CHAPTER VIII

MURRY AND ELIOT
In considering Middleton Murry as literary critic, comparison with T.S. Eliot, the greatest and most authoritative critic of the twentieth century, becomes inevitable. Comparisons, truly enough, are always odious specially when the writers belong to different schools of thought. But sometimes, as in the present case, they thrust themselves upon us. This is not because there is much in common between Murry and Eliot, but because both of them have dominated the critical scene of England during the first half of the twentieth century. As G. Wilson Knight remarks: "During the years following the first World War London's more advanced literary thinking was dominated by John Middleton Murry and T.S. Eliot, editors of *The Adelphi* and *The Criterion*."¹ No two other contemporary critics, in fact, thrust themselves upon us with such tremendous force.

From the very beginning Murry was intellectually drawn towards Eliot. In his later years he confessed that "there was a strange feeling of kinship between us."² Murry would review Eliot's *Ares Vos Prec* in *The Athenaeum*, and Eliot would review Murry's *Cinnamon and Angelica*. Murry wrote admiringly of 'the plays of T.S. Eliot,'³ and Eliot spoke of Murry's 'solitary eminence'⁴ in the kind of criticism he practised. Murry came nearest to Eliot when, a few days before the appearance of *The Waste Land*, he wrote the essay on 'Russian Literature' which concluded with a passage on Tchehov, which almost anticipated the great poem:

"'Good-bye, my treasure!' There is the magic that makes
a paradise of a desert of human hopes. We look again, we listen: yes, the harmony is there. And if the harmony is where Tchehov found it, then it is everywhere. He is, in the great company of men of genius, the latest born. He comes, the youngest son, and there is no inheritance for him. The great estate of human life has been divided; so he goes off alone into the waste and desolate places, the dreary commonplace wildernesses of the spirit, which are as like the wildernesses of the heroic writers, as the waste ground in a modern city is like the majestic jungles of the Amazon. Tchehov goes there, without hope, without belief; it is the last of all forlorn quests: and he brings back the Grail in his hands. 5 Hardly had he finished these words when, glancing at the Literary Supplement, Murry caught sight of the announcement of Eliot's poem. The coincidence so impressed him that he wrote to Eliot, who came down to meet him, and, to his great surprise, explained to him that there was a traditional connection between the Waste Land and the Grail — on which, indeed, his poem was based. Recalling this incident later, Murry recorded: "I came nearer to Tom Eliot in that day than I had ever been before, or ever was afterwards." 6 And in spite of extreme differences in certain matters, Murry always respected him as a critic. He once told Katherine Mansfield: "He's the only critic of literature that I think anything of." 7 Both of them spearheaded, almost at the same time, criticism against Milton. In his famous essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) Eliot held Milton responsible for causing a "dissociation of sensibility" which disrupted "the
direct current of English poetry."\textsuperscript{8} Murry, on the other hand, in his famous book \textit{The Problem of Style} (1922), said that he "felt many times in reading \textit{Paradise Lost} and \textit{Samson Agonistes} that he (Milton) all but killed it (the English language)."\textsuperscript{9} Likewise, both of them mounted attack on Shelley. For Eliot, Shelley's ideas were "repellent"\textsuperscript{10} and "puerile".\textsuperscript{11} Murry too felt dissatisfied with Shelley's belief in "absolute perfection."\textsuperscript{12} Shelley seemed to him "the victim of the divided heart and mind."\textsuperscript{13} The same contempt was shown to Yeats. To Eliot "Yeats' supernatural world was the wrong supernatural world."\textsuperscript{14} And Murry discarded his poetry as "idle dreaming."\textsuperscript{15}

Despite their joining hands against these poets, there were basic differences in their conception and execution of art and criticism. While Murry's whole effort has been to regard literature as "a means of self-expression,"\textsuperscript{16} Eliot's has been to lay stress on "a continual extinction of personality"\textsuperscript{17} in literature. "The point of view which I am struggling to attack," says Eliot, "is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality."\textsuperscript{18}

