CHAPTER IV

METHOD
In September 1922 while giving a lecture on the Nature of Poetry Murry once for all declared his preference for Anatole France's pregnant sentence to the effect that criticism is the confession of the adventures of a man's soul among books. On that occasion he said:

"The older I grow as a critic, the more essentially true does that sentence seem to be. Whether it is that I have some special liability to such adventures, or that my mind is such that the adventures I do have take a peculiarly exciting form - I cannot say; but the fact is that there are moments when criticism of a particular kind, the only kind I care for, utterly absorbs me. I feel that I am touching a mystery..... The sense of mystery deepens and deepens; but the quality of the mystery becomes more plain. There is a moment when, the deeper rhythm of a poet's work, enter me also. I feel his presence; I am obedient to it, and it seems to me as though the breathing of my spirit is at one with his..... In the greatest writers there is something grand and terrible in the sheer magnitude of this rhythmical upward and downward sweep of their secret path; in the lesser it is constrained and circumscribed; but in all writers who can claim a permanent validity the governing rhythmical motion is there..... An immediate contact with this motion as it governs a writer's work, a sense of it so close and so instinctive as to be wellnigh physical, as though the great wave had caught us away from our personal
selves and bore us with it, part of its substance, in its thrilling and sickening rise and fall, is, I believe, the appointed utmost of our knowledge of a writer. Then we know him indeed with a knowledge that time cannot diminish; we have lived with him, but with him impersonally, with what he was, not with what he appeared to be. All that we can do, if we are by nature fore-ordained to this form of wrestling with the ineffable, is to try to make partially explicit this knowledge that we have: to try, if we are critics, to show where the temporal garment is thinnest and sits closest to that which is beneath, to indicate the moments when the motion is most visible, to follow out in the very structure and detail of the work the secret pattern to which we have the key.¹

This is Murry's manifesto of his critical method. "The attitude Murry adopts," says James Reaves, "is that of one who has been deeply moved by what he has read and seeks to express his sense of its worth and communicate it to others."² Murry feels that a work of art should first produce an artistic impression. It should absorb him. To the recipient of a truly artistic impression it seems what Tolstoy says that "he knew the thing before but had been unable to express it."³ Or what Keats said in his famous axiom on poetry:

"... poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity; it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance."⁴ Second, he plunges deeper into the work and feels the vital motion that governs the work. Third, he follows out in the
very structure and detail of the work the secret pattern of the writer's motion of spirit.

To Murry the sense of adventure in reading is paramount. The adventure is of his soul among masterpieces. In fact both the poet and the critic are engaged in adventure. The poet is engaged in exploring the Universe for truth; the critic enters upon the same adventure to explore the inward and spiritual movement that urged the poet to embark upon the first adventure. Now and then Murry reminds us that he is engaged in a voyage of discovery. Adventure, therefore, bears a special connotation. It does not merely imply, as Reeves thinks, 'Curiosity and exploration', but the sense of discovery and mapping out not of the outward and visible but the inward and spiritual history of the poet's soul. "For there are the men," says Murry, "who have uttered a truth so mysterious that it cannot be wrenched apart from the words in which they uttered it; it cannot be made current or passed from lips to lips save in that living flesh of speech with which they clothed it. Not this abstraction nor that common place can contain their wisdom; it is what it is and cannot be translated. Through their words men have touched what they do not understand, yet cannot forgo. Shall we take our courage in our hands and say mysteriously that they have touched their own souls? There is nothing men understand less than their own souls, or more passionately desire to remember." Adventure for Murry, means the exploration of the 'Kingdom of the soul' which a writer's work opens to him. It is also an exploration of a kingdom of his own soul.
The key to understand a writer's work, Murry fervently believes, is to unravel the hidden workings of his soul that lie submerged beneath the words. Murry describes it as 'the golden thread of a poet's being'. To understand what he means by 'soul' which is the golden thread of a poet's being, we should turn to Keats' famous letter on the world as a Vale of Soul-making to find Murry's own basic belief expressed in most congenial idiom:

"The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is 'a vale of tears', from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven. What a little circumscribed straightened notion! Call the world if you please 'The Vale of Soul-making'. Then you will find out the use of the world (I am speaking now in the highest terms for human nature admitting it to be immortal which I will here take for granted for the purpose of showing a thought which has struck me concerning it). I say 'Soul-making' - Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence. There may be intelligences or sparks of the Divinity in millions - but they are not Souls until they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. Intelligences are atoms of perception - they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God.

