

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The Life of John Middleton Murry

F.A. Lea



The Life of John Middleton Murry

First Published in 1959, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* is the first biography of one of the most controversial figures in English letters. Many people know Middleton Murry in one or other of his capacities: as editor (of the avant-grade magazine *Rhythm*, while he was still an undergraduate, of *The Athenaeum* in its last, most brilliant phase, *The Adelphi* in the 1920s, *Peace News* in the '40s); as the foremost critique of his day; as author of some forty books on literary, religious and social questions; as the husband of Katherine Mansfield and intimate of D.H. Lawrence; as prophet, politician or farmer.... Few, even of his most vigorous champions or opponents, discerned the consistent purpose uniting all his multifarious activities. To trace that is the principal aim of this book. Believing that the duty of the 'official biographer' is rather to present than interpret, the author makes no attempt to evaluate Murry's theories objectively, confining himself to showing how intimately they grew out of his strange, tragic (and occasionally comic) experience. At the same time, he makes no secret of his own view of Murry's significance both as a thinker and as 'the representative figure of an age of breakneck social transition'.

The Life of John Middleton Murry will be of interest to scholars and researchers of historical biographies, British history, and literature.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

The Life of John Middleton Murry

by F.A. Lea



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

First published in 1959
by Methuen & Co Ltd.

This edition first published in 2021 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1959 F. A. LEA

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LCCN: 60001543

ISBN 13: 978-1-032-06957-9 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-003-20472-5 (ebk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-032-06960-9 (pbk)

The Life of John Middleton Murry



Die geistigsten Menschen, vorausgesetzt, dass sie die mutigsten sind, erleben auch bei Weitem die schmerzhaftesten Tragödien: aber eben deshalb ehren sie das Leben, weil es ihnen seine grösste Gegnerschaft entgegenstellt.

— NIETZSCHE

by the same author

*

THE TRAGIC PHILOSOPHER
A Study of Friedrich Nietzsche

THE LIFE OF
John Middleton Murry



F. A. LEA

LONDON
METHUEN & CO LTD
36 ESSEX STREET · WC2

FOR M.K.

© 1959 F. A. LEA
FIRST PUBLISHED 1959
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD
FROME & LONDON
CAT. NO. 6162/U

CONTENTS



PREFACE

page ix

Part I: 1889-1923

I	FIRST YEARS	3
II	ASCENDING CURVE	14
III	TAKING OFF	27
IV	CLIMAX	39
V	STRANGE SEAS OF THOUGHT	51
VI	'THE ATHENAEUM'	65
VII	DEATH IN LIFE	83

Part II: 1923-1931

VIII	REBIRTH	99
IX	JOURNALIST AT SEA	110
X	ABBOTSBURY HARVEST	122
XI	INHUMAN?	133
XII	RESURRECTION	145
XIII	SON OF WOMAN	157
XIV	BREAK-UP	169

CONTENTS

Part III: 1931-1939

XV	REVIVAL	page 181
XVI	SOCIALIST AT SEA	193
XVII	LARLING HARVEST	206
XVIII	ALL-TOO-HUMAN	219
XIX	RENOVATION	230
XX	SON OF MAN	244
XXI	BREAK-DOWN	256

Part IV: 1939-1957

XXII	LIFE IN DEATH	269
XXIII	'PEACE NEWS'	280
XXIV	HOME IS THE SAILOR	292
XXV	ANTICLIMAX	305
XXVI	ROUNDING OFF	318
XXVII	DECLINING CURVE	330
XXVIII	LAST YEARS	342
	THE WORKS OF JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY	355
	REFERENCES	359
	INDEX	373

ILLUSTRATIONS



1. J. M. M., c. 1891	<i>facing page</i> 48
2. J. M. M., c. 1903	48
3. Christ's Hospital, Newgate Street: The Grecians' Cloister	48
5. J. M. M., c. 1909	49
4, 6. J. M. M. with Katherine Mansfield, Clovelly Mansions, 1912	49
7. D. H. Lawrence, Katherine, Frieda Lawrence, J. M. M., Selwood Terrace, 1914	64
8. S. Koteliensky with Katherine, Portland Villas, 1920	64
9. Katherine	65
10. J. M. M. with Katherine, Menton, 1920	65
11. J. M. M. (centre) with Katherine and Richard Murry, Portland Villas, 1920	65
12. H. M. Tomlinson	144
13. J. W. N. Sullivan (<i>Courtesy of Mr Navin Sullivan</i>)	144
14. J. M. M.: Portrait by William Rothenstein in <i>Contemporary Portraits</i> , 1923 (<i>Courtesy of Sir John Rothenstein and the Tate Gallery</i>)	145
15. Violet le Maistre, 1923 (<i>Courtesy of Mr Winyard le Maistre</i>)	145
<i>Abbotsbury</i> . 16. J. M. M.'s parents with Weg and Col. 17. The Old Coastguard Station: the Murrys' quarters. 18. Violet with Weg	160

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>facing page</i>
<i>Yateley</i> . 19. J. M. M. with Violet, Weg and Col. 20. James Young with Weg and Col (<i>Courtesy of Mrs Marcelle Young</i>)	161
21. Cartoon by Thomas Derrick in <i>The Bookman</i> , April 1932 (<i>Courtesy of Mr Michael Derrick</i>)	192
22. J. M. M., 1935	193
<i>Larling</i> . 23. The Old Rectory. 24. Max Plowman. 25. Sir Richard Rees with Betty and Mary	208
26. J. M. M. with David, 1939	209
27. J. M. M. with James Maxton (front), Joseph Kruk and Dick Wallhead, I.L.P. Summer School, Caerleon, 1932	209
28. J. M. M. with H. R. L. Sheppard (centre front), P.P.U. Camp, Swanwick, 1937 (<i>Courtesy of P.P.U.</i>)	209
29. Facsimile of J. M. M.'s handwriting: Notes for <i>Jonathan Swift Thelnetham</i> . 30. J. M. M. with Mary (left), Ruth Baker and Donald Soper, 1950 (<i>Courtesy of Radio Times Hulton Picture Library</i>). 31. J. M. M. discussing Pacifism with Donald Soper, 1950 (<i>Courtesy of Radio Times Hulton Picture Library</i>)	304
32. J. M. M. in argument, 1950 (<i>Courtesy of Radio Times Hulton Picture Library</i>)	305
33. J. M. M. with Weg, Ruth Baker and his grandson John, Moselle, 1951	320
34. J. M. M. with Mary, Thelnetham, 1954	321
35. Lower Lodge, Thelnetham	321

Permission to reproduce plates 1, 2, 5, 17, 18 has been kindly given by Mr Richard Murry, plates 4, 6-12, 16, 25, 26 by Mrs Michael Church and plates 19, 24, 29, 33, 34, 35 by Mrs Middleton Murry.

PREFACE



THE 'OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY' IS suspect – rightly. Appointed by the literary executors of the deceased, inhibited by the scruples of his relatives, friends and 'others still living', the author is not expected to produce more than a faint outline – a bas-relief at best, and that so draped in fig-leaves as rather to pique the reader's curiosity than appease it. This being the official biography of John Middleton Murry, inasmuch as it was commissioned by his widow and elder son, it may be as well to set my cards on the table at the outset.