As against this, Murry maintains that "It is impossible to
to be an impersonal artist in literature, if you are an artist at all."¹⁹ For him the writer's experience is all-important. The significance of literature lies in the quality of experience absorbed by the writer. "The writer," says he, "creates out of his deepest experience. Deep, deep it must go, if his work is to outlast the ages, for by his power of reawakening deep experience in us, alone he lives."²⁰ Moreover, the notion of 'the substantial unity of the soul' which Eliot attacks, is the very marrow of Murry's whole theory of art and criticism. "The soul," he tells us, "is created within us: we achieve it, we bring it to birth, or, more truly, we bring ourselves to a condition wherein the soul cannot remain unborn. The soul is simple and mysterious; it is ourselves in a new wholeness, without division.... In it, mind and heart are at one, and are no longer what they were.... The great writer... brings to birth the soul that is within us, he affects the union of our mind and heart...."²¹ Murry unites mind and heart, Eliot disunites. "The basis and root of poetry," asserts Murry, "is spontaneous utterance of the undivided being. It is not the utterance of thought, neither is it the utterance of emotion: it is the utterance of the being before these faculties are differentiated."²² Eliot, on the contrary, thinks that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates."²³ For Murry the man who suffers and the mind which creates are absolutely one. Man's suffering is an essential part of a process of soul-creation which is the
crucible of great literature. "It is out of this travail," says he, "that the dynamic utterance of great literature is born; and out of this travail is born the power to receive it." According to Murry he is an imperfect artist whose mind and heart are at variance. The intellectual and emotional parts of man must become one.

Thus Murry seeks to establish complete relation between the writer and his work. In his book The Problem of Style which has become a classic, he lays down his theory of poetic creation:

"There is a profound perturbation of the poet's being, of which the occasion may be an object or event in the real world... to this perturbing emotion the poet gives utterance, that is checked from mere exuberance and lifted above the plane of a sensational reaction, by the discipline of rhythm and metre. .... Even though the actual process of composition may be mysterious, we can see the predominant part played by the originating emotion."

"The literary artist begins his career with a more than ordinary sensitiveness. Objects and episodes in life, whether the life of every day or of the mind, produce upon him a deeper and more precise impression than they do upon the ordinary man. As these impressions accumulate.... they to some extent obliterate and to a great extent reinforce each other. From them all emerges.... a coherent emotional nucleus. This is often consolidated by a kind of speculative thought, which differs from the speculative thought of the
the philosopher by its working from particular to particular. The creative literary artist does not generalise; or rather, his generalization is not abstract. However much he may think, his attitude to life is predominantly emotional; his thoughts partake much more of the nature of residual emotions, which are symbolized in the objects which aroused them, than of discussing reasoning. Out of the multitude of his vivid perceptions, with their emotional accompaniments, emerges a sense of the quality of life as a whole. It is this sense of, and emphasis upon, a dominant quality pervading the human universe which gives to the work of the great master of literature that unique universality which Matthew Arnold attempted to isolate in his famous criterion of the highest kind of poetry - 'Criticism of Life.'

Eliot, on the contrary, believes that poetry lives independently both of the poet who wrote it and of the life around him. The emotions and the feelings which are its material are his, but they are as if it were disinfected of all personal associations before they are forged into a work of art. In his celebrated essay, Tradition and the Individual Talent, Eliot says:

"The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum,
and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

"The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two kinds: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever: composed out of feelings solely.... The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

"It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting."

"Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."
This theory postulates that emotions and feelings alone are the raw material of poetry; intelligence, ideas, beliefs do not make the substance of poetry. Eliot assumes that no poet can think for himself. He is not interested in the thought itself. A poet must accept the thought current in his time, whether he approves it or not. The value of that thought does not affect the quality of the poetry. It is "of no importance." In truth neither Shakespeare nor Dante did any real thinking — that was not their job; and the relative value of the thought current at their time, the material enforced upon each to use as the vehicle of his feeling, is of no importance." Earlier he said: "The poet who 'thinks' is merely the poet who can express the emotional equivalent of thought." Is it possible for a poet to express "the emotional equivalent of thought" without being "interested in the thought itself"? Here Murry differs from Eliot. According to Murry, the part played by intellect, though subordinate, is very important. "Its most characteristic employment," says Murry, "is to explicate the large and complex emotional conviction, which is sometimes called 'a writer's philosophy', and may with less danger of misinterpretation be called his 'attitude', the element which determines his mode of experience and gives unity to his work as a whole. Lucretius used the philosophy of Epicurus, Dante the medieval conception of the Aristotelian cosmogony; but both those great poets used those intellectual systems as a scaffolding upon which to build an emotional structure. A great satirist like Swift uses the intellect, not to reach rational conclusions, but to expound and convey in detail a complex of very violent emotional
reactions." Though Murry uses 'thought' as a general term to cover intuitions, convictions, perceptions, and their accompanying emotion, he does not hold 'thought' as 'of no importance'. The thought that plays part in literature is systematized emotion. "In literature there is no such thing as pure thought; in literature, thought is always the handmaid of emotion." Yet, any poem worth its significance is written by him only who has 'thought long and deeply'. Approvingly Murry quotes Wordsworth: "...poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, has also thought long and deeply."

