I. A. Richards Selected Works 1919-1938

Volume 10: I. A. Richards and his Critics

Edited by
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I. A. RICHARDS AND HIS CRITICS

Selected Reviews and Critical Articles

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Introduction

I. A. RICHARDS AND HIS CRITICS

This volume presents a selection of contemporary criticism discussing those of Richards' works published between 1919 and 1938. Except for the correction of minor errors the texts have been reproduced as found, unless otherwise stated in the headnote to the article. These headnotes also contain brief biographical remarks on the authors, and other relevant information. For references to further articles discussing two or more of Richards' works the reader should consult the listing provided in Volume One, following the general introduction. For reviews and narrowly focussed articles the reader should consult the listings following the introductions to each of volumes of the present edition.

The pieces reprinted in this collection comprise a little over a quarter of the total number of significant critical publications in this period, but even so it has been impossible to maintain both quality and coverage; not all of Richards' books are treated in detail, and some not at all. Nevertheless, the range of the material included is broad, running from philosophical responses to *The Meaning of Meaning*, through general literary treatments of Richards' theories of poetry, and up to the later academic discussions of his attitudes to education and the philosophy of rhetoric. In this introduction I shall focus on one general characteristic of the second of these areas, the literary response, and examine the relationship between Richards and two of the twentieth century's leading critics, T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis. Richards was closely involved with both, personally and through his writings, and it will be suggested here that their reactions can be seen as representative of large constituencies of response to the problems framed by Richards' various theoretical projects. By attempting a coherent defence of poetry Richards raised questions about the status of the literary arts in education and in

public and private life which more cautious and prudent writers – poets such as Eliot, critics such as Leavis – would prefer to have left only superficially investigated. In proposing an open, explicit and intersubjective apology Richards had conceded that without such a successful defence the standing of poetry within and without the university was dubious. His thought attracted attention, much of it negative, precisely because he reflected the anxieties of readers, and his failure to produce convincing solutions to the problems he had so lucidly defined resulted in defensive misrepresentations and selective borrowing from his theories, as with Eliot, or rhetorical assaults undermining his credit, as with Leavis. These programmes were largely successful, and continue to account for much of the received critical wisdom concerning Richards.

T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards: Early Acquaintance

On the 5th of March 1915 the Moral Sciences Club of the University of Cambridge met in the rooms of C. A. Mace to hear a paper by one of its undergraduate members, I. A. Richards. Present were the secretary, F. C. Bartlett (the recently appointed assistant director of the laboratory of experimental psychology), and most of the club's other members, including Bertrand Russell. The minutes for the event record that Richards read

> a short but highly interesting paper on Assent, which was a term he preferred to use in the place of Belief. He endeavoured to give a psychological analysis of the state of mind called Assent. A quite general and well-maintained discussion followed, and was continued until 11.20.[1]

Belief was a topic they had addressed before, Bartlett himself having read a paper on the subject only a few months previously on the 30th of October,[2] and it was to be a persistent concern

1 The minutes of the Moral Sciences Club are held in the Archives of the University of Cambridge, in the University Library. Min.IX.41, leaf 180 r.

2 Min.IX.41, leaf 168 r.

in Richards' subsequent career.

The week after this presentation, on the 12th of March, the Club received a visitor in Russell's rooms:

> Mr T. S. Eliot of Merton College, Oxford [...] read a paper entitled 'The Relativity of the Moral Judgement' in which he attempted to compromise between an absolute idealist position and a relativist view. In the course of the discussion which followed it became evident that he regarded value as in some sense dependent upon the feeling of a particular subject at a particular moment and in some sense not. Conversation was kept up till 11.30. It was mostly about thrills but by no means thrilling in its nature.[1]

It seems certain that Richards was one of the eighteen members present, and was perhaps one of the Cambridge men that Eliot, still a little bruised by his rough treatment, described in a letter reporting his visit. He found his hosts' minds to be 'serious, industrious, narrow and plebeian' and characterized by a 'wide but disorderly reading, intense but confused thinking, and utter absence of background and balance and proportion'. Eliot explained these deficiencies by noting that Cambridge was scientific whereas Oxford was historical, and 'history is a more aristocratic pursuit than natural science, and demands a more cultivated mind'.[2] The juxtaposition of these two papers, and the confrontation of Oxonian and Cantabrigian intellectual styles, is to a bizarre degree proleptic of later discussions between Richards and Eliot, but at the time neither seems to have attracted the notice of the other, or later to have recalled this early intersection of their paths. Indeed it was not until four years afterwards, in 1919, that Richards discovered Eliot's poetry. He had taken an interest in a new journal, *Art & Letters*, being edited by Frank Rutter, Herbert Read, and Osbert Sitwell, and in August he was writing a paper on aesthetics for it,

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1 Min.IX.41, leaf 181 r.

2 T. S. Eliot to Eleanor Hinkley, 21 Mar. 1915, in Valerie Eliot, ed., *The Letters of T. S. Eliot* Volume 1, 1898–1922 (Faber and Faber: London, 1988), 92.

telling his mother that the paper was 'one of the new things fancily got up with pictures and poems'.[1] Amongst the poems in the issue he bought were Eliot's 'Burbank with a Baedaker: Bleistein with a Cigar' and 'Sweeney Erect', Richards marking the first of these lightly with a pencil.[2] He does not, however, seem to have been impressed, observing, again in a letter to his mother, that the magazine was 'no good', but 'people read it and may as well read me in it'.[3] When his article, 'Four Fermented Aesthetics', eventually appeared in the following issue it preceded Eliot's 'Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe', but nothing in this piece seems to have caught Richards' eye.[4] However, in 1920 or shortly after he bought, perhaps as a result of the earlier priming, Eliot's volume of verse, *Ara Vos Prec*. This contained most of Eliot's major poems up to that date, including 'Gerontion', 'Sweeney among the Nightingales', and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.[5] The effect of the book on Richards was immediate, as he was later to recall:

> I remember the sunlight on those large, fine pages and a breathless exhilaration as I came away with it – unable NOT to read it in the Market Place after happening on it in Galloway and Porter's bookshop – spreading the resplendent thing open: lost in wonder and strangeness and delight. I suppose somebody must have talked to me of him and told me he was in a bank and about his critical writings. But I don't recall being, in those early days, much concerned with his criticism – no, only with the poetry and almost at once with the idea that he would be *the one hope* for the then brand-new English Tripos. [...] From the

1 IAR to his mother, 22 Aug. 1919, Richards Collection, Magdalene College, Cambridge (hereafter RCM). Text quoted in John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 13.

2 *Art & Letters* 2/3 NS (Summer 1919), 103–5, copy in RCM.

3 IAR to his mother, 22 Aug. 1919, RCM.

4 See Ivor Richards, 'Four Fermented Aesthetics', *Art & Letters*, 2/4 NS (Autumn 1919), 186–93, and T. S. Eliot, 'Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christoher Marlowe', 194–9.

5 T. S. Eliot, *Ara Vos Prec* (Ovid Press: London, 1920). Published in early February 1920.

> English Tripos angle I still believe *that* was the best idea there ever was.[1]

Exactly when Richards first met Eliot after this is not at present known, but in a late letter, to *The Times Literary Supplement*, Richards remarked that his conversations with Eliot went back to 'well before *The Waste Land* was written',[2] which would place them at some time before October 1921. Richards apparently suggested a Cambridge post at their second meeting:

> We had perhaps twenty minutes' conversation: 'conversation' is the word – he being utterly and perfectly bank-like, as composed and cautious as a cat, and I, perhaps, like some sort of enthusiastic dog. 'No, he wasn't at all sure that an academic life would be what he would choose.' How strange that this lapsed academic should have provided so much fodder for academics! We of the young English Tripos in our benevolent excitement thought of teaching English literature as very Heaven. So this quiet, cool, and cagey stance impressed me then beyond all words. We none of us had the least notion of the Harvard opening he had in its department of philosophy. Indeed we knew fantastically little about him. What occupied most of our mental vision of him was that this great new poet (*O poor, poor man!*) was stuck in a bank.[3]

Richards was soon to visit him in this supposed prison:

> I was not a bit sure how you called on a junior member of a banking staff in Queen Henrietta Street, I think it was. But TSE was reassuring: 'Just ask for me and they will show you.' What they showed me was a figure stooping, very like a dark bird in a feeder, over a big table covered with all sorts and sizes of foreign correspondence. The big table almost entirely filled a little room under the street. Within a foot of our heads when we stood were the thick, green glass squares of the pavement on which hammered all but incessantly the heels of the passers-by. There was

1 I. A. Richards, 'On TSE', in Allen Tate, ed., *T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1967), 2. First published in a special issue of *The Sewanee Review* 74/1 (Jan.–Mar. 1966), 3–30.

2 I. A. Richards, 'The Waste Land', *Times Literary Supplement* 71/3646 (14 Jan. 1972), 40

3 I. A. Richards, 'On TSE', 3.

> just room for two perches beside the table. [...][1]

For a period of a year or so, during which Richards was occupied with the writing of *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), this interest in Eliot's poetry was a more or less private affair, and since he was not yet lecturing on modern poetry he had no occasion to mention it prominently in Cambridge. The absence, however, of any deep concern with Eliot's critical writings, evident in the memoir quoted above, requires explanation. There is after all no trace of Eliot's work in Richards' 1919–21 lectures on 'Theory of Criticism'.[2] Admittedly these lectures were first framed before *The Sacred Wood* (1920) made its author well-known, but there is more to this absence than mere chronology. Richards was later in life to tell his biographer, John Paul Russo, that his early reading in 1915–18 in Eliot, Hulme, Read, and Pound 'was if anything to move me to dissent', and that these writers 'didn't have anything whatever to offer toward what I really cared about'.[3] With Richards' papers available it is now evident that this was a tactful statement of his position, and that Eliot's criticism, so influential amongst other Cambridge teachers such as F. R. Leavis, seemed to him either commonplace or confused. In his copy of *Homage to John Dryden* (1924) Richards annotated Eliot's prefatory remark that articles 'Inadequate as periodical criticism [...] need still more justification in a book' with a straightforward rejection:

> Not at all! perfectly normal! What any of 100 educated readers might write if urged to by some motive!

In the book's last sentence – 'I hope that these papers may in spite of and partly because of their defects preserve in cryptogram certain notions which, if expressed directly, would be destined to immediate obloquy, followed by perpetual oblivion' –

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1 I. A. Richards, 'On TSE', 3–4.

2 See Notebooks 4 and 5, RCM.

3 IAR to J. P. Russo, 7 May 1976, in John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1990), 198–9.

Richards has underlined the words 'immediate obloquy' and 'perpetual oblivion' and written in the margin:

> No! No notice would have been taken. One has to forgive T.S.E. a great deal per page of his *prose*: so much ridiculous mock humility which is pretentiousness. How slow he must have been to grow up! Is this why his poetry is so good? Nearly all his prose is an amusing trail of logically incompetent manipulations of bogus information.[1]

Much of this quarrel was with the more superficial aspects of the persona invented to convey Eliot's criticism, and with some of the substance Richards was in unenthusiastic agreement, as can be inferred from his report on Eliot's address to the Cam Literary Club on the 7th of November 1924.[2]

> In the evening I heard Eliot's paper. Stuff about Chapman. Not very definite but we had a good deal of discussion on general topics and he seems to have some sound views (mine I mean). He has just been in for a short talk this afternoon.[3]

Richards, something of an academic celebrity following the publication of *The Meaning of Meaning*, a well-known lecturer in Cambridge, and on the verge of publishing *Principles of Literary Criticism*, could hardly have failed to interest Eliot, and as a result of this meeting was invited, in a letter now lost, to write for the *Criterion*. Richards replied on the 26th of November:

> What a flattering letter! Certainly I can do something for the *Criterion*. Very glad to. I'm just getting together some ideas on current changes in the world picture due to percolations into general awareness from Psychology (including Psychoanalysis), physics, biology, anthropology etc. etc.; with a view to considering how they may be affecting poetry. All this for my Modern

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1 IAR annotations to T. S. Eliot, *Homage to John Dryden* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), RCM.