When, in April 1957, Mrs Middleton Murry first suggested to me that, as a friend of some twenty years' standing, I should write her husband's life, I felt it to be an honour and privilege. I still do. Because I did, I was daunted, both by the responsibility itself and by fears lest I should be prevented from discharging it loyally by deference to others' wishes. My fears proved groundless. Few biographers, official or otherwise, can ever have been treated to such generous consideration and co-operation on the part of family and friends alike. From the day I agreed to the suggestion, Mrs Murry herself placed unreservedly at my disposal all the relevant documents in her possession – books, manuscripts, letters, diaries; while Miss Ruth Baker, Mr Murry's former secretary, was tireless in seeking out papers that would otherwise have been overlooked. Whatever merit this book may have – and its chief merit must lie in the material drawn from these sources – is due to them above all.

Out of respect for what appears to have been one of Murry's own last expressed wishes, I have refrained from citing the material in his journals relating to his tragic third marriage. I have also withheld the names of some half-dozen persons referred to in the narrative. I do not think that these reservations affect its veracity: and they are the only ones.

PREFACE

To have gone beyond this, to have presented Murry either exclusively as a public man or as a pattern of all the conventional virtues, would have been an unpardonable solecism. His virtues were of a different order; and of these the greatest, and the least conventional, was his honesty. Falsification, especially idealization, in biography shocked him as deeply as the framing of an experiment would a conscientious biologist. Nobody, he said, could understand even his public life who did not understand his private; and if ever a man strove, not only to understand, but to record, the truth about both, it was he. In his uncompleted autobiography, *Between Two Worlds*, he discarded the fig-leaf and set a precedent in self-revelation which incurred charges of 'exhibitionism' as strident as those of 'humbug' would have been if he had done otherwise. His journals reflect a submission to the injunction, 'know thyself', the cumulative effect of which is almost overpowering in its objectivity. If a man's life was worth recording at all, he maintained, it was worth recording truthfully; and he would have agreed with Carlyle that any man's life truthfully recorded was worth recording.

Largely because of this, his own life must be one of the most fully documented in the annals of literature. His forty-odd books – as personal in their way as his conversations – constitute only a tithe of his total output, as journalist, lecturer, diarist and correspondent. For months at a stretch, it would be possible to follow his movements, including the movements of his mind, from day to day, almost from hour to hour. *Hinc meae lacrymae*. More than once, in the course of this study, I was tempted to envy a fellow-biographer, of whose subject, a fourth-century saint, all that seemed to be known was the date of his death and a handful of dubious miracles. Ideally, the official biography should be a straightforward recital of events, leaving interpretation and evaluation to others. In this case, the necessity for stringent selection has ruled out any such possibility. So once more I had better state at the outset what consideration has governed my approach.

The Middleton Murry I have tried to present is first and foremost the moralist: that is to say, the man whose criticism, politics, theology, farming, were one and all expressions of an overriding need to determine (as he put it) 'what is good for man, *Tò εὖ Ζῆν*'. No one can be more conscious than I of the limitations imposed by this perspective. It has meant bolting the door on a number of side-alleys promising unique views or glimpses of the Georgian and post-Georgian literary scene. Readers more interested in Murry's associates than in himself

PREFACE

are bound to be disappointed. It has meant, again, passing hurriedly over books like *The Problem of Style* to dwell on others like *The Necessity of Communism*, which, though intrinsically much less valuable, are of greater biographical consequence. On the other hand, it must be allowed that, until Murry has been studied as a figure in his own right, no complete understanding will be possible even of Katherine Mansfield or D. H. Lawrence; and it may be hoped that one effect of this study will be to stimulate other writers – or better, other thinkers – to examine his particular contributions to various branches of knowledge more attentively than they have done in the past.

To name all those who have given me help is impossible. I trust that the references at the back will be read as acknowledgements by those whose material I have availed myself of directly; and that the many others whose letters and reminiscences have contributed indirectly will not think me any the less grateful because I have omitted to thank them individually. I must, however, express my particular indebtedness to Mr E. G. Collieu, of Brasenose College, Oxford, for information concerning Murry's student years, and to the following for sequences of letters extending over considerable periods: Mr H. P. Collins, Mme Katherine de Coninck, Mr L. G. Duke, C.B.E., Mr T. S. Eliot, O.M., Miss N. Gill, Mr J. P. Hogan, Prof. G. Wilson Knight, Mr Philip Landon (Emeritus Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford), Miss Mary Murry, Mr Richard Murry, Mrs Max Plowman, Sir Richard Rees, Mr Navin Sullivan, Mr A. W. Votier, Mrs Clare Walter, Mr J. H. Watson, Mr Henry Williamson, Mr W. B. Wordsworth and Mrs Marcelle Young. I am also very greatly indebted to Sir Richard Rees, Mr Richard Murry, Mr Colin Murry and Mr and Mrs J. P. Hogan for reading the manuscript and giving me the benefit of their criticism.

For permission to quote from the letters of D. H. Lawrence, published and unpublished, I am obliged to Messrs Laurence Pollinger, Ltd and Wm. Heinemann, Ltd; to quote from Katherine Mansfield's *Letters* and *Journal*, to Messrs Constable, Ltd and the Society of Authors; and to quote substantial passages from Murry's published work, to Messrs Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

In conclusion, I wish to tender my sincere apologies to anyone to whom I may inadvertently have given pain, either by the facts I have publicized or by the opinions I have expressed.

F. A. LEA

1 December 1958



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

PART I
1889-1923





Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

I

FIRST YEARS



THE MURRYS FIRST LOOM out of the Celtic Twilight early in the nineteenth century, with 'Thomas Murry Senior of the Parish of Hubberstone County of Pembroke Shipwright'. Thomas's mother was a Welsh-speaking, steeple-hatted native of Anglesey; his father may have hailed from Ireland, where the name is not uncommon in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records: but his further ancestry is uncertain, and immaterial. All that concerns us is that he had two sons, Thomas Junior, born 1831, and John, born 1835, who, he did solemnly and sincerely declare, were likewise apprenticed to the shipwright's trade.

These two began life by plying the ferry between Milford Haven and Haverfordwest. Later, the Hungry Forties bearing hard on the family, this proved an inadequate livelihood. As long as a crust of bread remained in the house, their father used to aver, his old mother (of the steeple hat) should not be sent to the Union: but often a crust of bread was literally all that did remain; and by their early twenties both boys were forced to migrate to Sheerness Dockyards, where he himself eventually joined them. The memory of those early privations seems to have exerted a decisive influence on their lives – and not only on theirs.

Thomas Junior, whose mortal fear of the Union survived into his ninety-second year, would take his son out into the streets and point to the crossing-sweeper at work, reminding him that such would be his own lot unless he worked hard at the Docks. The lesson went home. The boy (another Thomas) worked so hard that he hoisted himself clean out of the proletariat, ending his days as inspector of the Government Ordnance Factory at Dum-Dum – and father of Mary Murry, the novelist.

John was a rougher diamond. He would supplement his meagre earnings by pocketing copper bolts from the Docks and disposing of

them outside, until, getting wind of the transaction, his employers confronted him with a constable at the gates. Arrested, searched, and severely admonished, he thereupon vowed revenge on that constable, and seized the first occasion to wreak it. Unfortunately, it was the occasion of his father's funeral. It was just as the long procession was winding round Sheerness Green that he happened to catch sight of his enemy, and, throwing discretion with frock-coat to the winds, proceeded to settle the account. But this lesson too went home. His son (another John), who had been sitting beside him in the carriage, was so appalled by the squalor of the scene – the constable being borne off to hospital, his father to gaol, while the cortège paused open-mouthed – that he, like his cousin, turned his back on the proletariat for ever, ending his days as a Civil Service pensioner – and father of John Middleton Murry.