"... This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years. These three materials are the Intelligence - the human heart (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the World, or
Elemental space suited for the proper action of Mind and Heart upon each other for the purpose of forming the Soul or Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity. I can scarcely express what I but dimly perceive — and yet I think I perceive it — that you may judge the more clearly I will put it in the most homely form possible.

"I will call the world a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read. I will call the human heart the horn Book read in that school. And I will call the child able to read, the Soul made from that School and its horn book. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways. Not merely is the Heart a Horn book. It is the Mind's Bible, it is the Mind's experience, it is the test from which the Mind or Intelligence sucks its identity. As various as the Lives of Men are, so various become their souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the sparks of "his own essence...."

(Of this letter Murry wrote towards the end of his life: "When I first came to understand it, it was a pure revelation to me. Truth and Beauty were stamped upon it. I took it into myself, and it has lived with me from that day. It has been incorporated into my life, it has been creative of my life. It has opened me to experience, and enabled me to assimilate and yet be shaped by experience. It has helped to expose me to experience, and helped me to receive the
experience to which it exposed me. But for the endorsement which those words of Keats gave to my own dim perception of the truth which they contain, I would never have endured what I have endured or become what I am."

In this fine letter Keats gives the most faithful account of the process by which he conquered harmony within himself. This was the process by which he attained the condition of soul in which he wrote the finest poetry. According to Keats, the essential condition of poetry is created when man's mind is in harmony with his instinctive being. Keats makes three divisions of man's being: into Heart and Mind and Soul. The soul is something which exists only potentially in man. It has to be created in the process of man's life. "In the natural man," explains Murry, "the division is twofold - into Heart, which he (Keats) defines as 'the seat of the Human passions', and Mind. All direct sensational contact with the world of experience is made by the Heart; the true function of the Mind is to make this directly apprehended experience conscious. A man becomes natural by refusing to allow his Mind to become dominant and self-sufficient. If he can keep his Mind loyal to the experience of his Heart, then somehow the Soul is created. For a man to possess his Soul is to possess his Self, in the deepest sense of the word, and, mysteriously, at the moment of this Soul-possession, he sees the necessity and the beauty of the process by which he has come to achieve it. 'Do you not see,' cries Keats to his brother in the middle of this
letter on the world as a Vale of Soul-making, 'how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul?' By the submission of Mind to Heart, consciousness to unconsciousness, is slowly created the Soul. This achievement of soul, Keats describes, as 'the possession of a sense of identity' by the Mind. The Mind comes to possess 'a bliss peculiar to its individual existence'. This condition, in which the soul has now come into existence may be called 'Soul-knowledge'. It results immediately in "a knowledge of the unity and harmony of the universe which can be reached only through the individual's knowledge of unity and harmony in himself." The poet achieves the power to reveal this harmony through the completeness of his achieved humanity. And the harmony proceeds from a natural submission of the Self to all experience. The poet must submit to, what Bagehot calls, 'the experiencing nature' which is essential to a great artist. The poet must endure suffering and find consolation in the very experiencing of suffering itself. In *The Fall of Hyperion* Keats says:

None can usurp this height (returned that shade)
But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

The poet who is faithful to his experience becomes the instrument by which the truth and beauty of the world is perceived and revealed anew. Keats was a pure poet because he completely achieved the 'fusion of mind and body into the immanent reality of the soul, having a life and knowledge of its own,'
through 'a world of Pains and Troubles'. "When all the turmoil," Murry wrote in the *Nation*, "of aesthetic debate is over, the simple fact remains that the highest triumphs of art are possible only to those who have achieved in themselves a purity of soul. The purity of the great artist is based upon a profound acceptance of experience, and the endeavour always to find some point of hidden strength within himself from which he can at once submit himself to life and comprehend it.... We may say that Keats, during his last year of poetic activity, came to believe that the poet was in some sort the scapegoat of humanity, one who fronted experience on behalf of mankind."¹⁶ To front experience on behalf of mankind: that was Murry's ideal of a pure poet. Such was Shakespeare. He is distinguished from others by his capacity for suffering. "Take any one of his great contemporaries, take almost any one of his great successors; the finest, the noblest: a Sidney or a Spenser, a Milton or a Wordsworth - they are not sensitive as Shakespeare is revealed to be. They are fine spirits, touched to fine issues, and imbued with a moral and religious ideal; but compared with Shakespeare, they are men who are dreaming a dream, which veils them from the impact of reality. Shakespeare is absolutely distinguished from them by one simple thing: his suffering, and his capacity for suffering."¹⁷ There is in Shakespeare "the age of Experience - of the bitter knowledge of good and evil in the world and in himself, that comes to the
limed soul that, struggling to be free,
Is more engaged."

