Coleridge On Imagination

I. A. Richards

Edited by John Constable

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Editorial Introduction

Before departing for Peking in 1929 Richards drafted a 'Programme for after return from China', dated 14 June,[1] in which he listed four books, 'Problems of Practical Criticism', 'General Linguistic Methodology', 'Belief', and culminating in the 'Philosophy of Rhetoric' on which he had been working since the previous year. As has been shown in my discussion of the composition of *Mencius on the Mind* (see Volume 5), Richards' experiences in China moved him to modify this programme so as to allow a return to the topic of emotive meaning, this time examining it as a method of achieving social order, a method complementary to the personal psychological ordering which had been the major theme of his earlier writings. This single book might have completed the digressive movement, but already in *Practical Criticism* Richards had begun to view emotive utterance as a possible route to reference. As he noted in passing in an appendix to *Practical Criticism*, 'thought governed by emotive classifications is still thought'.[2] Further, he had begun to alter the relations of precedence in his linguistic scheme. *The Meaning of Meaning* presents emotive uses as valuable but relatively primitive linguistic functions gradually being surpassed for most purposes by the referential use, and both *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Science and Poetry* seem to suggest that in the very longest run emotive utterance might ultimately wither away. In *Mencius*, though, Richards contemplated the possibility that at least in regard to the social realm this was not only historically unlikely but in principle impossible. 'It may well be', he wrote, 'that a purely scientific psychology could give us no self-control or power of influencing others except in such indirect ways as are exemplified by the administration of drugs or the use of exercises.' If this were so, he continued, 'we should be forced probably to supplement scientific psychology with a fictional account of human nature in the interests of a finely ordered society and of reasonably unwasteful living'.[3] Whether this was also true of the personal realm remained unresolved. It is not particularly surprising, therefore, that he should yet again delay his other work and

return to the theory of poetry. That this next phase of work should take as its starting point the writings of Coleridge is, on the other hand, less easy to account for, though critics have generally supposed it to be a straightforward realization of a long-standing interest, and that, as Kathleen Coburn remarked, 'one could have predicted from the first two books [*The Meaning of Meaning* and *Principles of Literary Criticism*] in which Coleridge is referred to more often than any other critic, that some day Richards would write on Coleridge centrally'.[4] But the character of those early references is so superficial that it seems more reasonable to say that if Richards had not produced a book on Coleridge we would have no idea that he was deeply interested. As Richards himself says, 'I didn't – then – know anything about Coleridge. I wrote about him here and there, but I obviously didn't know him.'[5]

In fact, and as we shall see, Richards did not immediately feel the need to address the unfinished business which had brought *Mencius on the Mind* to completion. His original impulse, arising from disillusionment with university literary education, was to begin work on 'Multiple Definition' and on Basic English. Invited to address L. C. Knights' and F. R. Leavis' recently founded English Research Association in November 1931 he gave a paper entitled 'A Case Against Research in English',[6] a paper that produced stiff resistance from the Leavis circle.[7] Richards cared little, and was close to a state of despair. He had long been concerned that the study of literature was not appropriate in the university, writing to a friend in 1923 that it was 'profanation' to use literature as an examinable subject.[8] Now he thought that academic criticism was in itself pernicious. In 1933 he was to publish an article which opened by remarking that 'The worst threat to the world's critical standards comes just now from the universities'.[9] The issue that was troubling him did eventually find clear expression, in *Coleridge on Imagination* itself, where he poses the question 'Do we yet know enough about what we are doing when we try to analyse a passage of poetry to settle its merits or demerits *by argument*?', and concludes firmly that the answer is 'No'.[10] Evaluatory debate, the staple of the study of English as Richards had helped to found it, had simply lost all interest for him. It wasn't sufficiently

fundamental, theoretical, or constructive, and his reservations on this count were not confined to Cambridge English. Invited to speak at Oxford in early 1932 he wrote to his wife that he had found the paper 'very hard to make up', but 'not for lack of things to say but from fundamental reluctance to talk to them about anything'.[11] His fears in this case seem to have been well-founded, though the affair itself, which took place on the 20th of February, itself was lively enough. Richards spoke on literary fictions under the title 'Science, Value and Poetry',[12] and in the vigorous debate which followed he had to stand on the table to deal with his numerous and noisy disputants, amongst whom was John Sparrow, who had recently had a very acerbic exchange with Empson on the value of *Practical Criticism*.[13] Afterwards Richards was taken by his host, C. S. Lewis, to Magdalen where Richards was to stay. Unfortunately there were no books in the room, so Lewis went off promising to find something, and soon returned with his own copy of *Principles of Literary Criticism* which he handed over with the words 'Here's something that should put you to sleep'. The pages were heavily and sharply annotated.[14]