2 Reported in Ronald Schuchard, 'Editor's Introduction', in R. Schuchard, ed., *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry by T. S. Eliot* (Faber and Faber: London, 1993), 6.

3 IAR to D. E. Pilley, 9 Nov. 1924, RCM, in John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 31.

> Poetry Lectures next term. I'd like to make a statement of what I think is happening to poetry and how Science is going to affect it. Would this do? I could let you have it by mid January. It's rather an ambitious enterprise but I think I've found a viewpoint from which to look at it.[1]

These lectures contained remarks on Eliot himself,[2] but as Richards explained in a subsequent letter, probably from February or early March 1925, it did not seem appropriate to include them in the proposed article:

> Here is my scribble, a day behind time, because I had planned to push it into your letter-box, but am still at Cambridge. Do what you like with it. It's *long* I fear c. 6700 words. I've cut it all I can, but if you would like it reconstructed I'll do so, just say what you want done.
>
> I had left you to be mentioned last, but when I came to the point I couldn't do it. In the *Criterion* it would have looked wrong. So I put you in at the crucial point by way of a necessary acknowledgment in the middle of the argument. It strikes me now that possibly you won't agree with a word of it. If so I shall be very sorry.
>
> If it's right (and I haven't any qualms about that myself) it has a certain importance I think.[3]

Writing a few days later he added:

> My poor article. I wrote it when I had a heavy cold and it's defective in several ways. If you are not in a hurry to use it and can let me have it again for 3 or 4 days I can amend it considerably, I believe, without extensive changes. Trying to use more popular terms than my usual I made it likely to mislead. [...] The main defect is an omission to point out that while knowledge constantly and properly *directs* attitudes, i.e. decides which attitudes are applicable in which situations, knowledge isn't the source of the attitudes.
>
> I fear on the whole what I wrote doesn't clear anything up,

1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 26 Nov. 1924, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 IAR to D. E. Richards, 10 Feb. 1925 (RCM).

3 IAR to T. S. Eliot, undated (begins 'Here is my scribble'), internal evidence suggests February or March 1925. In the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

> but how to do this and still be moderately readable I don't know.[1]

'A Background for Contemporary Poetry' appeared in the *Criterion* in the summer of 1925,[2] and is notable for including the first use of the term 'pseudo-statement' to describe the emotive language normal in poetry. This view had been developing in sophistication since 1920 when Ogden and Richards had discussed it in their first joint paper, 'Symbolism',[3] and a detailed account had recently appeared in the tenth chapter of *The Meaning of Meaning. Principles of Literary Criticism* had offered a simplified version of the thesis, and Richards' *Criterion* article further reduced the account in bulk and complexity:[4]

> A pseudo-statement is a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes (due regard being had for the better or worse organisations of these *inter se*); a statement on the other hand, is justified by its truth, i.e. its correspondence, in a highly technical sense, with the fact which it states. The two have no connections with one another and they cannot conflict; their functions are too different. [...] Yet an important branch of criticism which has attracted the best talents from prehistoric times until today consists of the endeavour to persuade men that the functions of science and poetry are identical, or that one is a 'higher form' of the other, or that they conflict and we must choose between them.[5]

It was to be a thesis of deep and prolonged interest to Eliot.

The article was also the first occasion on which Richards committed himself to a printed comment on Eliot's poetry.

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1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, undated, begins 'My poor article', in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 'A Background for Contemporary Poetry', *Criterion*, 3/12 (July 1925), 511–28.

3 C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, 'Symbolism', *Cambridge Magazine*, 10/1 (Summer 1920), 32–40.

4 For a detailed discussion of the development of the theory of emotive meaning see Introduction to Volume 2, *The Meaning of Meaning*.

5 'A Background for Contemporary Poetry', *Criterion*, 3/12 (July 1925), [511–28], 518–19. Reprinted with many revisions and additions in *Science and Poetry* (1926), 59–62.

Richards sketched the modern scene and observed that the contemporary mind feels 'A sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the baselessness of aspirations, of the vanity of endeavour, and a thirst for life-giving water which seems suddenly to have failed [...]'. To this sentence, he attached a footnote, now one of the best known in English literary criticism:

> To those familiar with Mr Eliot's *The Waste Land*, my indebtedness to it at this point will be evident. He seems to me by this poem, to have performed two considerable services for this generation. He has given a perfect emotive description of a state of mind which is probably inevitable for a while to all those who most matter. Secondly, by effecting a complete severance between his poetry and *all* beliefs, and this without any weakening of the poetry, he has realised what might otherwise have remained largely a speculative possibility, and has shown the way to the only solution of these difficulties. 'In the destructive element immerse. That is the way.'[1]

Before long Richards would be presenting a detailed analysis of Eliot's poems as the culmination of the Modern Poetry lectures he began in the Michaelmas term of 1925 and delivered subsequently on many occasions.[2] This final lecture presented Eliot's poetry as a disciplined progression, seeing *Ara Vos Prec* as a 'view, a survey of the whole Occidental World by means of the typical selected instance', and *The Waste Land* as a further development of this experimentation,[3] which Richards noted was mostly concerned with sex because 'it is in sexual matters that our generation is undergoing its greatest reorientation of attitudes':

> The Waste Land – that state of mind, that province of soul – which Mr Eliot so perfectly renders, and from which he so miraculously escapes, does, for this age at least, come about

1 'A Background for Contemporary Poetry', *Criterion*, 3/12 (July 1925), 520. Reprinted unchanged in *Science and Poetry* (1926), 64–5.

2 Lecture VII, Modern Poetry, in Notebook 2, RCM.

3 Lecture VII, p. 11.

principally for reasons connected with sex.[1]

But Richards offered no exegesis of the poem, explaining that Eliot's poetic method handles intellectual material in a way which makes such an account redundant:

> I am not going to expound *The Waste Land*, because if what I am trying to say about the *principle* of Mr Eliot's poetry is true it is in far less need of expounding than is generally supposed. What stops people is that they expect an intellectual clue from outside, some elucidation of an *argument* they suppose must be there or implied. But the argument itself isn't there. *The Waste Land* preaches nothing, and would persuade you of nothing. It aims only to conduct your mind through certain feelings and attitudes because only by going through these feelings and attitudes can you reach a certain result. It is far more like a ritual or a notation for a set of spiritual exercises than like an argument, an exhortation, or a presentation of any sort of state of affairs.[2]

The Belief Debate

The publication of 'A Background for Contemporary Poetry' marked the beginning of a series of debates about belief that was to extend into the mid-thirties and to resonate in Eliot's critical writing, and arguably in the poems too,[3] for the rest of his life. The debate has two distinct concerns, the first being the question of whether a poet need believe the thought or philosophy he employs in his poetry, and the second, dependent on the answer to the first of these, is whether a reader need share the beliefs of the poet to appreciate the poems. The issues have an inherent difficulty, but the main obstacle to successfully following the debate is in the character of Eliot's remarks, which are not only vague but prone to be qualified into insubstantiality, as

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1 Lecture VII, p. 12

2 Lecture VII, p. 10v.

3 A. D. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (Cambridge U.P.: Cambridge, 1994), 366, note 17, claims but does not explicate in any detail a 'fascinating and rather complicated, relation' between Richards' *Science and Poetry* (1926, 1935) and parts of the second movement of *East Coker*.

they had been at the Moral Sciences Club in 1915, or simply contradicted on a following page.

The first references to, and interest in, Richards are found in Eliot's Clark Lectures, delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1926, and though used as a basis for many lectures and talks thereafter, not published in full until 1993.[1] Eliot's election as the Clark Lecturer was a controversial and surprising choice, but Richards, Eliot's most prominent Cambridge admirer, does not seem to have been involved, the invitation resulting from the suggestion of the previous lecturer, John Middleton Murry.[2] The major aim of the lectures, to provide a psychological classification of metaphysical poetry, would certainly have interested Richards, but the methods, a mixture of history and commonsensical speculation, would have seemed to him antiquated and unproductive. Nevertheless he attended all eight lectures, which were delivered on Tuesday afternoons beginning on the 26th of January and ending on the 9th of March. In a letter now lost Eliot wrote to Richards after the second lecture to arrange a meeting, Richards replying to say that he would be 'going to all your lectures', and they were sure to meet. He then added a further request:

> I find myself writing an Essay on your poetry for the *New Statesman*. Could you bear to have it read to you? I send it in at the end of the week. It would be so interesting to find out whether all my notions about it are erroneous, as I suspect. But if you had rather not see it before it is finished, I shall understand.[3]

It appears that Eliot's letter had remarked on the fact that he was reading *The Meaning of Meaning*, doubtless following up the linguistic and philosophical roots of Richards' theory of poetic statement, and Richards went on to ask him if he would

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1 R. Schuchard, ed., *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry by T. S. Eliot* (Faber and Faber: London, 1993).

2 See R. Schuchard, 'Introduction', *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, 6–10, for a discussion of the appointment and composition.

3 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 8 Feb. 1926. In the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

'mark some of the passages which most offend you [...] and let me have your copy later.' Whether Eliot did this is not known, but he certainly listened to the review, since in a later letter, on the 15th of February, Richards thanked Eliot for allowing him to read it out.[1]

The Clark Lectures themselves made direct reference to Richards, who is cited as 'the most brilliant of contemporary critics of criticism',[2] but the point of invoking him is to repudiate his psychologism, the disconnection between mental fact and the qualities of external objects. Eliot, as his editor Ronald Schuchard has pointed out, was reacting to a passage from 'A Background for Contemporary Poetry' (interestingly, a section not reprinted in *Science and Poetry*(1926)):

> We expect the things we love or hate to be in themselves love-worthy or hate-worthy. We suppose that *in their own nature* will be found justification for our attitudes towards them. And yet what knowledge we contrive to gain of them leaves us dispassionate. We find in them part of the cause of our emotion. But we find nothing to justify it, nothing to exalt it. A distressing situation which we refuse, if we can, to face.[3]

Eliot seems to have forgotten where this remark appears, and having failed to find it in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) he selected an alternative and analogous passage from that book as a substitute target. Despite this confusion, Eliot's point is straightforward. Richards sees the denial of objective qualities as a mark of scientific progress, Eliot retorts that it is merely one way of seeing things, with the implication that it is not necessarily of greater value and that Richards' position is indicative of a general decline in the quality of vision. This negative tone is confirmed in a passage concerned with Richards' views on the segregation of emotion and knowledge. In 'A Background', and

1 'Mr. Eliot's Poems', *New Statesman* (20 Feb. 1926), 584–5.

2 *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, 81.

3 'A Background for Contemporary Poetry', 521. For Schuchard's remarks see *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, 81.

in *Principles*, particularly in Chapter 35, 'Poetry and Belief', Richards had suggested that since science was threatening many of the emotional attitudes used to order our daily lives it would be necessary to compartmentalize feeling and knowledge to prevent needless conflict. Eliot's response to this suggestion is horror:

> Humanity reaches its higher civilisation levels not chiefly by improvement of thought or by increase and variety of sensation, but by the extent of co-operation between acute sensation and acute thought. The most awful state of society that could be imagined would be that in which a maximum condition of sensibility was co-existent with a maximum attainment of thought – and no emotions uniting the two. It would probably be a very contented state, and is all the more awful for that. It would not be necessary even that each individual should have both maximum sensibility and a maximum intellect: try to imagine a society in which everyone was either a Marcel Proust or an Einstein, or an inferior grade of one *or* the other, and you have the thing itself. It is a worse nightmare than you think, and is more possible than you think; it is merely the existence of a highly perfected race of insects.[1]

This hideous scenario is projected as the terminus of the historical decay of belief which Eliot describes in the lectures and uses to articulate his account of Metaphysical poetry. The metaphysicals, of whom Donne is the representative example, are voluptuaries of thought,[2] without any commitment to the ideas they employ,[3] and they represent a stage in the disintegration of thought and feeling, a well-known thesis in Eliot's other writings.