D.H. Lawrence had passed through the same travail to a "final serenity and insouciance." Similarly, Montaigne had undergone an arduous spiritual discipline before the composition of the Essays began. He processed his own alembic after a painful process of self-discovery through self-cancellation. "So little of himself was indeed his own, he found, that there was nothing left but 'the corner in his soul' where 'he could rest in the recognition that he belonged to the common sort.' The 'experiencing nature' is the primary endowment of the creative writer. This complete self-surrender or what Baudelaire declared, the 'belief in an integral unity' is the necessary condition of pure poetry. Pure Poetry is "the spontaneous utterance of the undivided being."21

There was nothing mysterious about this 'undivided being,' It was the birth-right, Murry believed, of every creature; and a few fortunate individuals carried it intact into manhood. Only in most men it was disrupted with the advance of self-consciousness. The poets who maintained an inflexible posture of the self failed - "they had poetic apprehension; they had not poetic comprehension."22 Those whose hearts endorsed whatever reality their minds registered succeeded. Such poets with their 'undivided being' had been Murry's inspiration, attracting and repelling him with hints of an attainable harmony. "To struggle somehow," he wrote, "to that point,
to see life as it has been seen and can be seen, to know it as it has been known and can be known, has been my driving impulse as a critic. Somehow to make the secret my own so that I might live by it, not as the anguished memory of a departed ecstasy, but as a secure possession - this has been my incessant and at times only half-conscious purpose. And I have found myself turning away from those poets whose knowledge was but momentary and incomplete (as was the knowledge of most of those whom we call, and rightly call, great poets) to those who possessed it wholly. Always I found myself driven back to the pure poets - to Shakespeare pre-eminently, to Keats, and in our own day to Anton Tchekhov."23 Murry was drawn to Shakespeare because of "that perfect harmony between the physical and the imaginative."24 He admired in Tchekhov "the quality of aesthetic impression he wished to produce, not by an arbitrary decision, but one which followed naturally from the contemplative unity of life which he had achieved."25 In Dostoevsky Murry saw "the waking consciousness of the harmony of all things..... His mind tyrannizes not over his body, nor his body oppresses his mind. He is a being beautiful, conscious only of his unity, and feeling within himself that which binds him to all humanity, the knowledge that he is the appointed end of all their striving."26 In fact the whole of Russian literature had a peculiar significance for Murry because "the Russian writer holds it instinctively as an axiom that a way of life to be truly satisfying must be based on a harmony of the human faculties.
Heart and mind must be at one. There must be no piece-meal realisations. If the claims of the moral nature of man are in conflict with the claims of his intellectual nature, then the house is divided against itself and must fall.”

The spirit in which the Russian writers approached the problems was "a spirit of complete loyalty to humanity." When Murry came to Keats he identified himself almost perfectly. "It was not only," says Murry's biographer, "that Murry had found, in his own experience, a clue to Keats; he had found in Keats a clue to his experience." He learnt from Keats, for instance, the fidelity to "the holiness of the Hearts' affections." It powerfully reinforced his own instinctive faith in Katherine's love which generated a new harmony and released tremendous energy in him. Indeed Murry's most fruitful periods were those he spent in conjugal happiness and harmony with Katherine Mansfield at Villa Pauline and Chalet des Sapins. "It's quite noticeable," wrote Murry in reminiscence, "that a new solidity came into my writing and my thinking in 1916.... I have no doubt that the crucial moment of change was at the Villa Pauline: when for the first time, both in love and work, I lost self-consciousness.... Anyway I do feel that in 1916 I became, for good or ill, a definite 'somebody', a real person." That was true. It was during these periods that he produced some of his finest critical essays, besides The Problem of Style. Even after Katharine's death on 9th January 1923, her soul continued to preside over the soul of Murry, continued to prompt him to
higher attainments. "I veritably believed that some sort of endorsement by the Universe was guaranteed to all my doings, and that I could do no wrong." Self-obliteration, which was the essence of a pure poet, was also, Murry firmly believed, the essence of love. "Now the essence of love, whether it be love for a child, a woman or a friend; or whether it be love for a daisy, like Chaucer's, or a grain of sand, like Blake's, or for a Grecian Urn, like Keats's; or whether it be the artist's love for the object of his imagination, or the love of the man of religion for God, or the love of the man of science for Nature - the essence of love in all these so various manifestations - whereby we know that it is identical in all, is self-annihilation."