However much he might have wished to turn his back on what he had long before called the false professionalism of literary academics and get to work on the 'Philosophy of Rhetoric' and the programme for Multiple Definition suggested by *Mencius*, there was still the obligation to lecture in Cambridge. He was initially uncertain what to offer, but was somewhat unexpectedly helped out by his wife. Replying in an undated letter presumably from late 1931 or very early 1932 he wrote to thank her for rescuing him from his indecision:

> Much indebted to you […] for your suggestion about Coleridge. I've got out the books and am very satisfactorily immersing myself in his biography etc. Much better than struggling ineffectually (under adverse conditions) to be original (again) over Mencius.[15]

The suggestion was clearly wise, and on the 9th of January Richards wrote to tell Dorothy that he was now occupied with both 'Mencius proofs and Coleridge'.[16] The goal of work, however, was not yet apparent, and he remarked in March that he still needed to 'settle what I'm trying to do with him'.[17] By

May this problem had been in part resolved, though he was showing signs of tiring of the labour:

> Here I'm sunk deep deep in Coleridge – you'll find the exposition of his 'imagination' intolerably obscure I'm afraid. However, I've promised to do what I can with it and it is a deep business.[18]

And to T. S. Eliot he reported that 'the job of getting out some lectures on Coleridge's critical principles takes all the energies I can dam up for it':

> But it is interesting to see how much better aware of most problems and more all-round he is, than our modern heroes. It's a bad look out for those to whom he's unfashionable.[19]

The duty of producing the lectures was about to become a self-motivating obsession. As Richards himself later said about the sudden growth of his interest in Coleridge, 'lots of things happen to people from having to give a course'.[20] Even so, it was not until some time later, after the first series of lectures were complete, that he decided to aim at a book, and to allow this book to take precedence over all the others he wished to write. It is difficult to draw certain conclusions here, but it seems that Richards had not yet made the connection with the redevelopment of emotive meaning theory. Writing on the 13th of November to a close Japanese friend, Kinichi Ishikawa, a journalist on the *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, he reported his plans in terms that suggest that the books were still separate:

> I'm just sitting down to a book on Coleridge as a philosophic critic before going on to bigger books on the theory of prose and the practise of interpretation.[21]

The study of Coleridge might come first chronologically, but his sense of intellectual priorities put it in a lower position, though a sense of the relationship between these concerns and his work on theory of imagination was beginning to form in his mind. A letter to Dorothy Richards of late 1932 reports on work he had been doing towards a review of Gustaf Stern's *Meaning and Change of Meaning* (1931), and brings in Coleridge as an afterthought:[22]

> I've been working all day at *Meaning of Meaning* matters. In every way these problems are so terrific and such a possible source of power I hardly dare touch them. However this Swedish work had to be dealt with – it is dealt with now, mostly – and I see my way (so many ways) to change almost every linguistic, literary, grammatical, philosophical, logical-intellectual problem. Meanwhile I've done one chapter of the Coleridge and this is all directly relevant to the rest of them.[23]

By January 1933 the connection had become firmer, though it remained limited in scope. Richards had been working at this time on model dictionary entries, and published later in the year a 'Preface to a Dictionary'.[24] In reporting to Dorothy on the 11th of this month the relationship with his Coleridge project is spelled out:

> Dictionary goes well. It shouldn't be such a long job to take it as far as I need to – as far as it is theoretically useful to me at present and it certainly serves as a magnificent means of organizing and consolidating my reading; also individual words will make books and chapters in other work. E.g. Imagination (for S.T.C.), Love, Belief, etc. etc.[25]

Richards was so concerned that this work should not be held up that he voluntarily downgraded his Magdalene position to a Research Fellowship, but as soon as he had the time, and was freed from teaching English in the College and lecturing for the Faculty of English, he turned away from Coleridge. Within a few months he completed a draft of *Basic Rules of Reason*, a short but involved primer in logic written in Basic English, and in part derived from the definitional exercises he had been developing in connection with his dictionary theory.[26] Few readers will share his excitement about *Basic Rules*, but it was evidently genuine, and within his revised sense of the value of literary research quite justifiable:

> It will be quite a decent size – larger than *Science and Poetry* and *much* MUCH Much more disturbing (alack alay!)![27]

A few days later Richards left for a Basic English Conference in Canada, together with Ogden and A. P. Rossiter, and it was not until November that he reviewed his writing. *Basic Rules* he

decided was not quite ready, and within a few days he wrote again to Dorothy to tell her that he was 'nearly done with the Logic stuff':

> Also made big advances with Critical material and decisions. What's really happening is that I'm shaping the main stuff for my next book (sequel to *Pract. Crit*.) on language[28]

Coleridge had become less of a pressing concern, indeed the project had been laid aside, perhaps abandoned altogether. It is interesting to note, for example, that when writing to the American poet Richard Eberhart in December he mentions his dictionary definition work on the meanings of 'love' and 'poetry', but does not refer to 'imagination'.[29]

On the 19th of January 1934 Richards changed his mind. Having sprained his ankle the day before while showing visitors around Cambridge he spent the day in bed, reading Coleridge. On the 20th Dorothy Richards recorded in her diary that 'I.A.R. decided to do Coleridge book', and on the 5th of February she wrote that

> Coleridge redesigned during course of morning. – Doesn't agree with him but much better than anyone else […] Great gulf – but saw how to translate.[30]

The stimulus for this recommitment of energy had come from a surprising source. On the 26th of October 1933 T. S. Eliot sent Richards a copy of his most recent work, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. Richards glanced at it and saw that while it touched on many areas of interest to him its tendency was a grave disappointment. His dissatisfaction with the book extended further and deeper than the handful of specific points addressed in the course of *Coleridge on Imagination* – the quarrel with Eliot's handling of Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination, and of Coleridge's respect for Donne – though these may well explain Richards' decision to use his previous work on Coleridge rather than any other project as a vehicle for his reply. Richards was not even particularly concerned with the many and severe criticisms and references to his own works, though he did in revised versions of both *Practical Criticism* and *Science and Poetry* address some of

these. Rather, Richards' response was to the status which Eliot accorded to poetry. Eliot's own views are only to be guessed at from the contour of prohibitions he lays down, but the cumulative impression is that poetry is an inferior sublunary, from which no very great profoundity can be expected. Religion, by contrast, is posited as the source of social and personal stability and value. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Arnold, and Richards himself, are all reprimanded for an overexalted conception of poetry, while Dryden, whom Eliot concedes to be inferior to Coleridge in most respects, is seen as nevertheless the sounder critic precisely because his ambitions for poetry are so modest. Similarly, Johnson is praised for recognising that 'poetry was still poetry, and not another thing,'[31] namely religion. Sidney is also honoured for conceiving of poetry as 'delight and instruction', an 'adornment of social life and an honour to nation',[32] a position which we are left to infer is very close to that of Eliot himself. For Richards it would have seemed an astonishing betrayal of Eliot's own poetic gifts, and it could hardly reach lower levels than the pages in *The Use of Poetry* where Eliot flippantly threatened to prefix a passage from Byron's *Don Juan* to a reissue of *Ash-Wednesday*, so as to suggest that he had intended nothing more in this poem than 'perhaps to be a moment merry'.[33]

These views were hardly new, and certainly not new to Richards who had followed Eliot's writing with great care. In the 1928 preface to the re-issued *Sacred Wood* essays Eliot had casually asserted that 'Poetry is a superior amusement', but the *Use of Poetry* extended this argument for a return to a pre-romantic attitude at much greater and more plausible length. It required an answer, and Richards was prepared to provide one.

At this point Richards had probably written or at least drafted in detail much of the commentary and plain explication of Coleridge's theory of imagination, which appears as Chapters 1–6 of *Coleridge on Imagination* and makes up somewhat over half of the book, the larger part of this material being based on his lectures of 1932. Now, in little more than two months, between the end of January and the end of March, he wrote most of the remaining material, chapters 7, 8, and 9, and reworked the earlier chapters to support these later additions.

