richards envisioned it, the end is independence, personal control, and "appropriate" action.<sup>70</sup>

Emblematic of his whole attitude, Richards could not share the aesthetic penchant for "isolated ecstasies." In 1924 he wrote: "Too great insistence upon the quality of the momentary *consciousness* which the arts occasion has in recent times been a prevalent critical blunder. The Epilogue to Pater's *Renaissance* is the *locus classicus*,"<sup>71</sup> At first one may find this puzzling in someone who could enjoy—and induce by reading poetry aloud—such moments of rapt attention. Richards was not merely reacting to sensational excesses; he felt that emphasis on single moments drew attention away from contextual relationships and wholeness, either in the "objective" work of art itself or in the direct experience of it. And Richards was concerned with the "after-effects," the "permanent modifications of the mind" that affect behavior. We find a parallel in his description of high mountaineering, where, against peak-counting, he writes that the view from the summit is "as a rule no more interesting than the other views"; the journey, not the arrival, is what matters.<sup>72</sup> Reviewing Max Eastman's *The Literary Mind: Its Place in an Age of Science* (1930), he chided an avowed apologist of modern science for marching abreast with the aesthetes. Eastman had defined the effect of "pure poetry" as "heightened consciousness," though the place of the literary mind in an age of science was only a middling one. "If 'heightened consciousness' is all we are to ask for," responded Richards, "what is wrong with lumbago?":

[Eastman] stops with the epilogue to Pater's *The Renaissance*. No doubt we should "burn always" with a "hard gem-like flame"; but the theoretical problem is, "What is its difference from a soft and smoky one?" The answer to which is inevitably in terms of that order or disorder among "impulses" (or however else you care to describe the elementary processes on which consciousness depends) that Mr. Eastman so objects to our bringing into an account of poetry.<sup>73</sup>

The point was to find the methods and develop the skills by which to compare experiences, from whatever quarter, and to evaluate them.

## 3 Moral Science and Cambridge Humanism

In 1912 Richards told his history supervisor Frank Salter, that he "didn't think History ought to have happened." In 1974 in the Clark Lectures he told his audiences the same thing. Another time, privately, he said that he "hated the past" for its suffering and cruelty and always looked ahead, "even now" (1972). So Richards "turned by accident to philosophy" because he "couldn't bear history."<sup>1</sup> This deep conviction left its imprint on his criticism, with its rejection of the heavy backgrounding of works of art in historical periods and his antipathy to personal memoir and biography. Richards' attitude reflected the Zeitgeist. By the beginning of the twentieth century, historicism provoked a strong reaction and antihistoricism had established itself in Europe: Nietzsche, the French symbolists and the English aesthetes, Husserl and Saussure, Bergson and Hulme had all repudiated the paradigmatic dominance of history and determinist explanations of culture.<sup>2</sup> The motives were mixed and various; the rejection was the same.

After only one term in history, Richards decided to change fields and went to Salter, who arranged a luncheon. When the day came round, Richards was left "alone with a little white-faced, large-glittering-spectacled undergraduate, four years older than me. A Senior, when I was a very raw Freshman. And we sat and had lunch together there in Frank Salter's rooms. And Ogden, it was C. K. Ogden, proceeded to tell me what I would have to read in every possible subject being taught at the University, who my chief instructors would be and why they would teach me the sort of doctrines they taught. He thoroughly believed in the economic and social determination of doctrine." In 1912 Ogden was finishing in classics and hoping for a by-fellowship. He was very much at home in Cambridge. That was the year he founded the *Cambridge Magazine*, and he was shortly to establish his chain of bookshops.

He was president of the Heretics, an undergraduate society that promoted radical causes. He could give Richards a map of the intellectual scene and, as Goethe said, since youth is the chief influence on youth, Salter was wise to leave Richards in such capable hands. Before the luncheon was over Richards had decided to study philosophy. "And at the end, characteristically, he took me off to his rooms and sold me two books."<sup>3</sup>

"By accident to philosophy," said Richards, who liked to stress the contingent in order to exploit the possible. More than accident occurs in these choices, with their winnowing-down of interests and straightening-out of goals. He had taken the Magdalene exhibition examination in history "by pure accident." Within a year and a half he switched to philosophy. Five or six years later, in 1917-18, he turned to medicine. Shortly afterwards—another accident—he began teaching literature.<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s he changed careers to literacy and language programs in China and America. Richards was an interdisciplinary figure; from the start he liked to move across fields.

Wordsworth's epithet for Cambridge, the "garden of great intellects" (*The Prelude* 3:267), handsomely describes Richards' Cambridge. From 1890 to World War I, the university witnessed its finest philosophical flowering since the Puritanism and Platonism of the seventeenth century. "Whitehead, Russell, Moore, McTaggart and the rest," observed Richards, "were all prophets, as it were, of various kinds."<sup>5</sup> "The rest" of the Cambridge moral science faculty included the logicians John Neville Keynes, W. E. Johnson, and John Venn, the economist John Maynard Keynes, and the philosophical psychologist James Ward. Wittgenstein arrived in Cambridge in 1911 and immediately drew the attention of Russell and Moore. C. D. Broad's *Perception, Physics, and Reality* appeared in 1914.

"Cambridge philosophy," writes Broad, "tends to be a thin stream, confined to a rather narrow and isolated, if sometimes deep, channel, and always in danger of almost drying up for considerable periods."<sup>6</sup> Its temperament is empiricistic, analytical, and mathematical. At the end of the nineteenth century it had strong connections with economics and the social sciences. A

psychology laboratory had been set up in 1897, sharing with the one at the University of London the honor of being the first in Great Britain. It might be an exaggeration to call Cambridge moral science "antihistorical," but, for the tripos (the honors examination in the field), philosophy began with Descartes. Greco-Roman and medieval thought were viewed as branches of classics and history. "Then, what I read in philosophy was a matter of chance," said Richards. "In those days at Cambridge you had no assigned reading. You had no apparent awareness—quite contrary to the fact—no apparent awareness in lecturers that others had ever thought about these matters before." Members of the faculty "would occasionally make a reference to someone—but it was in order to controvert."<sup>7</sup> When in 1974 an American friend, Hester Pickman, asked Richards for the meaning of "Moral Science," he replied: "The last word in philosophic savagery."<sup>8</sup>