Richards, then, is a very signal presence in the Clark Lectures, but not one which seems likely to have been of interest to Eliot as an interlocutor. Quite why this changed when it did is hard to sort out. But Eliot had obviously not read Richards' article in the

1 Clark Lecture, 8, in *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry by T. S. Eliot*, 221.
2 *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, 158.
3 *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, 132.

Criterion very closely – it was a period of great difficulty in his personal life – and certainly didn't have it to hand when writing the lectures. Conversation with Richards at this time, and the review which was read to him, took him back to it and particularly to the reference to his own poetry. The effect of finding himself cast as a voluptuary of thought, one, like the Donne in his own lectures, who believes nothing, was immediate, and at some time between finishing the Clark Lectures in March and the publication of Richards' *Science and Poetry*, which includes the text of 'A Background', in the summer of 1926, Eliot wrote a short 'Note on Poetry and Belief' as a contribution to a journal, *The Enemy*, being projected by his friend the painter, novelist, and literary satirist, Wyndham Lewis.[1] Eliot's strategy in this article, eventually published in February 1927, was to challenge Richards by suggesting that he was wrong to presume belief to have been historically stable in character. Thus, 'It would be rash to say that the *belief* of Christina Rossetti was not as strong as that of Crashaw, or that of Crashaw as strong as that of Dante'.[2] This is surprising, to say the least, for that is exactly what Eliot himself had said of Donne in the Clark Lectures, but this change of position brought immediate benefits, since it allowed Eliot to reply to Richards' footnote, which had so uncomfortably located him in the general decline, by saying that he cannot see in his own poem this '"complete separation" from all belief', or at least if there is a difference then it is 'something no more complete than the separation of Christina Rossetti from Dante'.[3] The evasion of Donne here is, of course, in itself remarkable.

This panicky attempt to deal with Richards' note suggests that it had gone home with appalling force, and it is not difficult to see why Eliot should have continued to take a close interest in his friend's thought, an interest which, unsurprisingly, Richards

1 'A Note on Poetry and Belief', Wyndham Lewis, ed., *The Enemy* No. 1 (1927), 15–16. For the reference to conversations with Richards see p. 15.

2 'A Note on Poetry and Belief', 16.

3 'A Note on Poetry and Belief', 16.

reciprocated. Further conversations were impossible, though, since Richards was travelling, first in the United States, then in Canada, Japan, and China, from the summer of 1926 until September 1927. Meanwhile, his views on Eliot were becoming very widely known. 'A Background' was reprinted in the United States in the mass-circulation *Saturday Review of Literature*,[1] *Science and Poetry* appeared in June, and the second edition of *Principles of Literary Criticism* carried Richards' *New Statesman* review of Eliot as an appendix. By contrast, Eliot's response, in 'The Note on Poetry and Belief', was relatively obscure, but with his review of *Science and Poetry* in the March number of *The Dial* this changed. Signs of Eliot's conversion, soon to result in his baptism, were evident – he rejected Richards' psychological theory of value on the ground that it is insufficient for one who believes that 'the chief distinction of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever'[2]– but rather than attempting to rescue himself as a believer, as he had done in his 'Note', he here tried the opposite tack, and by a series of questions suggested that when it comes to sceptical subtlety no Christian is to be outdone. In challenging Richards' account of the decline of belief he asked 'what right have we to assert what Dante actually believed, or *how* he believed it? Did he believe in the Summa as St Thomas believed in it [...]?'[3] No answer is given; it is a mere debating device, and the only strong criticism offered is the remark that Richards' proposal to maintain our attitudes without any pretence to scientific support is simply impractical:

> Poetry 'is capable of saving us', he says; it is like saying the wall paper will save us when the walls have crumbled. It is a revised version of Literature and Dogma.[4]

A much more significant response came obliquely in a paper, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', delivered on the 18th

1 'Science and Poetry', *Saturday Review of Literature*, 2 (1926), 833–4.
2 'Literature, Science, and Dogma', *Dial*, 82/3 (Mar. 1927), [239–43], 241.
3 'Literature, Science, and Dogma', 242–3.
4 'Literature, Science, and Dogma', 243.

of March 1927 as an Address to the Shakespeare Association. Eliot substantiated some of the remarks in the *Dial* review, but in fact moved very steadily in Richards' direction. The question of belief was raised squarely in relation to Dante, and Eliot wrote that 'I doubt whether belief proper enters into the activity of a great poet, *qua* poet'.[1] Donne was mentioned as an another example of a poet of whom it is difficult to conclude that he 'believed anything'.[2] Eliot was a long way from accepting other parts of the Ricardian thesis, but he seemed content to contemplate the possibility that a great poet might employ a philosophy, true or false, without being committed to it.

It is appropriate here to ask whether Richards was really offering Eliot anything new, and it seems fair to conclude that at general level he was not. In a letter of 1914, for example, Eliot remarks to Eleanor Hinkley that 'I have had for several years a distrust of strong convictions in any theory or creed which can be formulated. One must have theories, but one need not believe in them!'.[3] And in his early article 'Metaphysical Poets', first published anonymously in October 1921 in the *Times Literary Supplement*, then collected in *Homage to John Dryden* (1924) and ultimately immensely influential, Eliot writes:

> A philosophical theory which has entered into poetry is established, for its truth or falsity in one sense ceases to matter, and its truth in another sense is proved. The poets in question have, like other poets, various faults. But they were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling.[4]

Curiously, and uncharacteristically, Richards saved this article in its TLS form, which suggests that he knew Eliot was the

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1 *Selected Essays*, 138.

2 *Selected Essays*, 138.

3 To Eleanor Hinkley, 27 Nov. 1914, in Valerie Eliot, ed., *The Letters of T. S. Eliot* Vol. 1 (Faber and Faber: London, 1988), 73.

4 *Selected Essays*, p. 288–9. First published as 'Metaphysical Poets', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20/1031 (20 Oct. 1921), 669–70.

author,[1] and it is probable that he was interested by similarities with his own views, but it is unclear whether these resemblances are a mere indication of shared interests, or confirmation that Eliot was aware of Richards' thought. Indeed, it is conceivable that Eliot was in fact drawing on an acquaintance with the Richards and Ogden article 'On Talking', which appeared in mid-1921.[2] This paper offered an account of evocative language as distinct from scientific language, and suggested that when we employ the term Truth in relation to these two uses we are in fact employing quite distinct symbols, 'Truth^{S} and Truth^{E}', that is to say truth as it applies to symbols (i.e. science), and to evocation.[3] But the similarity between this position and that in Eliot's paper is only of a general kind, and the strongest conclusion we can draw is that Eliot did not lead Richards into these concerns (in fact, the issue of belief is evident in Ogden and Richards' 'Symbolism' paper of 1920[4]). In view of Eliot's still earlier remark on believing theories, it seems that what we observe here is a convergence, and that Eliot was drawn to Richards by what he saw as an elaborate version of ideas resembling his own, and of course by Richards' acute recognition that Eliot was, in *The Waste Land* and the earlier poems at least, a sceptical poet. A further possible use for Richards' disjunction of poetic value and belief was about to become apparent.

In October 1927 Richards returned from his travels with his wife, Dorothy, whom he had married in Honolulu in late 1926, and soon wrote to Eliot about the review of *Science and Poetry*:

> I got [...] a glimpse of your *Dial* article in Pekin but they were asking double its price so I waited for Shanghai and then missed it! My glance did however suggest to me that a good deal of mis-

1 The page is loosely inserted in Richards' copy of Eliot's *For Lancelot Andrewes*.

2 I. A. Richards, and C. K. Ogden, 'On Talking', *Cambridge Magazine*, 11/1 (1921), 57–65.

3 'On Talking', 65.

4 C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, 'Symbolism', *Cambridge Magazine*, 10/1 (Summer 1920), 32–40.

> understanding *had* occurred. My fault – I am not very successful as an active communicator in writing.[1]

He added that he hoped they could meet soon, and suggested dates. Whether a meeting and discussions took place is unclear, but Richards was certainly in correspondence with Eliot about the 'Practical Criticism' courses, the second series of which he was then giving at Cambridge and to which Eliot appears to have been at least a postal contributor, writing on the 20th of November with his remarks on poems by Whitman, Longfellow, and other pieces as yet unidentified.[2] Richards was also presumably reading Eliot's other articles of the period, notably the crucial 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', of which there is an annotated copy in the Richards Collection.

But both men were extremely active in their professional lives, and it seems that the first occasion on which Richards and Eliot were able to meet, perhaps the first meeting since 1926, was on the 23rd of February 1928 when Eliot came to Cambridge as Richards' guest at Magdalene College's Pepys Feast. Dorothy Richards records the day in her diary:

> Ivor to meet Eliot – who came up the stairs looking to me very gaunt and grim – as if he had burnt himself out. His queer-coloured, strangely piercing eyes in a pale face are the most striking thing about him. He is pale with special wrinkles which run horizontally across his forehead and his nose is definitely Jewish. He doesn't understand all I say nor do we him – His questions are surprising – disconcerting because so simple, sometimes almost inane – we talked of sky scrapers, of Canada and drinking; we took the initiative.

Eliot and Richards went on to the Feast, which Dorothy watched, as was customary for the wives of Fellows, from the balcony of the Hall, and then after the dinner she went to Richards' College rooms and 'found Eliot absurdly drunk – not talkative –

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1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 1 Oct. 1927, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 See Introduction to Volume 4 for further details, and comments on Eliot's involvement.

just fuddled'. At one in the morning they returned to the Richards' flat, and the conversation continued, but two hours was enough for Dorothy, who retired to bed to write up her diary:

> An hour ago Eliot was sleeping: looking exhausted with the effort to keep his eyes open. But true American that he is – as soon as there is at last a general move and any ordinary English man would have sighed relief and quickly disappeared to bed – Eliot wakes up, puts on more records and is once more absorbed by the 'mechanical toy'.

The talk, which Dorothy called a 'séance', continued until four in the morning, and unsurprisingly 'Eliot's early breakfast didn't happen'.[1] A difficult evening, but the relationship survived, and they became closer, as Richards reports:

> A little later, after my marriage, he got into the way of coming fairly often to stay with us in Cambridge, at first on King's Parade directly opposite the Gate of King's. He used to arrive wearing a little rucksack which protected him, he felt, from molestation by porters. It contained night things and a large new, and to us awe-inspiring, Prayer Book: a thing which in my innocent mind hardly chimed with, say, 'The Hippopotamus'.
>
> This, in those days, with 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service', represented for us what we took to be his position on the Church. I suppose a more experienced reader would have felt the Catholic trend in them. But we were listening to other things. I lent my copy of *Ara Vos Prec* to A. C. Benson, whose comment was: 'Watch out! I hear the beat of the capripede hoof!'[2]

The importance of Eliot's conversion was never concealed, and Richards, an atheist, accepted it calmly, with embarrassment only arising from practical considerations:

> We were suddenly made aware of our total inability to advise on (or even discuss) the character of the various Services available on Sunday mornings. We didn't even seem to know – such was

1 D. E. Richards' diary, 23 Feb. 1928, RCM.

2 I. A. Richards, 'On TSE', 5–6.

> the deplorable nature of our Cambridge circle in the mid-twenties – any person to consult.[1]

'Even so', Richards was later to write to Conrad Aiken 'it still takes a lot of getting over – even for me who hardly knew him before he bought his grand big Prayer Book.'[2] It was perhaps this fundamental disagreement, more than anything else, which accounts for the fact that they were close friends but not confidantes. As Richards himself puts it:

> I knew Eliot pretty well. [...] But I always had a difficulty in making him talk about truly serious matters. He preferred not to on the whole. [...] He may have had special cronies with whom he could be intimate, but with me he usually dodged it.[3]

It is likely, though, that this remark is to be explained in part as an attempt by Richards to ward off biographical enquiries. The facts of the matter suggest that there was a conversation in progress, face to face and in their writings, and that both were aware of this and committed to it. One phase of the exchange extends from Richards' publication of 'A Background for Contemporary Poetry', through *Principles* and *Science and Poetry*, and up to Eliot's conversion in 1927, and is focused sharply on the nature of what the poet believes. But during this phase Eliot was also increasingly sensing that a literary critic with definite doctrinal positions might be in very great difficulties when attempting to pass judgement on works based in traditions of thought other than his own. With conversion Eliot's anxiety seems to have deepened and his confidence in Richards' treatment as an assistant to have gradually waned. The experiment with scepticism in 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca' was not wholehearted or long-lived, and he was very soon evad-

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1 I. A. Richards, 'On TSE', 6.

