

**I.A. Richards: Theory of Metaphor,  
Theory as Metaphoric Variation**

*Affective Criticism: Theories of Emotion and Synaesthesia  
in the Experience of Literature*

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Without doubt I.A. Richards has been the dominant and most influential figure in the history of New Criticism. Many poets and critics have played significant roles in this movement, but its theoretical cohesion has for the most part resulted from its collective effort to come to terms with critical issues introduced by Richards. Many often disagreed with him, and often vigorously, but their differences obliged them to spell out their own understanding, confirming his pivotal role as the source and point of departure for their ideas. John Crowe Ransom stated in *The New Criticism*, published in 1941, "Discussion of the new criticism must start with Mr. Richards. The new criticism very nearly began with him." Allen Tate also acknowledged his indebtedness in his Preface to *Essays of Four Decades*:

Nobody who read I.A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* when it appeared in 1929 could read any poem as he had read it before. From that time on one had to read poetry with all the brains one had and with one's arms and legs, as well as what may be inside the rib cage.<sup>1</sup>

In a retrospective essay, Cleanth Brooks took pains to explain how his intellectual growth began in reaction against Richards' speculations in poetic theory:

I read him hard, in part because I felt that he had to be refuted, and in the process of trying to find the refutation--it was not easy, I quickly discovered--I learned a great deal about poetry and about literary theory. In fact, it dawned on me fairly early that even those concepts of Richards which seemed to my mind most outrageous could yield--often did yield, when tilted just a little, or perhaps it was simply my willingness to alter a mite my own angle of vision--observations and insights that were true and illuminating, and that, in any case, contained matter that I needed to ponder.<sup>2</sup>

No wonder that Stanley Edgar Hymen could claim in *The Armed Vision*, published in 1948, perhaps the most accessible summary of New Criticism at the time, that Richards was "the greatest and most important of practicing literary critics," or that Rene Wellek, the reigning scholar of the movement, whose intellectual orientation was substantially at odds with that of Richards, could grant his reluctant concession, "The stimulus that Richards gave to English and American criticism . . . by turning it resolutely to the question of language, its meaning and

function in poetry, will always insure his position in any history of modern criticism.” Today the word *position* seems tepid at best. The synonym *preeminence* would be more appropriate.

An unusually large number of poets and critics have benefited from Richards’ influence without fully accepting his basic model of aesthetic experience that he constantly reformulated throughout his career. The pervasive opinion has been that his methodology depends too heavily on “reductive” borrowings from current trends in linguistics, semantics and philosophy additional to psychology, and that most of this debt been precariously speculative, for example when he proposed an “impulse” theory of literary response without adequately defining the concept, or when he used logical positivism’s notion of “pseudo-statement” to describe literary “truth” as nothing more than a suspension of disbelief obliged by literary convention. His theory of organic form has been almost universally applauded, but not his “psychologism” in explaining form as a vehicle of emotional response, providing a “soft” aesthetics dependent on sensitivity and feelings rather than the “hard” standards of literary artifact emphasized by Pound and Ransom and illustrated by the poetry of Pound, Eliot, Stevens, and Williams, among the many excellent poets who emerged at the time. Unlike Pound’s cryptic manifestoes and the cautious judgments of T.S. Eliot’s critical essays, each of Richards’ relatively lucid theoretical excursions seems to have stirred intense controversy. Nevertheless, it was Richards, not Pound or Eliot, who raised the essential questions whose answers (necessarily different from his own) became the tenets of New Critical orthodoxy. Once Richards’ contemporaries such as Brooks and Warren in *Understanding Poetry*, first published in 1938, and William Elton in “A Glossary of the New Criticism, published in 1949, could reduce the extra-critical issues he introduced to what amounted to a formalist breviary, his scaffolding of aesthetic speculation could be granted lip service for having played a crucial role in inspiring our modern tradition in literary criticism, but without otherwise necessitating a careful and sympathetic assessment.

Whatever specific features of Richards’ speculation that critics chose to emphasize in their critical approaches, his underlying theoretical assumptions were accordingly given short shrift--either disregarded or superficially refuted. Ransom and Tate challenged his rigid dependence on affective psychology without sufficiently acknowledging his effort to explain cognitive meaning as a valid, if limited, aspect of total poetic response. Similarly, logicians like Max Black and Manuel Bilsky challenged his logical empiricism for its inductive limitations, overlooking his more organic perspective in even his earliest books. D.G. James reasonably questioned his affective assumptions in Kantian terms, but neglected the many passages in which he sufficiently qualified himself to avert refutation on this basis. Of critics more receptive to Richards, Cleanth Brooks and William Empson (the latter having begun his career as one of his graduate students) avoided confrontation by respectively emphasizing, at least at the beginning of their careers, the concepts of irony and ambiguity first suggested by Richards. And virtually all students and epigones during the heyday of New Criticism in the late forties and early fifties reduced to formulaic precision Richards’ concepts of form, tension, tone, irony, imagery, and metaphor independent of their original theoretical context proposed by Richards.

Richards’ academic apologists, W.H.M. Hotopf and Jerome Schiller take a more sympathetic approach--Hotopf by featuring Richards’ epistemology at the expense of his aesthetics, Schiller by restricting his focus to one of Richards’ books, *Coleridge on Imagination*, published in 1935, during what might be described as his middle period. Useful retrospective

studies have also been offered by Christopher Butler, Cyrus Hamlin, and John Paul Russo, the latter by thoroughly documenting Richards' indebtedness to G.E. Moore and others during his early years in Cambridge. All of these help to explain Richards' central role in literary criticism over the last four decades, but there has still been no real effort to obtain a sympathetic theoretical synthesis that explains the evolution of Richards' critical assumptions over the entire span of his career.

What therefore seems needed is a new overview. For all of Richards' books on literary criticism deserve close examination to help clarify this essential act of communication relevant to conceptual models obtained from non-literary fields of inquiry. Each affords a fresh nomenclature and a new and original theoretical vantage. Always at stake were basically the same ideas, but drawn from different fields of inquiry and explained according to what Richards himself described as theoretical "metaphors." When Max Black complained that Richards never recanted his earliest affective speculation, Richards gladly agreed, describing his strategy as a matter of metaphoric variation in his effort to convey pretty much the same assumptions from one book to the next:

And yet, in rereading *Principles* as Black's article has forced me to do, I am more impressed by its anticipations of my later views than by the occurrence of anything to retract. I changed my vocabulary and my metaphors somewhat, as he noticed, to present much the same views again.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier in the same article Richards described his theorizing as a type of metaphor for defining metaphor in poetry:

The study of metaphor, through metaphor, should become, I have suggested a central and governing part of the study of language. Perhaps one of the reasons why Black finds my later views "very puzzling" is that I have been trying to practice what as a student of metaphor I have preached.<sup>4</sup>

This is exactly the point. Whether he quite realized he was doing, Richards borrowed the concept of metaphor from literature to apply to his own excursions in literary criticism, and at this level, at least, his theoretical contribution can be grasped on a holistic basis as fertile but inchoate speculation rather than a coherent theory totally logical in all its part. Indeed, Richards was "metaphoric" in switching theory from one book for the purpose of creative redefinition rather than final analytic thoroughness. He might have considered each of his books a final judgment at the time he wrote it, but soon enough its assumptions were set aside for another final assessment, and yet another. As a result, it seems useful to compare and integrate his successive explorations with emphasis on common features instead of too quickly rejecting them for contradictions and incidental defects. For it is possible to extrapolate a composite underlying model at the root of his thinking. Some of his concepts might seem rusty, simplistic, or contradictory, but his complex serendipity still dazzles, and with slight modifications his most fundamental theory of affective response can be usefully resurrected.

Richards' series of books pertaining to literary response can be listed as follows, together with an indication of the fields from which his metaphoric variations were primarily drawn:

1922	<i>The Foundations of Aesthetics</i>	aesthetic theories of beauty
1923	<i>The Meaning of Meaning</i>	semantics
1925	<i>The Principles of Literary Criticism</i>	impulse psychology
1926	<i>Science and Poetry</i>	logical positivism
1929	<i>Practical Criticism</i>	direct experimentation
1934	<i>Coleridge on Imagination</i>	myth as projective imagination
1936	<i>The Philosophy of Rhetoric</i>	metaphor itself
1955	<i>Speculative Instruments</i>	communication theory
1960	<i>So Much Nearer</i>	“ “
1977	<i>Complementarities</i>	“ “

Of course much of Richards' speculation overlaps from one book to the next, with certain themes persisting over three or four books, and with others temporarily set aside only to be picked up at another time. However, there does seem to have been an overall unity of purpose whereby later books have extended and refined concepts barely touched upon at an earlier stage in his career. By making a systematic comparison among these books, we can therefore probe and evaluate Richards' fundamental assumptions on a more comprehensive basis. My effort here is simply to suggest a few of the assumptions essential to this task.

