

SPECULATIVE INSTRUMENTS. By I. A. Richards. (Routledge & Kegan Paul; 21s.)

In this gathering of occasional essays and addresses there is a salutary reminder that Professor Richards' concern with 'meaning' is not an attempt to reduce to a science language, and in particular the language of poetry, but rather to ensure by a proper recourse to scientific method the use of language as an *organ*, 'the supreme organ of the mind's self-ordering growth'. His concern becomes intense at the point where language and the living being interact and are related in a form of ambiosis.

His object in analysing complex structures of meaning is to fashion instruments for 'taking care of and keeping an account of the conduct of words'. It is clear that this explicit analysis of the nexus of associations which make up a meaning is simply the working out in the conscious mind of what does necessarily occur in normal comprehension without analysis. Its value is that it may serve as 'a preliminary to and instrument for comprehension', by heightening our power to recognize what language is doing, and to control it. Misunderstanding frequently arises because words shift and work on different levels of meaning—are general or particular, profound or casual. Argument and controversy foster this misunderstanding, and neither logic nor logical analysis have been effective against it. By developing an awareness of the resourcefulness of words this training in comprehension should make possible a more exact and more adequate communication between persons: for it may enable us to comprehend, and so to express and respond to, the complexity of our own and others' thoughts and feelings.

Professor Richards arms these general principles with a practical 'speculative instrument'—a system of notation with which the exact function of any word may be indicated and stressed; e.g. 'meaning' in the first paragraph could have been given a symbol, 'sw', 'to show that we are considering what may be *said with* a certain word or phrase, without decision as yet to what that is'.

This system 'towards a theory of comprehending' Professor Richards considers may be 'the most positive and stable thing in the volume'. It is certainly a useful instrument, but it seems possible that his lucid statement of the principles underlying the functioning of words may have the deeper and more enduring influence for the right use of language. The system provides a technique for an instructive mental exercise; but once the mind has been made supple by it only harm could come from continuing in the use of analytic notation, for then the vital and organic relations of the elements of meaning would no longer be comprehended.

However, in a later chapter he writes that 'we do not develop the

mind by giving it more facts, but by helping it to judge *relevance*'. Moreover, on page 51 he suggests that an important preliminary for this is 'responsive immersion in the actual, in its full concreteness, before, during and after the abstractive processes which yield perception'. It becomes clear that his main concern is to realize the full potentialities of language, as a means of comprehending experience, and as an organ of the developing self-consciousness of human beings. He is aware that the reality of words is in things, and in the mind's apprehension of things; and that the value of words is in ordering and communicating these inner realities.

Thus he has grounds for his claim that in these studies he is seeking *instruments* for 'the endless arch-enquiry: what are we, and what are we trying to become?'. In so far as we can find an answer by taking thought, Professor Richards has offered some useful, and sane and well-argued, suggestions as to how we might go about it. For this reason this is a book for educationalists, even more than for linguistic scientists.

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THE TIGHT-ROPE WALKERS (Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature). By Giorgio Melchiori. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 25s.)

Many collections of literary essays appear for which the claim is made that the various individual studies illumine a central theme, but more often than not, the collection remains stubbornly a series of individual essays held together only by their common authorship. Signor Melchiori's book is not one of these collections. Although the essays which go to make up this book were written over a number of years and have been published separately in various journals, they do, when brought together, genuinely illuminate one another and the result is a book, not a piece of book-making.

In spite of the rather arch title, there is nothing precious about *The Tight-rope Walkers*, and Signor Melchiori conducts his enquiry into modern literature with thoughtful ease and, in spite of a weakness for that irritatingly vague term 'baroque', a refreshing absence of jargon. His purpose is to find out 'by subjecting to different critical methods some major and minor writers, the common characteristics of the style of an age apparently so full of contradiction and uncertainty'. He finds the common characteristic to lie in 'funambulism'—a term which describes the sense of danger and precariousness so markedly present in some of the great works of modern literature. Such a precariousness implies the constant effort to maintain a balance and 'the achievement of the true artist in our age is like the successful acrobat who succeeds in keeping step by step, moment by moment, his balance, while being