Similarly, Eliot rules out as irrelevant any 'semi-ethical criterion' that can be applied to the emotions of actual life:

"If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of 'sublimity' misses the mark. For it is not the 'greatness', the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts." For Murry such distinction between art and morality is irrelevant. For him aesthetics and ethics are one.

In their attitude to love and marriage also they differ from each other. For Murry "Love is the only possible attitude of one human identity towards another." Love is just as
possible in the physical relation between man and woman as anywhere else. The relation between man and woman is quite fundamental to human existence. Love is not negation. "The physical union between man and woman is not an impurity from which we have to emancipate ourselves in our quest for God."^36 True love must find fulfilment in marriage. In Eliot's view any such fulfilment of human love is impossible. Love, in so far as it is attached to persons, is an illusion. His concern with the futility of love and drabness of sex is directly the result of his disbelief in 'the substantial unity of soul.' Because he completely separates 'the man who suffers and the mind which creates', he completely fails to establish a healthy and satisfying love-relationship between man and woman. In the poems and plays alike, there is an obsession with sexual failure. In his earliest poem The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, the hero is unable to make love. In the Portrait of a Lady, the lady desires to have the affection of the man; but he is unable to respond, because he is haunted by doubts:

"Are these ideas right or wrong?"

Sweeney, in Sweeney Erect, is quite capable of love but he gives no satisfaction to the woman with whom he mates. For Eliot there is nothing in love but copulation. The Waste Land is fully imbued with a sense of the inadequacy of love. In the 433 lines, there are as many as six episodes pointing out to the sordidness of human love.

In The Family Reunion, Harry and his father both fail to make a truly satisfying love-relationship with their wives.
In *The Cocktail Party* too, Edward and Lavinia have had no feeling of love in their wedded life. Though Celia has had the illusory feeling of ecstatic love in her relations with Edward, she soon finds to her horror that "there was no new person, us":

And then I found we were only strangers
And that there had been neither giving nor taking
And that we had merely made use of each other
Each for his purpose. That is horrible.

It is true that such disillusionment is often experienced by lovers. But Eliot makes it the ineluctable fate of all lovers. Fulfilment of love in ordinary experience is made inherently impossible. In *The Confidential Clerk*, the possibilities of love between Lucasta and Colby are deliberately ruined. There is nothing in their character or in the circumstances that might warrant disruption of love between them. It is done quite arbitrarily. Fulfilment of love is deliberately denied. "Love is the unfamiliar Name" - that is the conclusion of Eliot:

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire. 37

Love is made meaningful only by higher love. "The love of man and woman (or for that matter of man and man) is only
explained and made reasonable by the higher love, or else is simply the coupling of animals. Eliot therefore replaces human love by divine love. Love ceases to deceive when it is transferred from person to God. So far as ordinary life is concerned, love remains an experience without a name. It is this inhuman detachment from common experience of love that Murry thinks is the cause of many inexplicable complexities and ambiguities in Eliot's works.

Eliot's distrust of personality is more markedly shown in his criticism. His whole endeavour is "to divert interest from the poet to the poetry." He declares that "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry." It is interesting to see that both Murry and Eliot quote with approval, Remy de Gourmont's statement: "To erect into laws one's personal impressions, that is the great effort of a man to be sincere." But whereas Murry erects the laws "in accordance with his temperament," Eliot does so in accordance with the authority vested in "Tradition". This fundamental difference in their attitude is well explained by Harold Osborne who says: "English criticism has long been rent by a controversy representing the clash between two opposed attitudes of mind and personality rather than two schools of logical thought, with Mr. Middleton Murry as protagonist on the one side and Mr. T.S. Eliot on the other, the former maintaining that the critic responds to works of art by intuitive reactions broadly moral in character and that he should adjudicate upon them in accordance with these spontaneous intuitions, while T.S. Eliot is as passionately sure that the critic's work of assessment is more reasoned
and deliberate, evaluating the heritage of literature and art in terms of impersonal standards concreted in tradition.”

Eliot denounces Murry’s dependence on his “Inner Voice” for evaluating works of art, and instead tries to establish the supriority of “Outside Authority” as constituted in “Tradition.” His conception of Tradition and the relation of the individual artist to it is set forth in the following passages from Tradition and the Individual Talent, and The Function of Criticism:

“No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are re-adjusted and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of
English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities. "

"The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe - the mind of his own country - a mind which he learns in time to be more important than his own private mind - is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen." 