Moral science was an exclusive field: out of 1,200 matriculations in all subjects at Cambridge in 1912, only twelve students took the moral science tripos with Richards in 1915, but many were gone to the war. Undergraduates and faculty met regularly at the Moral Science Club. Richards read his first paper before the club on 5 March 1915. He said it dealt with the psychology of belief and J. H. Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. The paper is lost; the minutes, signed by Bertrand Russell and the secretary F. C. Bartlett, read: "Mr. I. A. Richards (Magdalene) then read a short but highly interesting paper on Assent which was a term he preferred to use in the place of Belief. He endeavoured to give a psychological analysis of the state of mind called Assent. A quite general and well-maintained discussion followed and was continued until 11:20."<sup>9</sup> The paper obviously impressed Bartlett and Russell.

Richards thought that the moral science combination of psychology and ethics was the "toughest" field at Cambridge; "They were raising the questions, and, then, there was no idea of what it all would mean, but it was open, all the possibilities were open."<sup>10</sup> Magdalene had a small teaching staff and sent students elsewhere for many subjects. Richards read philosophy first with the Hegelian J. M. E. McTaggart of Trinity and later with the logician W. E. Johnson of King's. He studied with McTaggart for

only two terms (Lent and Easter terms, 1912), though he claimed he felt his influence "very deeply."<sup>11</sup> This will not seem obvious on first inspection of the evidence.

## McTaggart and British Idealism

McTaggart figured in the late-nineteenth-century idealist reaction in Europe and America to science, determinism, and utilitarian individualism. This reaction took many forms. There were attempts to anchor religious faith in philosophy, or to substitute philosophy for religious faith, or to reexplore the Kantian realm of the beautiful ("free," "independent of natural determination") and to exalt aesthetic intuition and form.<sup>12</sup> For a time neo-Hegelianism established itself in British philosophy with T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, and McTaggart. Within a generation, however, the native line of empiricism vigorously reasserted itself. McTaggart saw his influence challenged (not without having had certain effects) by two of his students, Russell and Moore, both initially idealist in sympathy. Yet until his death in 1925, he remained a considerable presence, "the last of the 'speculative' philosophers at Cambridge or even in England."<sup>13</sup>

When Richards studied under him, McTaggart's three books on Hegel were in the past and he was working on his masterpiece *The Nature of Existence* (1921–27), which as a "complete deductive system of *a priori* metaphysics on the grand scale, . . . may be quite fairly compared with the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the *Ethics* of Spinoza, and the *Encyclopaedia* of Hegel."<sup>14</sup> McTaggart lectured on the history of philosophy from Descartes to Hegel and from Hegel to himself. Richards liked neither the lectures nor his supervision, finding McTaggart "lazy," intolerant of opposing opinions, and a "big-scale dreamer."<sup>15</sup> He took "crudely Jingo views of politics," wrote Basil Williams, and voted to expel Russell from Trinity in 1916 on account of an allegedly pacifist publication.<sup>16</sup> Leonard Woolf thought him "one of the strangest of men, an eccentric with a powerful mind which, when I knew him, seemed to have entirely

left the earth." Woolf recalled his distance, his long silences, his Buddha-like "immobility."<sup>17</sup> McTaggart argued against the introduction of English at Cambridge and said that "a Professorship of such a subject would not only be useless but positively harmful."<sup>18</sup>

McTaggart shared the assumption of many idealist philosophers that we radically misperceive the world about us. The veil of Maya is rarely, if ever, lifted to reveal ultimate reality. Lives, he felt, are so strewn with error and "so fragmentary that, in trying to explain them, we are almost tied down to two alternatives—either they mean nothing, or they are episodes in a long chain."<sup>19</sup> Then he read Hegel, and Hegel's description of the self-determining voyage of the Absolute Spirit through time unfolded the deep pattern of meaning to him. His early books on Hegel and dialectic set forth a conception of the Absolute that he spent his life expounding with increasing subtlety and certainty.<sup>20</sup>

McTaggart's Hegelianism was deeply colored by an emphasis on personhood and love, and this would influence the development of Cambridge humanism, the Cambridge Apostles, and the Bloomsbury Circle. By love we have the first dim perceptions that enable us to grasp the only important knowledge we ever have of reality. Humanity began with these awakened perceptions, followed their driving force, and now strives under the forms of time and imperfection through successive, opposing stages of incarnation towards the Absolute, which is "a timeless and endless state of love—love so direct, so intimate, and so powerful that even the deepest mystic rapture gives us but the slightest foretaste of its perfection." The Absolute is a long way off, and "[b]etween the present and that fruition there stretches a future which may well need courage."<sup>21</sup> Here and now we can experience something of the Absolute through love. This is a key point: the Absolute is a differentiated unity of finite selves, or individuals, for each of whom the unity exists. Selves do not lose themselves in the Whole like drops in the ocean; they maintain their identity, albeit an identity that has been enlarged and enlightened by love. Selves are timeless, perfect portions of the Absolute. Every human being is identical with an immortal person in the heavenly company,

contains a spark of love, and is eternal. By personalizing the Absolute in this way, McTaggart relocated that single, self-subsistent category of Hegel's Absolute in a transcendental idealization of his own existence, his love for his wife, his friends, his institutions: Clifton, Trinity, England. He was a member of the Cambridge Apostles. Friends, he felt, would meet again in future lives. "Loyalty was the essence of a personality," said Richards of McTaggart's concept, "he stuck the world together with this loyalty."<sup>22</sup> Love at first sight acknowledged the fact that the two souls had loved each other in a previous life. McTaggart delivered his mystical insight in his books *The Further Determination of the Absolute* and *Human Immortality and Pre-Existence* which he gave to friends who lost family members in the war. Traveling on the train to London, McTaggart would cast his eye and discover a soul for whom he felt an inborn affinity, whose soul he shared.

