I. A. RICHARDS
SELECTED WORKS
1919–1938

Volume 1  The Foundations of Aesthetics (1922)
Volume 2  The Meaning of Meaning (1923)
Volume 3  Principles of Literary Criticism (1924)
Volume 4  Practical Criticism (1929)
Volume 5  Mencius on the Mind (1932)
Volume 6  Coleridge on Imagination (1934)
Volume 7  The Philosophy of Rhetoric (1936)
Volume 8  Interpretation in Teaching (1938)
Volume 9  Collected Shorter Writings 1919-1938
Volume 10 I. A. Richards and his Critics
I. A. RICHARDS
THE PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Perhaps since his death the most widely known of all Richards' books, certainly the most read, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* is a simplified treatment of the major theoretical concerns of *Interpretation in Teaching*. Richards himself compared the relationship between these two books to that between two other of his works:

There is a sort of proportion sum: *Philosophy of Rhetoric* is to *Interpretation in Teaching* as *Science and Poetry* is to *Principles of Literary Criticism*. Each was a replaying on a more popular level, as I thought.¹

The remark is suggestive, since *Science and Poetry* was a work that Richards 'took a dislike to' soon after publication, and whose 'most clearly stated points were, I found, understood in ways which turned them into indefensible nonsense'.² *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* has never attracted much hostile criticism, or invited obvious and apparently wilful misunderstanding as *Science and Poetry* notoriously has, and we may infer that Richards' dissatisfaction is more with the fact that the positions in both these popular versions were taken to be suitable targets, or as his final position, when more complicated and less readily criticized versions were in print. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* is an introduction to *Interpretation in Teaching*, not a substitute for it.

The origins of this text are simple. In January of 1935 Richards was invited to deliver the Mary Flexner lectures for 1936 at Bryn Mawr College. He had just undertaken a very substantial 'Statement' for the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation on the application of his interpretational theories to education, and though this was a vast commitment, to be delivered by the end of 1935, he was attracted by the opportunity of

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travel to the United States, and the lectures were a further opportunity for making his views known. He accepted almost immediately, having obtained permission for yet another leave of absence from Magdalene and the Faculty of English.¹ The title at this time, and for the rest of the year, appears to have been 'The Interpretation of Prose',² and by September, and perhaps earlier, Richards had decided to present 'six discourses expounding those parts' of the Rockefeller Foundation's commissioned work 'which seem most suitable for a general audience'.³ The Rockefeller work was a summation of courses he had been engaged upon since completing his 'Practical Criticism' lectures in 1927. As he described the business to John Marshall, Assistant Director of Education at the Foundation:

I have gone a long way on from Practical Criticism. In fact since then, most years, I've given a course of lectures – under the perhaps odd title of 'Philosophy of Rhetoric' – which has been on the theory of interpretation and illustrations of its practical uses. I have got almost too large an accumulation of suggestions, plans, experiments and materials towards reconstructing 'general education' – chiefly by making people more able to take a fruitful interest in their own learning and thinking processes.⁴

Much of 1935 was taken up with collecting further protocols relevant to the work, and a frantic period of writing between September and December.⁵ When the Rockefeller statement was complete Richards was able to turn his attention to the composition of the lectures, and on the 29th of December he wrote to tell his wife Dorothy that he had begun work:

² IAR to David H. Stevens, Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, 16 Sep. 1935, Rockefeller Archives Center.
³ IAR to David H. Stevens, 16 Sep. 1935, Rockefeller Archives Center.
⁴ IAR to John Marshall, (undated, but stamped as received 3 Oct. 1934), Rockefeller Archives Center.
⁵ See the Introduction to Volume 8 for a further account of the composition of Interpretation in Teaching.
After the expansiveness of The Statement it would have been a pleasant change to tackle this opposite job of lively summary and condensation – but with only a few days for it – Well! Hell!

But the following day, with the writing actually progressing, it seemed better:

cheered by having now 2 full lectures, I and II, finished and a good deal of material for the rest sorted and more or less planned out.

On the 2nd of January he had finished three of the lectures, assembled two more, with only the last lecture left undecided. A bout of sinus trouble, and exhaustion after the effort of completing the Rockefeller ‘Statement’ had led him to decide that he would not polish the texts for the last three:

I suddenly felt that I’d go stale on the stuff and it would be dead by the time I had to give it if I finished off the second half too thoroughly.