## 2.

Richards' first book, *The Foundation of Aesthetic*, was co-authored in 1922 with C.K. Ogden and James Wood, providing a slender ninety-two page comparative study of current theories of beauty. Though now generally neglected, it first presented the concept of synaesthesia that was later afforded a variety of guises in his subsequent books. Only once again did Richards explicitly refer to synaesthesia, in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, yet it remains fundamental to all his subsequent explanations of the psychological equilibrium produced by art. Typically, Richards began *The Foundation of Aesthetics* with a multiple definition of sixteen possible meanings for the concept of beauty. These were divided into three groups progressively more affective in emphasis. The first was composed of purely objective theories, the second of pragmatic and functional theories, and the third of purely psychological theories, of which the most sophisticated was his own concept of synaesthesia. Theories of the first two groups were quickly surveyed without serious consideration, then the psychological theories of the final group were given much closer examination. The doctrine of aesthetic pleasure associated with Santayana's famous principle that beauty is "pleasure regarded as a quality of a thing" was criticized because of its restrictive critical vocabulary, and Clive Bell's theory of significant form was criticized because it presupposed the view that our response to art is a qualitatively singular experience distinct from all others.

More support was expressed for the empathy (or *Einfühlung*) theories of Theodor Lipps and Rudolf Lotze, nineteenth century German philosophers who explained aesthetic experience as a projective interaction of impulses that eliminates the boundary between self and object. It is interesting to note the extent to which Richards was willing to integrate the concepts of impulse and projection in this context, two years before he more systematically applied his theory of the

psychological impulse to literary response in *Principles of Literary Criticism* and twelve years before he “discovered” Coleridge’s projective theory of poetic response in *Coleridge on Imagination*. The latter has been widely praised for signaling Richards’ abandonment of Cambridge behaviorism for a more sophisticated theory of projective response, as if he at last made the appropriate choice between these exclusive concepts. Actually, Richards had favorably responded in his first book to both concepts as integrated by the theory of *Einfühlung* already developed in Germany. The most that might be claimed is that he later shifted his emphasis from behaviorism to organicism, but it is important to recognize that he never abandoned one for the other, since neither concept solely defined his views at any particular phase in his career.

Richards and his co-authors concluded that the most satisfactory theories of beauty feature synaesthesia, the equilibrium of impulses that bring the whole personality into play in the appropriate response to art. In the simplest and most primitive stages of aesthetic response, these impulses combine to produce emotions, but with increased equilibrium we actually become impersonal and disinterested, aware of our isolation from the world around us. If there is a partial ordering of impulses, disequilibrium leads either to irresolution or precipitous action, as demanded for example by Marxist critics (most obviously the Zhdanovites) in their obsessive commitment to the propagandistic value of art; but with our sentient equilibrium refined by art we achieve something like Nietzsche’s version of Apollonian detachment, the aloof experience of beauty as incipient response--Zen-like alertness which minimizes overt behavior. Aesthetic equipoise is gained at the expense of both neurosis and brute praxis through restraint that ultimately derives from the Chung Yung of Confucius:

Having no leanings is called Chung, admitted of no change is called Yung . . . By Chung is denoted Equilibrium; Yung is the fixed principle regulating everything under heaven.<sup>5</sup>

But Richards’ concept of synaesthesia had other sources as well. Wellek suggests that the word “coenaesthesia” might also have been acquired from *Psychological Principles*, by James Ward, who taught at Cambridge during Richards’ undergraduate years, and Richards himself acknowledged the importance of Friedrich Schiller’s theory of equipoise. Richards concurred with Schiller’s doubts that purely aesthetic experience is possible and acknowledged his inclusion of dispositions toward action among proper aesthetic responses, but he neglected to explore these concepts at length.

Richards and his co-authors obviously preferred Ethel Puffer’s explanation of a passive response, which they explored in much greater detail. As explained by Puffer--

The only aesthetic repose is that in which stimulation resulting in impulse or movement is checked by its antagonistic impulse, combined with heightening of tone. But this is *tension, equilibrium, or balance of forces*, which is thus seen to be a general condition of all aesthetic experience.<sup>6</sup>

Agreeing with both Puffer and W.M. Urban, another of his contemporaries, Richards maintained that synaesthesia expresses the perfect equilibrium among our greatest number of impulses, an intricate balance which inhibits us from breaking forth into inappropriate action. The effect of

beauty is the accomplishment of equilibrium by arresting the entire personality in stasis in effect the opposite of praxis. Intentionality, the Hegelian “for-itself,” is transposed into what James Joyce at the same time found in the epiphany, the “of-itself” as one’s satisfaction in a perfect moment of awareness untarnished by pragmatic obligation. Needless to say, politics, religion, and any other mode of belief is alien to this achievement, leaving us with what F.R. Leavis has described as “naï ve Marxism inverted,” the radical individualism of balanced sensibilities. The propagandistic value of art was accordingly reduced to its lesson in achieved equanimity, the introspective sense of harmony which discourages belief and the active pursuit of goals, whatever their value or necessity. This essentially formalist emphasis might seem to contradict Richards’ later didacticism, but the potential difficulty is resolved, simply enough, by treating equanimity as emotional equipoise preliminary to effective behavior. First equipoise imposed by the experience of literature, next useful praxis in real life.

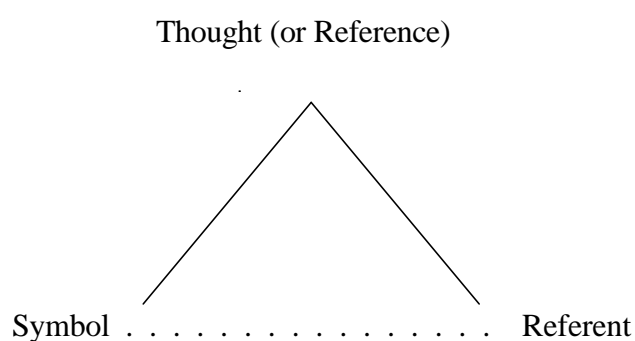
### 3.

Richards first confronted the distinction between meaning and emotion in his brief essay, “Emotion and Art,” published in 1919, and four years later gave systematic formulation to this distinction, specifically between referential and emotive aspects of language in *The Meaning of Meaning*, published in 1923, again in joint authorship with C.K. Ogden.<sup>7</sup> Here the two authors isolated the symbolic use of words, described as their “statement,” i.e. “the recording, the support, the organization and the communication of references,” from their emotive use, which is “probably more “primitive” as the expression of feelings and attitudes. This assumption, in accord with the James-Lange theory of emotion in currency at the time, has been confirmed by later research in brain physiology, which primarily locates the source of emotions in the limbic system, including the hypothalamus, septal nuclei, and particularly the amygdalae, two walnut-sized brain centers whose range of conscious effect extends from mild willfulness to uncontrollable rage. These lower brain centers incessantly color and modify the behavior of the neo-cortex in its cognitive processing, and their total suppression is impossible in the normal individual, no matter how much effort one exerts to divorce emotion from thought. Apparently, all conscious experience, including poetry, gives manifestation to this constant interaction between the limbic and cortical systems as mediated by the hypothalamus. To try to ignore this interaction, as for example recommended by John Crowe Ransom, in favor of a strictly cognitive theory of literary response, performs what amounts to aesthetic lobotomy, and Ogden and Richards’ instincts as students of psychology prevented them from doing so, though of course they lacked the precise knowledge of brain physiology at the time to justify their choice.

What remained for Ogden and Richards was the appropriate balance between meaning and emotion. Poetry almost exclusively concerns the latter, they said, because it makes an arrangement of words “for the sake of attitudes which their acceptance will evoke.”<sup>8</sup> Ogden and Richards claimed this second use, the “evocative function” of language, has dominated meaning in religion, art, and ordinary social intercourse since the prehistoric origins of language. Only recently has the “symbolic function” been isolated and purified to divest empirical science of human motivation, and it would be similarly useful, they suggested, to refine the evocative function of poetry in order to improve the “range and delicacy” of human experience (p. 159). Just as the empirical methods of isolation and quantification emancipated science from superstition and religion, so might poetry be brought to comparable levels of sophistication

emancipated from belief. Aesthetic experience would be perfected as concentrated perceptual activity, freeing the memory “to widen and amplify sensitiveness” while evoking emotions to be balanced and refined through heightened perception enhanced by memory (pp. 155-57).

Ogden and Richards acknowledged that the symbolic and evocative functions of language cannot be entirely separated, any more than intuition can be completely freed of logic (p. 241). They approvingly quoted Vendryes, a contemporary French linguist, to the effect that “the logical element and affective element mingle constantly in language,” but they also felt it was important to differentiate these two dimensions of experience, and this they sought to do with the context of what they described as the “sign situation,” as indicated by their diagram in the first chapter:



Here Ogden and Richards shifted Saussure’s vertical distinction between *signified* and *signifier* to the horizontal axis, permitting the addition of thought as the vertical component, the apex of an isosceles triangle to indicate its role in mediating their interaction. In the simpler model proposed by Saussure, the word symbolizes an idea which is no less limited and definable in its function. Parity exists between the two, and signification depicts an abstract concept, X represented by Y, rather than the individual’s holistic psychological response. A tight equivalence between signified and signifier accordingly predominates over tone, ambiguity, and figuration. The metaphoric “density” of Shakespeare, Keats, and much of the best English poetry is necessarily sacrificed to a classical “purity” more typical of the French poetic tradition previous to nineteenth symbolism.