The dialectical method led McTaggart to extravagant conclusions. Although he believed in immortality and retained membership in the Church of England, he was either an atheist or had reduced God to a noncreative and nonomnipotent person, more or less like the rest of humanity.<sup>23</sup> He disparaged the sciences and history, strange attitudes for a Hegelian. The existence of matter was a "bare possibility to which it would be foolish to attach the least importance, since there is nothing to make it at all preferable to any other hypothesis, however wild," including belief in "Gorgons" or "Harpies."<sup>24</sup> Physical objects like mountains, tables, and chairs had souls that communicated with one another but went unperceived by man's deceptive senses. The medieval historian G. G. Coulton once took Richards up to his attic room in St. John's and pointed to a mulberry tree. "Look, do you see that mulberry tree?" I looked down—it is in Trinity's small garden—and he said 'Do you see that track round the mulberry tree?' I did, it was bare. He said, 'That is where McTaggart composed *The Nature of Existence*, walking round and round that mulberry tree.' He would take the whole morning walking round and round the tree thinking out paragraphs. . . . That is a good way to philosophize, I think. But you won't find much of the garden or the mulberry tree in the book, more's the pity."<sup>25</sup> Most notoriously, McTaggart

denied the existence of time. Cambridge realists, hunting for glaring metaphysical absurdities, liked to assail McTaggart on time.<sup>26</sup>

Given Richards' opinion of McTaggart and McTaggart's view of undergraduates, it is reasonable to question how any intellectual commerce took place. When he said McTaggart influenced him "very deeply," it could have been a throwaway line. However, Richards carefully revised two drafts of this interview and stood by his remark. Surely it must be understood in some special sense. It is hindsight and the desire to register that his teacher had grasped a central truth with which he eventually concurred, even if McTaggart expressed it in (for Richards) an impossible system. What is this truth? F. H. Bradley was the other great neo-Hegelian, and Richards wrote on the flyleaf of his copy of Bradley's *Essays on Truth and Reality* (1914); "It seems a pity I shouldn't have been able to read F. H. Bradley when doing Princ. [iples of Literary] Crit[icism]." The idea in Bradley and McTaggart that captured him was dialectical relatedness, the interdependence of things, the impossibility of knowing anything without knowing its branching context and field of oppositions. It was contained in a remark of Hegel's of which Richards was particularly fond, which was cited and commented on by Bradley: " 'There is nothing behind the curtain other than that which is in front of it.' For what is in front of it is the Absolute that is at once one with the knower and behind him." The curtain is the sensuous veil, but one does not simply penetrate the veil to *find* truth, so much as to *make* truth out of what one finds, out of what one has brought. As Hegel glosses his metaphor, "There is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen."<sup>27</sup> From mere consciousness of anything to most profound self-consciousness, the mind overcomes its flaws and partialities through ever-widening sweeps into objectivity, negations, and progression. For Bradley, the real inner self is ultimately identified with the rule and order of the Absolute in its progressive manifestation.

If Bradley's Absolute subsumes individual identities in the

march of time, McTaggart's leaves them their finite particularity. In "Mysticism" (1908) McTaggart illustrated his notion with a passage of Sufi poetry that stuck in Richards' mind. It was from the twelfth-century Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar's *Manteq at-Tair*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald as "The Bird Parliament." A flock of birds gather together to find a king. The hoopoe tells them that they already have one, the Simorgh, who lives in a distant land. After a long, arduous journey, only thirty birds reach the sacred mountain and gaze upon the divine:

they ventured from the Dust to raise  
Their Eyes—up to the Throne—into the Blaze

And in the Centre of the Glory there  
Beheld the Figure of—*Themselves*—as't were  
Transfigured—looking to Themselves, beheld  
The Figure on the Throne en-miracled,  
Until their Eyes themselves and *That* between  
Did hesitate which Seer was, which *Seen*:  
They That, That They: Another, yet the Same;  
Dividual, yet One . . . <sup>28</sup>

Two of Attar's most recent translators observe that the climax "depends on a pun: *si* means 'thirty,' *morgh* means 'bird(s)'; the *si morgh* see the 'simorgh.'" <sup>29</sup>J. Spencer Trimingham explains that the Sufi mystic seeks purification in seven stages, first cleansing himself of natural desires, which are substituted for by love; "then he must be cast into the flames of passion ... to emerge in the state of union"; this brings about a "transmutation of self," "with gifts of dazzlement and wonder," and leads to "everlastingness," a "Fulfilment in Annihilation." <sup>30</sup> McTaggart endorses the Sufi claims for the driving power of love towards self-transcendence; he does not give up the self and its awareness of its joys and separate friends. Attar's lines celebrate the pantheistic belief whereby God names the "unity of which all finite things are illusive emanations"; the bird metaphor represents the idealistic relation between immortal persons and finite human beings. <sup>31</sup>

Idealist "fictions," as he referred to them, figure occasionally in Richards' criticism, notably in *Coleridge on Imagination*, where he

defends the admittedly paradoxical identity of subject and object, one of the idealist principles most objectionable to empiricism. The distinctions between the "self that knows," "its knowing," "its knowledge," and "what it knows," these may "seem inevitable, established in their own right as part of the order of existence. But for other purposes, as when our knowing *in the act of the realizing intuition* is developing itself, they are not ruling."<sup>32</sup> In *Beyond*, Richards borrows the bird passage from Attar at a crucial moment in his argument on the dialectical relation between one's highest self-image and godhead.<sup>33</sup> The birds see their god as a self-reflection and find the "Centre" of "Glory" in "Themselves." The "Centre" is the activating power of mind that requires the Other (or other positions of thinking) to comprehend itself; then, and only then, does the self discover the true extent of its supposed wholeness. The questioners in *Beyond*, through their questioning, come to know the self at a higher level of perception, something ever "beyond." Richards also cites Hegel's curtain metaphor in examining Job's challenge of Shaddai. Essentially, Richards thinks that "mind" tends to become what it ideally strives after and makes its own gods and demons; in this sense, knowing and being are one. Reflections, representations, opposition and identity, all exemplify the closing of the gap between knowing and being; hence the two sets of birds, mirror images, and dividing curtain.

