

Ivor Armstrong Richards Biography

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Biography

Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893-1979), English-born American semanticist and literary critic, crusaded to have "Basic" English adopted as a fundamental English vocabulary.

On Feb. 26, 1893, Ivor Armstrong Richards was born at Cheshire. He was educated at Clifton College in Bristol and Magdalen College in Cambridge. In 1922 he became a lecturer in English and moral science at Cambridge and four years later was made a fellow of Magdalen. He had collaborated with C. K. Ogden and Charles Woods, Cambridge psychologists, on the *Foundations of Aesthetics* (1921). With Ogden he collaborated on *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), a pioneer study in semantics, in which they established that what is known as "meaning" resides in the recipient as well as in the originator of the thought.

Richards's first independent book, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), was revolutionary in the development of modern criticism. Deriding "bogus" esthetic terms, like "beauty" which has no "entity," Richards held that all value judgments reside in the communicant, not in the object or poem itself or in the communicator or poet. His principles of judgment are developed from this position. *Science and Poetry* (1925) treats, in terms of vocabulary, experiences that he terms "critical" and "technical." In 1926 he married Dorothy Eleanor Pilley.

In 1929 Richards published *Practical Criticism*, a report on the sad results of testing value judgments by presenting a class with specimens of writing whose authorship was not revealed. In 1929-1930 Richards was visiting professor at Tsing Hua University, Peking. He was a lecturer and later a professor at Harvard, retiring in 1963. During the 1930s he wrote *Mencius on the Mind* (1932) and *Coleridge on Imagination* (1935), careful examinations of the systems of these protean thinkers. He also completed *Interpretation in Teaching* and *How to Read a Page* (both 1934).

Richards joined his former collaborator C. K. Ogden in a crusade for the use of "Basic" English, which consisted of the 850 words most commonly used in the English vocabulary. To elaborate on his theories, Richards wrote three tracts: *Basic English and Its Uses* (1943), *Nations and Peace* (1943), and *So Much Nearer* (1968). His translations into "Basic" included *The Republic of Plato* (1942), *Tomorrow Morning*, *Faustus!* (1962), and *Why So, Socrates* (1963). Two volumes of verse, *Good Bye, Earth* (1958) and *The Screens* (1960), won him the Loines Poetry Award in 1962.