Eliot's visit to stay with the Richardses from the 10th to the 13th of February was a further stimulus. On the 10th they discussed the issue of 'belief' in poetry, a topic they had been engaging with since 1929,[34] and on the 12th Eliot inscribed a copy *of After Strange Gods* to Richards, a book which in some respects extends and rigidifies the argument of *The Use of Poetry*, Richards immediately disliked it, and 'went for' Eliot when he visited again on the 13th of March.[35] The effect of this series of engagements with Eliot on the composition of *Coleridge* was dramatic. Richards gave a vivid account of the transformation to Eliot himself on the 22nd of March:

> My *Coleridge* – after having been a goods train heavily if richly laden – has suddenly turned into a sort of meteor and gone up into the Heavens. It's now a revelation of the essential mythopoeic faculty and settles provisionally all such things as the status of poetic belief (and some others), the co-ordinates of the mind-drift (with some tentative measures of it) and the definition range of *Nature*. It's all in Coleridge; but it has taken a little interrogation to get it from him.[36]

Writing to his wife on the same day, he told her that these last chapters were 'more important than all the rest put together',[37] and on the following day he observed that he had 'quite saved the book'.[38] The lecture course itself had appeared unsatisfactory and pedestrian, but now in his redesign of the book and his urgently felt need to defend poetry against Eliot's subtle and potentially influential denigration, he had at last found a way of connecting it to the reconsideration of the dual language hypothesis which had been the recurrent theme of his earlier writings. In the preface to the 1936 edition of *The Meaning of Meaning* Richards was to describe his Coleridge book as 'a new estimate of Coleridge's theory in the light of a more adequate evaluation of emotive language', and at the time of writing the final chapters Richards clearly felt that he had managed at last to touch on the subject material which really mattered to him:

> Just at present what I did Thursday, Friday and today seems the best thing I've ever done, in some respects. It seems to me to reconstruct everything for everybody, and to be a proper, clear and

> powerful statement of something all the other books have been gyrating round hitherto. Anyway, I've got a last chapter for the book that will make things hum. Title: *The Wind Harp* after an Aeolian Lute Coleridge took as an emblem of the mind, that sings as the breeze goes over it.[39]

In the margin he immodestly wrote 'Parts are as good as S.T.C.'. As the earlier remarks on the writing of *Basic Rules of Reason* clearly show Richards was prone to over-excitement whilst composing, but even allowing for this harmless and facilitating conceit, it should be clear that these chapters of *Coleridge* were assuming a crucial place in his mind, and offering him a vehicle for much of his recent thought. In the same letter he apologized for being unable to interrupt his writing to meet a friend from Japan, Rody Hall, who had been visiting England:

> I couldn't, having started on such a thing, chuck it, for almost anything. It's like leaving a baby to drown and one *can't* say 'All right, later will do, I'll take some other time' with such things. What comes again will not be the same. And just once, in a year or two, one has a feeling that what is coming is a kind of bloom or flower that can't be frosted so.
>
> Unless I'm deceived what I've written will be worth much more to Rody and his like (in 1000s) than anything I could have given him in just an afternoon in London. It was what he and I talked over, in an incomplete form, at Karuizawa[40] the best morning we had together. The readjustment, as I see it, of the whole problem of poetic belief and the fundamental analysis of mythology.

From now on the composition was straightforward, a colleague from Girton College, Gwyneth Lloyd Thomas, assisted him with typing and checking, and by the 17th of May he was able to write to Dorothy that the book was 'finished off, sending the script on to Basil Willey for comments on the 18th.[41] The book was in proofs by October, though Richards was still making corrections as late as the 7th of December[42] when the text was in the very final stages of its production. Printed copies reached Richards less than two weeks later, the haste of printing and binding being all too obvious:

> *Coleridge on Imagination* has come – horrid looking, I think, and on

> its back they've put A. I. Richards![43]

The book was 'filthily produced throughout', but Richards was in no mood for complaining.