Ogden and Richards accordingly expanded the isolated impression of a horse emphasized by Saussure from parity between signifier and signified to a holistic psychological response whereby the word *horse* temporarily foregrounds the individual’s total experience of horses since earliest childhood. Ogden and Richards treated the word as an extractable signifier which draws attention to its total locus of experience, most of which might bear only a remote connection to the particular object identified. As a symbol the word “horse” triggers manifold associations, so its retrieval from its unique sign situation in order to to be combined with other words in a particular sentence reinforces an even greater departure from its strictly cognitive referent. All in all, the word as symbol must be treated not as an equation, but as an *act* of reference, the use of one component of associational experience (the word itself, represented by the left leg of the

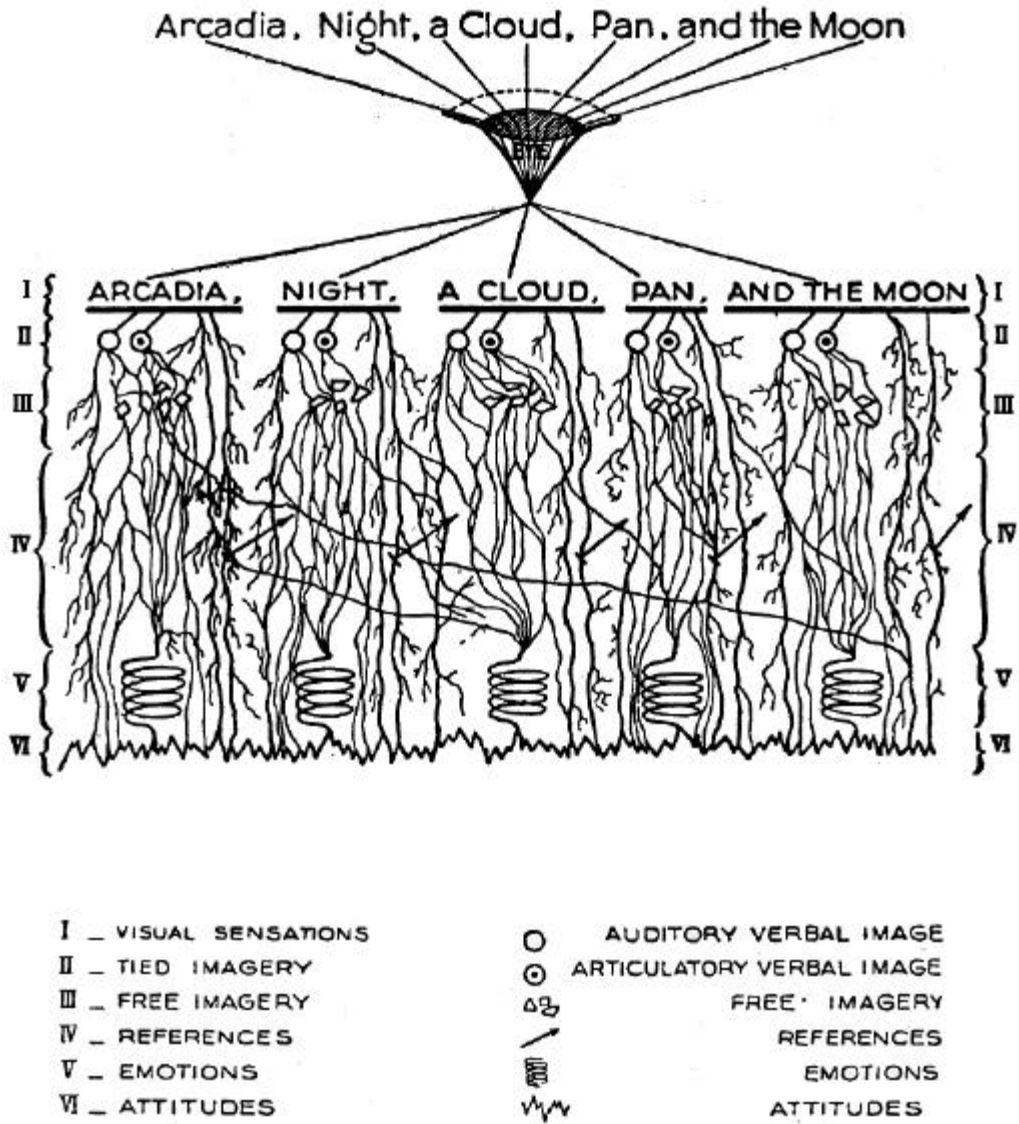
triangle) to vitalize the recollection of the whole experience in conjunction with other words used in the same manner.

This distinction establishes the basis, then, for differentiating poetry from scientific discourse. An inductive gap necessarily exists between any symbol and its referent (represented by the dotted base line). To close this gap science emphasizes the careful verification of meaning as represented by the horizontal base. Scientific methodology is strictly regulated so the inductive leap between symbol and referent can be made with maximum precision for accurately representing events and relationships in our physical environment. What Richards defined as the “Ultraquistic Subterfuge,” the confusion between the quality of things and their emotional effect, is accordingly reduced as much as possible in scientific inquiry, since this distortion of consciousness cannot be permitted to obscure the relationship between symbols and their referents. In contrast, poetry and the arts make a virtue of this subterfuge by emphasizing the wealth of human experience that impinges upon the sign situation, including the speaker’s attitude toward the referent, his own intentions, the audience he is addressing, and the ease or difficulty of what he is saying (pp. 223-27). Emotion and intuition must be acknowledged to be competently managed in the context of poetry, giving symbols their fullest resonance in the minds of reader, resulting in the achievement of synaesthesia discussed in *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, also the balanced impulses later to be discussed in both *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Science and Poetry*. This process activates the entire triangle from apex to base, and as a result it can be distinguished from the relatively simple inductive equation limited to its base. Though science and poetry draw upon the identical sign situation, they feature different, even complementary, operations, and they should not be confused through misguided belief in either religion or political dogma. While science purifies the relationship between symbol and referent by restricting the act of reference to accurate symbolization, literature properly treats this act as behavior, the consciousness that expands induction into a more inclusive context of judgment and sensibility. We need only be cautious of belief, the misguided effort to attribute inductive validity to emotive discourse, for this can lead us dangerously astray. As Richards later declared, “We need a spell of purer science and purer poetry before the two can again be missed, if indeed this will even become once more desirable.”<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.

In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, published a year later in 1924, Richards shifted from semantics to an “impulse” theory of psychology in order to justify the experience of poetry as an ethical accomplishment, since it helps to cultivate a more finely attenuated organization of the personality. In effect, he was trying to demonstrate that better ethics is an essential byproduct of improved aesthetic sensibility. To demonstrate this relationship, he resorted to contemporary psychology dependent on the theory of an impulse as the basic unit of conscious experience, whether of pleasure, pain, desire, memory, insight, etc. The impulse could be neither as tiny as the single neuron’s either-or choice in response to stimuli nor as globally inclusive as a motive or attitude. Instead, it was loosely understood as a unit, or packet, of nervous activity whose combination with others of its kind composes our conscious experience. Like Freud’s concept of the libido and Jung’s concept of archetypes, it now seems to have served as a useful construct for psychologists during the early twentieth century but without having been verified on a scientific basis relative to size, shape, or level of energy expended. Its suggestion of neural energy in

process nevertheless remained appropriate to modern neurology as long as there was no effort to isolate its existence as a thing or event that could be graphed, photographed, or bottled as evidence. Unfortunately, Richards used a bizarre graph on p. 116 to depict mental behavior with coils, tendrils, and nodes to represent the total process of thinking:

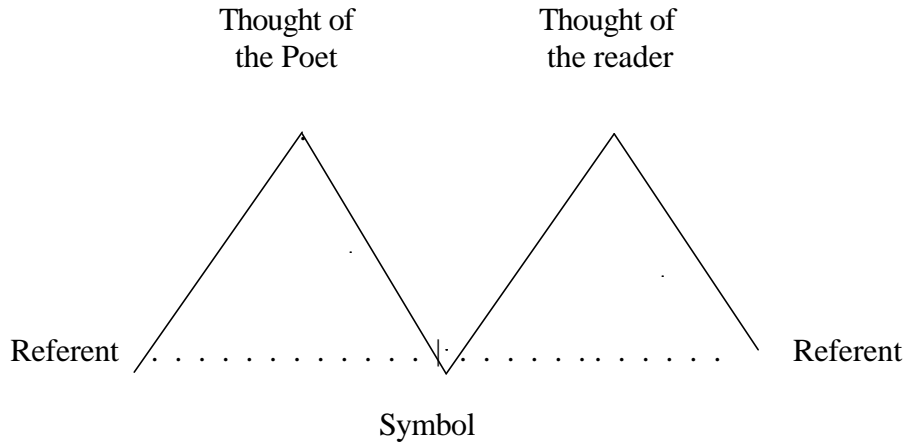


Here twelve categories are organized additional to the sign situation that Richards, with the help of Ogden, had already established for the grasp of language in both normal discourse and poetry. In this paradigm a hierarchy among these categories is necessarily implied by its vertical organization, but without any justification for it in neurological literature, either then or now. Twelve years later, in *A Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Richards seems to have abandoned the concept with his remark, “I will only say that I hold . . . that an identification of Thought with an activity of the nervous system is to me an acceptable hypothesis, but too large to have interesting applications” (p. 13). Today, Richards’ neurological paradigm seems best appreciated as metaphor, as in fact his notion of impulse may also be granted its metaphoric value in depicting conscious dynamics otherwise resistant to analysis. Richards warned, for example, against the

“distorted” impulse, raising the issue exactly how a single reified unit of experience can be distorted as compared to others. Obviously it cannot, but a combination of impulses, whatever its relevant size, can in fact bear results that deserve to be described as distortive.

His paradigm indicated above remains useful at least to the extent that it represents each reader’s mind comprising an indefinite variety of impulses whose balance and integration determine his intelligence, sensitivity, and good taste. Whatever personality structure frustrates the fewest impulses is qualitatively superior because it expands human potential, and it is poetry that does this best through its frustration of the fewest impulses. Conversely, loss sometimes results from the sacrifice of some impulses in order to gratify others, as occurs for both the debauchee and victim of authoritarian tendencies, each making too great a sacrifice for his own good. Richards’ argument can easily be divested of its reference to impulses, and without at all diminishing its significance. For most of us muddle through life integrating our needs and feelings well enough to survive, but of course we fall short of our full creative potential typical of such geniuses as Shakespeare, Mozart, and Picasso. Our relative shortfall comes from disequilibrium produced by the repression of feelings we cannot otherwise manage, leading to premature overt behavior as well as vulgar simplifications that betray our inability to come to terms with our experience with sufficient adequacy (pp. 276, 251). Poets thus serve as our “unacknowledged legislators,” in the words of Shelley, because they possess the genius to liberate and confirm our most fugitive impulses in the context of verbal expression, and in the process they help us to transcend our limitations. They possess the equilibrium to orchestrate these impulses in their fullest subtlety as incipient behavior, though of course their universal appeal may also encourage the direct gratification of relatively crude impulses associated with convention and sentimentality--the “message” too many readers demand of poetry. Here is where doggerel falls short of good poetry.

The crucial question for Richards became the problem of communication between ultra-normal and intricately organized poets and their readers whose normal but relatively crude systems of impulses can be refined through sharing in the experience of poetry. The poet must be able to communicate the subtlety and profundity of his experience, and the reader must be entirely “vigilant” (a term borrowed from Dr. Head) to benefit from the poet’s expressive superiority. The problem to be surmounted by poets and readers is the existence of a gap between their minds preventing adequate communication. This gap compounds the inductive leap between a symbol and its referent because the same symbol must be successively interpreted within two comparable but somewhat different “sign situations”--that of the poet and that of his readers who need to fathom his intentions. The symmetrical relationship that is brought into play between these two sign situations may be diagrammed with isomorphic triangles adjacent to each other on the same base, and though Richards did not extend his earlier model in this fashion, its application becomes obvious relevant to his later explorations of communication theory:



The intersection designated “symbol” represent the point of contact in communication, while the doubled base line represents three (not two) inductive gaps comprising the respective sign situations of the poet and reader as well as the leap in communication from one to the other. To bridge the third of these gaps (and in doing so, the others as well), poets must express their own experience well enough to induce a comparable response in the minds of their readers. Of course the experiential background of poets and their audience cannot be absolutely identical, even when poets read to themselves, since their current thinking is different from the experience they originally put into the poem. As a result the “ideal reader” is unattainable, leaving us with the distinction between a “qualified” reading and the range of actual responses that fall short of adequacy for one reason or another.

To help account for these misreadings, Richards turned to Tolstoy’s “infectious” theory of poetry proposed in *What is Art*, isolating three variables essential to effective communication:

1. Poetry is “infectious” in consequence of a greater or lesser peculiarity of the sensation conveyed.
2. Also in consequence of a greater or lesser clearness of the transmission of this sensation.
3. Also in consequence of the sincerity of the artist, that is, of the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself experiences the sensations which he is conveying. (p. 186)

The first principle did not especially concern Richards at this time despite his insistence shared with Tolstoy that normalcy is essential to creativity. However, he examined in depth the second and third principles, since they clearly reinforced his theories of communication and the poet’s normal organization of impulses, and in fact the emphasis on sincerity was subsequently adopted in *Practical Criticism* to define the personality endowed with balanced impulses. Here obviously borrowed from Tolstoy, the word *sincerity* soon became Richards’ central metaphor for defining poetry’s synaesthesia on a strictly ethical basis.

Finally, Richards emphasized in *Principles* the importance of literary form as the agent of communication between the poet and his readers. He claimed form introduces “technical” questions complementary to the “critical” component of aesthetic judgment, but he considered these questions to be of considerable importance in the interpretation of poetry. He had recognized their value as early as *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, when he proposed that the “psychological story of the organization of our impulses” must be balanced against the study of form, as a “physico-physiological account of the work of art as a stimulus” (p. 63). Later he speculated in *Practical Criticism* that perhaps half the feeling of poetry comes from form (p. 225), but here, in *Principles*, he more restrictively defined form as objective pattern that facilitates the stimulation of synaesthesia: “As [form] varies, so do our further or deeper responses to feeling and attitude vary (pp. 166-67).

Richards went on to claim that form uniquely shapes our response to poetry and rejected any notion of its validity beyond this affective purpose. Form is not, he said, a “simple, unanalyzable virtue of objects” (p. 167), and to think this is to fall victim to the fallacy of “projecting an effect and making it a quality of its cause” (p. 21). Instead, form is to be judged by the “interplay of effects” it arouses in the reader (p. 173). He accordingly explained formal elements as the features of poetry best guaranteeing the appropriate balance of impulses in readers as a duplication of those of the poet: “the stimuli, simple or complex, which can be most depended upon to produce uniform responses” (p. 193). Rhythm and meter were likewise explained as a subtle interaction between expectation and surprises, and metaphor was explored as a “semi-surreptitious method by which a greater variety of elements can be wrought into the fabric of experience” (pp. 139-40, 240). In similar fashion, the genre of tragedy was explored as a radical expansion of consciousness totally releasing suppressed experience through the reconciliation of pity, the impulse to approach, and fear, the impulse to retreat (pp. 245-46). In short, all form was interpreted as the use of objective pattern to refine the impulses of the reader.

## 5.

In his fourth book, *Science and Poetry*, published in 1926, Richards offered a summing up that amplified for the lay reader the social and personal implications of his affective theory subsequent to *The Foundations of Aesthetics*. He also expanded his “impulse” theory to explain the political basis of his aesthetics. He assured the reader that the “Magical View” that emphasizes belief in spirits and powers had declined over the previous three hundred years, and with increased rapidity since the advent of Darwinism and modern astrophysics. Scientific knowledge had supplanted earlier “edifices of supposed knowledge,” but without answering the questions--requests, actually--that have always been primarily rooted in human need. Universal apocalypse seemed imminent, and our collective psychological deficiencies for coping with this amounted to a “biological crisis.”<sup>10</sup> As before, he maintained that these deficiencies ultimately derive from disorganized impulses, but he primarily traced this disorganization to the abandonment of the Magical View necessitated by modern science. It has been this loss, he proposes, that makes destructive behavior possible on a mass scale. If balance is to be restored, there must be a concerted effort to regain equanimity, and this is best achieved, Richards claimed, through refining and universalizing our appreciation of poetry.

Richards felt that modern critics must therefore accept their social responsibility to expose the public to poetry's superior adjustment and reconciliation of impulses. The static equipoise to be gained would be neither ill-considered praxis nor torpid inactivity, but "incipient preparedness," a readiness for action that would effectively substitute for actual behavior. Most other problems, both social and individual, could be resolved if this sustained condition of alertness were regained by a sizeable minority of citizens. Poetry would offer a "perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos," in fact a new Hindenburg Line for defending western tradition from the onslaught of barbarism.<sup>11</sup> This social objective also seems to have inspired Richards' later concern with education and the creation of Basic English for universal communication. He was convinced that the nurturing of the sentient individual is the first and most necessary step in the preservation of culture, and he felt that individuals primarily (but not exclusively) benefit from an equanimity he had earlier defined as synaesthesia. His medium of choice for the cultivation of this internal balance was poetry, but it could just as easily have been art or chamber music.