This second John was evidently endowed with a formidable energy and determination. At the time of the funeral, 1871, he cannot have been more than eleven, and, as the only responsible member of a large and feckless family, he had his sisters' welfare as well as his own to consider. Yet by dint of sheer hard work, without a word of encouragement from anybody, he succeeded in teaching himself to write, in securing a post at Somerset House – first as boy-messenger, then as a temporary clerk at £1 a week – and, by his twenty-eighth year, in laying aside enough to marry and set up house on his own, in Ethnard Road, Peckham.

His wife, Emily – *née* Wheeler – loyally reinforced his efforts. While he, to earn a further sixpence an hour, trudged from Somerset House to a Penny Bank in the Brompton Road, toiling as a cashier till midnight, she took in lodgers at home. Their life together, for the first few years, was confined to the small hours and Sundays. That was the price to be paid, in the 1880s, for rising above your station. She knew it and did not complain. If she submitted as a wife, however, she must have grieved as a girl: for she was only eighteen when they married, and, though no better off than he – she brought a dowry of £30 – less obsessed by the spectre of poverty. By nature gay where he was dour, tender where he was hard, reckless where he was circumspect, she never completely resigned herself to the meagreness of their existence. She would day-dream of gipsies and caravans. The couple, indeed, were of singularly opposite temperaments – and the opposites emerged in their son.

FIRST YEARS

Born on August 6, 1889, John Middleton Murry was pronounced a beautiful baby, and good-looking he was always to be. Yet his very face was a *coincidentia oppositorum*. Look at any portrait, or pen-portrait, of him in middle life. What have those large, luminous, contemplative eyes, so easily flooded with tears, to do with that combative chin; those finely chiselled, fastidious lips with that coarse, thrice-broken nose? Nowadays heredity is discounted, circumstance deemed all-important: but if that chin was his father's so was the forcefulness it betokened, and if those eyes were his mother's so was the sensibility. What nature had proposed, no doubt, nurture disposed: but the traits coexisted from the start – and not always peacefully.

As the first son of an only son, he was naturally the apple of his grandfather's eye. By this time, the shipwright had retired to a pub in Bow Road, The Ordell Arms, and there the baby was taken to see him. Once, when his aunt had gone off, first to fight somebody, then to play tip-cat, leaving him squatting outside in the street, the old man, outraged by such negligence, descended from on high like Jehovah and felled her to the ground. His outbursts, both of fury and of affection, however, were already nearing their end. It must have been soon after this that the family were summoned to his deathbed:

I sat there, on a chest at the end of his bed, in a reefer coat with gold anchor-buttons, staring at him, half-frightened . . . Everybody was sent out of the room by a motion of his head, and I sat there alone, staring at him with big eyes. Every now and then he would say something to me, which I could not catch; it seemed to get lost in his bushy black beard, as he struggled to lift himself to get a full sight of me. At last I understood what he wanted and pulled a chair close to his bedside and perched myself upon it. And we looked at one another. How long I sat there, looking at him, he looking at me, I cannot say. I know it was a long time, and that I was not tired. I know it was a long time, because I was dimly conscious that the misgivings of my parents at leaving me alone with him, were being increased into restiveness and anxiety by the length of my stay. But they dared not interfere . . . They were afraid of the dying lion. I was afraid, and not afraid. I knew him as a lion; but I knew also that he would never dart his paw on me. And as I looked at him, and felt something of the speech that was in his eyes when he looked at me, my little heart was *weh* with a grief unspeakable.¹

This was when Murry was three. Thenceforward, his glimpses of his grandfather's world were few and fleeting. His gaze was turned, willy-nilly, in quite another direction.

To him, it was a picturesque world, at least in retrospect. He liked to recall the odd, Dickensian characters who frequented it – the old gentleman, for instance, who had lately retired from the profession of catching black beetles in Buckingham Palace. But his romantic leanings were not shared. To his father, it was a world of perdition, such characters a *memento mori*. John Murry felt always as though he were skirting an abyss, where one false step would be fatal. And the feeling was not unwarranted. Of all classes of late Victorian society, the lower middle class had most to fear. The proletariat itself was secure by comparison, if only because it could sink no lower. This haunting sense of insecurity determined his every move, exacerbated his feverish efforts to better himself, and infected all who came within his reach. Nothing was more dreaded in that household than his work-frayed temper, and nothing so sure to provoke it as the least suggestion of back-sliding.

Furthermore, he was an idealist. Not for himself alone had he pinched and scraped and denied himself and his wife. Just as far as he, by his own unaided exertions, had risen above the rank of his parents, so far, he was resolved, should his son rise above his own; and nothing was to distract or divert him. Nor was the ideal itself indeterminate: it was incarnate before his eyes. Day by day from the high places of the War Office there descended those tangled screeds which it was his duty and privilege to transcribe; day by day he beheld the exalted beings from whom they emanated. 'They arrived at ten o'clock, in hansom cabs when it was wet; they went to lunch at their clubs at one, and returned at three. They drafted more letters till half-past four, and then they departed. One or two of them stayed during lunch-time, in case war broke out in the interval; and they had elegant meals brought to them in their rooms.'² It was to this empyrean that his son was destined.

The end was laid down before the child was out of his cradle. The sole doubt related to means. Clearly, the key was education: but what was that? John Murry could not be sure, but he knew at least that it meant the three R's, and History, and Latin. The three R's, therefore, it was, from the moment the boy could speak. By the age of two he was reading the newspapers aloud to the clients of The Ordell Arms; at two-and-a-half he was sent to school – the Rolles Road Board School. Then came sums, and dates, and tags from *The Victoria Spelling Book* – *multum in parvo, noli me tangere* – to be conned by rote and repeated Sunday mornings. At seven he was doing quadratics, author – already – of a treatise on Gothic Architecture, and top of the Bellendon Road

FIRST YEARS

Higher Grade Board School. It was merely a question of time before he should stand for a scholarship.

'The only moral imperative I knew in my youth was: "Thou shalt work".' ³ It is rather horrible to contemplate, this forcible feeding, and he himself looked back on it with horror. 'It involved the complete obliteration of a child's childhood.' ⁴ It involved, in other words, an atrophy of the sensuous, a hypertrophy of the intellectual, from which he never recovered. Probably it was accountable for his short-sightedness too, and for a susceptibility to minor ailments that robbed his manhood of at least as many working-hours as he had had to put in as a boy. At the age of eleven, his aunt said, he was just 'a little old man'.⁵

Mention of this aunt, however, recalls the other side of his nurture – the maternal side. For John Murry did not have things all his own way. By 1893 he had saved up enough to move from Peckham to East Dulwich, and there, instead of lodgers, his wife's mother and sister shared the house. Much of the boy's spare time, therefore, was passed in the company of three women, all of whom he adored. His grandmother, he writes, 'had an instinct for life':

She had known what hard times were; she had been through a kind of poverty which even my father's family had never known: yet she was completely unsoured. She had brought up her two daughters – my mother and my aunt – to be gentle and generous. They had learned from her to be tender. Experience has taught me that this quality of tenderness in woman, which my grandmother possessed so abundantly and which flowed on through her two daughters, is rarer than I imagined. After all, these were the only women I knew: and this quality was the same in them all. They were all gentle and generous.⁶

This grandmother used to take him for carefree holidays in Hastings, where he was allowed to play with the dustman's children and get as grubby as he pleased – indulgences that would have shocked his father. As for Aunt Doll, then a girl in her teens, she was less an aunt than a playmate herself – and something more. 'I used always to see in you my ideal of beauty',⁷ he told her years afterwards; at the same time confessing how 'terribly hurt' he had been when she took it into her head to marry. Even then he was 'a woman's man'.