> However it doesn't matter a hoot really. If it isn't the rot I suspect it of being, how it turns out makes no difference.[44]

The uncertainty here, very unusual for Richards and in strong contrast to the hyperbole of his letters of late March, is an index of the ambition of the book, and the degree to which Richards felt he had extended his theory, perhaps beyond his grasp. Certainly the book's transition from the mundane explication of Coleridge, suitable for undergraduates, to the heavenly ambitions of the final chapters is unclear, and the source of the fault line is obvious; Richards had attempted to conjoin materials from two different sources, namely the lecture course of 1932 on the distinction between fancy and imagination, and the inspired chapters of early 1934. The first of these had not initially been directed towards a book, and had not even been planned as a medium through which he could address the modified views he now held about evocative language, and which found their expression in the writings of early 1934, where Richards attempted to provide a companion study to the account of suasive language in *Mencius*, one which countered Eliot's recent backsliding by showing that emotive uses of language were not a dispensable accessory, but 'the completest mode of utterance'.[45] Since the explicit connection between these elements arose late, in the redesign of 1934, it is not as fully articulated as it might be, and failing to grasp the transition from one to the other is the single greatest obstacle to understanding the book as Richards conceived it in 1934. Having suggested in the account of the composition that the work has two different sources of conceptual input, and that the lectures on Coleridge were pressed into service for purposes other than those which called them into being I now want to show that though this linkage is subtle it is not forced. Richards' early intimations that Coleridge's treatment of imagination was relevant to the matters unresolved after his work on Mencius are in fact sound. To see why we have go back to the essays and

lectures of the early nineteen-twenties.

When first outlining his aesthetic theory in the summer of 1920 and the first months of 1921 Richards described two large fields of emotive effect, one of the harmony, the other of the equilibrium of impulses. This is discussed at greater length in my introduction to *Principles of Literary Criticism*, and a short summary will be adequate here. Noting that not all arrangements of impulses were equivalent, and that there were poems which were clearly valuable though of a lesser rank, Scott's 'Coronach' is his example, Richards suggested that some verbal stimulations produced harmonies of impulses tending towards action, whilst the best poems produced equilibria resulting in no outward action:

> In equilibrium, there is no tendency to action, and any concertgoer must have realized the impropriety of the view that action is the proper outcome of aesthetic appreciation. When impulses are 'harmonized' on the other hand they work together, and such disciplined co-ordination in action is much to be desired in other places. When works of art produce such action, or conditions which lead to action they have either not completely fulfilled their function or would in the view of equilibrium here being considered be called not 'beautiful' but 'stimulative'.[46]

For reasons which remain somewhat mysterious, but are presumably only those of economy of presentation, Richards did not take up and develop this suggestion in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, and it does not make any significant figure in his work until *Mencius on the Mind*, which examines the possibility that the suasive power of the emotive use of language might produce desirable social results, if, and this qualification is crucial, the users were sufficiently subtle as readers.[47] Though the subject matter here is unmistakably that of harmony, Richards does not use the term except in passing, and there is no attempt to address the literary application of the distinction as it had been first outlined in his lectures. But this is exactly what occurs in *Coleridge on Imagination* where the opposition between harmony and equilibrium reappears in terms of the distinction between 'Fancy' and 'Imagination'. The motivations for taking up this matter once again were numerous, and involved. A preliminary, but important wish was to defend

Coleridge's views against those, such as Eliot in *The Use of Poetry* [48] who thought the distinction a false one. Rather more constructively, Richards wished to use the distinction to prepare the way for a reconsideration of equilibrium itself, specifically its genesis and communication, and, then to employ this reconsideration to present a new estimate of emotive language which would complete the reinvestigation begun in *Mencius*, and provide a new setting in which the studies of Mencius and Coleridge could be located.

The first movement of this was straightforward. Richards examined and explicated Coleridge's treatment of the Primary Imagination, that is the 'normal perception that produces the usual world of the senses'.[49] Then he moved to Secondary Imagination, which in Coleridge's words 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify'.[50] This is in itself vague, but Richards at least gave the appearance of glossing it:

> The Secondary Imagination, re-forming this world, gives us not only poetry – in the limited sense in which literary critics concern themselves with it – but every aspect of the routine world in which it is invested with other values than those necessary for our bare continuance as living beings: all objects for which we can feel love, awe, admiration; every quality beyond the account of physics, chemistry and the physiology of sense-perception, nutrition, reproduction, and locomotion; every awareness for which a civilized life is preferred by us to an uncivilized.[51]

The psychological materials thus created are then available for manipulation by Fancy, 'which collects and re-arranges, without re-making them, units of meaning already constituted by Imagination'.[52]

As literary examples Richards took up the examples cited by Coleridge. As Fancy we are given:

> Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
> A lily prison'd in a gaol of snow,
> Or ivory in an alabaster band;
> So white a friend engirts so white a foe.[53]

And as Imagination:

> Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky
> So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.