2 IAR to Conrad Aiken, 9 Nov. 1971, in John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 187.

3 IAR in 'Beginnings and Transitions: I. A. Richards Interviewed by Reuben Brower', in Reuben Brower, et. al., eds., *I. A. Richards: Essays in his Honor* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1973), [17–41], 30.

ing the difficulties by abandoning the higher claims traditionally made for poetry. In the preface to the 1928 reissue of *The Sacred Wood* he concluded that poetry had to be assigned to the category of 'amusement' lest it be mistaken for something more important:

> poetry is not the inculcation of morals, or the direction of politics; and no more is it religion or an equivalent of religion, except by some monstrous abuse of words.[1]

However, Eliot was unwilling to relinquish the right to judge individual cases of poetry in these terms, and on the next page, in one of the many adjacent contradictions that make discussion of Eliot's writing such a frustrating, and unrewarding, exercise, he wrote that 'poetry [...] certainly has something to do with morals, and with religion, and even with politics'.[2] The motivation for this fudging becomes immediately apparent when he goes on to observe that when he asks himself why he prefers the poetry of Dante to that of Shakespeare 'I should have to say that it seems to me to illustrate a saner attitude towards the mystery of life'.[3] On the one hand, as a Christian, Eliot does not want poetry to be offered as a competitor or substitute for religion, it must be separate from it. On the other, he wishes poetry to remain within the jurisdiction of a dogmatically driven ethic. Furthermore, he was conscious that this latter form of criticism was insensitive to his own response, since immediately after expressing his preference for Dante over Shakespeare he added that 'we appear already to be leaving the domain of criticism of "poetry"'. We may take this as suggesting that by applying dogmatic considerations we are in some unspecified way being less than just to those qualities of poetry which cannot be adequately evaluated within a scheme of religious morality. It seems absurdly bathetic to suppose that these

1 Preface to *The Sacred Wood* (Methuen: London, 1928), viii–ix.
2 *The Sacred Wood*, x.
3 *The Sacred Wood*, x.

are the qualities of successful 'amusement', but Eliot offers no alternative.

These remarks, then, offer no coherent solution to the problem, they merely indicate that it was becoming more pressing. His attempts in 1927 to find some assistance in Richards had not been entirely successful, but he remained interested, perhaps hoping that something might come out of further elaborations of Richards' position, and the next phase of their exchange, which is clearly marked more by shifts in Eliot's attitude than in that of Richards, grows out of Richards's remarks on 'Belief' in *Practical Criticism*.

Eliot, as has been noted, was involved in the gathering of protocols for this book in 1927, and in 1928 Richards wrote to say that he would soon be sending a script of the book for Eliot to inspect, and also to thank him for his most recent contributions.[1] Writing on the 2nd of July to arrange a meeting in London when they could discuss the book, Richards remarked that he would 'bring a bundle of strange documents with me', meaning the protocols themselves. In many respects their relationship was now closer than ever before, and Eliot was sending Richards copies of his poems printed and in typescript. *Simeon* arrived in late September, provoking Richards to add a postscript to a letter:

> Many thanks for *Simeon* who has just come. Admirable, I think, and well got up – but not the illustration. I wish I could see how you get lines to look so settled and final, so fixed and finished.[2]

On the 28th of September Eliot sent parts I and II of *Ash-Wednesday*, remarking that he 'was not sure whether the weakness is a question of detail, or whether they are fundamentally wrong'.[3] Richards replied reassuringly:

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1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 26 June 1928, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 20 Sep. 1928, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

3 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 28 Sep. 1928, RCM. Quoted in John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 47.

> I don't think there is *much* wrong with the poems. Perhaps you have been working at them too closely. They are stronger – to a stranger's eye – than you suggest. May I keep them a little to see how they *wear*. The last thirds of them are perhaps a little thin, and a little evidently deliberate. I certainly don't think there is anything *fundamentally* at fault.

Enclosed was some of his own recent writing:

> Tit for tat, herewith a chapter on Belief belonging to the Third part of *Practical Criticism*, which is now almost finished. The same view, I think, exactly that I tried to maintain in *Science and Poetry*, but I hope clearer and not as easily misunderstood. I had your review before me. Most useful![1]

This chapter seems to have resulted in a very productive exchange between Richards and Eliot, producing a re-examination of the question of 'Belief', and resulting in several publications by both. Unfortunately, Eliot's reply, which he describes as 'a foolish letter from me about your chapter',[2] is lost, but it is at least clear that both were deeply interested. Initially, Richards was too busy with the completion of *Practical Criticism* to take matters much further forward, but in late January or early February 1929 he wrote to Eliot to tell him that he had decided to accept an invitation to visit Tsing Hua University in Peking for a year, leaving in the summer:

> It seems to me if we are ever going to discuss problems of belief we ought to begin before many more months have passed. I should be sorry to postpone it altogether until the nineteen-thirties.[3]

Very shortly afterwards Richards wrote again to report on his preparations for the Belief discussions:

> I shall probably be sending you a sheaf of notes on Belief as a

1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 1 Oct. 1928, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 20 Nov. 1928, RCM.

3 IAR to T. S. Eliot, undated, begins 'It is lucky', internal evidence suggests a date before 4 Feb. 1929. In the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

> first step to our dividing the subject in discussion later. I am rather anxious to get the main heads of the subject arranged on paper in some form before breaking off with it for my Peking year. I hope it won't mean reading any German, if so I'm completely out of it – but I don't think it should be necessary. There seems to be more than enough to say that hasn't been properly reflected upon without.[1]

These notes were in fact a remarkable set of numbered propositions extending over eighteen pages of a foolscap notebook beneath the heading 'Belief · Feb. 1929 · Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.'[2] Richards did not send these notes, and there is no evidence of a discussion of them at this time, though there were social meetings. On the 28th of March, for example, Eliot visited the Richards at the house of Dorothy's family in London, and on the following day, Good Friday, the Richards were the guests of the Eliots, Richards recalling how on this occasion Eliot's 'precision occupied itself much with the exactly the right temperature at which hot cross buns should be served'.[3] Whether any substantial conversation took place around this time is unknown, but attempts to arrange a meeting in Cambridge in May[4] were finally cancelled in a letter from Eliot of the 21st of that month:

> I shall be very sorry to miss a meeting with Tillyard and the others; but the main thing really is that I should see you once or twice before you leave for China: to get some notion of a line which you purpose to work on, and of another for me to work on. How long can you be in London, and when, before you sail? If we could have one or two mornings, or afternoons, it would be useful to me.

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1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, undated, begins 'Comparing the costs', internal evidence suggests a date before 4 Feb. 1929, but after the undated letter beginning 'It is lucky' (cited above).

2 Notebook 3, RCM. A long extract has been published in John Constable, 'I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, and the Poetry of Belief', *Essays in Criticism* 40/3 (July 1990), 222–43.

3 I. A. Richards, 'On TSE', 6.

4 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 19 Mar. 1929, 22 Mar. 1929. RCM

> I have just finished a sort of pamphlet on Dante into which I have worked a few notions discussed with you: the idea of the *Vita Nuova* as a manual of sex psychology, and the idea of the difference between philosophy as philosophy and philosophy in poetry: the distinction between Belief and Poetic Assent or Acceptance. (Of course the further difference, which I believe can be established, between philosophic, theological and scientific belief, does not enter here. And the really exciting point, whether Russell's analysis of the proposition is not as antiquated as Bradley's, does not enter either.) I have merely got down a vague literary adumbration of a few questions I want worked out more thoroughly; so when I send you the proof, please think of it as rough notes incorporated in a popular pamphlet. The only other effect is that having put these remarks in connection with Dante will alter the form of my Donne, and I think improve it. The only point which I hope I have made, in the little Dante book, is this: that for[1]

Frustratingly, the rest of the letter is missing.

Eliot's main interest in this *Dante* book was now the question which he had raised but not addressed in his 'Note on Belief': 'how far can any poetry be detached from the beliefs of the poet'. As we have seen, Eliot held conflicting views on this matter. In 1929 he tried once again, using Richards' most recent publication to support his new position. Relying on his linguistic analysis of emotive statement, in *The Meaning of Meaning* and in *Practical Criticism*, Richards had written that 'most readers, and nearly all good readers, are very little disturbed by even a direct opposition between their own beliefs and the beliefs of the poet':

> Lucretius and Virgil, Euripides and Aeschylus, we currently assume, are equally accessible, given the necessary scholarship, to a Roman Catholic, to a Buddhist and to a confirmed sceptic.[2]

Eliot accepted this, not because the linguistic or philosophical support was convincing but because the consequences of rejecting it were unacceptable to him, a mode of reasoning very

1 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 21 May 1929, RCM.

2 *Practical Criticism*, 271.

common in his later writing: 'if you hold any contradictory theory you deny, I believe, the existence of "literature" as well as of "literary criticism"'.[1] It is worth noting that Eliot chose to delineate the threatened valuables in terms of their socially defined categorization, and their public evaluation, rather than private comprehension and pleasure. What was really at stake for him was the authority of the critic.

Eliot found himself in great difficulties in developing this position. While he was happy to 'deny [...] that the reader must share the beliefs of the poet in order to enjoy the poetry fully', he found that he was uncomfortable with the distinction, required by this acceptance, between Dante's beliefs as a man and a poet:

> we are forced to believe that there is a particular relation between the two, and that the poet 'means what he says'.[2]

Consequently, he revisited Richards' claim that *The Waste Land* had effected 'a complete severance between his poetry and *all* beliefs' and pronounced it 'incomprehensible'. Similarly, when he came to discuss the other underpinning of Richards' position, the analysis of statement, he found himself unwilling to accept the consequences of Richards' presentation of poetic statement as 'pseudo-statement', a collection of words which resembles scientific statement, but is valuable not on account of its reference but because of the attitudinal manipulations it brings about. Richards' ideas were acceptable as a description of Keats' 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty...' and Shakespeare's 'Ripeness is all', but when Eliot came to Dante's 'la sua voluntate è nostra pace' he found himself obliged to conclude that it affected him as it did because it was 'literally true'. Eliot then very candidly brought the observations to a close by admitting that 'I cannot, in practice, wholly separate my poetic appreciation from my personal beliefs', and that 'one probably has more pleasure in the poetry when one shares the beliefs of the poet'.

1 *Dante*, quoted from the reprinted text in *Selected Essays*, 269.
2 *Selected Essays*, 269.

These remarks were obviously self-contradictory, but Eliot continued to hope that he could call on Richards' views to support him as a critic seeking authority over non-Christian literature, without having to admit that Richards' analysis of the proposition also applied to the central texts of his own religion.