Chapter VI, "Poetry and Beliefs," introduced the most notorious arguments in *Science and Poetry*, and, for that matter, in Richards' entire corpus of criticism. Here Richards sought to borrow the notion of "pseudo-statements" from philosophy, referring to all ideas that are meaningless in the sense that they can be neither proved nor disproved. As defined by the Vienna Circle and later elaborated by Rudolph Carnap, this unfounded knowledge necessarily included almost all matters of religion, literature, and popular philosophy. Whatever the negative implications might have been relevant to the concept of God, Richards thought the pejorative implications of the concept could be neutralized relevant to literature, since it could be put to use in a clarifying literature's suspension of disbelief that is crucial to poetic equipoise. For in fact, Richards insisted, fiction, religion, and most human communication depends more than we want to admit on pseudo-statements as expressions that express feelings and attitudes important to us quite aside of their lack of verifiable truth. In matters of religion, issues of "truth" or the lack thereof might be important on a strictly veridical basis, but not in matters of literary gratification. Truths might somehow be suggested by a novel or poem, but without imposing any necessity for hypotheses to be demonstrated by scientific experiment. For the important role of pseudo-statements is in merging information with feelings and attitudes in a fusion that is of crucial importance for cultivating poise and equanimity. Time-honored beliefs may be factually inaccurate, but their function as pseudo-statement has always been potentially beneficial in both religion and literature, so they must be cultivated by shifting our emphasis from potential superstition to poetry itself, a safer vehicle of ordinary human aspirations. Once liberated from factual pretensions, poetry in particular may actually be refined to deploy pseudo-statements as the effective use of misinformation toward the achievement of synaesthesia. Poetry's language may be appreciated as an "experimental submission" we grant to poets so we can benefit from their more finely attuned organization of experience.

In the final analysis, Richards abysmally failed in his effort to market the notion of pseudo-statement with fellow critics, most of whom were unwilling to sacrifice belief and religion to this particular designation, to say nothing of the many literary truths they had always taken for granted. Nor were they willing to accept as the primary function of literature the creation of a static equipoise of impulses, thereby relinquishing to science the quest for insight relevant to human affairs, if not matters of empirical inquiry. Richards had obviously outreached

himself, and it was only by quickly shifting his emphasis to “sincerity” in *Practical Criticism*, that he recovered his former good standing among fellow critics. It turns out, however, that essentially the same assumptions were at work. As defined by Richards, pseudo-statements remained the primary “stuff” of poetry, while sincerity more acceptably characterized the poet’s attitude toward his readers while spinning his web of inventions toward an improved balance of impulses. That poetry could be both sincere and misrepresentative did not bother Richards. Raw information always played second fiddle to feeling and disposition; the virtue of integrity seemed more a matter of internal harmony than verifiable factual accuracy.

## 6.

In *Practical Criticism*, published three years later, in 1929, Richards shifted his emphasis from ideal poetic response to the sources of failure actually encountered while reading poetry. In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, he had defined poetry as a consummate achievement in normal experience for both poets and their readers; then in *Science and Poetry* he had advocated the pursuit of this normal behavior toward the achievement of stability of individuals as well as the survival of civilization. Here in *Practical Criticism* he took a complementary tack by establishing poetry’s misrepresentation as the consequence of personal inadequacy in both poets and readers. He continued to treat sincerity as poetry’s most important ingredient despite its elusiveness to all but a tiny minority of reader, but he revised Tolstoy’s concept of sincerity according to the Chung Yung of Confucian philosophy, defining it as the honest response to a finer differentiation among impulses in the creative individual. Through expanded consciousness, sincerity supposedly offers the delicate inclusiveness enabling us to be true to both our judgment and intuition. Sincerity liberates fugitive and tangential flights of imagination because of our freedom to explore unafraid whatever occurs to us, with the paradoxical result that we become “more appropriately responsive to the outer world.” There is greater synaesthesia as defined in *The Foundation of Aesthetics*--also greater facility in utilizing the sign situation emphasized in *The Meaning of Meaning*. Inspired by poetry’s sincerity we have somehow, almost mystically, bridged the inductive gap to “effect a union of the external and internal,” a feat which science accomplishes only through the most rigid discovery procedures.<sup>12</sup> Because of its consummate sincerity, poetry helps us to merge the subjective and objective dimensions of experience, giving refinement to our fullest breadth of consciousness: “Being more at one within itself the mind thereby becomes more appropriately responsive to the outer world” (p. 287). True inner harmony helps us to find harmony with our environment as well.

And what of insincerity? The word *insincerity* is too harsh to advocate in literary criticism, but its less pejorative substitute, irony, bears close examination relevant to the contrast between overt and intended meaning, for example when the remark, “Such an interesting speech” expresses revulsion. Richards had earlier treated irony as double consciousness in a brief passage in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, arguing that it consists of “bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses.” Richards concluded, “That is why poetry which is exposed to it is not of the highest order, and why irony itself is so constantly a characteristic of poetry which is [of the highest order].” In other words, bad poetry is deservedly subject to ridicule, while the best poetry exercises double consciousness whose irony often verges on ridicule. In a more positive light, Richards claimed that irony produces an “equilibrium of opposed impulses, which we suspect to be the ground-plan of the most valuable aesthetic

responses, brings into play far more of our personality than is possible in experiences of a more defined emotion” (pp. 250-51). Irony’s service to poetry derives from its confessed ambivalence, thereby expressing a greater portion of the poet’s identity--and that of the reader as well--than would otherwise be possible. It might be mentioned here that Cleanth Brooks used this paradox obtained from Richards as the theoretical basis for his influential book, *The Well Wrought Urn*, published in 1947.

Once Richards internalized his theory of taste and intuition based on the principle of sincerity, he was able to formulate in *Practical Criticism* one of the most radical principles of affective criticism, the notion that poetry is too complex to be judged according to strictly objective criteria. Instead, he proposed that we must first read it carefully with understanding and feeling, then withdraw a level of abstraction to take stock of our total response: “Value in poetry turns nearly always upon differences and connections too minute and unobtrusive to be directly perceived. We recognize them only in their effects” (p. 302). And if these feelings and attitudes are to be fully consulted, the entire person necessarily becomes involved: “The choice of our whole personality may be the only instrument we possess delicate enough to effect the discrimination” (p. 302). As a result, the poet’s sincerity must be matched by that of the reader, each drawing upon full consciousness to master the experience afforded by poetry.

Though Richards had earlier challenged Santayana’s definition of poetry as the projection of our feelings upon objects which stimulate them, he now seems to have revised his opinion, extending this definition to its two logical corollaries: (1) that the critical judgment of texts ultimately rests on assessing our subjective response to them, and (2) that this response must involve the “choice” of our entire personality, no part compartmentalized from the rest. Like Santayana, Richards was willing to accept the apparent paradox that heightened subjectivity is essential for making objective distinctions in judging poetry, and, vice versa, that analysis based on strictly objective desiderata such as irony, tone, imagery, or texture can be faulted for lacking this crucial extra dimension. In fact, Richards claimed, any critical principle is likely to be misused if isolated from total consciousness as a source of critical judgment. Richards also proposed a third corollary that any lapse in poetic technique which breaks a particular rule (for example nonsense, vagueness, mixed metaphor, or the pathetic fallacy) is nevertheless justified if it produces a satisfactory response in the sensitive reader (pp. 195-96, 204, 354). The ultimate criterion of formal technique for Richards became poetry’s effect, the subtlety and human appropriateness of the response it evokes.

Richards also proposed in *Practical Criticism* that poetic response combines four aspects of human intelligence--sense, feeling, tone, and intention--all of which are of crucial importance. Our failure in interpreting poetry results from our inability to respond properly to one or more of these. Sense expresses the thought of poetry, its intellectual content that is necessary to control our feelings (pp. 191, 274); feeling expresses the attitude we have toward what we describe, our usually fugitive emotional response that we try to articulate as defined by sense (pp. 181, 21-11, 217); and tone expresses our attitude toward those whom we address--in poetry the feelings of poets toward their readers. Richards maintained that tone is particularly elusive to definition since it thoroughly intermingles with the other aspects of meaning, but he argued that it probably remains the single most important ingredient of style, and, unfortunately, the most common source of poetry’s failure through faults such as over-insistence and condescension (pp. 182,

209). Finally, he defined his fourth category, intention, as the aim of the poet, the “effect he is endeavoring to promote,” outside and yet controlling the relationship among the other three because it can only be accomplished through their instrumentality (pp. 182, 356). Richards believed that all four must successfully interact in good poetry and that the competent reader must be in a high state of vigilance to respond to this interaction.