Murry loved to quote the great mystic, Meister Eckhart: When the Self is annihilated, God must enter into possession.

It was not only the great poets, however, whom Murry could reveal in this way. The same experience which had been the instrument to his presentation of Keats made him accessible to Jesus Christ and the Christian mystics. "The comprehension of the great artist is achieved by a process analogous to that by which the comprehension of the great saint is achieved."

The mystic's soul in rapport with the Universe and God is the natural product of his undivided being. The re-birth of Jesus was nothing other than the reintegration achieved by the poets. "If it can be put into a word," said Murry precisely, "this is the fundamental distinction between the teaching of Jesus and all other religious wisdom that I know; that he
taught not goodness, but wholeness: and this both in the inward man, and in the outward world. Wholeness in the man himself means that the soul is not a partial faculty of man; it is not something that can be opposed to and distinguished from mind and heart; it is a creation which includes both these within itself. The soul is simply the condition of the complete man. And to this completeness in the man, which is his soul, there corresponds a completeness and harmony of the world of his experience; it also, without abstraction or denial of any of its elements, suffers a like transformation, and becomes organic, harmonious - it becomes God."  

Likewise, Murry extended this principle of 'wholeness' to the sphere of the relation between man and woman. He recognised complete harmony between man and woman, so absolutely necessary for the writer's imaginative power and perfect vision. "The total relation", he stressed, "between man and woman is the chief of all the human relations wherein we learn to surpass the selfhood and enter into possession of our own Identities."

Thus Murry was attracted to William Blake who realized a relationship equally satisfying to Heart, Mind and Body. Blake and his wife offered an ideal example of true marital relations. "The doctrine of true marriage," said Murry, "of which Blake and his wife offered so memorable an example, is instinctively held by many simple people. They know the experience which Blake described as the destruction of the Negation and the redemption of the Contraries.... The passing from sullen and embittered hostility between man
and wife into a condition of mutual recognition of the
Identity .... is the true potentiality of marriage. Achieved,
it is completely invulnerable to the efforts of modern icono-
clasts to persuade mankind the marriage is an obsolescent
institution.... But that the steadfast relation of marriage
is the path to a truly human perfection of the spiritual life
admits of no doubt whatever."^38 Needless to say that in Blake
Murry found a re-affirmation of his own faith that the man-
woman relation, far from being sterile, might itself be made
"the means to a rare spiritual achievement."^39 The man-woman
relation viewed in this light enabled Murry to attempt one of
the best expositions of Blake's Prophetic Books. He discovered
that a crisis in Blake's conception of them coincided with a
crisis in his relations with his wife. It was only after
great effort of reconciliation which was a self-inflicted
humiliation, that Blake solved his marital crisis, regained
his imaginative power and proceeded on unhampered to complete
the Prophetic Books.