Dialectical relatedness would have implications for Richards in constructing his revolutionary theory of metaphor, the so-called "transaction between contexts." He would argue that metaphorical language offers a direct insight into how "thought and feeling and the other modes of the mind's activity proceed." On the page opposite his definition of metaphor, he quotes a Sufi mystic: "I am the child . . . whose father is his son, and the wine whose vine is its jar," summing up the whole process of that meditation which does not forget what it is really about."<sup>34</sup> When in the 1940s Richards began to speak of a dialectical method, it could have been another name for a collection of his linguistic strategies: multiple definition, contextualism, analysis of metaphor. Richards' dialectic was far removed from McTaggart's or Hegel's, and Marxists would be correct in saying that, on their grounds, Richards remained a

nondialectical thinker. But he himself claimed the patrimony of Plato's dialectic: "the continuous attempt to audit an account of the meanings used in a discussion" (*Rep.* 5316).<sup>35</sup> Dialectical definition helps participants in their climb up the ladder of truth, from the relation of words to things or ideas, to hypothetical thinking, to the highest intellectual and creative perceptions. Richards had recourse to the neo-idealist R. L. Nettleship to explain one stage of this ascent; the lowest of intellectual operations in Plato are "image-viewing," vulgar opinion, and "uncertain belief," which are "produced by the mind typically by the words we learn before we have any experience of the things they name."<sup>36</sup> Such behavior, notes Richards, is especially typical of young children. The point is, we are draped in linguistic veils; dialectical method enables us to penetrate them or turn them inside out.

McTaggart's quotation of Attar in support of his philosophical beliefs was not an isolated phenomenon. He held poetry in very high esteem, preferring writers with a religious or philosophic vision such as Clough, Browning, Pope, Omar Khayyam and, above all, Swinburne. "He would read Swinburne in his bath," wrote Dickinson, "and turn to him for relief whenever things were going wrong in his universe."<sup>37</sup> He believed that philosophy is the "systematic study of the ultimate nature of reality." Science studies the nature of reality in a systematic way, but not its ultimate nature. The poet "does not study the nature of reality systematically, but he does study its ultimate nature."<sup>38</sup> This formula would have been congenial to the young Richards. In his first published essay, "Art and Science" (1919), science is defined as the "systematic connection of propositions," while art is "interested in propositions for their own sake, not as interconnected." The most worthwhile artistic propositions are "not those whose connections we have the best hope of tracing."<sup>39</sup> If Moore's philosophy gives a more regular approach to Richards' first essays, McTaggart's often enough is already there.

McTaggart's philosophy impressed Richards in yet another way, though here the influence was tributary to the larger stream of Cambridge humanism.

# Cambridge Humanism

With Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, Moore, and Russell, McTaggart ranks as a leading contributor to a treasury of values and attitudes of which Richards was beneficiary. At the turn of the century, J. M. Keynes remarks, these thinkers stood completing in the area of ethics and emotion a revolution that had begun with intellect in the mid-Victorian religious crisis.<sup>40</sup> Cambridge humanism, as it may be called, is characterized by directness in speech and writing; rationalism; a strain of idealism that envisages the ultimate harmony of the good, the true, and the beautiful; agnosticism; personalism; anti-authoritarianism; dedication to work; and a meliorist faith in human endeavor. McTaggart expressed certain of these themes in his metaphysics; Russell and Moore in their ethics; Keynes in his economics; Forster in his novels; Dickinson, Russell, and Leonard Woolf in their social criticism and politics; F. M. Cornford in his studies of Socrates and Plato; and Richards in his criticism.

Many of the architects and proponents of Cambridge humanism (though not Richards) belonged to the Apostles, the conversation society that numbered among its members Henry Sidgwick, McTaggart, Russell, Moore, Whitehead, Dickinson, Fry, Forster, Keynes, Lytton Strachey, and Leonard Woolf.<sup>41</sup> The society was one of the most powerful groups of moral thinkers in the early twentieth century, and its influence spread throughout the English-speaking world. As Stuart Hampshire writes of this "tradition of strenuous free-thinking in the moral sciences":

There is a sharp edge of superior atheism, and of the high moral tone of true enlightenment, which is to be found in most of the Cambridge critics of earlier utilitarian thinking and in Sidgwick, Roger Fry, Moore, Forster, The established church, and the leaders of conventional opinion in both parties and in the press, were the targets. . . . Mill and the Utilitarians had been clear, candid and free from transcendental cant, and they had been consistently naturalistic in their approach to moral problems and to the definition of morality; they had also dismissed the idea of salvation, whether in this world or in the next, and instead they had looked to public life and to the social order for reasonable

improvement.<sup>42</sup>

However, the cleaning up of public life could not fill the void left by eliminating the supernatural, and thinkers in this moral tradition began to look further afield for nourishment. McTaggart's version of personal idealism is an example. Hampshire observes that Moore's "non-natural" good is "one cautious step away from 'supernatural,' a characteristic stopping short, a halfway house for one who has felt the void, but who could not, after the liberal enlightenment, contemplate the supernatural."

Richards said that Lowes Dickinson had a "tremendous influence on me politically. *A Modern Symposium* was a book I would be able then to recite."<sup>43</sup> Dickinson had two cultural ideals, the Greeks and the Chinese. His Greeks were the Greeks of Goethe and Schiller, joyful and harmonious beings with a comprehensive view of life. Their religion encouraged them to feel "at home in the world" and free to exercise all their powers; Dickinson contrasted this belief with the faith of his grandfathers, the religion of guilt and alienation from God. The Greek view of ethics was aesthetic, a golden mean, no crushing weight of duty, no Manichaeian struggle of opposing principles: "the distinction of good and evil is one of order or confusion, among elements which in themselves are neither good nor bad,"<sup>44</sup> To these "pagan" values Dickinson's Chinese added reverence for right and order, courtesy, and nonviolence (i.e., "Christian" qualities). He wrote his *Letters from a Chinese Official* to protest the rapacity of the Western powers in the Boxer Rebellion, and he became an advocate of internationalism and the League of Nations. Richards first got to know Dickinson personally through their mutual passion for China. *A Modern Symposium* sets forth a variety of political positions (Tory, liberal, socialist, anarchist, nihilist) with great fairness, and it is probably through its tone of sweet reasonableness and tolerance for opposing views that the book made its noblest appeal and exerted its political influence over Richards. The book's final speech is given by a member of the Society of Friends, and his words echo Dickinson's beliefs, which received one of their finest expressions in a tribute to