In a chilly and intimidating world, these three stood for warmth and security. They ensured that whatever else he was starved for, he was not starved for affection: and that was something he never forgot. The same letter to his aunt, of condolence on the death of her son, concludes:

'Days come when I would give up everything to be a child again and sit in the kitchen while you and Mum laughed and laughed and laughed – you remember how? – at something I could never quite make out. This letter is only to let you know that in my heart I return all that love you gave me. I love you still and always will.' ⁷ Since these words were written from Bandol, during one of the happiest spells of Murry's life, his childhood, though drab, could not have been altogether joyless.

Indeed, it was not altogether drab. If Sunday mornings were darkened by homework, the afternoons were redeemed by Sunday School – an hour of purely secular enjoyment, consecrated to readings from Kingston and Ballantyne. Romance entered Coplestone Road in the small person of Edith Pinnington next door, to whom he paid tongue-tied courtship, and in whose eyes he distinguished himself by beating her father at ping-pong. At ping-pong itself – a novelty in the 'nineties, and the first of the long succession of ball-games to enlist his enthusiasm – he was something of an infant prodigy. Then, there were the annual excursions to Margate, Brighton or Yarmouth, on which even John Murry could relax: and once, 'seized by an unaccustomed spirit of adventure', ⁸ he took the whole family to Jersey. That was in 1896. To the same year belonged 'the most glowing memory' ⁹ of all, and perhaps the most lastingly effective – Beerbohm Tree's production of *Julius Caesar* at His Majesty's, which they watched from high up in the ninepennies:

From the beginning I was spell-bound. I had not read *Julius Caesar* – nor indeed any Shakespeare at all. But the whole thing was marvellous to me. Rome – the crowds – Caesar – the togas – the swords – the eagles – the storm – the lightning – the growls at Anthony – and then the cheers. I was in ecstasy. And then – wonder of wonders – the scene between Brutus and Cassius in the tent. The tears streamed down my face. Whether, in any sense, I understood the play, I have no idea. But it was all unbearably splendid and beautiful to me.¹⁰

Half a century later, reading in her autobiography that it was this same production which had opened 'the world of theatrical enchantment' to Lady Cynthia Asquith, Murry felt as if they 'shared a secret'.⁹

And yet, 'the terrors of childhood are much more real to me than the joys'.¹¹ Perhaps he exaggerated his nervousness. It took some pluck to steal a lift on the back of a dray, at the risk of the driver's whip; and one of his school-fellows at Bellendon Road remembers him as a ring-leader of mischief. But nervous he was, harrowed by night-horrors,

FIRST YEARS

unable to go to bed without a knotted towel for company. Fear was in the air he breathed. Every bit as much as his father, he felt that at any moment the ground might cave in under his feet. The very mythology which, like most children, he evolved and half-believed, reflected this abiding *Angst*. It centred, he recalled, on two deities: God, whose 'business was to punish you for wickedness', and the Power, who had 'one sole activity – to "git you, ef you don't watch out"'.¹² Before both he walked in fear and trembling. Nowhere, except with his grandmother, mother and aunt, could he ever feel really secure. And when, at the age of eleven, he did succeed in winning a scholarship, the last familiar landmark fell away. The sentence of exile became irrevocable.

'The sense of being a stranger in a strange land', he was to write in 1931, 'dates back further than I can remember.'¹³ That was his father's legacy. The measures taken by John Murry to ensure his son's security defeated their end. The higher he rose in the social scale, the better he adapted himself outwardly to one milieu after another, the more of an impostor he would feel, the more rootless, the more homeless, the more complete an outsider. Perdurably established by his strange education were, on the one hand, a craving for some setting to which he could *belong* without pretence, on the other a critical intelligence that would make it all the harder to satisfy. At the same time – and this was his mother's legacy – his very touchstone of *belonging* would remain the kitchen at Coplestone Road. Only where his affections as well as his intelligence were engaged would he ever be completely at one, with his setting or himself. The interplay, the conflict, the conciliation, of these two factors make up the history of his life – a life 'like the Scriptures, figurative', inasmuch as it epitomizes the quest of the common man in a century of breakneck social transition.

His entry into Christ's Hospital, in the first month of the first year of the century, January 1901, was itself symbolic. It was in response to the mounting pressure of a million John Murrays that the great Tudor foundation had thrown six scholarships open to Board School boys. Murry's was one of the first six. The night his success was announced, his aunt remembered, he behaved 'like a little maniac, dancing round the room and crying "I've passed! I've passed!"'¹⁴ till she and his mother were positively alarmed. No doubt his father's jubilation was scarcely inferior to his own. Christ's Hospital had been recommended by no less a person than his former chief at the War Office,

himself an Old Blue. The first milestone, at least, had been passed on the high road to Somerset House.

The school was still situated in Newgate Street. The Grecians' Cloister, in the centre of the buildings, was the same that Coleridge had adorned. The oak-panelled wards, with their great open hearths, were as steeped in tradition as a church. Everything was venerable, impressive – to a small boy accustomed to the narrow thoroughfares and narrower minds of East Dulwich, more than a little overpowering. Christ's Hospital, at first, was 'a kind of bewildering dream, with brief intervals of lucid wakefulness'.¹⁴ But not, it would seem, a bad dream. Murry's first extant letter, dated January 25, 1901, deserves to be quoted, if only for the sake of the opening, with its characteristically scrupulous, even pedantic, reservation:

Dear Mother,

'What is your name and where do you live?' Everyone asks me that question until I would like to punch the head of every impertinent questioner that speaks to me. Wait till I've been here a little longer and I'll teach a lesson to some of the smaller ones.

We went up for a little exam. this morning in Arithmetic and I got on allright. In the afternoon we had one in Algebra. These are to ascertain which form we are to be placed in.

Make beds. wash. BREAKFAST. Brush boots. SCHOOL (2 hrs.). Play. Dinner. Play. SCHOOL (2 hrs.) play. tea. School. to Bed. Such is the daily routine of Christ's Hospital. I'm not quite mummy sick yet though I'm always thinking of you and Dad and all my Royal Family. Send to the Warden the Saturday after next for me to go out. I ought to have brought some goodies in with me like the other fellows did, for the tuck shop is always packed, not in the ordinary sense of the word, but just like sardines in a tin. By the bye you might get me a couple of tins of decent bloater paste.

We saw the headmaster this morning and a very nice fellow gentleman he is.

Send some stamps use my sixpence to help pay for this.

I s'pose I shall have to have a 'lastly' to my little sermon so I'll have it now.

Jack.

No doubt the Royal Family was much in the news at that moment. 'Mafeking' and 'Ladysmith' were scrawled over the staircase walls; 'and I remember', Murry wrote fifty years later, 'that though I was only 9 or 10 a wave of nausea and foreboding (mentally quite incomprehensible) swept over me on Mafeking night'.¹⁵ His mother's 'goodies' were a

more present affliction, consisting, alas, of seedcakes so repulsive that he could neither eat them himself nor offer them to his friends – with the result that his furtive sorties to the dustbin gained him a quite undeserved reputation for consuming his parcels in secret.

Boys whose homes were in London were allowed out on Saturday afternoons. This had its advantages. To the children of Bellendon Road, his silver buttons, leather girdle and yellow stockings were objects of envy and admiration – an admiration he lost no time in exploiting. One of them, Victor Cooley, remembers being severely reprimanded for his addiction to Omar Khayyam – a corrupting influence. Murry himself carried a copy of 'Elia.' On the other hand, there were drawbacks. For one thing, he was acutely embarrassed by his aunt's deference to the school beadle, whenever she came to collect him; for another, his father, having never got over his being placed second instead of first on the scholarship list, would subject him week by week to a searching inquisition on his place in class *vis-à-vis* his rival, Allen – and Allen, though eight months his junior, was far ahead. When, after several terms' evasion, this awful truth came to light, there was an explosion that shattered the household: which, perhaps, was why Murry remembered Allen's birthday to the end of his life.

