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# Savitri

*A Legend and a Symbol*

*SRI AUROBINDO*



**BOOK ONE**  
*The Book of Beginnings*



CANTO I

THE SYMBOL DAWN

It was the hour before the Gods awake.  
Across the path of the divine Event  
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone  
In her unlit temple of eternity,  
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.  
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,  
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse  
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite ;  
A fathomless zero occupied the world.  
A power of fallen boundless self, awake  
Between the first and the last Nothingness  
Recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came,  
Turned from the insoluble mystery of birth  
And the tardy process of mortality  
And longed to reach its end in vacant Nought.  
As in a dark beginning of all things,  
A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown,  
Repeating for ever the unconscious act,  
Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,  
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force  
Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns  
And carries our lives in its sonnambulist whirl.  
Athwart the vain enormous trance of Space,  
Its formless stupor without mind or life,  
A shadow spinning through a soulless Void,  
Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,  
Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulls,  
Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.  
The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still.  
Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;

A nameless movement, an unthought Idea  
 Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,  
 Something that wished but knew not how to be,  
 Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.  
 A throe that came and left a quivering trace,  
 Gave room for an old tired want unfilled,  
 At peace in its subconscious moonless cave  
 'To raise its head and look for absent light,  
 Straining closed eyes of vanished memory,  
 Like one who searches for a bygone self  
 And only meets the corpse of his desire.  
 It was as though even in this Nought's profound,  
 Even in this ultimate dissolution's core  
 There lurked an unremembering entity,  
 Survivor of a slain and buried past  
 Condemned to resume the effort and the pang  
 Reviving in another frustrate world.  
 An unshaped consciousness desired light  
 And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change.  
 As if a childlike finger laid on a cheek  
 Reminded of the endless need in things  
 The heedless Mother of the universe,  
 An infant longing clutched the sombre Vast.  
 Insensibly somewhere a breach began:  
 A long lone line of hesitating hue  
 Like a vague smile tempting a desert heart  
 'Troubled the far rim of life's obscure sleep.  
 Arrived from the other side of boundlessness  
 An eye of deity pierced through the dumb deeps ;  
 A scout in a reconnaissance from the sun,  
 It seemed amid a heavy cosmic rest,  
 'The torpor of a sick and weary world,  
 To seek for a spirit sole and desolate  
 'Too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss.

## SAVITRI

Intervening in a mindless universe,  
Its message crept through the reluctant hush  
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy  
And, conquering Nature's disillusioned breast,  
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.  
A thought was sown in the unsounded Void,  
A sense was born within the darkness' depths,  
A memory quivered in the heart of Time  
As if a soul long dead were moved to live:  
But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,  
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,  
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt  
And old experience laboured out once more.  
All can be done if the God-touch is there.  
A hope stole in that hardly dared to be  
Amid the Night's forlorn indifference.  
As if solicited in an alien world  
With timid and hazardous instinctive grace,  
Orphaned and driven out to seek a home  
An errant marvel with no place to live,  
Into a far-off nook of heaven there came  
A slow miraculous gesture's dim appeal.  
The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch  
Persuaded the inert black quietude  
And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.  
A wandering hand of pale enchanted light  
That glowed along a fading moment's brink,  
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge  
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.  
One lucent corner windowing hidden things  
Forced the world's blind immensity to sight.  
The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak  
From the reclining body of a god.  
Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first

Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,  
 Outpoured the revelation and the flame.  
 The brief perpetual sign recurred above.  
 A glamour from the unreached transcendences  
 Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,  
 A message from the unknown immortal Light  
 Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,  
 Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues  
 And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.  
 An instant's visitor the godhead shone:  
 On life's thin border awhile the Vision stood  
 And bent over earth's pondering forehead curve.  
 Interpreting a recondite beauty and bliss  
 In colour's hieroglyphs of mystic sense,  
 It wrote the lines of a significant myth  
 Telling of a greatness of spiritual dawns,  
 A brilliant code penned with the sky for page.  
 Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed  
 Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares ;  
 A lonely splendour from the invisible goal  
 Almost was flung on the opaque Inane.  
 Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts ;  
 Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm  
 Parted the eternal lids that open heaven ;  
 A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near.  
 Ambadress twixt eternity and change,  
 The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths  
 That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars  
 And saw the spaces ready for her feet.  
 Once she half-looked behind for her veiled sun,  
 Then, thoughtful, went to her immortal work.  
 Earth felt the Imperishable's passage close.  
 The waking ear of Nature heard her steps  
 And wideness turned to her its limitless eye,