We have seen how precious for Murry are the qualities
of Soul. The word 'Soul' has a unique importance in the
critical canon of Murry. Soul is the creative centre.
Apprehension of truth and beauty emanates from a peculiar
condition of the soul in which all the divergent elements
are inseparably kneaded. Where mind accepts what heart
dictates. Soul is the cornucopia of uniqueness. What gives
its uniqueness to a work of art flows from the soul of the
artist. The writer creates out of his deepest experience.
If his work is to survive, deeper and deeper must he go. He lives by his power of re-awakening deep experience in us. His work strikes deep responsive chords in every human heart because it is infused with his soul which alone comprehends reality. Men respond to the words of the great poet not with their minds or their bodies but with their soul. "Great poetry," declares Murry emphatically, "is the utterance of that to which the human soul responds, of that which the human soul endorses. So that the history of the souls of the great poets is the most essential history of the human soul itself." This is Murry's fundamental belief. Without this fundamental belief literature would be a meaningless and futile thing to him. "To know a work of literature," says Murry, "is to know the soul of the man who created it, and who created it in order that his soul should be known. Knowledge of a work of literature which stops short of that may be a profound, an inspiring, a bewildering knowledge, but it is not the real knowledge. The writer's soul is that which moves our souls. That is the truth which, in my belief, must be accepted; when that is accepted we can advance towards some understanding of the mystery why the words of the poet are his soul, and why the greater the poet the more completely are his words his soul." This soul-finding is Murry's special method of which he is the sole master. The mystery that penetrates a work of literature becomes suddenly illumined the moment his soul meets the soul of the writer. The appeal is always from soul to soul.
Murry distinguished between the investigator of the human soul who begins from nothing, and the scientific novice who begins where the mightiest of his predecessors ended. The investigator of the human soul is true to his own primary experience; the scientific critic is manifestly false to his own primary experience. The former makes non-rational knowledge the domain of his inquiry; the latter creates odium and prejudice against non-intellectual knowledge. Murry, therefore, disliked the cold scientific analysis in contemporary criticism as spurious. To Derek Savage he wrote: "The point is that this life-giving, life-changing contact between the reader and the good book is all-important. Yet criticism makes nothing of it. I mean modern criticism, for Coleridge and Hazlitt do take it into their reckoning. But contemporary criticism - of the influential sort, ranging from a Mortimer to a Leavis - completely disregards it, does not admit it as a possibility, or if it does, only to stigmatise it as a sentimental illusion to be contemptuously suppressed. The condition which it imposes as a necessary pre-condition of its own functioning is that there shall be no vital reciprocity between the critic and the work criticised. It has to be excluded, dismissed, as a sort of spurious magnetic 'disturbance' of the cold 'scientific' investigation. I am sure there is in this attitude a radical falsity, amounting to a real deathliness." Murry once took up cudgels against I.A. Richards who in his stimulating book, Principles of Literary Criticism, cavilled at what he called the 'revelation'
theory of poetry, which holds that poetry reveals the hidden nature of reality. The theory was first propounded by the early romantic poets of the nineteenth century. It is found also in Goethe. Richards considers a range of representative Revelation doctrines selected from the writings of famous critics, Carlyle, Pater, Aristotle, Wordsworth, Goethe, Coleridge, and Middleton Murry himself, and finds them 'a veritable museum of critical blunders'. "The chief difficulty," in his opinion, "of all Revelation Doctrines has always been to discover what it is which is revealed. If these states of mind are knowledge it should be possible to state what it is that they know. It is often easy enough to find something which we can suppose to be what we know." Instead, Richards postulated his own theory of the 'nervous system'. Speaking of the joy of tragedy he writes: "The joy which is so strangely the heart of the experience (of high tragedy) is not an indication that 'all's right with the world', or that 'somewhere, somehow there is justice'; it is an indication that all is right here and now with the nervous system." Richards assumes that the satisfaction people derive from tragedy is derived because all is right with their nervous system. By the nervous system Richards means the very delicately refined sensibility which is required to respond fully to King Lear. To this Murry issued a rejoinder to I.A. Richards. First, Murry says, the assumption that the tragic satisfaction indicates that all is right with the nervous system is 'unwarrantable' and 'doubtful'. 
Second, he agrees that it does require a refined sensibility to respond to *King Lear*. But the reason for believing this is not that all is right with the nervous system but that *King Lear* in itself is a very delicate and subtle object. Richards has, Murry thinks, made an 'illegitimate simplification' of the poem-reader relation. The truth, he points out, is that the strange joy that comes to the reader of high tragedy is born of two elements: the subtle quality in the tragedy itself, and a delicate sensibility in the reader. It is something in the tragedy itself that acts upon the delicate sensibility of the reader. "We do not go to him (Shakespeare)," says Murry, "in order to learn whether our nervous systems are in order, nor do we get any answer to that doubtless important question through him. The joy that comes to us after a tragedy of his is not indeed a sign that we know the secret of the universe, however much we may feel that we do; but it is a sign that the truer and more complete experience of reality we gain through Shakespeare does bring us, what we sometimes dream all true experience of reality would bring us were we but capable of it, joy and serenity.

Once break this contact with the real, once persuade men that high tragedy has not its roots in outward life, there would be no joy and acceptance in the tragic experience any more. But in attempting to break that contact with the real, you are attempting the impossible. Everyman capable of experiencing a Shakespearean tragedy at all knows, with the same certainty he has of his own experience, that he is making
contact with the real. He is making contact with art also. That he sometimes forgets. But by forgetting it, he gets to the root of the matter, which far cleverer men miss by remembering it, namely that art is but a means - the most potent of all means - of bringing reality nearer to us than we have power to bring it to ourselves.46

What, therefore, distinguishes Murry from all contemporary critics is the 'vital reciprocity' between himself and his subject. Murry wrote to Derek Savage quoting Samuel Butler's aphorism: "If you wish to preserve the spirit of a dead author, you must not skin him, stuff him, and set him up in a case. You must eat him, digest him, and let him live in you, with such life as you have, for better or worse."47 In order to live with the author, Murry always made a direct approach to him.