Further meetings were difficult to arrange, and Richards was not only entering one of the busiest of all phases of the Cambridge year, the setting and marking of the Tripos examinations, but also preparing for his visit to China. But in a letter to Eliot written sometime before the 20th of June and not long before departure on the 2nd of July, he wrote that:

> We shall probably be lingering on some days after the 20th and I shall hope to see you on one of them. I have a fairly bulky collection of remarks (yours + mine) now on Belief, and it would be a pity if we did not run through them together – I haven't altered that chapter I think from the draft of it you saw some months ago.[1]

Though there is no certain evidence of a meeting, it is likely that time was found to discuss these notes and that Eliot's later shifts of position, veering away from Richards' views, are in part a response to their radical scepticism. Eliot may have been further alarmed that the whole issue of 'Belief' had by now risen up in Richards' scale of interests, and that he was planning a book on the subject.[2]

For the time being Richards was fully occupied by travelling and adjusting to his new duties in China,[3] but he continued to brood over the belief issue, adding further observations to his notebook.[4] Eliot on the other hand was beginning to withdraw

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1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, undated, begins 'We shall probably be lingering'. In the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 See the titles listed in the 'Programme for after return from China', dated 14 June 1929, Notebook 3, RCM. The plan appears to have been based on an earlier outline dated 14 May 1928.

3 See Introduction to Volume 5, *Mencius on the Mind*, for an account of Richards' activities.

4 Notebook 3, RCM.

from the engagement, the first signal of this shift appearing in his article of February 1930 for the New York *Bookman*, 'Poetry and Propaganda'. He began by summarizing the views of Montgomery Belgion and Richards as the poles of the debate. Belgion, Eliot wrote, suggests that the poet is an irresponsible propagandist who takes up a philosophy or a view of life and presents it in as convincing a manner as possible. Richards on the other hand claims that while poets may employ beliefs in their composition, the ideal reader 'will appreciate the poetry in a state of mind which is not belief, but rather a temporary suspension of disbelief.':

> The one critic would say [...] that you will value Dante more highly if you are a Catholic [...] Mr Richards would say, I think, that [...] when you are enjoying Dante's poem to the full as poetry, you cannot be said either to believe, or to doubt, or to disbelieve, its scholastic philosophy.[1]

Eliot observes that his Dante essay of the previous year was an attempt to mediate between these two positions, but that he was 'now making a fresh start'. He obviously inclined towards Belgion's views, and cast Richards, in a grotesque misrepresentation, as one who 'likes the poetry because the poet has manipulated his material into perfect art, which is to be indifferent to the material, and to isolate our enjoyment of poetry from life'.[2] Milton, whose theology Eliot regarded with suspicion, is said to be 'more apprehensible from the Richards point of view', because in reading Milton 'we are I think rapt by the splendid verse without being tempted to believe the philosophy or theology.'[3] The attribution of such a vapid formalism to Richards is, of course, unjust, but it enabled Eliot to present himself as one for whom the ideas of the poet mattered, and in this context he found it possible to resign his universal critical authority by conceding that he did 'not believe that a Christian can fully

1 'Poetry and Propaganda', *The Bookman*, 70/6 (Feb. 1930), [595–602], 598.
2 'Poetry and Propaganda', 599.
3 'Poetry and Propaganda', 600.

appreciate Buddhist art, or vice versa'. Nevertheless he retained the liberty to make a moral judgement about the philosophy, and an artistic judgement about the art, the price of this freedom being a return to the most hackneyed of divisions between form and content.

At the same time Eliot was producing more creditable essays. In his letter to Richards about the *Dante* pamphlet he had written that with these ideas in hand he would be able to 'alter the form of my Donne', and 'improve it', a reference to the projected book arising from the Clark Lectures, *The School of Donne*. This book was never completed, but Eliot used his Clark Lectures as material for a series of BBC broadcasts on seventeenth century poetry in March and April 1930, and the remarks on Donne in the second of these, 'Rhyme and Reason: The Poetry of John Donne', allow us to infer something of the changes he was contemplating. Beginning with George Santayana's account in *Three Philosophical Poets* of a philosophical poetry where a poet either employs an existing philosophy, or develops a new one of their own, Eliot contrasts this with a metaphysical poetry. The differences are in commitment and belief attitudes:

> in philosophical poetry the poet *believes* in some theory about life and the universe and makes poetry of it. Metaphysical poetry on the other hand, does not imply belief; it has come to mean poetry in which the poet *makes use* of metaphysical ideas and theories. He may believe some theory, or he may believe none.[1]

The philosophy is employed as a means of emotional investigation and communication:

> Of metaphysical poetry in general we may say that it gets its effects by suddenly producing an emotional equivalent for what seemed merely a dry idea, and by finding the idea of a vivid emotion. It moves between abstract thought and concrete feeling; and strikes us largely by contrast and continuity, by the

1 'Rhyme and Reason: The Poetry of John Donne', *Listener*, 3/62 (19 Mar. 1930), [502–3], 502.

> curious ways in which it shows thought and feeling as different aspects of one reality.[1]

Donne was produced as the prime example of this instrumentalist belief attitude:

> Donne was a learned student of philosophy. But his poetry is not that of a man who believes any philosophy. He enjoys his learning, and enjoys using a philosophical idea in poetry. His poetry expresses no settled belief in anything.[2]

Further, Eliot remarked of the neo-Platonic roots of 'The Ecstacy' that, contra Herbert Grierson, he 'cannot see that Donne held this philosophy except for the purpose of this particular poem', and that despite being 'interested in philosophy' Donne was 'very little interested in the discovery of truth through philosophy'. This is not, of course, a translation of Richards' emotive theory of poetic statement; Eliot was emphatic in his claims that what Donne is concerned with is 'feeling transmuted by thought', and 'thought transformed by feeling', which although vague is apparently a dynamic theory of interactions within an authorial consciousness, whilst Richards' account, simplified for clarity, is concerned with the use of statement in the communication of equilibria of impulses. Nevertheless, the resemblances are very strong, and Eliot was evidently adopting a position towards Donne that resembled that of Richards towards Eliot's own poetry. His difficulties with regard to Dante were resolvable since Dante was emerging in his writing as the only poet with any pure and wholehearted beliefs, all other subsequent poets being in various declensions of unbelief towards whatever views they held, and he was content to contemplate the possibility that his own poetry, pre-conversion, was beliefless since he was now, presumably, in a happier state.

Richards was informed of neither the *Bookman* paper nor 'Rhyme and Reason', Eliot failing to send copies. Indeed there

1 'Rhyme and Reason', 502.
2 'Rhyme and Reason', 502.

was a decline in the frequency of their correspondence during the latter part of 1929 and early 1930, though they were not completely out of touch, Richards writing at least once to enlist Eliot's help for William Empson, who had recently lost his Bye-Fellowship at Magdalene through an indiscretion.[1] But it was not until the early summer that they wrote again at length on 'Belief', Richards opening the discussion and showing considerable restraint:

> I've been putting off writing until I had something solid to say about Belief. Realising now that this may be equivalent to Doomsday, here at last is an acknowledgment of your letter and of the *Dante* which I think is going to be very useful to me. [...] The *Bookman* article came my way. I feel you are quite right about the number of individual and other disturbing differences in the problem. All I shall try to do is to make a kind of chart of the number of types of belief theories which might be held. If I do something with it soon, I'll send you a copy. I've just pledged myself to read a paper here on Belief to a Chinese society. – Apparently my 'poetry without *any* belief', which you find so difficult to conceive, is just *Chinese Poetry*. On the other hand it is comparatively (to our poetries) a trivial, hopscotch literature. [...] I'll at least have read your notes on Belief carefully within the next three weeks, when you shall hear from me again even if I can't write out my 'paper'. Also Dante remarks, but my knowledge of the poet will have to improve before any remarks would have value. Much tho' I've enjoyed looking at your observations.[2]

Eliot's reply suggested he was at the end of this phase of the debate:

> I think I have neglected, or rather postponed, writing to you for the same reason; that I have nothing more as yet to say about

1 See Richard Luckett and Ronald Hyam, 'Empson and the Engines of Love: The Governing Body Decision of 1929', *Magdalene College Magazine and Record*, 35 (1991), 33–40.

2 IAR to T. S. Eliot, undated, begins 'I've been putting off'. Eliot replied on the 12th of May 1930, and post across Siberia was taking approximately fifteen days at this time, so we may assume that Richards' letter was written in April.

> belief, and probably shan't until you are more accessible for discussions. [...] My *Bookman* paper was a poor attempt, a paper written in a hurry to fulfil a promise connected with the collection of funds for repairing the organ of a Bloomsbury church: so don't take it seriously.[1]

Inexplicably, Eliot makes no mention of the 'Rhyme and Reason' article, and in fact, as will become clear, it is this disparaged *Bookman* piece that appears to indicate the path Eliot was about to take.

Richards replied on the 13th of July to say that his work in China had led him to suspect that Chinese thought had not 'developed many of our most important schemas, eg., Thought, Will and Feeling; Truth: Subjective, Objective: Substance, Attribute'. This recognition, he went on to explain, had become connected with his work on 'Belief problems', with which he had 'been fairly busy intermittently':

> I'm afraid the results wouldn't quite do for the *Criterion* as they stand as yet. And as I've promised something on something to the *Symposium*, if you know what it is, I think I'd better send my disjointed remarks there, where they can't refuse them (I think). [...] I'm promising myself some leisure now. I've had very little since coming to China, and propose to do an article in semi-controversy with you for the *Bookman* on Belief – if you don't raise an objection. There are several outstanding misunderstandings between us in print which I would like to try to clear up before going on to a positive development of my general theory, so far as I have one. 'Belief' by the way doesn't seem to have an obvious equivalent in Chinese. What about it in German, French, and Italian? Can you catch any differences of a kind to be worth noting. I can't trust myself with them. But probably the whole range of technical, popular, and degenerate uses of our 'belief' can be reproduced with the same distinctions there. Certainly the whole range can't in Chinese – you get the ranges of trust or fidelity instead – at least I think so, as far as I have gone as yet.[2]

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1 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 12 May 1930, RCM.

2 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 13 July 1930, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

Eliot did not object to the idea of a *Bookman* controversy, but nothing came of Richards' plan. Fortunately, the *Symposium* article, 'Belief', though only an interim statement, is substantial, and particularly impressive in its precision if read in juxtaposition with Eliot's articles of this period. Richards had clearly become dissatisfied with the eddying movement of the debate so far, and had decided to step back to ask himself whether any constructive communication was taking place in his exchange with Eliot (who is not, in fact, ever mentioned). He presented his analysis of the term 'Belief' as a sample of the sort of rigorous attention to ranges of meanings that would be necessary before much conversation in 'refined intellectual language' was profitable.[1] Nevertheless, the literary origins of the interest were made clear, and Richards lucidly outlined the problem that had drawn him into this question:

> It is this: There are many great poems which seem to have sprung from and to embody beliefs. Can we understand them without ourselves accepting and holding these beliefs? The presence of the belief in the poet seems to have been a condition of the poem. Is its presence in the reader equally a condition for successful reading for full understanding?
>
> Either answer, yes or no, to this question brings in great difficulties. If we say 'yes', then clearly we can understand very little poetry – only the poetry in which we can find our own beliefs. But we do seem to appreciate poetry containing beliefs that are quite unacceptable to us. On the other hand, if we answer 'no', it becomes very hard to say what our appreciation is, whether without believing the beliefs we are really submitting enough to the poet, and whether we ought to say we are understanding him. This negative view easily turns into a barren aestheticism.[2]

His solution is simple but suggestive, and though not perhaps entirely satisfactory it has the considerable merit of compatibility with his earlier positions. What he here attempted was a description of the ways in which scientific statements and

1 'Belief', *Symposium*, 1/4 (Oct. 1930), 423–30.