Of the first of these Richards claimed that, as Coleridge says of Fancy, the images are 'fixities and definites', and 'remain when put together the same as when apart'. He noted, for example, that the relationship between the pairs, 'Adonis' hand : Venus' hand' and 'lily : gaol of snow', is characterized by clarity. Both are fair, both white, and, in a slightly more complicated way, both are 'pure':

> But there the links stop. These additions to the hand via the lily in no way change the hand (or, incidentally, the lily). They in no way work upon our perception of Adonis or his hand.[54]

Of the second, the case of imagination, he remarked by contrast that

> the more the image is followed up, the more links of relevance between the units are discovered. As Adonis to Venus, so these lines to the reader seem to linger in the eye like the after-images that make the trail of the meteor. Here Shakespeare is realizing, and making the reader realize – not by any intensity of effort, but by the fulness and self-completing growth of the response – Adonis' flight as it was to Venus, and the sense of loss, of increased darkness, that invades her. The separable meanings of each word, *Look!* (our surprise at the meteor, hers at his flight), *star* (a light-giver, an influence, a remote and uncontrollable thing), *shooteth* (the sudden, irremediable, portentous fall or death of what had been a guide, a destiny), *the sky* (the source of light and now of ruin), *glides* (not rapidity only, but fatal ease too), *in the night* (the darkness of the scene and of Venus' world now) – all these separable meanings are here brought into one. And as they come together, as the reader's mind finds cross-connection after cross-connection between them, he seems, in becoming more aware of them, to be discovering not only Shakespeare's meaning, but something which he, the reader, is himself making.[55]

The contrast here is between short runs of evocation and those which are seemingly endless, and the similarity with the distinction between Harmony and Equilibrium is not so much in

the terminology employed, or the logical relations between those terms, but in the underlying psychological phenomena referred to. As is often the case with Richards' work the descriptive quality of his psychological remarks is their most rewarding aspect. Consider these two descriptions, of Harmony in Scott's 'Coronach', and Equilibrium in 'Proud Maisie'. First harmony:

> With Coronach it's a question of the awakening of a certain group of emotions, and of the consistent sequence of these emotions, so that they mutually support one another.
>
> It's a question of maintaining an emotional level, and keeping it full and *rounded as it were*, and *just strong enough*.[56]

Then Equilibrium:

> With the first verse we have a group of impulses brought into play, large group, very active.
>
> Then with the second verse the first two lines add another group, quite sharply distinguishable, and then at once with the last two lines in comes an opposing group of impulses, almost antagonistic.
>
> Some impulses even here of these two groups overlap, 'six braw gentlemen'
>
> But the two groups are mainly antagonistic and would, I think, without the setting merely sharpen themselves.
>
> They do this in the next verse with almost a deadlock until the *'duly'* upon which the whole emotional tone of the poem changes. The impulses seem to spread and widen. The whole of the personality of the reader comes into play. The word gives the hint, so to speak, for the sense of *inevitability*, *of repose* which then begins. It is this sudden repose *inside* the stress of rival impulses which I call here *balance* or equilibrium.

Harmony's terminated psychological process, leading therefore to decision and possible action, parallels Fancy's stable and terminated run of evocation. Similarly, the seemingly interminable evocational run described in the theory of Imagination recalls Equilibrium's unending psychological process and sense of expansion within.

The distinction was played out again, in simpler terms in the final chapter of *Coleridge on Imagination*, and as part of the general counterargument to Eliot's endorsement of pre-romantic models of the poet's creativity. Richards remarked that 'with the

best poetry there is nowhere to arrive, no final solution',[57] whereas poems 'which have a destination, a final solution – whether it be the enunciation of a supposed truth, or suasion to a policy, or the attainment of an end-state of consciousness [...] have only a subordinate value.'[58] They are subordinate simply because they do not, as all instances of the secondary imagination do, create 'norms of value',[59] but only manipulate them, suasively. However, the subordination does not deprive them of value altogether, and just as the point of the harmony and equilibrium distinction had been to provide a frame in which the 'Coronach' could be properly honoured, so the effort of distinguishing fancy and imagination is justified because it shows where suasive but not supremely poetic emotive uses of language were to be allowed, indeed encouraged. *Mencius on the Mind*, though it is not immediately obvious, is concerned with this matter.