His most favourite approach was to excavate the self-recorded experiences of highly conscious men. "It is time, high time," Murry declared, "a serious beginning was made with the work of co-ordinating the inward experiences of that great body of men in whom the human consciousness came nearest to perfection - the great priests and prophets, the great philosophers and the great artists."48 Further he says: "The sooner a systematic and concerted effort is made to co-ordinate the most intimate and fateful experiences of men whom we know to have touched the reality of themselves a little (or a great deal) more closely than the ruck of mankind,
the better for us all. We might begin to economize something of that enormous waste of spiritual effort which is entailed upon those who are engaged in a perforce lonely struggle for a meaning, a purpose, and a truth; they no longer need to begin everything, every time, all over again from zero."

Two objections are raised against this approach and both of them are disproved by Murry. First, the data thus used are 'selected, uncharacteristic, and abnormal'. To this, Murry says that "it needs something approaching a great man even to attempt to tell the truth about himself." Second, the great men do not tell the whole truth about them. Murry rejected this as sheer 'scepticism'. "The fact is," he said, "that, whether or not a great man can tell the whole of truth about his inward experience, he knows and can tell infinitely more of it than any outside observer." He cited the example of Newman. "His acts and utterances disturbed, perplexed and scandalized the most part of his contemporaries, he seemed to them casuistical, shifty and treacherous. When he gave to the world the story of his own life as he himself knew it, his obvious sincerity instantly prevailed. His *Apologia* was manifestly the truth concerning a rare human soul." The same credit he gave to Montaigne. "Not the least mark of Montaigne's peculiar greatness is that nothing he tells us directly about himself cannot be corroborated, and given amplitude and richness from the body of his work." There are critics who in this "age of analysis" ascribe to biographical evidence no real critical importance. "No
biographical evidence," they say, "can change or influence critical evaluation."54 "The whole view," they assert, "that art is self-expression pure and simple, the transcript of personal feelings and experiences is demonstrably false."55 These are partial and mistaken views. Murry's own biographical and critical studies throw entirely new light on the subject and bring out very absorbing and interesting facts. In his Preface to Jonathan Swift Murry retorted: "Criticism is one thing and biography another, we are told by many peremptory voices: and never again, if they can help it, the twain shall meet. I am unabashed in holding to a different view. I believe that where the materials for the biography of a great writer are available, the study of his life and work do fructify each other, and that to hold them rigorously apart is, very often, to refuse illumination."56

Keats and Shakespeare which Murry wrote with all his faith and all his force to commemorate the inward spirit of Keats is the best illustration of his method. In this book his underlying principle has been "to understand Keats by Keats.\"57 His investigation is based squarely on the facts. He never takes recourse to conjecture. Nor is he influenced by any 'conception of an ideal Keats'. Nor does he fit Keats to some pattern of his own. He faithfully believes what Keats has said. "The proper attitude of criticism," Murry says, "towards Keats is one of complete humility."58 For his subject Murry got the hint from Matthew Arnold's assertion that Keats 'is with Shakespeare'. His further readings of
Dr. Bridges and Professor Bradley confirmed his belief that "Keats was indeed the natural approach to Shakespeare." But what amazed Murry was his discovery that "Keats himself was far more conscious than I had ever been of the strange relation between himself and Shakespeare. At all the crucial moments of his life his reference and appeal lay to Shakespeare, not to that inanimate Shakespeare which is the name given to a volume of printed words, but to a real presence, a living being whom Keats believed that he intimately understood, and made demands upon Keats' loyalty from which in his moments of extreme agony he struggled in vain to escape." Moreover, "the most intimate motion of Keats' inward life gradually revealed itself to me as a motion of loyalty to Shakespeare the man. What was to me astonishing was to find proof that Keats was conscious of it." The proof Murry found in Keats' own letters. He copied out passage after passage of Keats' letters bearing upon the inner workings of Keats' soul. When he went through them in isolation, there, to his great astonishment and delight, "was the golden thread - Shakespeare, Shakespeare, Shakespeare." He found, to his pleasant surprise, that "the living centre of his thought and feeling, into which his deepest speculations on the nature of poetry and his most intimate sensations were inseparably merged, was Shakespeare." He had only to pick out the clues of Shakespearean word and phrase in Keats' letters. Murry picked up, for instance, the letter written to his brother by Keats on December 28th, 1817: ".....The excellence of every
art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine King Lear, you will find this exemplified throughout...... several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason... This, being pursued through volumes, would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."64 This letter, in Murry's estimate, reveals a conclusion to the story of the influence of Shakespeare upon Keats. "Keats has a sense," he says; "of some mysterious and simple relation between the character and the works of Shakespeare, which he cannot articulate. In the work there is an intensity which makes all disagreeables evaporate from the closeness of their relationship with Beauty and Truth; in the man there is a Negative Capability which enables the sense of Beauty to obliterate all consideration, which is 'only' another word for 'all irritable reaching after fact and reason.'"65 Another letter of Keats' written to Woodhouse on 27th October 1818 reveals the poetic character: "As to the poetic character itself..... it is not itself - it has no self- It is everything and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or
fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much delight in concerning an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does not harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity—he is continually in for and filling some other body ..."66