Confucianism: humanity is "a Being spiritual and eternal, manifesting itself in time in the series of generations. This Being is the mediator between heaven and earth, between the ultimate ideal and the existing fact. By labor, incessant and devout, to raise earth to heaven, to realize, in fact, the good that as yet exists only in idea— that is the end and purpose of human life; and in fulfilling it we achieve and maintain our unity each with every other, and all with the Divine."<sup>45</sup>

Wilfred Stone called the idealism of the Cambridge humanists "the dream of a coterie of lapsed Protestants."<sup>46</sup> There might be something unwordly in the issues they championed, causes off the main track of bureaucratic and political in-fighting. Richards' years of struggle with the Basic English movement is a case in point. Keynes looked back and said we were "the last of the Utopians" who believed "in a continuing moral progress by virtue of which the human race already consists of reliable, rational, decent people. ... we repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men. We were not aware that civilisation was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and the will of a very few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skilfully put across and guilefully preserved."<sup>47</sup>

Richards was thoroughly imbued with the values of Cambridge humanism. Its exemplary figures, diverse as Mill, Swinburne, and Confucius, were his own. He said that when he wrote his essay on E. M. Forster in 1927 he "had been for over a decade very deeply a devotee, ready to let *Longest Journey* and *Howards End* shape as they could his outlook and even his life."<sup>48</sup> He began writing about Confucius as early as 1920, lived and taught in China, wrote a study of Mencius, argued the need for better mutual understanding between East and West in many essays, and always praised Chinese traditions of civility and nonviolence. In 1947 he published a short book, *Nations and Peace*, one of his rare forays into political writing, proposing unilateral disarmament by one small nation as a symbol for world peace. A lapsed Protestant, Richards in *Beyond* is equally and fiercely critical of Jahveh, Homer's gods, and the Christian divinity. He eventually made his way back to the

ancient Greeks and employed Plato's mind-state analogy to present his ideal of world citizenship, the relation among university disciplines, and the harmonious personality, and he translated a number of Greek texts into simplified English, including the *Iliad* and the *Republic*. Then, he spoke of his own work generally as having "a schematic background to encourage skepticism."<sup>49</sup> And, invincibly optimistic, Richards found the Utopian frame of mind congenial.

One juxtaposition of texts shows Richards indebtedness to the ideal of Cambridge humanism. In 1930 the promising philosopher Frank Ramsey died at twenty-six. He was the son of Magdalene's president, had grown up at Magdalene, and was a close friend of Richards', Dickinson knew and eulogized him:

there is, I think, a certain type, rare, like all good things, which seems to be associated in some peculiar way with my alma mater. I am thinking of men like Leslie Stephen . . . like Henry Sidgwick, like Maitland, like one who died but the other day with all his promise unfulfilled. It is a type unworldly without being saintly, unambitious without being inactive, warm-hearted without being sentimental. Through good report and ill such men work on, following the light of truth as they see it; able to be sceptical without being paralysed; content to know what is knowable and to reserve judgment on what is not. The world could never be driven by such men, for the springs of action lie deep in ignorance and madness. But it is they who are the beacon in the tempest, and they are more not less needed now than ever before.<sup>50</sup>

Richards describes his ideal in "A Psychological Theory of Value" in *Principles of Literary Criticism*:

At the other extreme are those fortunate people who have achieved an ordered life, whose systems have developed clearing-houses by which the varying claims of different impulses are adjusted. Their free, untrammelled activity gains for them a maximum of varied satisfactions and involves a minimum of suppression and sacrifice. Particularly is this so with regard to those satisfactions which require humane, sympathetic, and friendly relations between individuals. The charge of egoism, or selfishness, can be brought against a naturalistic or utilitarian morality such as this only by overlooking the importance of these satisfactions in any well-balanced life. Unfair or aggressive behavior,

and preoccupation with self-regarding interests to the exclusion of due sensitiveness to the reciprocal claims of human intercourse, lead to a form of organisation which deprives the person so organised of whole ranges of important values.<sup>51</sup>

Richards has recourse to Bentham for the "greatest happiness for the greatest number" principle, but the noble liberalism, moral coloring, preference for spiritual over material values, psychological wholeness and grace derive from Cambridge humanism.

## W. E. Johnson

Richards suffered a second attack of tuberculosis and did not return to Cambridge for 1912-13. He recovered on Dartmoor. With his characteristic ability to extract an ornament from an inconvenience, he called the break "a very good thing to . . . another fine accidental intervention that let me do some miscellaneous reading."<sup>52</sup>

Back at Cambridge, Richards' supervisor in moral science for his "last two years, nearly" (1913-15) was the logician W. E. Johnson (1858—1931). Johnson was important "not so much for any one thing, but in the general intellectual rigor and imagination brought to bear upon issues." He was a "quiet, gentle man" who suffered badly from asthma. When Richards went to King's for supervision he would often find him lying in bed and would take notes from a man "quietly delivering monologues." Compared with McTaggart, however, Johnson was "more judicious, more balanced, more interested in trying to say and restate what others thought. McTaggart was more interested in what *he* thought, always trying to push his theories; around the mulberry tree he went." But Johnson's were "lessons in intellectual integrity."<sup>53</sup> It may well be that Richards learned to discipline his mind from Johnson.

For many years, Johnson lectured on philosophical psychology. Under him, Richards wrote a report on William James's *A Pluralistic Universe*, an analysis of compound propositions and a

study contrasting the cognitive relations we have to our own mental states with those we have of another individual. In *The Meaning of Meaning* and *Interpretation in Teaching*, Richards refers with approval to Johnson on linguistic usage and ostensive definition.