Thus far Richards had supported Coleridge and reinforced his own claims for poetry. Something had been done to counter Eliot's general observations, and it had been suggested, though only briefly, that 'imagination' as it is understood in poetry is constitutive of the moral order that Eliot claimed could only be found in religion. In the 'Wind Harp' chapter, which Richards had reported to his wife and to Eliot as being the most important in the book, he attempted to expand on this last point by presenting 'imagination' as a mental operation so fundamental that it envelopes and contains all others. The language use specifically connected with this fundamental creative imagination is the emotive use which brings about an equilibrium of impulses. Thus poetry emerged as the language use of prime value, and science was left as a specialized and reduced form of imagination.

The route by which Richards attempted this ascent was circuitous, and began with a division of the senses of 'nature': 1. The external world which stimulates our nervous system; 2. The 'images', 'figments', 'things', 'existences', which the mind constructs in response to this stimuli by means of the perceptive and imaginative activities; 3. Those 'images' etc. sufficiently similar in all humans for us to say that they are in 'common'; and 4. a special subset of our 'images' etc. needed to give an

account of the external world.[60] It will be noticed that the primary and secondary imaginations correspond roughly to what Richards here termed the 'perceptive and imaginative activities' of the mind. Richards confirmed this by remarking that 'in imaginative perception we see Nature as invested with characters derived from our own feelings, our hopes and fears, desires, and thoughts.'[61] In other words, nature in Sense 2. is a 'projection of our whole response to Nature in Sense 1.'[62] This, on Richards' view in 1934, was the most fundamental, complete, and integrated response to the world of which a human mind is capable. Furthermore, recalling Richards' earlier and crucial remark in *Practical Criticism* that 'thought governed by emotive classifications is still thought'[63] we can see more readily that it was being proposed not as a weaker alternative to science but as a prior and superior form. Science thus declined in importance, and became an abstraction justified only by pragmatic considerations, namely the ease with which it might be used to manipulate nature in sense 1. It becomes the business of poetry, on this view, to avoid the reductions of Nature in either sense 3 or 4 and to communicate particularly powerful and valuable imaginative constructions of nature in sense 2. Emotive utterance does not appear as a pollutant of reference, as it does in *The Meaning of Meaning*, but rather the only way in which minds can communicate their fullest response to the world, and this should be true not only of equilibrium producing texts, the highest form of poetry and the focus of *Coleridge*, but also of that emotive utterance only directed towards the productions of harmonies, which was the focus of *Mencius*. Consequently Richards found himself writing that 'poetry is the completest mode of utterance'.[64] This whole view became, in the following chapter, the ground on which Richards rebuilt the case first presented in *Science and Poetry*. Because of the growth in power of our abstracted Natures in senses 3 and 4 we are undermining the authority of nature in sense 2, that nature in other words which is most fully imbued with our feelings. Richards had already established to his own satisfaction that this nature is that which constitutes our fullest response to the world, and consequently he could move smoothly to the conclusion that 'to lose touch with Nature here

is to lose touch with ourselves'.[65]

Whether we find this system acceptable will largely depend on whether we have an alternative account which fits the facts better, or at least whether we have a group of more or less related accounts which fit individually some of the facts better and promise to be fully integrated. But regardless of whether we do accept it, and I do not, we must recognize that Richards has here attempted to fulfill a long outstanding obligation to supply some of the larger lacunae in the theory of value expounded in *Principles*. The later chapters of *Coleridge*, in spite of their confusing turbulence, are an attempt to present a scientific and causal account running from stimulus to poetry.

Perhaps the most neglected chapter in this account is that on metre, 'The Sense of Musical Delight', the only part of the book published as a journal article. Most of Richards' writings on metrical theory, in *Principles* for example, exhibit a contempt for the field of prosody, about which he nevertheless seems to know little, and are motivated by a pre-analytic hostility arising as a reaction to critics who used metrical correctness as a standard of excellence. The chapter in *Coleridge on Imagination* is no exception. However, it is a keystone chapter in the argument of *Coleridge on Imagination*, and its presence is a tribute to Richards' scrupulous attention to weaknesses in his own argument. What he attempts in 'The Sense of Musical Delight' is to explain why the language of so much poetry, in other words of the Secondary Imagination, should be metrical. This, it is true, is partly to meet Eliot's views in *The Use of Poetry*, where metrical form is treated as a mere grace of utterance, but Richards' treatment far exceeds what would be required by this pretext, and suggests that he was aware that without such an account the theory he was proposing in *Coleridge* would be vulnerable. To appreciate the difficulty let us accept, for the time being, Richards' arguments concerning the importance of the secondary imagination, and the supplementary implication that poets are in possession of minds with unusually powerful endowments in this faculty. In the communication of their best and most successful imaginative constructions, constructions which bring, as Coleridge says, 'the whole soul of man into activity', surely authors will require great