But he believed that all his ‘necessary preparations intellectually’ were complete, and on the 18th of January they sailed for the United States. Before going on to Bryn Mawr they stopped off in Harvard where Richards attended a Lowell Fellows dinner, sitting between Skinner and Lowes, and afterwards ‘enjoyed much talk with Quine’. They lunched with M. H. Abrams, recently a visiting scholar at Magdalene, and Richards called again on B. F. Skinner, with whom he talked about the application of reflex theory to language. In Philadelphia they settled quickly, but were soon engaged in a vigorous round of social and professional engagements. Two days before the lectures were due to start a letter from England told them that Mansfield Forbes, who

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1 IAR to D. E. Richards, dated by DER 30 Dec. 1935 (probably composed by Richards 29 Dec. 1935), RCM.
2 IAR to D. E. Richards, 30 Dec. 1935, RCM.
3 IAR to D. E. Richards, 2 Jan. 1936, RCM.
4 D. E. Richards' diary, 27 Jan. 1936, RCM.
5 D. E. Richards' diary, 28 Jan. 1936, RCM.
6 D. E. Richards' diary, 29 Jan. 1936, RCM.
had recruited Richards to teach for the English tripos in 1919, and was one of Richards’ closest Cambridge friends, had died suddenly of a blood clot. Richards was ‘horribly shocked’,¹ and the death seems to have cast a gloom over the first lecture and the rest of their stay:

Found after a few minutes the Hall was too much and immense Gothic roof – no light – crimson curtains, too much heat, and a complete inability to listen – all quality goes out in the roof. Very depressing, but they said they liked it.²

In the following days Richards gave seminars related to the lectures, and met Paul Weiss, later to review Philosophy of Rhetoric, whom A. N. Whitehead had warned Richards was a ‘dragon’. Richards found him to have a ‘very quick and supple and acute mind’, with ‘a good way of rephrasing and exploring other people’s remarks’.³

Richards now set to work finishing off his next lectures, with the assistance of Dorothy who ‘in despair typed away at Lecture II which she says doesn’t hang together and isn’t comprehensible’.⁴ Their mood was lifted by the certainty that they would be going on from Philadelphia to China, to carry out Basic English related work for the Rockefeller Foundation, and Dorothy resumed Chinese lessons in preparation.⁵ Richards only ‘survived’ the remaining lectures, but appears to have enjoyed the question and answer sessions with colleagues.⁶ News that Hitler had reoccupied the Rhineland was disturbing, but a meeting with the Flexner family, the patrons of the lecture series, was a great success, and the Richardses left Philadelphia feeling that they had been ‘spoiled’.⁷ The lectures were not yet ready for submission to the Oxford University Press, and imme-

¹ D. E. Richards’ diary, 8 Feb. 1936, RCM.
² D. E. Richards’ diary, 10 Feb. 1936, RCM.
³ D. E. Richards’ diary, 12 Feb. 1936, RCM.
⁴ D. E. Richards’ diary, 16 Feb. 1936, RCM.
⁵ D. E. Richards’ diary, 21 Feb. 1936, RCM.
⁶ D. E. Richards’ diary, 6 Mar. 1936, RCM.
⁷ D. E. Richards’ diary, 4 Apr. 1936, RCM.
diately after leaving Bryn Mawr Richards was engaged to travel to Washington for a three day conference on his Rockefeller ‘Statement’ with a group of leading North American educators. With these responsibilities discharged, they decided to travel slowly to San Francisco, visiting Santa Fe, and then Taos, where they had a ‘sunset meditation on the prehistoric past’. A brief visit to the Grand Canyon led them on to San Francisco at the beginning of April, and they departed on the 2nd, sailing under the Bay Bridge and the unfinished Golden Gate Bridge, the ‘most lovely structures in steel we’ve ever seen’, with ‘tiny figures of men cheering high up in a faint creaky tone’. Richards revised his lectures at sea on the 4th, 5th, and 6th, and he dated his preface to _The Philosophy of Rhetoric_ during a nine hour stop-over on the 7th at Honolulu, where the Richardses had married ten years before.

A short delay seems to have held up publication when Richards lost a set of proofs – they didn’t resurface again until the middle of January the following year – but the book was printed and copies available in early December. However, and in spite of the fact that the title page is dated 1936, it was not officially published until the 14th of January 1937. Looking at it Richards was unenthusiastic, and wrote to Eliot:

> Few I fear will like _Philosophy of Rhetoric_. This way of having a thing published a whole year after you did it, when all the warmth of the act has gone, would stop me writing I expect. Perhaps that is the remedy.

Richards’ fears were misplaced, and the book was well-received

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1 IAR to David H. Stevens, 6 Apr. 1936, quoted in D. E. Richards Diary, 6 Apr. 1936, RCM.
2 IAR to David H. Stevens, 6 Apr. 1936, quoted in D. E. Richards Diary, 6 Apr. 1936, RCM.
3 D. E. Richards' diary, 2 Apr. 1936, RCM.
4 IAR to D. E. Richards, 16 Jan. 1937, RCM.