Of course the shocking disclosure of *Practical Criticism* was that the great majority of readers fall grotesquely short of this ideal. For a series of unidentified poems by poets of varying talent--some famous, some not; some brilliant, some ordinary--he gathered hundreds of “protocol responses” from students at Cambridge University in England, and, having systematically sorted through them, he found most of their assessments completely irrelevant to the intended meaning and effect of these poems. Moreover, the protocol responses almost inevitably praised obviously bad poetry and rejected good poetry. Reluctantly, he concluded, “We must cease to regard a misinterpretation as a mere unlucky accident. We must treat it as a normal and probable event” (p. 336). With typical systematic thoroughness, he isolated ten primary difficulties leading to misinterpretation, each posing a separate problem though he found they usually “depend upon one another like a cluster of monkeys”:

1. The difficulty of making out the plain sense of poetry, its overt meaning,
2. The difficulty of sensuous apprehension, of experiencing the form and movement of poetry.
3. The difficulty in visualizing imagery.
4. The intrusive influence of mnemonic irrelevances.
5. The intrusive influence of stock responses, “views and emotions already fully prepared in the reader’s mind.”
6. A proneness to sentimentality, the “over-facility in certain emotional directions.”
7. Inhibition, the fear of acknowledging a particular experience.
8. Doctrinal adhesions, the intrusiveness of irrelevant beliefs.
9. Technical presuppositions, the acceptance or rejection of a style because of its technical qualities, usually through identification with the styles of other poets.
10. General critical preconceptions, the judgment of poetry according to a particular critical theory. (pp. 13-17, 180).

In each instance Richards showed how the sign situation he had emphasized in *Meaning of Meaning* was misused almost beyond remedy among the students used as subjects. Even the plain sense of poetry was demonstrated to be commonly lost upon readers, necessarily compounding difficulties for the other nine categories, since poetry’s entire superstructure of

connotations and formal effects cannot be adequately grasped if its basic meaning is misunderstood. Otherwise, perhaps the most rampant disorder for Richards was the fifth, the stock response, which he obviously considered the crutch of average intelligence in modern civilization. Richards maintained that the stock response might be convenient in our simplest daily behavior but can only be harmful to our appreciation of poetry because it encourages impersonality, unexamined habits, and a general withdrawal from experience in its fullest subtlety. The “premature fixation” of stock response, he argued, can only support facile conclusions the very antithesis of poetry. Once habit precludes the shock of new discovery, the opportunity for genuine poetry disappears, since, “Nearly all good poetry is disconcerting, for a moment at least, when we first see it for what it is. Some dear habit has to be abandoned if we are to follow it” (p. 254). The very best poetry disrupts to produce greater synaesthesia, and of course consciousness must be expanded so we might better respond to this disruptive effect.

7.

In *Coleridge on Imagination*, published in 1935, Richards shifted his emphasis from the discreet “sign situation” to the metadynamics of consciousness as a more global projection of meaning upon objective forms. Previously, Richards had concentrated upon the interpretation of poetry as an internalizing process--a Lockean integration of discreet perceptions received from an external source, the text of poetry. Now Richards reversed priorities to meet Kantian demands articulated by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*. No longer was poetic response treated as heightened receptivity, essentially a passive act of perception; instead, its projective dimension was highlighted as the regnant capacity of the mind to impose pattern and coherence upon the perceived symbolic content of poetry.<sup>13</sup> The general reception to this departure in Richards’ critical approach was generally enthusiastic among Anglo-American critics. Such figures as Tate, Brooks, Max Black, and Jerome Schiller, among others, praised Richards for his shift in perspective as if it represented a major revision in Richards’ aesthetics. F. R. Leavis concurred in discerning such a transition, but only to attack both the earlier and later positions, while Wellek and Richards himself argued more persuasively that much less change was involved than the others supposed.

The issue of communication Richards emphasized since the very beginning was now expanded to include the projective consciousness of the poet inducing comparable projective consciousness on the part of readers. What most intrigued Richards about Coleridge was his theory of the imagination as an integrative capacity for combining the objective and subjective realms in a new and more encompassing unity of experience: “The subject is what it is through the objects it has been” (p. 57). By giving primary value to this projective integration, Richards could more effectively show how poetry bridges the inductive gap as a “coadunated” and “esemplastic” act of experience--*coadunated* in the sense that all parts are inter-related (pp. 84-5), and *esemplastic* in the sense that imaginative unity is imposed to obtain this assemblage (p. 76). According to Richards, full understanding of this subjective achievement would settle the rivalry between “regulative” and constitutive” epistemologies extending back as far as Plato and Aristotle, finally establishing a meaningful synthesis between our statements “I am” and “there are things” (pp. 65, 184). Consciousness could be redefined according to A.E. Powell’s theory of romantic imagination, the mind providing an “active, self-forming, self-realizing system” which simultaneously generates and discovers reality through its projection of meaning beyond

itself (pp. 69, 146). In its synthesis of subject and object, the mind could also be shown to impose pattern according to an “all in each” principle that units of meaning surrender their independence to their cooperative purpose (pp. 81, 97). Both the isolated object and its cognitive equivalent in the admittedly reified “unit” of experience could be demonstrated to exist as abstractions we project into the realm of “things” (pp. 144-46), as opposed to poetry’s truly “concrete” experience whose projective realization is more clearly organic.

Richards also proposed his own theory of myth to explain the manifold coherence of experience we project upon nature. He defined myth as “the utterance of the whole soul of man, and, as such, inexhaustible to meditation.” What we obtain from a myth, he said, is only what we put into it, the unity that explains and justifies our experience. Myth transforms us from beasts to men and actually gives us what may be defined as “soul” in the value and purpose we find in our lives (pp. 171-74, 181). Myth articulates the pattern and embodiment of our projected world of experience--it finally governs our behavior and aspirations, our judgment of ourselves and the people we know. Richards not surprisingly claimed that poetry is the most satisfactory vehicle for myths, “the myth-making which most brings the whole soul of man into activity,” but it does this without evoking action, desire, will, or intellectual assent, the inadequacies he had combated with his earlier “impulse” theory (p. 288). Like synaesthesia, poetic myth transcends a Lockean principle of “regulative” meaning that is vulgarly didactic and unjustified in its dependence upon the methods and assumptions of science. Instead, projection affords a journey that is its own end with no destination beyond itself (pp. 173, 213-4). Only to a limited degree may ordinary belief be afforded the credibility we want to vest in our myths, so we must turn to poetry to exercise this capacity to the purest degree.

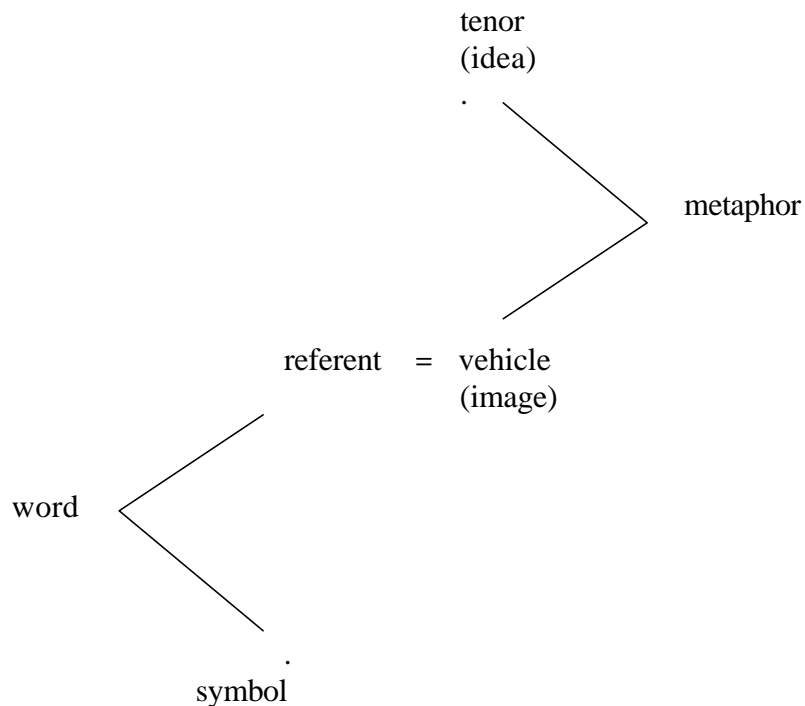
Also important for Richards in *Coleridge on Imagination* was the relationship between words and experience. As anticipated in *Meaning of Meaning*, he challenged popular linguistic assumptions by claiming that a word is not a unit of meaning, but an “abstraction from an utterance” which in and of itself, artificially isolated, has too many possible significations to be useful for communication. Only its combination with other words confirms its reference well enough to make it a useful vehicle for being understood. The most important factor in the speech act is its context of experience, not the symbol itself in the context of syntax, which is, after all, only one component of the “sign situation”: “Apart from the speech act,” he claimed, “there are no words” (p. 101, 104, 107). Paradoxically, however, he went so far as to argue that the absence (or, more appropriately, the breakdown) of syntax is often favorable to the imagination (p. 91). He accordingly found in the single word at least a modicum of creativity--“the projection of its meaning into a word is an instance of imagination”--though the cluster of such projections composing the speech act obviously seemed the key to the fullest resources of the imagination (p. 110). Almost two decades earlier, in “Meanings Anew,” published in *So Much Nearer*, Richards had emphatically insisted upon the useful but subordinate role of syntax:

The point is that if we can conceive the situation fully and accurately enough we will find the justification for the grammatical structure to derive almost always from its service to the semantic aims of the utterance.<sup>14</sup>

Richards' never changed this view. Of course the importance of both syntax and the symbolism conveyed by the single word was acknowledged, but their instrumental capacity kept them subordinate to semantics.