## 1915—1918

"I was mostly reading everything *except* philosophy until about three weeks before the final tripos examination when I did give myself a good dollop of reading."<sup>54</sup> The examination Richards took in June 1915 consisted of two parts each of logic, psychology, and ethics; then an elements of philosophy section and two essays. Several questions bear not only on what he had studied but on the kinds of issues— "Cambridge" issues—that would occupy him in the years immediately ahead. Two of the logic questions concerned language: "how considerations of the grammatical structure of Language may throw light upon the logical structure of thought"; what kinds of information are given by "purely verbal statement," with an explanation of definition with illustrations from science, and "the importance of distinguishing between verbal statements and statements of fact." Under psychology, he was asked to treat the nature of imagination as contrasted with perception, conception, and belief, and to locate any agreement in regard to the meaning of the term among its applications. For ethics, he could have chosen to define "psychological hedonism," to explain the "use and abuse of biological analysis in Ethics," or to show the different ways in which the possibilities of conception and belief could be said to be "limited," and whether the possibility or impossibility of conception or belief could be taken as a criterion of truth and falsity.<sup>55</sup> With McTaggart and Moore as his examiners, Richards received first-class honors. Magdalene College awarded him a small monetary prize<sup>56</sup>

Richards did not take [part two](#) or the tripos, having lost part or a year to history, and a whole year to illness. He returned home to

Clifton in the summer of 1915 and not long afterwards succumbed to a third tubercular lesion. His mother rented Idwal Cottage at the top of the Nant Ffrancon Pass in North Wales in 1916 and stayed to care for him. When he was better he remained on his own, and for a long period his only companion was his pet spaniel Sancho Panza. Richards said he "wore nothing but a sheepskin coat, no shoes, could run through anything, any scree. I was a very odd mixture."<sup>57</sup> This time, according to Kenneth Richards, "he made a good recovery. The mountains and fresh air always suited him."<sup>58</sup>

In the Welsh mountains, in 1917, Richards was introduced to his future wife, Dorothy Eleanor Pilley.<sup>59</sup> She was born on 16 September 1894 to Camberwell, London, the eldest daughter of John James Pilley, a wealthy food manufacturer and science lecturer, and Annie Maria Young. She attended Queenswood, Eastbourne, and finishing schools in Paris and Hanover. A vivacious, strong-minded, and competent individual of liberal sympathies, she had just decided upon a career in journalism when she met Richards. She had also taken up rock-climbing. It is fitting that their long partnership began in the rugged hills, because mountaineering was their lifelong enthusiasm. Pilley became one of the great sportswomen in the history of British mountaineering.

With Richards' tuberculosis keeping him out of the war, he returned to Cambridge in the autumn of 1918 in search of a career. The war had left the university deserted. As at Clifton during his earlier illness, he "read and read": "The effect of T. S. E., Hulme, Herbert Read, Pound . . . was if anything to move me to dissent. (They didn't come to be much discussed till a lot later.) ... I was mainly engulfed in philosophical, logical and psychological strugglings, again with outcomes of dissent from rather than of attachment to any particular positions."<sup>60</sup>

He took a room over the archway of the Eagle pub, opposite St. Benet's Church. Six months later Ogden rented him an upper-story corner flat, facing west towards King's Parade, in a timbered Tudor-style building, "a decrepit old house," down the street at i Free School Lane. It was an unhealthy site for a recent tubercular patient. "Very poor. I had to be careful."<sup>61</sup> One of Ogden's book depots was downstairs. There Richards lived from 1918 to 1925.

"I was only doing what a lot of people do at universities, hanging about, hoping for a job. And I was suffering from what Ogden used to call 'hand-to-mouth disease.'"<sup>62</sup> He waited for a by-fellowship in moral science and divided his energies between medical subjects and philosophy. He studied physiology and chemistry at the Cavendish Laboratory, hoping to get the necessary qualifications and move on to the new field of psychoanalysis. His brother Kenneth was a physician serving at the front and must have been an inspiring example. At the same time he threw himself into linguistics and psychology; "I couldn't keep away from G. E. Moore's lectures, delivered just across the road (from the Cavendish Laboratory) in what were then called 'The New Lecture Rooms.'"<sup>63</sup>

## 4 G. E. Moore: "The Other Theory of Art"

Richards led the age of analysis into literary criticism. The person who most represented that age for him was G. E. Moore. "I spent seven years studying under him and have ever since been reacting to his influence," Richards observed in 1968.<sup>1</sup> He was drawn, first, by Moore's most central philosophical concerns: the rejection of idealist metaphysics, the appeal to direct intuition and common sense, realism, theories of meaning, synonymity, definition, and other linguistic topics, and the placement of works of art among the highest goods. Second, Moore's search for first principles, for a "new and initially uncommitted beginning,"<sup>2</sup> notably in *Principia Ethica* (1903), had its parallel in Richards' attempt to refound criticism in psychology and the philosophy of language in *The Meaning of Meaning* and *Principles of Literary Criticism*. The working title of the latter had been, after Moore's example, "Principia Critica." Third, Richards absorbed—and emulated—Moore's methodological style: the analytical aggressiveness, the relentless drawing of distinctions, the norm of common sense and sincerity, and the professional tone. Fourth, one acknowledges the influence of the man: Moore was independent-minded, questioning, gentle, and Socratic, though he certainly lacked irony. His personal magnetism drew Richards to his lectures and discussion groups for years. Richards admired the way Moore teased and prodded language, modeling and remodeling sentences to extract their meaning or "proposition." When Richards said the "first sign of discipleship is the mannerisms," he was calling attention to his early classroom style, which he based on Moore's.<sup>3</sup> Beyond a style of teaching there was a habit of mind that could fabricate and dismantle theories and methods, his instruments for examining the truth, falsehood, and meaning of propositions. Looking back in later years, Richards saw this attitude, which he named "complementarity," as perhaps his

largest debt to Moore.