2 'Belief', 431–432.

poetic statements are believed by able readers. Taking as a starting point William James' remark that 'belief' is a 'readiness to act as if it were so' Richards suggested that scientific belief and poetic belief differ in the 'degree to which success or failure in the action can affect the view which prompts it.'[1] If we believe that a train leaves at three minutes to four and it actually leaves at two minutes to two, 'the failure of my action in trying to catch it at once changes my view':

> In contrast to this, philosophical and religious beliefs do not and, I think, cannot come into this kind of close testing contact with what actually happens and therefore cannot be themselves upset by the failure of their consequences to correspond with actuality.[2]

Scientific beliefs will therefore depend on '*junctures* with actualities', whereas religious and philosophical beliefs will not be tested as to their truth or falsehood in this sense, though we may evaluate them according to the degree in which they succeed in 'ordering the personality' and assist in living a 'good life'. Richards termed the two belief attitudes 'verifiable belief' and 'imaginative assent', harking back to the terms he had employed fifteen years before in his Moral Sciences Club paper:

> The distinction if it is valid appears to have wide bearing and drastic consequences. Imaginative assents, unlike verifiable beliefs, are not subject to the laws of thought. We can easily hold two or more mutually incompatible views together in imaginative assent if their incompatibility is merely logical. I think it is relevant to remark here how often religions and philosophies present us with self-contradictions as their central secrets. Imaginative assents are not ordered logically – they have another principle of order based on the compatibilities of movements of the will and the feelings and the desires.[3]

The quality of this deceptively simple psychological account

1 'Belief', 434.
2 'Belief', 434.
3 'Belief', 436.

may be judged from the appropriateness of Richards' reference to the core secrets of religions and philosophies as self-contradictions, and the ease with which his theory handles it.[1] Eliot's distaste for such an account was inevitable.

When Richards wrote to Eliot in November, just after the *Symposium* piece was finished, he observed that the article had originally contained a discussion of Eliot's remarks in *Dante*, but that he had left it out 'intending to write another article to carry matters further with you'.[2] Other business had intervened, but he remained 'very anxious to do something more'. The line of development projected can be inferred from his reply to Eliot's discussion of translation in a letter of the 9th of August 1930. Eliot's remarks themselves respond to Richards' news that he was working on a Chinese philosopher, Mencius, and describe his own experiences of studying Indian metaphysics in Sanskrit, which he said led him to the conclusion that it was impossible to be 'on both sides of the looking-glass at once':

> That is, it made me think how much more dependent one was than one had suspected, upon a *particular* tradition of thought from Thales down, so that I came to wonder how much *understanding* anything (a term, a system etc.) meant merely *being used* to it.[3]

Richards replied at length:

> I'm realizing every week that your 'understanding = familiarity' equation (suggested in your last letter) is not *very* far wrong. Mere getting used to Mencius, without knowingly developing thoughts or feelings further with regard to him, does mean to change one's sense of the situation. On the other hand it's not necessary to be cynical about it, since doubtless a good deal goes

1 See Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994), for a contemporary account which starts with a similar observation, but proceeds to explain the prevalence of such views in terms of mental susceptibility to such puzzles rather than the equilibrium of psychological impulses.

2 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 30 Nov. 1930, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

3 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 9 Aug. 1930, RCM.

on *un*knowingly which ought to be counted in as genuine understanding. With poetry etc. I'm fairly sure that there is a spurious 'feeling of understanding' which *is* simply 'feeling of familiarity'. But that there is also genuine understanding (i.e. response which corresponds to what it ought to correspond to, whatever that may be) I don't doubt. So far as *assent*, conviction, belief-feelings etc. come in (which, I agree with your *Dante* note, they needn't) these I should say were enormously influenced by familiarity (in some contexts) and by unfamiliarity (in others). E.g. the extra violent feeling in 'conversion' when the sense (or a sense) of a doctrine has just struck the convertee for the *first* time; and contrariwise the reassuring belief feeling reinforcement of familiar ritual.

Clearly these are topics which would bear some fruit if properly treated. I don't know why one does other things.[1]

But he didn't do anything directly with this material, and with this letter the second phase of the 'Belief' debate came to a close. In 1932 Eliot attempted to reignite the business by proposing that an article by Montgomery Belgion on Belief might be used by Richards and Martin D'Arcy, the principal authors discussed by Belgion, as a basis for a further exposition of their views in a series of articles in the *Criterion*.[2] Richards regarded Belgion as an unworthy opponent, having answered another article of his at length in the *Criterion* of the previous year,[3] and refused.[4] He was now, perhaps, less interested by this whole issue, and becoming progressively more and more deeply committed to continuing his work on fundamental revisions to the teaching of reading.[5] Indeed it seems indicative that when Richards chose, in *Mencius on the Mind* (1932), to discuss the *Dante* pamphlet's remarks on Keats' 'beauty' lines, the conclusion that he drew was not related to the Belief debate in itself, but rather that Eliot was

1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 19 Oct. 1930, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 24 Feb. 1932, RCM.

3 'Notes on the Practice of Interpretation', *Criterion*, 10/40 (Apr. 1931), 412–20. A reply to Montgomery Belgion, 'What is Criticism?', *Criterion*, 10/38 (Oct. 1930), 118–39.

4 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 26 Feb. 1932, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

5 See Introduction to Volume 8, *Interpretation in Teaching*, for a fuller discussion of this interest.

guilty of a misunderstanding which showed just how badly 'our current trainings in interpretation need improving'.[1]

Eliot for his part remained interested in the question, but was continuing to distance himself. *Thoughts after Lambeth* (1931), makes a very sharp reference to Richards, who is unnamed:

> when I wrote a poem called *The Waste Land* some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the 'disillusionment of a generation', which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.[2]

He is here thinking of the remark in the 1926 review, read to him by Richards, that *The Waste Land* expressed the 'plight of a whole generation'.[3] More pointed still were criticisms offered in his 1933 Harvard lectures *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, where Eliot appears to be making an attempt at a definite break. Richards was deeply affected by this book, partly by the waspish references to his own writings (the *Times Literary Supplement* review made special mention of how amusing Eliot's sniping was[4]), and partly by the ill-treatment of Coleridge, but mostly by the very reduced status which Eliot now seemed to accord to poetry. The last of these left Richards in a state close to outrage and in January 1934 he dropped other plans and went back to his stalled *Coleridge* book in order to produce a response and a reproof to this backslider.[5] On one of Eliot's regular visits to Cambridge in February he and Richards resumed the conversations on Belief,[6] stimulating Richards to complete

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1 *Mencius on the Mind*, 117.

2 *Thoughts After Lambeth* (Faber & Faber: London, 1931), 10. (Richards' copy, presented by Eliot, is unannotated.) Reprinted in T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932, 3rd edition, 1951, [363–387] 368.

3 'Mr. Eliot's Poems', *New Statesman* 26/669 (20 Feb. 1926), 584–5. Reprinted as 'The Poetry of T. S. Eliot' (1926) below, and as Appendix B in the 2nd edition of *Principles of Literary Criticism*.

4 [A. F. Clutton-Brock], 'The Use of Poetry', TLS, 32/1663 (14 Dec. 1933), 892.

5 For a detailed account see 'Introduction' to Volume 6, *Coleridge on Imagination*.

6 D. E. Richards' diary, 10 Feb. 1934, RCM.

both *Coleridge on Imagination* and also an article, 'What is Belief?'.[1] In this piece Richards, frustrated by years of fruitless discussion, takes a more aggressive attitude and suggests that 'Belief' in any of the strong senses is an undesirable and inhibiting condition:

> I suggest, then, that there may be reasonable ground for not wishing to Believe anything. Those who say, 'I am convinced', and think this should recommend their views may be a little naïve. And in making this suggestion I am not overlooking the immense value of Beliefs to certain types of minds. The ages of faith may have supplied invaluable ingredients to human nature. I think it very likely that we should be today infinitely the poorer without them. I wish only to discourage the assumption that the type of mind which needs Belief is necessarily the finer. Often it seems to be, and if this were usually so, at present, there would be nothing to surprise us. For our tradition encourages such minds and serves them with all its treasures.[2]

The position, unlike the *Symposium* article, is an elaboration of earlier views, and in its final observations we find *Principles* and *Science and Poetry* inflected by his reading of Ogden's recent book, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions*:

> I began by remarking upon the hopeful possibilities of scepticism. The kind of questioning which, for me, dissolves the traditional landmark, Belief, into a cluster of undeveloped problems, can be applied to almost all our mental landmarks. Truth, Knowledge, Beauty, the Will, the Good, the Self – with all their satellite terms – fade out. Under a persistent analysis they appear as merely fictions – devised to suit changing needs and owing their seeming solidity to their systematic interlocking ambiguity. [...] The hope of scepticism is that it may uncover behind these fictions more of the actual forces by which we live. Then, with a more conscious control, we may better order our lives.[3]

With this exasperation the matter might have rested, but in early

1 'What is Belief?', *Nation*, 139/3602 (18 July 1934), 71–4.
2 'What is Belief?', 74.
3 'What is Belief?', 74.

1935 Richards was given the chance of revising *Science and Poetry*, and the copy sent to Eliot on the 23rd of September led to an exchange of letters, beginning with Eliot's acknowledgment:

> I find the discussion on page 65 and thereabouts a little confusing. Of course you have to put everything into a very compressed form, but if you could have had another page or two at this point one would like to have some statement as to the differences of *true* and *false* in relation to judgements and pseudo-judgements respectively. I take it that what you mean by a pseudo-judgement is quite different in nature from an ordinary false judgement. That is to say a scientific judgement which happens not to correspond with the facts. The question then arises in what way true and false can be applied to pseudo-judgements. I presume that anyone making a pseudo-judgement has the alternative of one or more other pseudo-judgements which he rejects because they seem to him false. Furthermore, are all pseudo-judgements of the same kind.[1]

Richards described this in a letter to Dorothy as a 'fairly simple misunderstanding',[2] but he was at this time working round the clock to finish a long statement on educational theory for the Rockefeller Foundation,[3] and it was not until the 4th of November that he replied to Eliot:

> I would have written before but page 65 of *Science and Poetry* stood in the way. I see that, with the first line of the bottom paragraph, it does still tend to equate pseudo-statements with *false* judgements, which is very misleading. A Pseudo-Statement, for me, is something utterly different in function, powers, status, nature, order of being, etc., from any scientific or other verifiable statement, true or false. One way of bringing out the differences might be to say that a statement has ideally one ascertainable limited meaning, and is, for science, defective if it is ambiguous; while a Pseudo-Statement normally has inexhaustible meanings. But that only shifts the difficulty over to 'meaning'.

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1 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 2 Oct. 1935, RCM. Quoted in John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 95.