"I thought of literature then, as I think of it now, of the literature of the world, of the literature of Europe, of the literature of a single country, not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as "organic wholes," as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance. There is accordingly something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to earn and to obtain his unique position." 

These passages clearly lay down that the value of a creative artist's work depends on the degree of his allegiance
to tradition. Eliot believes that the artist's self is inherently individualistic and rebellious. To curb it, he must acquire a sense of tradition. Of Hardy, for example, Eliot says: "The work of the late Thomas Hardy represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by an institutional attachment or by submission to any objective belief... He seems to me to have written as nearly for the sake of 'self-expression' as a man well can; and the self which he had to express does not strike me as a particularly wholesome or edifying matter of 'communication'." What Eliot suggests here is that if Hardy's personality had been curbed by institutional attachment and submission to objective beliefs, his work would have been more valuable and significant. Hardy's creative originality, his deep insight into reality, his capacity to illuminate/experience, and his gifts of expression - these have no value for Eliot. Murry, on the other hand, would set Hardy among the greatest. "What they have, he has, and has in their degree - a plenary vision of life." Though Eliot harps on tradition, yet his judgements are not always consistent with his theory of tradition. Rather they are based on "personal impressions." Milton's theology, he finds, "largely repellent" because it betrays "the intellectual and moral aberrations of the author." Hobbes is "one of those extraordinary little up-starts whom the chaotic motion of the Renaissance tossed into an eminence which they hardly deserved and have never lost." Burns was "a decadent representative of a great alien tradition,"
Shelley's ideas were "repellent" and his beliefs "excite my abhorrence." 

"We have the same respect for Blake's philosophy (and perhaps for that of Samuel Butler) that we have for an ingenious piece of home-made furniture; we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and ends about the house." Arnold "lacked the mental discipline, the passion for exactness in the use of words and for consistency and continuity of reasoning which distinguish the philosopher." 

"With Goethe... I often feel too acutely 'this is what Goethe the man believed,' instead of merely entering into a world which Goethe has created." He ought not to have written poetry at all. "His true role was that of a man of the world and sage." Dickens was "a decadent genius." George Eliot's "individualistic morals" are to be "deplored." 

Whitman's content is "claptrap." H.G. Wells "lapses from vulgarity into high seriousness." D.H. Lawrence was a "snob," lacked "critical faculties which education should give," manifested "incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking," and there was in him "a distinct sexual morbidity"; his "deplorable religious upbringing" gave him "his lust for intellectual independence"; "like most people who do not know what orthodoxy is, he hated it"; his "insensibility to ordinary social morality is so alien to my mind that I am completely baffled by it as a monstrosity." Yeats' supernatural world was the wrong supernatural world." 