If he had become 'lethargic' in class, however (and that is not surprising – nature was bound to get its own back sooner or later), he was neither idle nor unambitious. The same letter which describes (indiscreetly) life at school as 'one long holiday',¹⁶ speaks of his spending every playtime in the library; and he was already resolved on becoming, like Coleridge, a Grecian – one of the select band of sixth-formers destined for university scholarships: 'Won't I think myself someone when I'm one which I count as being a dead certainty if I like to try. When I shall have 15 big buttons instead of 7 small ones.'¹⁶

Moreover, traits were emerging, not indeed of the future Civil Servant, but of the real Middleton Murry. Together with two other scholars, Allen and Downie, he had soon formed a little circle of initiates, among whom he was the acknowledged leader. It was on his initiative that they decided to set up a 'Republic'. Allen, as mathematician of the group, was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer; an artist, co-opted to design the postage stamps, became Postmaster General; and Murry himself, of course, as President, drafted the Constitution. The Republic was followed by a newspaper. All had to pool their resources to purchase a jellygraph, while he, Editor-in-Chief this

time, contributed the leading articles. And no doubt there were further projects, since (Sir Harold Downie recalls) it was noticeable that each new enthusiasm enlisted a new band of collaborators.

This was while the school was in London. With the removal of Christ's Hospital to Horsham, in the summer of 1902, more orthodox pastimes engrossed him. His old 'blind hunger for the country' ¹⁷ met at last, he became, in spite of his short-sightedness, a good enough cricketer to end up as House Captain of Maine A, and a really able swimmer. Cricket, indeed, never lost its fascination for him. In his sixties he still could, and frequently did, recall every detail of a match at the Oval, which his father had taken him to that summer; he even acquired the objectionable practice of taking a portable radio on to the beach in order to listen in to Tests.

At the same time, life at Horsham was so rich and strange that nothing could well have prevented him from feeling, ever more acutely, the contrast presented by his home. The Murrys had moved, via Ewell and Kingston, to Hampton Wick; and he had been blessed with a small brother, Arthur (hereinafter called Richard, the name by which he was to be known) – and 'blessed' is the word, for he was never happier, then or afterwards, than in the company of very small children. But it was the holidays now that were become a bewildering dream. 'My parents and I lived in complete aloofness.' ¹⁸ They had neither interests nor tastes in common; and 'one holiday it struck me suddenly, with an awful despair and a guilty consciousness of treachery, that there was not a single object in the whole house which I should have been glad to have for its own sake. This was, in its own small way, a tragic realization.' ¹⁹ It was, since it meant a deepening shame, both of his class and of his parents themselves.

In his autobiography, *Between Two Worlds*, he has told of the days of suspense he endured when his father was due to visit the school; of his panic fear lest John Murry should disgrace him in the eyes of his housemaster (a groundless fear, Sainte-Croix being well aware of his origins, and many blue-coat boys no better off); and of the odd compensatory fantasy he evolved afterwards. According to Downie, he would have had his schoolfellows believe that his father belonged to the Indian Civil Service and had just come to bid good-bye at the end of another furlough. Such tales never quite imposed on them, and made him more mysterious than popular.

Perhaps it was to escape the ordeal of Hampton Wick that, in the

summer of 1907, he and another seventeen-year-old stumped up all they possessed – £9 between them – to go on a walking-tour of Brittany. In the days before youth hostels, this was something of an adventure, and he was understandably proud of it. His account of the trip, *A Fortnight in Brittany for £4.10.0.*, still survives, though his numerous attempts to get it published came to nothing. Written in a competent, undistinguished prose, with occasional lapses into Lamb, and neatly rounded off with a list of 'Expenses (in detail)', it proves that he had already acquired a working knowledge of French, and that he was deeply impressed with the hospitality of the countryside. It does not add that the hospitality of Morlaix extended to making both of them tipsy, nor that they were so exhausted by the end that he, at least, had to be carried ashore.

Meanwhile, whatever his shame of his family, he was justifying their expectations academically. His 'lethargy' did not outlast the move to Horsham. Although he himself gives us to understand that among his contemporaries he was 'definitely one of the least literary',²⁰ that was not their impression. On the contrary, to them he appeared very much of a bibliophile, with his choice selection of Restoration dramatists and eighteenth-century essayists, his beautiful Temple Shakespeares, which he saved up to buy as they came out, and the little volume of Ford which he took to chapel because it looked like a Bible. His taste for poetry had been aroused by Lucretius, and for literary criticism by Quiller-Couch – whose *Adventures in Criticism* had led him on to Coleridge and Arnold, the first of his heroes. To his utter astonishment, moreover – for he could never rid himself of the idea that he was comparatively backward – he was awarded, at sixteen, the Charles Lamb Medal for an essay on 'Literature and Journalism' and at eighteen, the Gold Medal for Classics, a year before his time. He was the obvious choice for editor of the school magazine – and he had encompassed his fifteen big buttons.

That meant that once again he would have to stand for a scholarship. Christ's Hospital had given him all it had to give. It had shaped him, 'the spiritual waif of modern industrial society',²¹ into the semblance of a gentleman, with a gentleman's accent, a gentleman's manners and a gentleman's accomplishments. Now it was Oxford's turn. He sat for the examination in the summer of 1908, and once again with success. At any time prior to the twentieth century, his obvious destination would have been the Church.

II

ASCENDING CURVE



IN 1908 BOARD SCHOOL boys can scarcely have numbered more than a dozen at Oxford and Cambridge together. Murry himself knew of only two, and both had come by way of Christ's Hospital. Few schools were well enough endowed to provide exhibitions; and without exhibitions worth £70 in addition to a scholarship worth £100, he could not have afforded to go up. As it was, he was by no means badly off. Many a student today, recalling what the pound could buy then, would consider him fortunate.

His own feelings, as the autumn approached, were fearfully mixed. Oxford meant another plunge into the unknown; and what made it all the more daunting was the reputation of the college he had been assigned to, Brasenose. It was rumoured to be a 'tough' college. His trepidation was such that not only did he 'sidle into Oxford and out of it by a devious route through Guildford and Reading, rather than face two London termini, and the piracy of a connecting cab', but he would, he says, have 'run to the ends of the earth'¹ rather than betray the yet more devious route by which he had reached a university at all.

However, as so often happens, rumour had outlasted reality. The Vice Principal of Brasenose at that time was a disciple of Pater, F. W. Bussell, and under the influence of this remarkable man (while posing as a Tory squire, a pluralist with ten livings in Norfolk, he was reputed to have read – and remembered – the whole *Encyclopaedia Britannica*), the character of the college had already undergone a change. From being exclusively athletic and social, it was inclining towards the academic. Straws in the wind had been the foundation of a literary Pater Society by two undergraduates, Frederick Goodyear and Charles Mellows, and of a college magazine, *The Brazen Nose*. It was Goodyear who greeted Murry on the night of his arrival with an invitation to join the Society.

He was swept from the start into a social and intellectual whirl which left no time for misgivings. 'I am enjoying myself up here immensely', he wrote to his aunt (whose photograph hung in his study as it had at Christ's Hospital): 'Of course it's all so strange at first, but one falls into it immediately without that irksome fledgling stage which you have when at school. A couple of decent rooms all to one's self, good food, – and you don't know how much we appreciate that after what we got at school – comfortable rooms, some pocket-money, everything that goes to make life pleasant to people of my age.'² The food never ceased to impress him. He could not understand how anyone could complain, as some young aristocrats did, preferring to cook a simple meal for themselves in their rooms. But if their assumptions abashed him, he concealed it effectively. Only one of his contemporaries recalls that he was 'noticeably reticent' about his origins. Others deny that he betrayed any class-consciousness whatever.