Giving very interesting details, Murry tells us how Keats rejected Milton and kept his steadfast loyalty to Shakespeare. This happened some time between Tuesday, 15th September and Sunday, 19th September 1819 when Keats abandoned the second Hyperion for ever. Keats' letter to George of 21st September 1819 explains it: "I shall never become attached to a foreign idiom, so as to put it into my writings. The Paradise Lost, though so fine in itself, is a corruption of our language. It should be kept as it is, unique, a curiosity, a beautiful and grand curiosity, the most remarkable production of the world: a northern dialect accommodating itself to Greek and Latin inversions and intonations. The purest English.... is Chatterton's... I prefer the native music of it to Milton's, cut by feel. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic Verse cannot be written, but is as the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to another verse alone."67 By quoting this letter Murry made it "palpable that Keats' rejection of Milton was an integral part of a movement of Keats' whole
being; and that this must of necessity have been so, because a poet of Keats' kind is a complete man who cannot suffer a divorce between his heart and mind and soul to endure. Milton is the great master of the poetry which is created out of that divorce. Milton's poetry is a magnificent thing, but in the final judgement it is lifeless and sterile thing."

This is how Murry's wonderfully successful method traces the spiritual development of Keats as poet and man under the serene and benign influence of Shakespeare, which also involves his attempt "to examine the nature of pure poetry, to discover what it is, what is its significance, from what kind of human being it is produced, and, as far as possible, the causes which make that kind of human being what he is." It surely enhances the critical importance of Murry's method. It also gives a good blow to the detractors of biographical method.

A similar approach Murry made to Katherine Mansfield whose life and work, he believed, 'were one and inseparable'. "I can think," he writes, "of only of Keats to compare with her in this respect, that her letters are essential to a real understanding of her work. They form a single whole with her stories: one naturally fulfils and completes the other. Indeed, there were moments when it seemed to me that her letters more completely expressed the nature of her genius than even the most remarkable of her stories. There have been moments when I have felt the same about the poetry and the letters of Keats." What distinguished Katherine Mansfield, according to Murry, was her peculiar gift of spontaneity.
By spontaneity he means "an absence of any cleavage or separation between the living self and the writing self." Murry was convinced that "Utterance comes only as the result of inward clarification." Illuminating the natural movement of Katherine's soul through a conflict between Love and Disillusion Murry demonstrates how love triumphed in her and created in her that 'serenity' - 'the serenity of a rainbow that shines through tears' - which is an imperishable quality of a great artist. How did she pass through a crucial moment in the progress towards this condition of inward clarity, Murry cites a remarkable passage from her Journal:

"For a long time she said she did not want to change anything in him, and she meant it. Yet she hated things in him, and wished they were otherwise. Then she said she did not want to change anything in him, and she meant it. And the dark things that she had hated she now regarded with indifference. Then she said she did not want to change anything in him. But now she loved him so that even the dark things she loved, too. She wished them there; she was not indifferent. Still they were dark and strange, but she loved them. And it was for this that they had been writing. They changed. They shed their darkness - the curse was lifted and they shone forth as Royal Princes once more, as creatures of light." As a consequence of this condition of 'crystal clarity' achieved after a 'long travail of soul', Katherine Mansfield was able to respond with 'astonishing simplicity' to the truth and beauty of life. That simplicity was not a mere technical
achievement but the outcome of her submission to the general cruelty of life what she called 'the snail under the leaf'. "By this submission," says Murry, "of the Self to life, the chosen nature finally becomes an instrument for the utterance of life's secret." Katherine Mansfield's letters and stories bear ample testimony to this.