G.M. Hopkins' "innovations, like the mind of the author, operate only within a narrow range and are easily imitated, though not adaptable for many purposes."
Obviously these critical pronouncements are directed not "upon the poetry" but "upon the poets." This is not very different from Middleton Murry's view that "in the last resort they must depend upon the inner voice," a view which Eliot denounces in the *Function of Criticism*. If, as Eliot says, Murry's view comes near to sanctioning "doing as one likes," Eliot's own theory equally comes near it. The theory of Eliot, therefore, is not as "impersonal" as Eliot would have us believe. In fact in the essay on *Dante* (1929) some doubts creep in with regard to the validity of his position. His speculations on the mixture of biography and allegory in Dante's *Vita Nuova* provide ample proof of his interest in the value of artistic works as "Self-revelations." "The type of sexual experience," he says, "which Dante describes as occurring to him at the age of nine years is by no means impossible or unique. My only doubt (in which I found myself confirmed by a distinguished psychologist) is whether it could have taken place so late in life as the age of nine years. The psychologist agreed with me that it is more likely to occur at about five or six years of age. It is possible that Dante developed rather late and it is also possible that he altered the dates to employ some other significance of the number nine. But to me it appears obvious that the *Vita Nuova* could only have been written around a personal experience. If so, the details do not matter: whether the lady was a Portinari or not, I do not care; it is quite likely that she is a blind for some one else, even for a person whose name Dante may have forgotten or never known. But I cannot find it incredible
that what has happened to others should have happened to Dante with much greater intensity. This clearly shows how much great significance Eliot attaches to Dante's personal experience. Mr. S.S. Hoskot, who in his doctoral thesis 'T.S. Eliot - His Mind and Personality' deals in detail with the repressed personal strain in Eliot's poetry, comments: "Indeed the unusual assurance with which he speaks of the Vita Nuova experience as the personal experience of Dante, and the confidence with which he attributes universal human significance to it leads us to conclude that he himself had a similar experience. This hypothesis is supported by the recurrence of several apparently baffling allusions and references in his poems. It also appears that this vision of loveliness which, like Dante, he seems to have received at an early age, was associated in his mind with an obsessive sense of personal failure or betrayal. Further, it would seem that this vision of ideal beauty and the sense of disloyalty to it generated feelings of fear, self-contempt and frustration which made actual experience of sex and love appear wholly unsatisfying and barren and that the agony and remorse resulting therefrom were finally conquered by a long process of self-imposed discipline, which enabled him to look upon his experience from a less self-conscious standpoint and thus to conquer the sense of guilt attached to it." In another important essay Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca (1927) Eliot recognises the significance of private emotions: "What every poet starts from is his own emotions. And when we get down to these, there is not much to choose between Shakespeare and
Dante. Dante's railings, his personal spleen - sometimes thinly disguised under Old Testamental prophetic denunciations - his nostalgia, his bitter regrets for past happiness - or for what seems happiness when it is past - and his brave attempts to fabricate something permanent and holy out of his personal animal feelings - as in the *Vita Nuova* - can all be matched out of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, too, was occupied with the struggle - which alone constitutes life for a poet - to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal. The rage of Dante against Florence, or Pistoia, or what not, the deep surge of Shakespeare's general cynicism and disillusionment, are merely gigantic attempts to metamorphose private failures and disappointments."68 This very much corresponds to Murry's claim that "if they (the English writer, divine, Statesman) dig deep enough in their pursuit of Self-Knowledge - a piece of mining done not by the intellect alone, but by the whole man - they will come upon a self that is universal."69 That the poet's catalyst mind, instead of remaining "inert, neutral, and unchanged," receives and also gives expression to personal and private agonies, Eliot now recognises. As a critic he now clearly admits the value of personality as an ingredient in poetic creation. In the essay on Yeats, he expressly modifies his earlier demand for complete impersonality in art, and emphatically declares that Yeats' later poetry is superior to his earlier specifically because it is written out of intense personal experience.70 He also admits that the writer's thought and belief cannot be separated from his work, that their
value must be taken account of in literary judgments. Indeed he actually ranges himself with literary moralists and asserts that "literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite, ethical and theological standpoint."\(^71\) He tells us further that "the greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards."\(^72\) In this we find the echo of Murry's standpoint: "great literature happens to be a great deal more than art."\(^73\)

To see how near to Murry Eliot has moved from his youthful position of uncompromising aestheticism, one has only to contrast The Function of Criticism (1923) with The Frontiers of Criticism (1956). The former was composed as a result of ire aroused by the impressionistic criticism such as that of Middleton Murry; the latter to make concession in its favour. "Thirty-three years ago," says Eliot, "it seems to have been the latter type of criticism, the impressionistic, that had caused the annoyance I felt when I wrote on 'the function of Criticism'. Today it seems to me that we need to be more on guard against the purely explanatory."\(^74\) In the same essay he ultimately recognises the value of biography. "Nor is there any reason why biographies of poets should not be written. Furthermore, the biographer of an author should possess some critical ability; he should be a man of taste and judgment, appreciative of the work of the man whose biography he undertakes. And on the other hand any critic seriously concerned with a man's work should be expected to know something about the man's life."\(^75\) "We must identify biography with criticism."\(^76\)
Such remarkable change, it seems, was due to the great impact of Murry's critical biographies such as *Keats and Shakespeare, Son of Woman, William Blake*, topped with *Jonathan Swift* (1954) which scored a major victory for Murry and elicited encomiums from Eliot who said about it: "No student of Swift can afford to overlook."  

In the theory and practice of criticism, though Murry is more consistent than Eliot, the latter's influence was unparalleled. In Murry's earliest writings there is nothing to compare with 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1917), 'Hamlet' (1919), 'Philip Massinger' (1920), and 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921), which, as Edwin Muir says, altered "the direction of the writer's activity and the preferences of the reader's taste."  

The Sacred Wood, comprising of some of these essays, "sent people off in new directions, chasing a variety of hares."  Yet making Eliot succumb to his own point of view is no small achievement for Murry.