In addition to its place in this narrative, the Moore-Richards relationship may stand as a warning paradigm for the complexities of a biographical and interdisciplinary problem: influence. "It is reasonable, is it not," Richards said apropos of Moore, "to expect that a deep influence may take years—even decades—before producing its full effect. And the effect produced may often be very unlike what might be thought likely."<sup>4</sup> Commonly we treat influence as a force impinging on, absorbed and surmounted by, a recipient; it is taken, that is, as a stage of development. The name of this "emanational model" derives from the *stellarum influxus*, the ethereal or astral fluid that flows down into the world and affects lives and destinies.<sup>5</sup> But the model is inevitably inadequate, because it falsifies both the interactive capacities of "mentor" and "student" and the continuing, varied, and buried history of the influence through a life. After the first perplexed, but admiring, stages, and then a selecting-assimilating-revising time, Richards reacted sharply to Moore, as if in expiation and embarrassment over the manner of his initial acceptance. This in turn was succeeded by a mature understanding of Moore's influence. Further, the influence encompassed Richards' critique of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, who were themselves indebted to Moore, and the influence of C. L. Stevenson, a philosopher well versed in Richards' thinking, on Moore himself. We are obviously concerned with a multifarious influence lasting some sixty years.

The facts of the relationship begin in the student's appreciation of Moore's spoken words and unique character as a lecturer. When Moore returned to Cambridge to teach moral science in 1911, he had already earned a reputation both as a "great refuter" of versions of British idealism and utilitarianism and as a formulator of an original notion of goodness. *Vrincipia Ethica* had immediate significance for a number of students and fellow members of the Cambridge Apostles. Of these, Strachey, Keynes, Fry, and Woolf would soon be influential themselves. Moore did not then lecture on ethics, however. He gave a course on philosophical psychology to prepare undergraduates for [part one](#) of the moral science trips. The course met three times a week, each term, for the next

fourteen years. The style and subject matter of these lectures is known because Moore published a set he gave in the winter of 1910-11 at Morley College, London. He rewrote the course each year, never took a sabbatical, and rarely missed a class.<sup>6</sup>

Richards, who "must have attended, oh, a thousand lectures by him,"<sup>7</sup> pondered Moore's influence in interviews, in one essay, and in scattered comments and letters. He unreservedly praised Moore as his most deeply cherished teacher, a "master," by whom he was "enthralled," one "who took philosophy of mind so seriously and set us standards of scrupulosity and pertinacity we couldn't do much more than dream of living up to."<sup>8</sup> "My old mentor—no, my old dominator."<sup>9</sup> Although Richards believed (somewhat disingenuously) that he did not thoroughly understand Moore, he claimed nevertheless to have been under "complete subjugation." "I always thought if I went back to him for a whole course of lectures once again an inkling would come. But . . . no." He paraphrases Shakespeare's Owen Glendower (I *Henry IV* 3.2.47-48). "To trace Moore in the tedious ways of art / And hold him pace in deep experiment." Those who listened to the lectures underwent a "powerful influence, not one that I would suppose Moore could for a moment conceive. He was not at all interested in that. He was interested in the problem in hand: more interested in it than, I think, I have ever seen anyone interested in anything."<sup>10</sup>

In assessing a particular quality, one can rob a writer of originality by confusing what is derivative with what is similar or parallel. A more general influence is much harder to gauge. On this topic Richards was fond of citing a passage from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (2.232-37):

Hard task to analyze a soul, in which,  
Not only general habits and desires,  
But each most obvious and particular thought,  
Not in a mystical and idle sense,  
But in the words of reason deeply weigh'd,  
Hath no beginning.

If at times Richards' comments on Moore seem aimed at throwing one off the track, they also bespeak mixed feelings that run deeply.

What is in this mix? What is the true extent of Moore's influence on him? "Enormous, and it shaped me in a thousand ways —*negatively*. ... I feel like an obverse of him. Where there's a hole in him there's a bulge in me." Thinking back over the experience of Moore's lectures, he admitted that he "got really interested in language because I felt something must be done to stop the leakage of information that was going on there all the time."<sup>11</sup>

## Moore's Character

Moore's personal character played a creative role in his philosophy of direct intuition and common sense, and for this reason was more effective in supervisions, discussion groups, and lectures than on paper. Russell knew him as an undergraduate: "For some years he fulfilled my ideal of genius. He was in those days beautiful and slim, with a look almost of inspiration, and with an intellect as deeply passionate as Spinoza's. He had a kind of exquisite purity. I have never but once succeeded in making him tell a lie, and that was by a subterfuge. 'Moore,' I said, 'do you *always* speak the truth?' 'No,' he replied. I believe this to be the only lie he had ever told."<sup>12</sup> Leonard Woolf compared Moore to the divine "sillies" in Russian fiction and to the Platonic Socrates with his "cosmic absurdity in the monumental simplicity." Moore's philosophical insights and his famous distinction between things good in themselves and things good merely as means substituted "for the religious and philosophical nightmares, delusions, hallucinations, in which Jehovah, Christ, and St. Paul, Plato, Kant, and Hegel had entangled us, the fresh air and pure light of plain common-sense."<sup>13</sup> Moore left one feeling that one must come to grips with his arguments, prove him wrong, or else assume him to be right.

Simplicity, directness, and passionate honesty shaped Moore's intellectual character, though there was less agreement on the total character than on the individual qualities. G. J. Warnock thought that Moore "had no leanings whatever towards paradox and peculiarity of opinion" and was "entirely without any of the

motives that tend to make a metaphysician."<sup>14</sup> One could argue otherwise and Richards, among others, came to find many of Moore's positions extremely peculiar. Moore had a fearlessly naive and independent temperament. He said he "did not think that the world or the sciences would ever have suggested to me any philosophical problems." What suggested those problems to him were the strange views other philosophers held about the world or the sciences, things that too often went against Moore's common sense. The things that interested him were, he said, of two kinds, "first, the problem of trying to get really clear as to what on earth a given philosopher *meant* by something which he said, and, secondly, the problem of discovering what really satisfactory reasons there are for supposing that what he meant was true, or, alternatively, was false."<sup>15</sup> Richards saw something central in the first problem with regard to his understanding of Moore, for he "replied" to it many times in print, in lectures, and conversation. The following is typical: "He [Moore] could hardly ever believe that people could mean what they said; I've come to think they hardly ever can say what they mean."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, "saying what was meant," finding the appropriate language, gave Moore immense difficulties, not only with language, but also with system. Just as he thought that he frequently did not "understand" philosophic systems, he himself never felt that he could begin to develop a system of his own. It went against his grain to invent or acquire an extensive idiom that might have facilitated some elements of philosophic exposition, which might at least have nailed down some items once and for all. Writing for this reason proved painstaking. He was not prolific. He had failed, after four years, to review Broad's *Physics, Perception, and Reality* when Russell rescued him and reviewed it promptly. "As a philosopher," wrote Norman Malcolm, Moore "was not very imaginative. He was not fertile in ideas, as was Russell. He was not a profound thinker, as was Wittgenstein. I believe that what gave Moore stature as a philosopher was his *integrity*, an attribute of character rather than of intellect."<sup>17</sup>