## SAVITRI

And, scattered on scaled depths, her luminous smile  
Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds.  
All grew a consecration and a rite.  
Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven ;  
The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind  
Arose and failed upon the altar hills ;  
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.  
Here where our half-lit ignorance skirts the gulfs  
On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth,  
Here where one knows not even the step in front  
And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,  
On this anguished and precarious field of toil  
Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,  
Impartial witness to our joy and bale  
Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray.  
Here too the vision and prophetic gleam  
Lit into miracles constant meaningless shapes ;  
Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,  
Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range.  
A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,  
The worship of a Presence and a Power  
Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,  
The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.  
Only a little the God-light can stay:  
Spiritual beauty illumining human sight  
Lines with its passion and mystery Matter's mask  
And squanders eternity on a beat of Time.  
As when a soul draws near the sill of birth,  
Adjoining mortal time to Timelessness,  
A spark of deity lost in Matter's crypt,  
Its lustre vanishes in the inconscient planes,  
That transitory glow of magic fire  
So now dissolved in bright accustomed air.  
The message ceased and waned the messenger.

'The single Call, the uncompanioned Power,  
 Drew back into some far-off secret world  
 The hue and marvel of the supernal beam:  
 She looked no more on our mortality.  
 'The excess of beauty natural to God-kind  
 Could not uphold its claim on time-born eyes;  
 Too mystic-real for space tenancy  
 Her body of glory was expunged from heaven:  
 'The rarity and wonder lived no more.  
 'There was the common light of earthly day.  
 Allfranchised from the respite of fatigue  
 Once more the rumour of the speed of Life  
 Pursued the cycles of the blinded quest.  
 All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;  
 'The thousand peoples of the soil and tree  
 Obeyed the unforeseeing instant's urge,  
 And, leader here with his uncertain mind,  
 Alone who stares at the future's covered face,  
 Man lifted up the burden of his fate.

And Savitr too awoke among these tribes  
 That hastened to join the brilliant Summoner's chant  
 And, lured by the beauty of the apparent ways,  
 Acclaimed their portion of ephemeral joy.  
 Akin to the eternity whence she came,  
 No part she took in this small happiness;  
 A mighty stranger in the human field,  
 The embodied Guest within made no response.  
 'The call that wakes the leap of human mind,  
 Its chequered eager motion of pursuit,  
 Its fluttering-hued illusion of desire,  
 Visited her heart like a sweet alien note.  
 'Time's message of brief light was not for her.

## SAVITRI

In her there was the anguish of the gods  
Imprisoned in our transient human mould,  
The deathless conquered by the death of things.  
A vaster Nature's joy had once been hers,  
But long could keep not its gold heavenly hue  
Or stand upon this brittle earthly base.  
A narrow movement on 'Time's deep abysm,  
Life's fragile littleness denied the power,  
The proud and conscious wideness and the bliss  
She had brought with her into the human form,  
The calm delight that weds one soul to all,  
The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy.  
Earth's grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears  
Rejected the undying rapture's boon:  
Offered to the daughter of infinity  
Her passion-flower of love and doom she gave  
In vain now seemed the splendid sacrifice.  
A prodigal of her rich divinity,  
Her self and all she was she had lent to men,  
Hoping her greater being to implant  
That heaven might native grow in mortal soil.  
Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change ;  
Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:  
It fears the pure divine intolerance  
Of its assault of ether and of fire ;  
It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,  
Almost with hate repels the light it brings ;  
It trembles at its naked power of Truth  
And the might and sweetness of its absolute Voice.  
Inflicting on the heights the abysmal's law,  
It sullies with its mire heaven's messengers:  
Its thorns of fallen nature are the defence  
It turns against the saviour hands of grace ;