## 8.

Richards directly confronted the issue of metaphor in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, published in 1936, and his analysis has been extraordinarily influential in the field of criticism. It can therefore be discussed with emphasis upon his affective theory of poetic response--also with reference to his explanation of his various shifts in critical theory as metaphoric variation. Richards proposed that all metaphor divides into two components respectively labeled the "tenor" and "vehicle," the first consisting of the idea represented and the latter consisting of the imagery that represents it. As already explained in *Coleridge on the Imagination*, he wanted to expand the category of imagery to include besides the visual image any idea or mental event that represents something (pp. 32-33). He also took into account comparisons and figures of speech, but their inclusion in his theory of metaphor would have rendered his argument tautological, since the tenor-vehicle dichotomy itself depends a treatment of metaphor as a figure of speech dependent on comparisons. In Shakespeare's Sonnet LXXIII, for example, the wording, "'boughs which shake against the cold" offers the image, or "vehicle," of a barren tree during the winter to depict as its "tenor" the aging poet's vulnerability to the indifferent forces of nature. Through this visual evocation both logic and syntax can be subordinated to the expression of feelings too complex to be exactly defined. In effect, signification is doubled by means of metaphor, since the word's projective image catapults reference to an idea beyond itself that otherwise seems elusive and inaccessible to language. This tandem doubling of signification may be depicted by vertically combining Richards' respective models of metaphor and the sign situation described in *Meaning of Meaning* in a more inclusive paradigm that extends Saussure's model of signification:<sup>15</sup>



For scientific discourse the total sign situation is strictly limited to an inductive leap between symbol and referent on the lower component alone, but for poetry the sign situation activates the entire vertical process from symbol to tenor as integrated at the verbal level by the symbol-referent binarism and at the experiential level by a vehicle-tenor interchange. If a word's meaning is kept explicit, objective accuracy might be gained at the sacrifice of personality. However, if reference is metaphorically doubled, experiential inclusiveness takes precedence over rigid objectivity. What results is a symbolic flexibility that brings to language the fullest resources of consciousness

In "Art and Science," a brief paper published in 1919, Richards had already used the word "vehicle" to refer to any conscious representation either in poetry or prose exposition.<sup>16</sup> He argued that all ideas embody propositions, but he also wanted to differentiate these propositions from the imagery or constructions used to convey their meaning to the reader. In "Emotion and Art," also published in 1919, Richards retained the same distinction, expanding his concept of "proposition" to include ideas expressed in poetry as well:

A proposition is what is meant by any sensible form which has a meaning. A vehicle is any sensible form which has a meaning, or gives access to, or places before the mind, a proposition or import.<sup>17</sup>

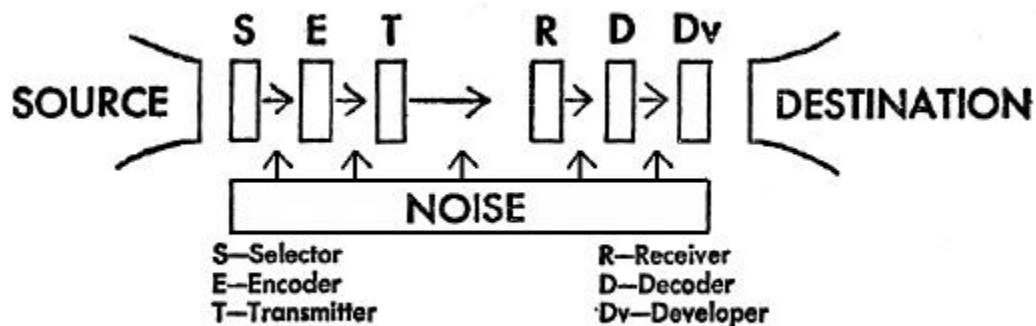
Seventeen years later, in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Richards obviously resurrected this distinction in his explanation of metaphor, substituting "tenor" for "proposition," but retaining the word "vehicle" as originally used. Tenor referred to an inchoate and apparently indefinable idea, and vehicle referred to its tangible representation through imagery immediately accessible to the minds of readers. This imagery need not be visual, but in its cohesive and near-eidetic integrity it could extend signification to ideas otherwise elusive to verbal expression. Richards accordingly proposed that thought itself is metaphoric because it "proceeds by comparisons" which result from the brain's function as a "connecting organ" (pp. 94, 125). Poetic metaphor could then be all the more appreciated, since it captures the intrinsic associative freedom of the mind as a superimposition of metaphor upon metaphor (pp. 108-9).

## 9.

After World War II, Richards' obsession with Basic English, universal literacy, the problems of translation, and other such issues restricted his contributions to affective poetics to perhaps a dozen articles gathered in *Speculative Instruments*, published in 1955, *So Much Near*, published in 1968, and the final pages of *Complementarities*, edited and published by John Paul Russo in 1976. Essays included in *Speculative Instruments* extend from 1940 into the early fifties, with only two of them published for the first time in the text. Essays in *Complementarities* similarly extend from 1919 to 1975 without new inclusions, while six essays in *So Much Nearer* were included for the first time. Richards' final essays have been devoted to a widely divergent range of topics, and they often possess an elliptical specificity that discourages casual reading. However, there is obvious continuity in his treatment of poetic response that can be traced to his earliest books and articles. Richards' use of information theory in his latest stage, which has undoubtedly been influenced by the Russian formalist critic, Roman

Jakobson, a colleague at Harvard, is accordingly no less valuable than his earlier theories in explaining aesthetic response. Once again Richards has discovered a new and useful paradigm for dealing with poetry as subjective behavior, this time based on encoding-decoding and feedback feed-forward dynamics. As before, he engages in extravagant flights of reductionism, but it is important to recognize that he also continues to subordinate his speculation to his insistence upon a “thick” and full-bodied experience of both poets and their readers confronted with the challenge of language in action.

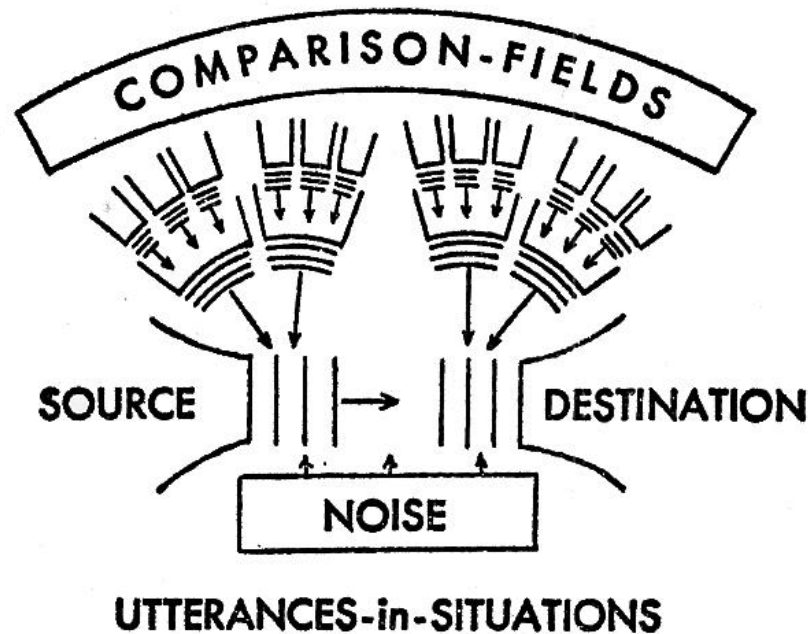
The most impressive of these has been Richards’ reassessment of poetry, “The Future of Poetry” (pp. 150-82). Through careful selection, a theory of poetic experience can be gleaned from these later essays that effectively complements his earlier theoretical contributions, for once again theoretical metaphor occurs just as fruitful as his earlier approaches in redefining poetry. Richards emphasizes communication as a transaction that begins with “encoding” by the poet and ends with “decoding” by the reader. The two inversely sequence the subjective processing of language through a complex feedback-feed-forward interaction with constant modification.<sup>18</sup> In his paper, “Toward a Theory of Comprehending,” first published in 1953, he proposed a highly reified model based on a conventional diagram of communications theory:



Here the poet is identified as “source,” and the reader as “destination.” The horizontal line between the two consists of six boxes, three apiece for the poet and reader. The appropriate sequence for the poet, from left to right, includes the selector, encoder, and transmitter, and for the reader--in reverse order, but also from left to right--the receiver, decoder, and developer. All six units supposedly spin on vertical axes, and the sound of poetry, identified as “noise,” is consigned to an elongated box of its own at the bottom.<sup>19</sup> Once in horizontal sequence from left to right, the poet’s categories of selector and encoder and the reader’s categories of decoder and developer can be seen to simplify the entire mental apparatus--coils, tendrils, and all--proposed on a vertical scale by Richards in his earlier model included on p. 9. Some version of an H can therefore be concocted with the encoding-decoding transaction providing the middle bar between two upright neurological stanchions, one for the poet and the other for the reader, the latter with coils to the right instead of the left. Perhaps the most compelling feature of Richards’ most recent model relevant to his earlier theoretical speculation is the idealized mirror-image symmetry of the two behaviors involved in poetry--its composition and the reader’s interpretation. In both instances the sign situation is divided into three steps, and the two most subjective of them, respectively selection and encoding for the poet and decoding and developing

for the reader, should be recognized to denote the interaction between the sign itself and the choice of the entire personality involved in the sign situation described in *Meaning of Meaning*.