The lecture format suited Moore's character, his philosophical intentions, his limitations, and especially his appeals to intuition,

Mencius, a "submission to the inner processes of development."<sup>40</sup>

In Mencius's approach to language, Richards finds a natural ally. "Not getting in words, not seek in mind," says Mencius's Master; if the principle cannot be articulated clearly, its distinctions are dubious. The Master castigates the abuse of language, "one-sided words," "extravagant," "evil," and "evasive" words, "growing/arising in the mind, injurious in government." As in the Confucian *Analects*, the world must be made to conform to ideals set down and perfected in language, a concept that holds out strong appeal to Richards. Serious errors in language, he comments, are not corrected by reference to the dictionary, or even by a course in the theory of interpretation, but by a "rectification of the whole personality." Perhaps the greatest of Chinese classical stylists, Mencius impresses Richards as a technician of language. Reading him is like reading Shakespeare or "much modern writing," a language of condensed thought, bold analogy, and indefinite syntax; a language not just of "senses," but of "gestures": "Its very indefiniteness and the range of its intricately allied meanings may give it a quasi-magical compelling force, a suasive sanction and authority that more explicit terminology would lack"; its emotive components "probably take precedence" over sense components and borrow "from one another a small number of tricks for growing internal supporting structures of sense." We are by now familiar with Richards' delicate balances among components of meaning. Richards weaves the Mencian texts into a kind of prose poem on the *hsing*, sounding sometimes like Hopkins. In the Ox Mountain parable, Mencius compares the human heart to a mountain; its shoots of trees are like the buds of the virtues; over-pruning destroys the trees and man's natural moral inclinations. Human beings respond similarly to a night's rest and the morning's business. To secure Mencius's meaning, Richards brings the oppositions to the surface: "With one's day-night-what-rests, dawn's spirit, one's likes-dislikes to men's difference slight: one's-morning-day's-what-done have fettered-lost it, fettered again and again then one's night-spirit not sufficient to sustain (itself)."<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Ernest Fenollosa and Pound, Richards did not consider

the Chinese non-dualism of matter and mind or "spirit" to be culturally superior to Western ideas. But neither was it inferior. Coming from the West, Richards might be expected to lean towards rationalism and see the difference in terms of an analytic hypothesis, if nothing more; Mencius looked for a more mystical union of forces. Always in search of underlying parallels, however, Richards points out that the notions of truth and method in modern pragmatism and instrumentalism (whereby ideas are "tools to be judged by the work they do"—still a "heresy" in European schools of philosophy) have affinities with ancient Chinese philosophy. This may explain why John Dewey's instrumentalism is the "most influential" Western philosophy in modern China (Richards had been reading in his friend Hu Shih's *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*; Hu Shih received his doctorate from Columbia where he imbibed pragmatism and its theory of inference). For Richards, the study of Mencius and the Chinese written character argue strongly against regarding Western linguistic and philosophic distinctions as rooted in the condition of things.<sup>42</sup> To this end, too, he proposes an experimental use of stimulus-response psychology in studying Chinese behavior; if not less culturally loaded than the traditional Western division of mind into thinking, willing, and feeling, at least it cuts an unfamiliar swath across the field of investigation.

Writing on Mencius renewed Richards' interest in the technique of multiple definition. This technique should not be taken as a mechanical separation of Chinese meanings for reblending in English translation. Such a method would hardly lead to an incisive rendering of the original. On a clue from Mencius, Richards would follow the traditional Western approach to analysis, then reverse it, and move from the plane of organized abstractions to "concrete imagining," and so "submit the mind to the fact." In this manner, Richards hoped, "the knowledge which it is in the mind's nature to have of itself (and the rest of nature) may develop without interference." The mental action oscillates obscurely between analysis and imagination, between criticism and poetry. For Richards, this is the best way to understand the "ore-like" character of Chinese philosophy, which includes

"together without distinction, elements we [in the West] only have a use for when we have separated them." We must learn to recombine these elements by a process of "high abstraction" and "philosophic daring." Linguistically, the Chinese written characters approximate Coleridgean "Facts of mind." The difference between Chinese philosophic method and a Western philosophy like Kant's is that the latter uses an "explicit logic," the former an "indicated guess."<sup>43</sup> One needs both, but the intelligently prepared for *indicated* guess (no shot in the dark) is the necessary corrective to the impositions of explicit logic. In sum, Mencius and the Chinese language offered Richards what seemed an independent confirmation of his deepest beliefs.

The multiple definition of Chinese words leads to the same for English ones, the "systematic survey" of the language used for translation, and the "technique of comparative studies." If words are "still viciously ambiguous" for purposes of "general communication," a reduced model language for specialized communication (language-training exercises, international codes, translation), one that maps out the meanings of its main abstract words and "operators," could effect some measure of control. Since definitions of major words are likely to conceal "positions," the listings of meanings would have to isolate points at which disputes in translation are most likely to break out. The defamiliarizing process involved in employing a reduced language would force a redistribution of attention "in an unwonted fashion to watch our thoughts as well as think; and to notice their forms as much as their contents."<sup>44</sup> In effect Richards was divulging the secret of Basic, an entire controlled language in itself. The very limitation of the word list prevents mere paraphrase or synonym trading and requires the "building up of analytic and descriptive phrases and clauses to take the place of the missing words."<sup>45</sup> Translating into Basic, with its streamlined severity we may observe the controls that the *other* Basic words exert over word choice, and thence the principle guiding these choices. "At some places," Richards said in 1933, Basic is an "almost automatic method of analysis."<sup>46</sup>

If multiple definition served translation needs and the interests of analytical training, it might have larger philosophical merit as

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