He was, of course, taking Classics. Courses in English were happily unknown. Outside the broad demesne of Latin and Greek, supplying a permanent standard of excellence, the student of those days could read what authors he chose, and read them as sources of pleasure, not as samples of schools. He could even lose himself in a book and discover a taste of his own: whilst for those who wished to discuss, there were societies innumerable. Through these Murry quickly made friends. The Pater Society introduced him to Michael Sadleir and two younger men, Philip Landon and Leonard Duke; the intercollegiate Milton Society (which Goodyear also prevailed on him to join) to a group of exceptionally able undergraduates, mostly from Trinity, including Joyce Cary and E. H. W. Meyerstein, Arnold Toynbee, Thomas Higham, Duncan Macgregor, F. R. Barry and Philip Mitchell. It was of this group that he wrote:

They were a little older than the average undergraduate. Some of them had come on from Scottish universities, while Joyce had put in a year at an art school. Something had intervened for them between the public school and the university, which made the difference. They were neither overgrown sixth-form boys, like me, nor pass-men up for a good time. There was nothing precious about them, yet their intellectual interests were various and widespread; and they judged for themselves. To me they were vastly stimulating: I can hardly have been that to them.¹

The last sentence is unwarranted. 'Murry certainly contributed more than his fair share to the informal education of his contemporaries',

PART ONE: 1889-1923

writes Higham (now Dean of Trinity), and his statement is supported by Meyerstein and others. Although no orator, in congenial company such as this he could always be a good talker; Cary described him as 'brilliant in dialectics'; and his personality was already impressive. 'With his white face, black hair and aquiline features', says Duke, 'he always reminded me of the portraits of Dante: there was a look almost of spirituality, humanized by his quaint way of holding his head on one side, and his smile – rather shy than sly.' Donald Gladding also 'got the impression of a future poet or saint'. Some found him verging on the sentimental or precious, but all emphasize his good looks – only spoilt, according to Sadleir, by 'his ungainly, lunging walk'.*

Since several of these friends were fine athletes as well as intellectuals, Murry was able, he tells us, 'to make my athletic contribution to the college, so to speak, vicariously'.³ But this was not the whole truth. Although his attempts at rowing ended, on one occasion at least, in his being thrown into the river, he rose to be captain of the Hornets, the Brasenose Cricket XI. Altogether, his first two years at Oxford were so fully occupied that it is less surprising to learn that he was usually up till one or two in the morning than that he continued to make progress in the Classics. Fortunately, his tutor, H. F. Fox, was a man he could love and admire – Fox lives again in *Between Two Worlds* – and in those days admiration and love invariably called forth his best.

His first vacations were spent at home. His parents had prepared him a snugger – very small, but with its jars of tobacco and lines of books very impressive to his small brother. A carpenter living next door, who worked at Hampton Court, gave him his first lessons in woodwork, helping him to fashion a cigarette-box and cribbage-marker out of Palace timber; and he adorned the walls with copies of pictures, good enough, in Richard's opinion, to belie his own belief that he had no talent whatever for draughtsmanship. It was a cosy retreat, and, like most undergraduates, he worked harder at home than at college.

During the Long Vacation of 1909, however, Fox invited him and three others for a month at Snape, in Suffolk, studying and sailing on the Alde. As a schoolboy, he had passed evening after evening

* Murry himself attributed this to the necessity of keeping pace with the bigger boys at Christ's Hospital, when they marched to a band.

dreaming of cruising with his friends; now the reality proved as good as the dream. 'What was probably at best good fun to my companions was a wild delight to me. When they went off to play golf, I would take out the boat alone, and generally succeed in running myself aground. Then I waited, blissfully, for them to return and extricate me. The estuary of the Alde was then a marvellous piece of country – soaked in sunshine – and for the first time in my life I entered into a care-free, country existence which I felt to be my rightful heritage.' That reading-party was decisive. He could no longer endure the idea of spending his vacations alone in a suburb; and 'as soon as my month was over . . . my mind was filled with a single purpose – to find some place in the country where I could live'.⁴ The upshot was that he took a room in a farmhouse, a few miles from Stow-on-the-Wold, and spent the next two vacations there.

These too were bliss. After a hard struggle to overcome his shyness, the farmer and his wife took Murry to their hearts. Trafalgar Farm became his home in a way that Lutterworth, Cedars Road, had never been. For a spell, he was simply one of the Peachey family. They were the originals of the Williamsons in *The Things We Are*, and he let them believe that he, like the hero of his novel, had only a mother, who lived abroad on a pension. But 'I suppose that I was as near as I ever could be to my real self in the kitchen at Waterloo. There I had no need, and therefore no desire, to defend a precarious position.'⁵ This brief interlude of 'reality' and unalloyed happiness stamped itself so indelibly on his memory that the chapters devoted to it in his autobiography are among the most vivid he ever wrote. J. D. Beresford once cited them as evidence that he might (despite *The Things We Are*) have become a novelist of distinction.

Probably it was Peachey who implanted in Murry that hankering after a farm of his own which found such belated fruition. It was certainly he who infected him with his own passion for hunting (which another reviewer, Winifred Holtby, cited as proof of his egocentricity). For a time he could contemplate no career that did not entail riding. That Christmas, accordingly, he broke the grim news to his father that, instead of trying for Somerset House, he would enter the Indian Civil Service – at the same time extracting £30 for the purchase of a horse. Then, as an eligible suitor, he proceeded to fall in love. His courtship (conducted on horseback) was auspicious. Fate and the vicar's niece smiled; and when, towards the end of the Easter Vacation of 1910,

news reached Trafalgar Farm that he had not only been awarded the Bridgeman Prize for an essay, but was one of four Brasenose men (a record since 1898) to win a first in Honour Moderations, his prospects seemed to be assured.

Unluckily – or luckily – just at this moment the Peachey's had another visitor, a young French officer of the submarine service, Maurice Larrouy, who had stopped with them before to learn English. In his spare time Larrouy wrote novels, under the name of René Milan, and naturally he was interested to meet an Englishman of literary leanings: more especially as Murry, having lately supported with 'mournful optimism' (*The Brazen Nose*) Sadleir's attempts to win Oxford for the Symbolists, was now endeavouring to read them. Larrouy pointed out the absurdity of studying Rimbaud or Mallarmé before one could converse intelligibly with a French porter. If he, Larrouy, could find time to visit England, Murry could afford a vacation in Paris. In fact, it was imperative that he should, if he dreamed of becoming a critic – was Paris not the capital of culture? He would make the arrangements himself.

If Murry was really dreaming of becoming a critic, his decision to enter the Indian Civil Service must have died almost as soon as it was born. But that is what we should expect. His life at this time was entirely fluid, ready for any mould it was poured into. He had no convictions of his own. What passed for his personal convictions were, like most people's, those of the circles he moved in: only he, moving in so many, never had time to consolidate them. He just conformed to the expectations of his associates, adopting *persona* after *persona*. The Cotswold *persona* had been one – the best-fitting so far, but no more secure for that. Now he would have to try on another. For Larrouy, after he had left, pressed home the attack by post, and was reinforced by Cary and Sadleir. Reluctantly, Murry acquiesced.

Consequently, instead of returning to Trafalgar Farm for the summer, he took a tutorship at Hopetown, Northumberland, coaching and golfing with Lord Charles Hope, in order to pay for the excursion. And in fact he never returned. His sweetheart he saw once more, as she happened to be passing through Oxford; the Peachey's, without a line of explanation or affection, gratitude or regret, he let drop out of his life for ever. The Christmas Vacation of 1910-11 found him alone in Paris.