2 IAR to D. E. Richards, 3 Oct. 1935, RCM.

3 See Introduction to Volume 8, *Interpretation in Teaching*.

> Another way would be to say that a Pseudo-Statement expresses or invites the contemplation of the whole mind but a statement is a departmental matter. I don't know that these help much, though. They so much need expanding themselves. The senses of *true* and *false* for statements and Pseudo-Statements are, I hold, so different that they cannot be fairly talked of with the same terms. All the analogies have to be severely restricted. For Pseudo-Statements *true* means something near *troth* (O.E.D, 1 and 2). Certainly Pseudo-Statements conflict and have to be accepted or rejected accordingly: but, whereas we all know how to find out what a statement says, we don't know (in any similar way) how to find out what Pseudo-Statements offer to us (not *say*; they don't say anything in any sense in which statements do). Or rather, with Pseudo-Statements, the process of finding out is a process of experimental growth and is the same as acceptance or rejection, as the case may be.
>
> I suppose there are many kinds of Pseudo-Judgements, but I don't feel happy about any classification that the traditional discussions suggest, since these (e.g. religious, philosophic, poetic) seem to me to derive in part from confusions between statements and Pseudo-Statements.
>
> It is a pity that I called them Pseudo-Statements, as you remarked long ago. It does have a derogatory smack – but so do other possible terms, e.g. *myth*. Perhaps that is a hangover from 18th Century and 19th Century bedazzlement by Science? [...][1]

In its suggestion that pseudo-statement might be characterized as involving the whole mind Richards' own position shows the influence of his recent study of Coleridge, but the level at which he engages with Eliot is elementary. After so much discussion it is a peculiarly depressing exchange. In 1970 Richards looked back on the reception of *Science and Poetry* with a regret that may be taken to apply to many of his views on poetic language:

> What seemed to me its best and most clearly stated points were [...] understood in ways that turned them into indefensible nonsense. That was, I came to feel, what the opponents – some of them eminent – wanted them to be.[2]

1 IAR to T. S. Eliot, 4 Nov. 1935, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

2 I. A. Richards, 'Preface', *Poetries and Sciences* (W. W. Norton: New York, 1970), 7.

Certainly Eliot now seemed quite clearly aware that he could not employ any part of Richards' views in conjunction with his religious beliefs, and his critical position after this time continued to become both clearer and more orthodox. In his 1935 article, 'Religion and Literature'[1] we find a very forthright statement in favour of a hierarchy of critical values, with the top rank being that of a religiously informed moral criticism:

> Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint.[2]

The literary values he left room for were those of the feeblest belle-lettrism:

> All of these writers were men who, incidentally to their religious, or historical, or philosophic purpose, had a gift of language which makes them delightful to read to all those who can enjoy language well written, even if they are unconcerned with the objects which the writers had in view.[3]

Needless to say Richards took no interest in such remarks, and the debate lapsed, though traces of its impact on Eliot can be seen in many later essays, most notably in 'Goethe as Sage' (1955).[4] Apparently motivated by the wish to extend his own critical jurisdiction, he there attempted to recover a little of the sophistication of his earlier views by introducing a distinction between the 'philosophy' of a poet and his 'wisdom'. This distinction is never fully treated, and is perhaps only intelligible to those who can recognize it as an attempt to recast Richards' views of the mid-twenties.

This regression and fading away is an unfortunate conclusion to their engagement, but the high points, in the late twenties and very early thirties, are amongst the most important exchanges in either career. Richards' early writings on 'belief'

1 *Selected Essays*, 388–401.
2 *Selected Essays*, 388.
3 *Selected Essays*, 389.
4 In T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (Faber and Faber: London, 1957), 207–27.

drew Eliot into the open, and obliged him to offer an explicit defence of his position as a Christian critic exercising judgement over writings based in other beliefs. He attempted this in part by borrowing components from his friend's linguistic theory of poetry, but Richards' views were not easily co-opted, and after finding that he could not take what he required without accepting the deeply sceptical and naturalistic epistemology that underlay it, Eliot abandoned the struggle and declared himself for what he had in any case been since 1926, and perhaps earlier, a Christian moralist.

Richards and Leavis

The reception of Richards within the Leavis circle is a contentious subject, and only fully intelligible in reference to Leavis' extremely thin skin and his sense of institutional exclusion. The facts of the matter are simple. Richards and Leavis were initially on good terms, certainly in 1928 and 1929,[1] and Leavis quoted Richards with approval in his early writings. Then in the mid-thirties Richards became a principal target, receiving a devastating dismissal in Leavis' review of *Coleridge on Imagination*. Understandably, Richards did not respond to the personal assault, and somewhat surprisingly did not attempt any reply to the substantive criticisms. Leavis continued to refer to Richards, sometimes with no more severity than was customary for him, and occasionally with respect. But in 1967 he took the very prominent occasion of the Clark Lectures to assert that Richards' psychology was mere pseudo-science and that 'his interest in literature was not intense and was never developed'.[2] There does not appear to have been any diminishment of these feelings with time, and a pointed reference to Leavis in William Empson's contribution to Richards' festschrift cannot have

1 D. E. Richards' diary for these years records regular meetings for tea and lunch, eg. 2 Feb. 1928, 8 Feb. 1928, 2 Mar. 1928, 6 Dec. 1928, 18 Feb. 1929, 22 Feb. 1929, 10 Mar. 1929, 24 May 1929, 25 May 1929 (RCM).

2 F. R. Leavis, *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (Cambridge U.P.: Cambridge, 1969), 17.

helped.[1] When Richards wrote in 1978 to congratulate Leavis on being made a Companion of Honour he received only an unsigned note in reply: 'We repudiate with contempt any approach from you.'[2]

No one would wish to handle the details of this breakdown of friendship for their own sake, but the issue is hard to evade. The feud is not only notorious, being very prominent in Ian MacKillop's admirably even-handed biography of Leavis,[3] but is an important element in the intellectual lives of both men. For Leavis the review of *Coleridge on Imagination* represents, as MacKillop says, a 'crucial document in his life story',[4] and more than any other single treatment was probably responsible for much of the decline in Richards' standing in the later thirties and the years following. Furthermore, a consideration of the roots of the conflict will reveal that Leavis's motivation conjured up an intellectual division from differences of emphasis and opinion that did not deserve dramatic treatment; and consequently this personal quarrel has distorted an exchange of considerable importance in the development of English studies. Continued misunderstanding of this fact has in its turn distorted our comprehension of the history of that development.

It is true, of course, that although respectful Richards was never much excited by Leavis. When remarking to T. S. Eliot in 1929 that he regarded Leavis as a 'a good supervisor on literary and general critical matters', he then added that 'I shouldn't say he was worth coming here under difficulties for',[5] a remark which reveals more than anything else Richards' lack of interest in those without theoretical programmes. On the other hand the importance of Richards in Leavis' early published writings is

1 William Empson,'The Hammer's Ring', in Reuben Brower, et. al., eds., *I. A. Richards: Essays in his Honor* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1973), [73–83], 74–5.

2 Unsigned, undated letter, to Richards, RCM.

3 Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press: London, 1995).

4 MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, 201.

5 IAR to T. S. Eliot, precedes 4 Feb. 1929, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.

beyond doubt. The opening pages of *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930) quote Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* in support of Leavis's contention that a critical elite stands to the general population as gold does to paper currency.[1] A letter to the *Spectator* of the 9th of April 1932 remarks that everyone concerned with literary criticism, and especially at Cambridge, has incurred a debt to Richards.[2] In the article 'This Age in Literary Criticism' (1932), Richards is put alongside T. S. Eliot, a theoretician to compare with Eliot's practical excellence, and is applauded for his 'very great' 'achievement'.[3] *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) quotes Richards five times, always with respect, and praises him for 'what appears to have been the first intelligent critique of Hopkins'.[4] In *For Continuity*, also of 1933, Richards is again cited with respect, and is said to have 'improved the instruments of analysis' and 'consolidated and made generally accessible the contribution of Coleridge'.[5] This literary respect was supported by a close social relationship, the Richards being amongst the first people to be told of Leavis's engagement to Q. D. Roth, Richards' student. Dorothy Richards' diary reports the event:

> Ivor came back grinning violently at lunch – Queenie Roth had just told him amid comments about Lady Chaterjee's lover that Leavis and she were engaged! He gathered she had done the proposing! Which seems very likely and most amusing. What an admirable couple they will make – though Ivor says rather another Bennett combine.[6]

In February, March, and May, the two couples met at least five

1 F. R. Leavis, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (Minority Press: Cambridge, 1930), 4.

2 F. R. Leavis, 'A Candid Critic', letter to the *Spectator*, 9 Apr. 1932, in John Tasker, ed., *Letters in Criticism* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1974), 26.

3 F. R. Leavis, 'This Age in Literary Criticism', *Bookman*, 83/493 (Oct. 1932), [8–9], 9.

4 F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1961), 165.

5 F. R. Leavis, *For Continuity* (Minority Press: Cambridge, 1933), 69.

6 D. E. Richards' diary, 13 Feb. 1929, RCM.

times for tea.[1] However, the personal relationship came under some strain in June. Lascelles Abercrombie had recently resigned from the Professorship of English at the University of Leeds, and enquiries were being made in Cambridge to find a successor. Arthur Quiller-Couch, 'Q', asked Richards if he would be interested,[2] but Richards declined, and instead Leavis' name came up. Muriel Bradbrook recalled that

> Ivor Richards later told me that 'Q' thought Leavis should move, and asked Ivor to put to him the idea of going to Leeds; which Ivor did, to his own undoing.[3]

Suspicious though Leavis may have become of Richards, there was no falling out, and matters seemed amicable enough when in July 1929 the Richards left for China taking a leisurely route via Switzerland and Russia. On the 4th of December, in Peking, Mrs Richards began a very friendly letter to Queenie Leavis describing Chinese marriage rites, drafting the letter in her diary, as was usual for her, before copying it out. After a few words there is a heavy ink line terminating the letter, below which Dorothy Richards has written 'violent disinclination on Ivor's part', the first documentary evidence of real awkwardness. The reasons for Richards' reaction may be inferred from the circumstances of their next communication, in April of the following year, when the Leavises wrote to the Richards, in a letter now lost, to complain that H. S. and Joan Bennett were active in preventing F. R. Leavis's promotion. Richards replied to say that he was 'Distressed to hear of your falling out', and that he felt sure the Bennetts were 'not conspiring against you as you suggest':

> But at the same time you've now given the affair such a bitter twist that I don't see how it's to be cured. – More's the pity. [...]

---

1 D. E. Richards' diary, 18 Feb., 22 Feb., 10 Mar., 24 May, 25 May 1929, RCM.

2 The meeting is mentioned in Arthur Quiller-Couch to IAR, 17 June 1929, RCM.

3 M. C. Bradbrook, 'Nor Shall My Sword', in Denys Thompson, ed., *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions* (Cambridge U.P.: Cambridge, 1984), 32.

> I'm very sorry about it all and wish you could be friends again. Knowing what College High Tables are like don't you think that there is a risk that you might attribute to Bennett things which are not his doing at all.[1]

It seems therefore that although the events of the previous year had made Richards reluctant to correspond, contact of some sort was maintained, and he was still willing to make the attempt to calm Leavis, even if he thought this hopeless. Writing the next day to another Cambridge friend Richards remarked that the 'Leavis situation is due rather to factors within than without', and that 'Leavis has a much worse enemy in himself than in the Faculty'. Queenie, he observed, 'seems rather to be reinforcing his conspiracy mania'.[2] The Richards wrote again to the Leavises, again in an amicable way, just before leaving China, in December 1930,[3] but they did not meet again until October 1931 when they returned to Cambridge. In the autumn of that year Leavis' probationary lectureship came to an end, and no further appointment at Cambridge seemed likely. He may have expected Richards to assist. Ian MacKillop reports that Richards 'looked panic-stricken with embarrassment when Leavis encountered him in the street',[4] and D. W. Harding remarked that this was 'a time when [Leavis] was disappointed in hopes for Richards' personal support',[5] but the details of this matter remain obscure. In any case there were other factors in the progressive cooling of the relationship.