To complicate matters further, Richards adds a third and fourth categories: previous experience relevant to the choice of words, described as a “comparison field”; and the specific “utterances in situations” from one or more comparison fields that can be resurrected to inform the present verbal context. The result of this perhaps redundant complication is a more complex diagram, as follows:



In his original treatment of the sign situation Richards was primarily interested in the response to verbal meaning in its fullest resonance, and his diagram was appropriately simple. Now, much later in his career, everything seems too complicated. Richards' latest formulation does gain mechanical sufficiency in explaining what happens, but at the expense of the holistic sign situation he earlier proposed as a matter of semantics. Apparently lost in the transition are organic implications relevant to the conscious resources brought into play--specifically synaesthesia as a balance of impulses and the choice of the entire personality. However, the two complementary models remain useful in combination, since they effectively help to define each other on a metaphoric basis, the first emphasizing process, the second a dynamic mixture of interactive functions. And in fact this concession can be extended to all of Richards' theories and paradigms.

For in fact each of Richards' theoretical constructs is at least useful in raising issues that deserve to be investigated. As byproducts of his theory of practical criticism (considered by many his most useful contribution to literary criticism), Richards has introduced an entire nomenclature of poetic devices useful to literary interpretation--most obviously image, metaphor, ambiguity, tension, and tone. Most of these concepts have been adopted as basic equipment of literary criticism, featured in published explications and taught in basic literature classes without

more than passing acknowledgement of Richards' theoretical superstructure. But just as important have been his intermediate conceptual models of literary experience that have featured such principles as synaesthesia, the sign situation, balanced impulses, pseudo-statement, the choice of the whole personality, mythic projection, and, finally, various applications of information theory. With each of these reformulations in Richards' half-century adventure as a critic, he has advanced to a new and compelling level of sophistication in the analysis of poetry, yet compatible with the rest, toward establishing the valid experience of poetry at its best and most useful level of realization.

Throughout his career Richards has consistently sought to demonstrate how the sufficient experience of poetry subverts orthodox stereotypes through the cultivation of superior balance and harmony in individual consciousness, but also in society as a whole. Richards has accordingly staked his theoretical task on the assumption shared with Matthew Arnold that the final defense of modern civilization is ultimately dependent on educational reform through an improvement of reading skills that is best achieved, Richards insisted, by cultivating an adequate response to good poetry. Even today, with reference to Shelley's famous equation between poets and legislators, Richards maintains, "I would like to read, not '*Poets* are the unacknowledged legislators,' but '*poems* are the unacknowledged legislation of the world.'"<sup>20</sup> Each of Richards' theoretical contributions surveyed here can be recognized to have explained poetry toward this end, but with the ancillary achievement of having provided a remarkable explanation of literary judgment relevant to an essentially democratic political agenda. For better readers make better citizens as far as Richards was concerned. If his fellow New Critics Burke and Empson were qualified Marxists, while Pound, Eliot, the Chicago school, and Southern agrarians were dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, Richards himself stayed exactly in the middle, an educated liberal horrified by the implications of World War I and seeking a small-d democratic answer to prevent anything like that from happening again.

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<http://www.edwardjayne.com>

Attached is a brief letter I received from I.A. Richards in response to this paper:

24 Sept. 1970

Dear Mr. Jayne

I am just back from 3 months in South America to find your Chapter awaiting me. Thanks for the two copies.

I hope my long failure to reply has not seemed discouraging. Perhaps you guessed that I would be likely to be away somewhere.

Anyway, I want to be the most encouraging. Yours seems to me by far the best of any of the attempts to unravel my writings that I have so far seen. I haven't as yet had time to do more than broadly take in what you are doing. But I will take the earliest opportunity (in the next week or so) to jot down comments --using one of the two copies.

I am in a bit of a spin at the moment taking in 3 months of slack--haven't as you will see managed even to find some uncrumpled Notepaper.

With best wishes.

Sincerely

I.A. Richards

N.B. After receiving this letter, I talked with Richards over the telephone about expanding the project, but at that point he primarily wanted me to focus my inquiry on his poetry, which did not particularly interest me. He never sent the comments he promised, and we had no further contact. Distracted by numerous other tasks, I set the project aside until two decades later, when I submitted it with few changes to a journal I now forget and without enclosing Richards' letter. An editorial assistant rather too quickly rejected it, and since then the manuscript has lain buried in a filing cabinet. For present purposes I have resorted to extensive copy editing, now and again with modifications I consider appropriate to my original intentions when I wrote this paper as the first chapter of my Ph.D. dissertation. It should perhaps be mentioned that the last four paragraphs of the current draft have been almost entirely rewritten.

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**FOOTNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Allen Tate, *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago: Swallow, 1968), p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Cleanth Brooks, "I.A. Richards and the Concept of Tension," in *I.A. Richards: Essays in his Honor*, ed. by Reuben Brower, Helen Vendler, and John Hollander (New York, Oxford: 1973), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> "Emotive Meaning Again," in *Speculative Instruments* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), fn. p. 53. Wellek begins his article, "On Rereading I.A. Richards," pp. 533-34, by citing this footnote to demonstrate the presumably regrettable continuity of Richards' ideas throughout his career. I fully concur with Wellek's insistence upon Richards' continuity, but I treat this as a strength, not a weakness.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (New York: Lear, 1925), pp. 13, 72. The reference to bringing the whole personality into play is best explained by a footnote on p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> "Emotion and Art," *Athenaeum* 18 July: pp. 630-31--included in *Complementarities*, ed. by John Paul Russo (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976), pp. 7-11.

<sup>8</sup> *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956), p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Science and Poetry* (W.W. Norton, 1926)--rev ed., *Poetries and Sciences* (Norton), 1935, 1970. See p. 65 in the 1926 ed., p. 55 in the 1970 edition. The core of Richards' argument summarized here is in chap. 5, "The Neutralization of Nature," pp. 57-65 in the 1926 ed., pp. 50-56 in the 1970 ed. The persistence of Richards' apocalyptic expectations throughout his career is suggested by his interview in *Complementarities*, ed. by John Paul Russo (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976), p. 262.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95 in the 1926 ed., p. 77 in the 1970 ed.

<sup>12</sup> *Practical Criticism, A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Routledge & Kegan, Paul, 1929) pp. 284-89.

<sup>13</sup> *Coleridge on Imagination* (1935, rpt. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1960).

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<sup>14</sup> *So Much Nearer: Essays toward a World English* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), p. 119--repr. of *The Athenaeum*, June 27, 1919, pp. 534-35.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Meaning of Meaning*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> "Art and Science," in *Complementarities*, pp. 3-6--repr. of *The Athenaeum*, July 18, 1919, pp.534-35.

<sup>17</sup> "Emotion and Art," in *Complementarities*, p. 8--repr. of *The Athenaeum*, July 18, 1919, pp. 630-31..

<sup>18</sup> "Toward a More Synoptic View," in *Speculative Instruments*, p. 22 ff; later discussed in "Variant Readings and Misreadings," in *So Much Neare: Essays toward a World English*(New York, 1968), p. 185.

<sup>19</sup> The version of the paradigm illustrated here is from, "Variant Readings and Misreading," in *So Much Nearer*, p. 185. For the earlier version see, "Toward a Theory of Comprehending," in *Speculative Instruments* (Harcourt Brace, 1955), pp. 22-23--published earlier yet as "Toward a Theory of Translating," in *Studies in Chinese Thought*, ed. by Arthur Wright (Chicago, 1953). For a simpler six-box diagram as well as the most ambitious of the diagrams, with all six steps of processing words depicted in motion, see "The Future of Poetry," again in *So Much Nearer*, pp. 156 and 158.

<sup>20</sup> "The Future of Poetry," in *So Much Nearer*, p. 151.

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