At first, he was very much alone. Larrouy had booked him a room

at the Hôtel de l'Univers, Rue Gay Lussac, but given him no introductions. Cary, who knew the Latin Quarter well, was not due to join him until the New Year. Left to his own devices, he quietly adopted a routine. It was dictated partly by his poverty (though why he should have been so poor is obscure), and partly by his shrinking from every fresh human contact. The mornings were spent at the picture galleries, the afternoons in reading or writing, the evenings at one or other of the cafés frequented by students, where he took his first and only meal of the day and sat on till after midnight.

Left Bank cafés, however, are no place for solitude. Within a week of his arrival at most, the art-students had found him out. If he was not an artist himself, he was something still better – a votary of the arts. His impressionability, his receptivity to their ideas, his naïve and unconcealed admiration for their devotion to the *métier*, won him their hearts. They invited him to their tables, they showed off before him – and he loved it. He was even delighted when they asked him to lend them money, since that proved that they thought him one of themselves, and would have been ashamed to hold back, though it meant wiring to Cary for more. 'I have made two score of acquaintances and three *friends*,'⁶ he was exclaiming in a letter to Landon soon after Christmas; one of these friends, a Pole named Ouritz, was 'nothing less than a genius':⁷

I met him and three others in a cheap café; on a night when one of them had made 40 francs out of a dealer for some hackwork. They invited me to share their wine and I became one of the party: we talked in a weird mélange of French (they can hardly speak French) – German and Italian. How we talked! From ten o'clock to three in the morning in praise of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer – and Art. It will be many years before Art becomes so real a thing in speech to me again. For to Ouritz it was a thing to die for and live for – to sink one's whole being in. And so we talked – and I became a hero among a company of heroes. Ouritz is indeed *φύλι θεός* – light eyes and flaxen hair – flushed with good wine towards the end he climbed upon the table and chanted a part of the *kalevala*: – a wonderful thing that every true Lothringian knows from his cradle. And we parted after I had bound myself with many oaths to visit them.⁶

The genius of Ouritz seems to have manifested itself chiefly in the *kalevala* and the confusion of his studio, where Murry posed for his portrait next day. But what mattered to him more by far than the quality of their achievement (which he had no means of judging anyway) was

the enthusiasm of all these young men. That was intoxicating. He was caught up in a world quite different from any he had hitherto known – a world of which Art was the pivot and pole. He goes on:

I have come to see and see clearly how living and quivering a thing is Art; here in Paris it is a Life-force you can feel – and perhaps you will find when I come back that a heresy or two has taken root in my brain on the question. At all events L'Art pour L'Art has a different but a much more real meaning now to my soul: because I have seen it lived and heard it worshipped and watched the sacrifices made for it. And so you can read between the lines that my life here has been fuller than it ever had been before. I have got clear on things that shifted vaguely before me and the whole vividness and directness has reacted 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.⁶

What that meant in practical terms was that he would apply for a Senior Hulme Scholarship, spend a year and a half at the Sorbonne under Bergson, a further year and a half in Germany, and then either 'be a don or starve in Paris as a journalist'.⁶

Ostensibly it was to attend Bergson's lectures that he had come to Paris on this occasion. 'I never went', he states in *Coming to London* – giving the lie to some of his letters. But he was studying *L'Évolution Créatrice*. Bergson was the chosen philosopher of many of the young Post-Impressionists, and already he seems to have seen himself as a theoretical exponent of the movement. What else could 'a life of Art' denote, so far as he was concerned?

The years 1910-11 were the heyday of Fauvism in France. Thanks to Cary he had come all prepared to be impressed by it – his first letter extolling a poster whose 'yellow-greens screamed in a discord which was the consummation of a perfect harmony';⁸ and soon he was meeting some of its representatives. One in particular commanded his admiration – John Duncan Fergusson, the Scottish artist. Again, it was more by his personality than his paintings: only whereas the bohemianism of Ouritz quickly palled, the rhythm of Fergusson did not. A man some years older than Murry, he had the engaging habit of referring to anyone he respected – anyone, that is, 'who put up, consciously or unconsciously, some resistance to the disease of mechanical uniformity' – as an 'artist':

The effect of this was (though he never formulated it) that he, in his capacity of a painter of pictures, was a representative and peculiar cham-

pion of this tribe of men. If he stuck to his guns, and faced without flinching the unpopularity he knew was coming to him through abandoning his earlier and very saleable manner, he was, in his function of advance-guard, somehow clearing the way for future freedom for the tribe. Again, it followed that it was unseemly for an artist to live uncleanly or in disorder: he must embody a natural discipline of his own. His rhythm must be his own rhythm: but rhythm he must have. In other words, art was not a profession. No man could be a professional artist. By profession he might be a painter, a writer, or equally well a boxer or a boot-black; whether he was an artist or not depended on what he was in himself. Art was a quality of being – an achievement of, or an effort towards integrity.⁹

Fergusson's influence on Murry, like his friendship, was lasting. The first-fruits of their desultory discussions was the idea of a new magazine, to be entitled *Rhythm*.

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive! To Murry, the Post-Impressionist resurgence veritably was a dawn – 'There are great artists working here to-day'⁸ – and, like Wordsworth at a similar climacteric, he had fallen in love. How much of his enthusiasm, of his sense of identification with the French school, sprang from his passion for Marguéritte, how far his decision to attend the Sorbonne was really motivated by that, he himself might have found it hard to say. Rive Gauche, Fauvism, Marguéritte – to him they were all one 'sensation'. That it played some part, however, and probably the largest part, he would have been the last to deny, and his whole future life would confirm. Its motto might have been: *Cherchez la femme*.

Not that he was exceptionally passionate – quite the contrary. Francis Carco's description of him at this time, spending night after night with the *petites femmes* and sending them flowers on the morrow (a practice which he, Carco, shamed him out of) is on a par with his statement that Murry was already *Times* correspondent. He may well have given Carco to understand such things – for he could not shake off the 'tyrannous pretence of manifold experience in another's presence'¹⁰ – but in truth his intellectual precocity was matched by an emotional immaturity peculiar even in an Englishman. '*C'était un adolescent au teint clair, aux yeux pétillants d'intelligence et d'ironie, qui cachait mal, sous ses allures décidées, une grande pudeur.*'¹¹ His very attractiveness to women was bound up with that *grande pudeur*. They sensed his craving for affection, and it brought out the mother as well as the mistress.

It was not only the art-students of the Café d'Harcourt who had sought him out. From the first he had been an object of interest to the *petites femmes*. 'It is a job to write a reasoned critical letter', he had confessed to Landon soon after his arrival, 'with Yvonne and the rest of them clasping your neck and reading every word, that they can't understand.'⁷ Yvonne, demonstrative, vulgar, vain, was of one breed; Marguéritte of quite another. An unsophisticated country girl from the Corrèze, not long resident in Paris, not yet subdued to the life, '*J'ai fait mes bêtises*', she acknowledged, but she was only too ready to renounce them – as she did, the moment she had enticed him to bed. She took a job as a sempstress – while he, completely oblivious to all but this new enchantment, promised her an allowance of 10s. a week. By the time Cary arrived in Paris, 'worldly-wise, *and sweet*',¹² it was already too late for his warnings. In Marguéritte, Murry had found the warmth and security he craved; in him she had found – or thought she had found – a husband.

