CHAPTER II

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES
The foundations of the impressionistic criticism that Middleton Murry wrote were laid early in his life when at Christ's Hospital his taste for literary criticism was aroused by Quiller-Couch whose *Adventure in Criticism* made him interested in Coleridge and Arnold whom he almost worshipped. Later at the famous Brasenose College, Oxford, his romantic taste was further sharpened by his association with the Pater Society founded by two undergraduates, Frederick Goodyear and Charles Mellows. It was at the instance of Goodyear that Murry joined the Society. The Vice-Principal of Brasenose College, F.W. Bussell, himself was a disciple of Pater and exercised considerable influence on Murry. Murry followed enthusiastically Pater's principle of art for art's sake and explained its many implications. "Art is autonomous," he once said, "and to be pursued for its own sake, precisely because it comprehends the whole of human life." Having close affinity with Pater in conception of both art and criticism he granted to both of them their sovereign place. "Art," according to him, "reveals to us the principle of its own governance." Murry was the first man to clear misgivings about Pater's theory of Art for Art's Sake. It was not Pater, he said, but his followers who created the false dilemma concerning art and morality. For Pater distinguished clearly in literature between what he called qualities of mind and qualities of soul. The qualities of mind are largely the qualities of technique without which a complete and perfect expression of the writer's apprehension of life is
impossible. Qualities of soul, on the other hand, are qualities of the apprehension itself. This quality of soul we are bound to judge by moral standards. Morality is involved again when we distinguish between good books and great ones. In great works we require not merely a quality of soul but scope and comprehensiveness also. About this Pater clearly says: "It is on the quality of the matter it informs and controls, its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that the greatness of literary art depends."  

During the Christmas Vacation of 1910-11 he also came in contact with the Post-Impressionists of Paris. His visit to Paris, Murry writes, made him "clear on things that shifted vaguely before me and the whole vividness and directness has reached back upon me and given me myself an end to live for - which will be a life of Art as far as I can make it so."  

There are three philosophers - Plato, Wittgenstein, Santayana - whose general conclusions Murry adopted in his criticism. From Plato whom he had read with admiration at Oxford, he borrowed the basic notion that literature is "the creative revelation of the ideal actively at work in human life," and it is, Murry emphasises, the imitation of this 'ideal' and not just random persons and events which Aristotle underlines in the Poetics in which it runs like 'the golden, persistent thread'. Like Plato, Murry had a humanistic philosophy and made a moralistic, aesthetic approach to all questions
in life and literature, and modulated his inquiries by the overriding principle of "What is good for man." The ideal of the good must be determined by the 'aesthetic intuition'. For Murry, what is good is also beautiful. The identity between the good and the beautiful is 'axiomatic, absolute, irreducible'. It is this identification between the good and the beautiful that makes Plato's Republic 'one of the most magnificently human of all books' and his philosophy 'the most human'. It also makes Murry's criticism the most human ever written by anyone. From Ludwig Wittgenstein, the Austrian philosopher, whose Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus he admired as one of the 'most stimulating pieces of modern philosophical writing', Murry obtained the idea of two distinct kinds of knowledge: that which can be 'said' or demonstrated, and that which can be revealed or 'shown'. This latter 'revelational' knowledge he attributed to art as opposed to the abstract systematic knowledge of logic and mathematics. "The utterance of poetry," said Murry, "is not the utterance of logic." Poetry is one of the means of attaining the revelation."It lies," says he, "in the very heart of the nature of all great poetry - of all great art whatsoever - that it should reveal to us directly a kind of existence of which the thinking of our mundane minds has no inkling." He also endorsed another profound statement of Wittgenstein that "Ethics and aesthetics are one." For Murry, as for Wittgenstein, "art and morality are one." Murry was profoundly convinced of the necessity of morality without which no writer could become truly great.
"The strength of a truly great writer," he remarked, "endures either because he builds upon the foundations of a morality which he accepts, or because he is animated by the intense desire to discover one." The third philosopher who influenced him and stimulated him was George Santayana, a thinker whom, Murry thought, it was "quite impossible to dismiss." He too was a Platonist whose attitude to life and literature was "really an aesthetic one." In the Preface to Poetry and Religion (1900), which Murry highly admired, Santayana declared that "religion and poetry are identical." Writing further in the final chapter 'The Elements and Function of Poetry' he explained that "when the poet enlarges his theatre and puts into his rhapsodies the true visions of his people and of his soul, his poetry is the consecration of his deepest convictions, and contains the whole truth of his religion." Murry approved Santayana's sense of the relationship between poetry and religion, both of which arise in "a momentary harmony of the soul amid stagnation or conflict." Like Santayana, Murry also felt that "poetry exists chiefly in a state of imperfection; for the most part the harmony in the soul of the poet of which it is created, and the harmony in the soul of the reader which it creates, are alike momentary and evanescent."

Besides these three general ideas which combine to constitute his moralistic aesthetic approach, Murry wholeheartedly subscribed to the famous dictum of Anatole France that "Criticism is the adventures of a man's soul among books." The intimate personal contact between the critic and the work of art, he
believed, was essential. The more the critic "can lose himself in the object, the more himself he is."22 "If criticism is indeed," he goes on, "the confession of a soul's adventures among masterpieces, the greater the adventure, the greater the interest and value of the confession."23 For Murry criticism is a personal affair. He would have agreed with his friend and inspirer D.H. Lawrence like whom he sought 'true man-woman relation' that "literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism can never be a science; it is, in the first place, much too personal, and in the second, it is concerned with values that science ignores."24 This should not give the impression of lawless criticism or mere mental tourism. To avoid any misunderstanding Murry wrote that "A law or a rule, or rather a system of laws or rules, is necessary to the critic ... but it must be his own law, his own system, refined by his own effort out of his own experience. Otherwise he is a pedant and not a critic."25 This led him to appreciate Remy de Gourmont's maxim that "the whole effort of a sincere man was to erect his personal impressions into laws."26 That was, for Murry, the motto of true criticism.