It meets the sons of God with death and pain.  
 A glory of lightnings traversing the earth-scene,  
 Their sun-thoughts fading darkened by ignorant minds,  
 Their work betrayed, their good to evil turned,  
 The cross their payment for the crown they gave,  
 Only they leave behind a splendid Name.  
 A fire has come and touched men's hearts and gone ;  
 A few have caught flame and risen to greater life.  
 Too unlike the world she came to help and save,  
 Her greatness weighed upon its ignorant breast,  
 And from its deep chasms welled a dire return,  
 A portion of its sorrow, struggle, fall.  
 To live with grief, to confront death on her road,—  
 The mortal's lot became the Immortal's share.  
 Thus trapped in the gin of earthly destinies,  
 Awaiting her ordeal's hour abode,  
 Outcast from her inborn felicity,  
 Accepting life's obscure terrestrial robe,  
 Hiding herself even from those she loved,  
 The godhead greater by a human fate.  
 A dark foreknowledge separated her  
 From all of whom she was the star and stay ;  
 Too great to impart the peril and the pain,  
 In her torn depths she kept the grief to come.  
 As one who watching over men left blind  
 Takes up the load of an unwitting race,  
 Harboured a foe whom with her heart she must feed,  
 Unknown her act, unknown the doom she faced,  
 Unhelped she must foresee and dread and dare.  
 The long-foreknown and fatal morn was here  
 Bringing a noon that seemed like every noon.  
 For Nature walks upon her mighty way  
 Unheeding when she breaks a soul, a life ;  
 Leaving her slain behind she travels on:

## SAVITRI

Man only marks and God's all-seeing eyes.  
Even in this moment of her soul's despair,  
In its grim rendezvous with death and fear,  
No cry broke from her lips, no call for aid ;  
She told the secret of her woe to none :  
Calm was her face and courage kept her mute.  
Yet only her outward self suffered and strove ;  
Even her humanity was half divine :  
Her spirit was opened to the Spirit in all,  
Her nature felt all Nature as its own.  
Apart, living within, all lives she bore ;  
Aloof, she carried in herself the world :  
Her dread was one with the great cosmic dread,  
Her strength was founded on the cosmic might ;  
The universal Mother's love was hers.  
Against the evil at life's afflicted roots,  
Her own calamity its private sign,  
She made of her pangs a mystic poignant sword.  
A solitary mind, a world-wide heart,  
To the lone Immortal's unshared work she rose.  
At first life grieved not in her burdened breast :  
On the lap of earth's original somnolence  
Inert, released into forgetfulness  
Prone it reposed, unconscious on mind's verge,  
Obtuse and tranquil like the stone and star.  
In a deep cleft of silence twixt two realms  
She lay remote from grief, unsawn by care,  
Nothing recalling of the sorrow here.  
Then a slow faint remembrance shadowlike moved,  
And sighing she laid her hand upon her bosom  
And recognised the close and lingering ache,  
Deep, quiet, old, made natural to its place,  
But knew not why 'twas there nor whence it came.  
The Power that kindles mind was still withdrawn.

Heavy, unwilling were life's servitors  
 Like workers with no wages of delight ;  
 Sullen, the torch of sense refused to burn ;  
 The unassisted brain found not its past.  
 Only a vague earth-nature held the frame.  
 But now she stirred, her life shared the cosmic load.  
 At the summons of her body's voiceless call  
 Her strong far-winged spirit travelled back,  
 Back to the yoke of ignorance and fate,  
 Back to the labour and stress of mortal days,  
 Lighting a pathway through strange symbol dreams  
 Across the ebbing of the seas of sleep.  
 Her house of Nature felt an unseen sway,  
 Illumined swiftly were life's darkened rooms,  
 And memory's casements opened on the hours  
 And the tired feet of thought approached her doors.  
 All came back to her. Earth and Love and Doom,  
 The ancient disputants, encircled her  
 Like giant figures wrestling in the night:  
 The godheads from the dim Inconscient born  
 Awoke to struggle and the pang divine,  
 And in the shadow of her flaming heart,  
 At the sombre centre of the dire debate,  
 A guardian of the unconsolated abyss  
 Inheriting the long agony of the globe,  
 A stone-still figure of high and godlike Pain  
 Stared into space with fixed regardless eyes  
 That saw grief's timeless depths but not life's goal.  
 Afflicted by his harsh divinity,  
 Bound to his throne, he waited unappeased  
 The daily oblation of her unwept tears.  
 All the fierce question of man's hours relived.  
 The sacrifice of suffering and desire  
 Earth offers to the immortal Ecstasy

## SAVITRI

Began again beneath the eternal Hand.  
Awake she endured the moments' serried march  
And looked on this green smiling dangerous world,  
And heard the ignorant cry of living things.  
Amid the trivial sounds, the unchanging scene  
Her soul arose confronting Time and Fate.  
Immobile in herself, she gathered force.  
This was the day when Satyavan must die.