Another kindred approach of Murry's was his elucidation of the writer's works through marital relations. A brilliant example is his essay on George Gissing. George Gissing belonged to a very poor family. His low status prevented him from mixing in the society of girls. While he was a student in Manchester he fell in love with a girl named Nellie Harrison who had taken to the streets. Suddenly Gissing decided to keep her from the streets. But it was difficult to support her on his meagre scholarship. So he began to steal money from the coat-pockets of his fellow-students hanging in the college cloakroom. One day he was detected and sentenced to prison. A few sympathisers, however, collected a small fund, to enable him to leave for the United States and turn over a new leaf. After a year he returned to England and deposited himself in London where Nellie joined him. In October 1879 they were married. Gissing wrote his first novel, Workers in the Dawn, which immediately attracted attention and won abundant praise from Frederic Harrison who introduced him to John Morley. He was offered the career of journalist. But Gissing preferred to be a recluse. The paramount reason was his fear that the
secret of his past would come to light. The fear of social exposure, according to Morley Roberts, 'absolutely dominated' Gissing. Its fearful vibrations are minutely and dexterously traced by Murry in some of Gissing's finest works. Murry selects three major novels of Gissing: Isabel Clarendon, New Grub Street and Born in Exile, and finds that "what is peculiar about the heroes of those novels is that they are frustrated by something more than their poverty." Godwin Peak, the hero of Born in Exile, wishes to marry a lady who should be an embodiment of feminine beauty. This he meets in Sidwell Warricome. He calculates that in order to win her with the consent of her family he must convert himself into a parson, though he is a rationalist. Gradually he begins to love Sidwell. But the fear of his deception is brooding over him and it is ultimately exposed. "When we look closer," writes Murry, "we discern that this fine novel is a brilliant and moving parable of his (Gissing's) own situation. The imposture of which the exposure hangs over Peak, and finally cheats him of his life-fulfilment in marriage to Sidwell, is the counterpart of Gissing's own prison-sentence which disabled him from the society in which he might have found his mate. And just as, in the judgment of his own conscience, he found nothing in his fatal act of which he need be truly ashamed, so in the novel Peak is acquitted - not merely forgiven, but found innocent - by the love and penetration of Sidwell." Bernard Kingcote, the hero of Isabel Clarendon, suffers from 'a strange paralysis of will'.
He is loved by Isabel. But Kingcote is afflicted with self-
distrust. So he withdraws at the critical moment. In *New 
Grub Street*, Reardon, the central figure, suffers from a 
similar fate. He marries Amy, his ideal woman. But under 
the weight of disappointment, poverty and anxiety her love 
grows cold and she becomes hard. The effect on Reardon is 
disastrous. Why, Murry asks, are Peak, or Kingcote or 
Reardon, of this extraordinary composition? Murry himself 
provides the answer: "The strange and pitiful fact of 
Gissing's history supplies the key to the mystery. He was - 
or he was persuaded he was - shut out from the love and 
companionship he longed for, not lack of money, but by fear 
that the scandal of the past would be revealed." Disi-
illusion and disappointment becomes the distinctive note not 
only of Gissing's characters but also of his creative ima-
gination. In creating his heroes Gissing was satisfying "his 
own most personal canons of emotional and intellectual 
in integrity."78

In an essay *A Critical Credo* Murry summed up in five points 
the method of appreciation, the only kind of criticism which 
he dearly loved:

"First, the critic should endeavour to convey the whole 
effect of the work he is criticising, its peculiar uniqueness. 
Second, to work back and define the unique quality of the 
sensibility which necessitated this expression. Third, to 
establish the determining causes of this sensibility. (Here 
the relevant circumstances of the writer's life have their
proper place). Fourth, to analyse the means by which this sensibility was given expression, in other words, to conduct a technical examination into the style. Fifth, a still closer examination of a perfectly characteristic passage, that is, a passage in which the author's sensibility is completely expressed. This fifth and final movement is really a return to the first, but with the important difference that the relevant material has been ordered and placed before the reader."79

Murry's method can be compared with that of Spingarn, who, in 1911, said that the critic should ask and answer sincerely these questions:

What has the author tried to do?
How has he fulfilled his intention?
What is he striving to express?
How has he expressed it?
What impression does his work make on me?
How can I best express that impression?80

With this chart Murry, like a perfect navigator, voyaged in the realms of gold, explored the wide expanse, and was thrilled to his inmost being with delight and wonder when his wondering eyes discovered a new planet swimming into his ken.