Richards had supervised Q. D. Leavis' doctoral dissertation, indeed the Leavis' friend Denys Thompson has observed that the foundation of the project 'lay in a few sentences of Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism*',[6] and Muriel Bradbrook even

1 D. E. Richards' diary, 15 Apr. 1930, RCM.

2 Letter to Gwyneth Lloyd Thomas, transcribed in D. E. Richards' diary, 16 Apr. 1930, RCM.

3 D. E. Richards Diary, 11 Dec. 1930, RCM.

4 MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, 127. No source is given for the anecdote.

5 D. W. Harding, 'No Compromise', in Denys Thompson, ed., *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1984), 197.

goes so far as to specify them: pp. 32, 36, 58, 60–1.[1] The degree had been awarded in the autumn of 1931, with Richards and E. M. Forster as examiners, but in discussion after the viva voce interview Q. D. Leavis had exhibited a 'complete and furious contempt' for Richards' criticisms.[2] Richards had then taken the dissertation typescript to review for possible changes, but forgotten to turn up for the appointment made to discuss them,[3] and Q. D. Leavis had then written asking for the typescript so that she could send it to Chatto & Windus for consideration with a view to publication. Richards had been surprised by the sharpness of her tone in this note,[4] and seems to have said so when they next met.[5] For her part she was disappointed that the comments 'were all in the nature of proof-corrections'.[6] Richards does seem to have made further suggestions for changes, including substantial cuts, suggestions that Leavis found unacceptable: 'I will admit to having been rather depressed you hadn't seen my point about the necessity for constructing the book in that way and no other.'[7] Chatto & Windus were enthusiastic about publication, and Richards decided that further attempts to urge revision were as pointless as Q. D. Leavis apparently found his suggestions. Nevertheless the correspondence, though uneasy, is not in fact hostile, and they continued to meet. However, when the book finally appeared as *Fiction and the Reading Public* in 1932 there was no acknowledgement either of the formal academic relationship or the inspiration, a fact that Mrs

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6 Denys Thompson, 'Teacher and friend', in Denys Thompson, ed., *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions* (Cambridge U.P.: Cambridge, 1984), [44–51], 47.

1 M. C. Bradbrook, 'Nor Shall My Sword', in Denys Thompson, ed., *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions* (Cambridge U.P.: Cambridge, 1984), 34.

2 F. R. Leavis, letter to Ronald Bottrall, 21 Oct. 1931, quoted in Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press: London, 1995), 130.

3 Q. D. Leavis to IAR, Undated, 'Friday', presumably late October or early November, RCM.

4 Q. D. Leavis to IAR, Undated, 'Friday', RCM.

5 Q. D. Leavis to IAR, Undated, 'Friday', RCM.

6 Q. D. Leavis to IAR, Undated, 'Friday', RCM.

7 Q. D. Leavis to IAR, 26 Nov. 1931, RCM.

Richards, at least, noticed immediately.[1]

Yet another point of friction arose when Richards addressed the inaugural meeting of the English Research Society, notionally founded by L. C. Knights, but in fact instigated by Leavis himself, in whose house at Chesterton Hall Crescent it met for the first time in November 1931. Richards had volunteered to give the first paper, and spoke under the title 'A Case Against Research in "English"'.[2] Leavis wrote to Ronald Bottrall in the following year describing the event:

> Well, Richards offered eagerly to address the first meeting, turned up with his wife and another feminine admirer, and dismissed with an amused superiority that was often close to a snigger every possibility of profitable research in English. It was impossible for me to say anything without endorsing the implication that it was all my little stunt. I think he was partly annoyed at the number of researchers whom I had helped with the formation of subjects [...] To deal with him on the spot was morally impossible, so half a dozen stalwarts drew up a reply. It's as devastating a document as I've seen. 'Your main contribution seems to us not worth arguing about,' etc. He had dismissed most intelligent kinds of research (my wife's in particular by implication) as involving 'axes to grind'. Is that not merely a way of raising prejudice? Would you, or would you not, say there were no axes to grind in *The Principles of Literary Criticism, Science and Poetry, Practical Criticism*? But the most drastic effects depend upon close reference to what he had said. The society suggested ironically that he had of course been playing Devil's Advocate, and had meant to provoke this response. On receiving the document, he agreed that of course he had. And he has since been lavish in encouragement.[3]

The Leavises visited Richards and his wife some days afterwards, and Mrs Richards records in her diary that they were

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1 D. E. Richards' diary for 29 April 1932. For an alternative account of this affair see MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*.

2 Published for the first time in Volume 9, *Collected Shorter Works 1919–1938*.

3 F. R. Leavis to Ronald Bottrall, 13 July 1932, quoted in Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, 142–3. Through a printing error the citation of the source of the document has been misplaced as note 27 to page 143.

both 'truculent, she about her Ph.D. Thesis [...] and he indignant about the Research paper'.[1] The degree of real dissatisfaction is hard to gauge; Q. D. Leavis wrote to Richards on the following day, 28th of November, that 'Frank asks me to say that "poverty" was the last criticism that could be brought against your address: it was very much admired.'[2] I am inclined to discount this as mere politeness, and to assume that from this point on Richards was under suspicion. For his part Richards was growing progressively less and less comfortable with Leavis's ambitions, though he contributed an article on 'The Chinese Renaissance' to the second issue of *Scrutiny*.[3] In the same issue appeared Leavis's pugnacious 'What's Wrong With Criticism?', which had been drawn from a pamphlet rejected by Eliot for the Criterion Miscellany series,[4] and which may be taken as a representative example of the self-projection which was troubling his Cambridge colleagues. Social contact continued but Richards did not attempt to conceal his doubts. Leavis later recalled a conversation at about this time in which Richards compared their careers and observed 'with quiet admonitory irony: "*I* am not a moral hero."'[5]

But for the time being this increase in tension was a private matter. Richards was deep in his own projects, and Leavis did not write on Richards and had no occasion to show his hand. Instead, he began by suggesting to D. W. Harding in 1932 that he produce a consideration of Richards for *Scrutiny*.[6] As Hard-

1 D. E. Richards' Diary, 27 Nov. 1931, RCM.

2 Q. D. Leavis to IAR, 'Saturday' [28 Nov. 1931], RCM.

3 'The Chinese Renaissance', *Scrutiny*, 1/2 (Sep. 1932), 102–13.

4 F. R. Leavis, 'What's Wrong With Criticism?', *Scrutiny*, 1/2 (Sep. 1932), 132–46.

5 F. R. Leavis, 'A Retrospect', in *Scrutiny*, Vol. 20, *A Retrospect, Indexes, Errata* (Cambridge U.P.: Cambridge, 1963), [1–24], 3. Leavis's description presents this remark anonymously, but in an interview of March 1976 with Francis Mulhern, Q. D. Leavis identified the speaker as Richards (Quoted in Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (NLB: London, 1979), 201).

6 D. W. Harding, 'Evaluations (1): I. A. Richards', *Scrutiny*, 1/4 (Mar. 1933), 327–38, and reprinted in this volume. Also reprinted in F. R. Leavis, ed., *Determinations: Critical Essays* (1934), 218–43.

ing himself remarked this was 'at a time when he was disappointed in hopes for Richards' personal support and knew that my admiration for Richards' early work was tempered by a sense of its limitations'.[1] However, Harding's essay, though critical, is quite impersonal, and while Richards cannot have found it comfortable to read he could not have resented the seriousness of attention which it demonstrated.

One final point may be touched on here. Richards himself used to attribute the breakdown of his friendship with the Leavises to the fact that Queenie had asked for support and advice in 1929 when it became clear that her family did not approve of the engagement to Leavis. According to his account he and Dorothy returned from a degree ceremony in pouring rain to find that Queenie had been waiting for them for two hours, sheltering by the hedge outside their house. There followed a spontaneous and complete account of her family's resistance to the marriage.[2] Ian MacKillop has reasonably remarked that it is very hard to see why this confession should have caused any awkwardness between the Richards and the Leavises,[3] and as has been shown above there does not seem to have been any break before the Richards left for China in August. In the light of examination of Richards' papers it appears likely that the date of the event was simply misremembered. In 1929 the Richards were living in a flat in Green Street, and did not own a house with a hedge until very late in 1932. On present evidence it seems that the anecdote refers to an appeal made by Queenie, in early 1933 perhaps, when the Leavises were under severe strain due to ill-health,[4] or

1 D. W. Harding, 'No Compromise', in Denys Thompson, ed., *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1984), 197.

2 For example, Richard Luckett, a friend of Richards in his later years. Personal communication to the author, 2 Feb. 2001. Also recorded in John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), Biographical Register entry for F. R. Leavis.

3 Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press: London, 1995), 105.

4 D. E. Richards' diary for 1 December 1932: 'Queenie said to be v. ill still – kind of conscious fits, going rigid. Frank getting impatient.'

even in the following year. Such a confession, at such a time, would have been much more likely to have caused embarrassment, particularly if it were as full and far-ranging as Richards' recollection suggests. When combined with other matters, it might just have contributed, perhaps catalytically, to a collapse of friendship such as that in the middle thirties. Remarkably, however, there is no reference to the event in Dorothy's diary, perhaps suggesting that it did not at first seem particularly important.

In review, though, it would appear that there was no decisive event, not even this supposed confession, which turned Leavis against Richards, but, rather, an accumulation of irritation arising from more or less minor social friction, stretching back into the late 1920s, combined, in all probability, with a sense of injustice at Richards' relatively easy financial circumstances and his success. By the mid-thirties Leavis' students were being offered what one of them remembered as a 'scathing denunciation' of *The Meaning of Meaning* and *Practical Criticism*,[1] and expressing what Ronald Duncan, then a student and a close intimate of Leavis, described as a 'savage resentment' towards Richards:

> because [...] *Principles of Literary Criticism* had been acclaimed because of ideas which Leavis had first articulated, he carried in his pocket a snapshot of Richards leaving what looked like a seaside bungalow. 'Dr Caligari leaving the scene of his crime', he would say, putting the photograph back in his pocket again.[2]

The Duncan memoir is eccentric in many respects, and I hesitate to rely upon it in detail, but this anecdote does Leavis little credit even if it is just to him only in broad outline. *Principles of Literary Criticism* was based on lectures written and delivered in 1919, 1920, and 1921, and the book itself was printed by November 1924, all of this when Leavis was an unpublished

1 See T. C. Worsley, *Flannelled Fool: A Slice of a Life in the Thirties* (Alan Ross: London, 1967), 61.

2 Ronald Duncan, *All Men are Islands: An Autobiography* (Rupert Hart-Davis: London, 1964), 90.

undergraduate and graduate student. If we assume that Duncan's memory had played him false and he had meant to refer to *Practical Criticism*, Leavis' claim would still be implausible. The 'Practical Criticism' notebooks make clear that much of the content of the work was in draft form by 1925, and certainly no later than 1927. Moreover, Richards' views in that work are continuous with *Principles of Literary Criticism*, *Science and Poetry*, and in a fundamental sense with *Foundations of Aesthetics* and *The Meaning of Meaning*. Indeed, if there was a transfer of ideas then the flow was from Richards to Leavis, as Leavis' own early references suggest and most students of Leavis grant.[1]

Leavis's quarrelsome character was well known – Eliot in conversation with Richards in February 1934 called him a 'little dog who chases after motorbikes'[2] – but his views on Richards were more or less confined to casual talk and correspondence until 1935. In this year the publication of a devastating review, 'completely adverse' as Leavis himself says,[3] of *Coleridge on Imagination* made the breach public. Eliot wrote to Richards asking about this review – 'Whazzz the matter with Leavis? He seems to be bilious.'[4] – and Richards replied:

> What *is*, indeed, the matter with Leavis? I've not been informed, except through that article. I suppose it was just my turn (as his last friend here in the Faculty!). You mind what you do, it will be your turn before long![5]

Eliot's response is known through Empson's later recollection:

> I had gone to his office at Faber's to ask for a book to review for

1 See, for example, Frank Whitehead, 'F. R. Leavis and the schools', in Denys Thompson, ed., *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions* (Cambridge U.P.: Cambridge, 1984), [140–52], 147: 'Undoubtedly Leavis took valuable hints from Richards (perhaps more than he was later disposed to acknowledge).'

2 D. E. Richards' diary, 12 Feb. 1934, RCM.

3 'Dr Richards, Bentham and Coleridge, *Scrutiny*, 3/4 (Mar. 1935), [382–402] 402.

4 T. S. Eliot to IAR, 16 May 1935, RCM.

5 Undated letter of 1935, in the possession of Mrs Valerie Eliot.