Thus, for the first time, both the demands of his nature were fulfilled: intelligence and affection were at one. For the first time, in the Paris of Fauvism and Marguéritte, he could feel that he *belonged*. And, within a matter of weeks, the conciliation was finding expression in the first of his writings to bear the unmistakable Murry impress: an essay on 'Art and Philosophy', produced in one of those moments of 'inspiration' which (he told Landon) visited him in Paris alone, during which 'I really see visions for some hours on end; and I understand things that I never understood before'.¹³

The essay shows him at the top of his enthusiasm for Bergson. At the same time it shows just what Bergson had come to mean to him. Life, it tells us, proceeds by 'unending creations', of which the artist's are the type and continuation. Since no analysis of the old will suffice to predict the new, reason, in order to apprehend life, must be transformed into intuition, 'that point, as it were, at which the reason becomes most wholly itself, and by its own heightened working conquers the crude opposition of subject and object, from which at a lower level it cannot become free'. By the same token – this being the artist's prerogative – philosophy must be transformed into a 'recognition of the rational supremacy of art'.

Art, in other words, expresses a new wholeness of the personality, a unity to which the intellect is merely instrumental. Here the implicit has become explicit. This essay, immature as it is, diffuse, hortatory,

seeking to make up by emphasis for all that it lacks in definition, is none the less the authentic forerunner of *Things to Come*, just as *Rhythm*, in whose first number it appeared, was to be the forerunner of *The Adelphi*.

Truly that vacation in Paris marked a climacteric in Murry's development; and it is no surprise to learn that it was followed by a 'fearful revulsion' ¹³ from Oxford. To return from the delicacy of those evenings with Marguéritte to the prurientes of the man with whom, to his outspoken regret, he had elected to share rooms in Ship Street, from the fervid debates of the Quarter to 'the pointlessly subtle and insincerely clever' ¹⁴ discussions of the Pater Society, was almost more than he could bear. For a week or two he was actually ill. 'Another year and a half', he mourned to his aunt, 'is a terribly long time before one can be up and doing – although I'm afraid it will be very quaint things that I shall do in life.' ¹⁵

He put a brave face upon it; he took part in college activities as usual, composing the Brasenose Ale Verses for the annual Shrove Tuesday celebrations, opening discussions on 'Mysticism and Literature' and 'Criticism and Art'; to none of his friends, except Cary, did he breathe a word of his love. But his heart was no longer in the business. He had left it behind in Paris – and where his heart was, there went much of his treasure also. By Easter his resources were so exiguous that it was only by raising £10 from family and long-suffering friends that he was able to go back at all.

Go back he nevertheless did – and immediately the spell reasserted itself. Not that he saw much of Marguéritte now. While he occupied her rooms at No. 36 Rue des Ecoles, she had gone to live with a relative, who insisted upon her returning at nights. But his time was blissfully occupied, roaming the streets, reading the Symbolists, chatting with painters and poets into the small hours of the morning. He was, he told Landon, sunk in 'a coma of happiness' ¹⁶ – a coma so deep, in fact, that before he awoke to what was happening, he had left his pocket-book in one of the cafés and lost every sou he possessed. Still, in response to his frantic cards, Landon, Duke and Cary stumped up; and still he stayed, living on doughnuts, chestnuts and (if one of his letters is to be trusted) hashish, or scrounging meals from his friends.

The idea of *Rhythm* had by this time taken definite shape. He had interested Goodyear and Sadleir. Sadleir's father, a connoisseur and collector of paintings, had subscribed £50 to the venture, and Michael

himself was to join him in Paris. Fergusson remembers their calling at his studio one morning for permission to use a picture of his, then on exhibition, for the cover of the opening number. He promised to design a new one, and also to act as art editor – on condition that the price of the magazine did not exceed a shilling. Only at that, he pointed out, could it hope to circulate in Aberdeen and Perthshire.

Actually, Fergusson never supposed that it would last beyond one or two numbers. But these young men were enthusiastic, and their enthusiasm was contagious. Very soon Murry was able to announce an imposing list of contributors, including, on the artistic side, Othon Friesz and Anne Estelle Rice, Derain, Van Dongen, Peploe and Picasso; on the literary, Francis Carco, Edouard Gazanin and Tristan Dérème, 'the three leaders of the young fantaisiste movement'. *Rhythm*, he informed Landon, was to be the organ of Modernism:

Modernism means, when I use it, Bergsonism in Philosophy – that is a really *Creative* Evolution with only in the end an Intuition to put the individual at its heart roots; an intuition which is the raising of Personality to the nth degree, a conscious concentration of vision. This I cannot pause to enlarge on now. I hope next term every week to have a gathering of those people who are really heart and soul with us, who stand for Progress in a real sense in Art matters, whereat we can discuss matters. Incidentally it does touch politics very very intimately and I am a yellow Syndicalist; that too I can't explain.

Now Bergsonism stands for Post Impressionism in its essential meaning – and not in the sense of the Grafton Exhibition: it stands for a certain symbolism in poetry on the one hand; and a certain definite rejection of suggestion on the other. It stands equally for Debussy and Maehler in music; for Fantaisisme in Modern French literature, and generally if you like for 'guts' and bloodiness.

Now, there is a lot to explain there, and doubtless you will demand it next term till then it must wait; but without seeing the connexions between the elements, you may see the general drift of the idea, on which the venture is to be run. It is to be kept absolutely cosmopolitan – no suggestion of connexion with Oxford; so that I want you to leave my name or anything local out of the question – Oxford is almost the negation of our idea. We will have no Shavianism or False Aestheticism . . . But still we want more younger men from England – young men in London: who have not gone thro' the unenthusiastic aesthetic atmosphere of Oxford: How to get them is the problem?

We are arranging to have the paper distributed in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, London, Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, New York, and Munich

and all over the world by subscription. My heart is absolutely in it, and now that I know that there are so many other men over the world with the same enthusiasms and the same disgusts I have a new interest in Life. I am playing with every penny I have in the cause.

Schools have gone to glory as far as I'm concerned. I sink or rise to my proper place in Paris and Oxford fades away.¹⁷

In *Between Two Worlds* all this side of Murry's life in Paris is totally eclipsed by his love-affair and its painful dénouement. Of the circumstances attending the birth of the magazine he retained 'no memory at all'.¹⁸ His own narrative, accordingly, gives a quite false impression, both of its importance to him at the time and of the extent to which he was the moving spirit. For all their vagueness and youthful didacticism, his letters leave no doubt that he was, as he appeared to Fergusson and others, a much more positive and enterprising person than he himself would have us believe. And perhaps if the course of true love had run smooth, his contributions to the earlier numbers would not have been so feeble as they were.

The trouble was, that though Oxford might fade away from his mind, there could be no question of his fading away from Oxford. Apart from his scholarship and exhibitions, he had not a penny of his own to play with. To have gone down now would have meant throwing away all his advantages and declining into some office that would leave neither leisure nor energy for editing. Upon his enduring another four terms depended whatever future he aspired to. *Rhythm* itself depended upon it.

Yet here was Marguéritte, trustfully waiting for the word that would make her his wife – and he dearly longing to speak it. Cary was right: he had landed himself in an impossible position. Paris had kindled all his latent idealism, only, it seemed, to dash water on it. She, who had meant security to him, now meant the very reverse. 'If I had had any money, even the chance of the tiniest job in Paris – or indeed in England – if, like Joyce Cary, I had had £300 a year of my own – or even a *quarter* of that – I should have married Marguéritte. There is no earthly doubt about it. And what, I wonder, would my life have been then? Something unimaginably different?'¹⁹

As it was, his second vacation in Paris drew to a close, like the first, without the word being spoken. He went back to Oxford promising to return in the summer – but this time resenting the love (or was it now only pity?) which had compelled the promise. 'Every time that