freedom to find the best words and arrange them in the best order. Given this, how can it be that they so often resort to restrictive metrical patterning? As with many other devastating objections the simplicity of this point belies its power. Richards, to his great credit, recognised the damage it could do and drew attention to the point by attempting to meet it.

His defense was to attempt to show that the question is misconceived, and that the problem only presents itself if we take rhythm to be a feature arising from the patterning of the gross physical qualities of words. If instead we take it to be a feature arising from the 'movement of meaning' then the difficulty disappears. Aside from its very suspicious vagueness, the defense is in any case weak, and vulnerable to the recurrence of the original counter question, 'If metre is a movement of meaning, why is it that these extremely valuable meanings so very often move in a regular way?'

The metrical issue is the soft underbelly of *Coleridge on Imagination*, as it is of the largest part of traditional literary criticism which posits poetry as transcendentally or at the very least uniquely valuable. If Richards cannot account for the relation of verse to poetry, then his suggestion that poetry is the *communication* of valuable mental states begins to crumble. Given any mental state it is, as elementary logic will show, vanishingly unlikely that the metrical language available to an individual will contain resources for its communication superior to those available in prose. We are left, in this case, with the possibility that metrical states may cause in both writer and reader states which they *take* to be valuable. This may appear to differ little from traditional claims, but its naturalism in fact opens up the way to a causal explanation of the peculiar link between verse and poetic effect. Indeed, providing such an explanation is one of the most difficult challenges in literary studies, and of interest, moreover, in relation to any language and period which has used metre and experienced its puzzling effects.[66]

It has been customary to accept Richards' view that, as he later observed in this book, 'With Coleridge we step across the threshold of a general theoretical study of language capable of opening to us new powers over our minds',[67] and to conclude,

as his biographer John Paul Russo does, that *Coleridge on Imagination* signals a new departure and opens up the paths followed by Richards himself in his subsequent books *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* and *Interpretation in Teaching*.[68] As my historical account shows it is more accurate to say that it represents a stepping aside, a recurrence to an earlier phase of thought, the evocative theory of value, first outlined in the early 1920s. This return is hardly surprising. Richards was now positing the merit of the 'Philosophy of Rhetoric' on the importance of the verbal material his educational programme would enable students to read adequately, and in two related studies, *Mencius on the Mind* and *Coleridge on Imagination*, he attempted to supplement and strengthen the claims for the texts to be studied. In *Mencius* he had suggested that our political life would be best handled by a well-regulated suasion, a view which may begin to look more substantial and less sinister in the light of the theory of imagination presented in *Coleridge*. Such a high risk strategy required remarkably alert and discerning readers, and the 'Philosophy of Rhetoric' would equip its students with techniques of 'multiple definition' towards this end. In *Coleridge* he had claimed that the rich effects of the greatest poetry were the successful communication of the mind's most fundamental figurations of the world, which were nevertheless under threat from a growth in the power and wide distribution of more abstract and pragmatically effective accounts of nature. A 'Philosophy of Rhetoric' would enable students to prevent conflict between these two 'myths', as he was now calling them, and derive benefit from both.

On this view *Coleridge on Imagination* is a transitional elaboration of the earlier work, but with changed emphases. Indeed, as one of Richards' best readers, W. H. N. Hotopf, has said of *Philosophy of Rhetoric* and *Interpretation in Teaching*, 'What we get [...] is a return to the aims of *The Meaning of Meaning*, but regarded as much more weighty now that the development of the whole personality is seen to be involved.'[69] We should not forget, however, that there is a strong and relatively new element of anti-rationalism in *Coleridge*, seen for example in the enclosure of science within a theory of mind and language which accords poetry a superior position. The