END OF CANTO I



# Mystic Poetry\*

## I

This is the real stumbling-block of mystic poetry and specially mystic poetry of this kind. The mystic feels real and present, even ever present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed in intellectually devised images. He uses words and images in order to convey to the mind some perception, some figure of that which is beyond thought. To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract, has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To him, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and he can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to him an image but a fact. What is to be done under these circumstances? The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer.

Another question is the place of philosophy in poetry or whether it has any place at all. Some romanticists seem to believe that the poet has no right to think at all, only to see and feel. I hold that philosophy has its place and can even take a leading place along with psychological experience as it does in the Gita. All depends on how it is done, whether it is a dry or a living philosophy, an arid intellectual statement or the expression not only of the living truth of thought but of something of its beauty, its light or its power.

The theory which discourages the poet from thinking or at least from thinking for the sake of the thought proceeds from an extreme romanticist temper, it reaches its acme on one side in the question

\* Letters in reply to questions from a disciple.

## MYSTIC POETRY

of the surrealist, "Why do you want poetry to mean anything?" and on the other in Housman's exaltation of pure poetry which he describes paradoxically as a sort of sublime nonsense which does not appeal at all to the mental intelligence but knocks at the solar plexus and awakes a vital and physical rather than intellectual sensation and response. It is of course not that really but a vividness of imagination and feeling which disregards the mind's positive view of things and its logical sequences; the centre or centres it knocks at are not the brain-mind, not even the poetic intelligence but the subtle physical, the nervous, the vital or the psychic centre. The poem he quotes from Blake is certainly not nonsense, but it has no positive and exact meaning for the intellect or the surface mind; it expresses certain things that are true and real, not nonsense but a deeper sense which we feel powerfully with a great stirring of some inner emotion, but any attempt at exact intellectual statement of them sterilises their sense and spoils their appeal. This is not the method of the highest spiritual poetry. Its expression aims at a certain force, directness and spiritual clarity and reality. When it is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or domains or enter into a field of occult experience; it is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or at an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself, by identity.

It may be noted that the greater romantic poets did not shun thought; they thought abundantly, almost endlessly. They have their characteristic view of life, something that one might call their philosophy, their world-view, and they express it. Keats was the most romantic of poets, but he could write "To philosophise I dare not yet"; he did not write "I am too much of a poet to philosophise." To philosophise he regarded evidently as mounting on the admiral's flag-ship and flying an almost royal banner. Spiritual philosophic poetry is different; it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being and their action upon each other. Whatever language, whatever terms are necessary to convey this truth of vision and experience it uses without scruple or admitting any mental rule of what is or is not poetic. It does not hesitate to employ terms which might be considered as technical when these can be turned to express something direct, vivid and powerful. That need not be an introduction of technical jargon, that is to say, I suppose, special and artificial language, expressing in this case only abstract ideas and generalities without any living truth or reality in

them. Such jargon cannot make good literature, much less good poetry. But there is a 'poeticism' which establishes a sanitary cordon against words and ideas which it considers as prosaic but which properly used can strengthen poetry and extend its range. That limitation I do not admit as legitimate.

I am justifying a poet's right to think as well as to see and feel, his right to "dare to philosophise". I agree with the modernists in their revolt against the romanticist's insistence on emotionalism and his objection to thinking and philosophical reflection in poetry. But the modernist went too far in his revolt. In trying to avoid what I may call poeticism he ceased to be poetic, wishing to escape from rhetorical writing, rhetorical pretension to greatness and beauty of style, he threw out true poetic greatness and beauty, turned from a deliberately poetic style to a colloquial tone and even to very flat writing; especially he turned away from poetic rhythm to a prose or half-prose rhythm or to no rhythm at all. Also he has weighed too much on thought and has lost the habit of intuitive sight; by turning emotion out of its intimate chamber in the house of Poetry, he has had to bring in to relieve the dryness of much of his thought, too much exaggeration of the lower vital and sensational reactions untransformed or else transformed only by exaggeration. Nevertheless he has perhaps restored to the poet the freedom to think as well as to adopt a certain straightforwardness and directness of style.

Now I come to the law prohibiting repetition. This rule aims at a certain kind of intellectual elegance which comes into poetry when the poetic intelligence and the call for a refined and classical taste begin to predominate. It regards poetry as a cultured entertainment and amusement of the highly civilised mind; it interests by a faultless art of words, a constant and ingenious invention, a sustained novelty of ideas, incidents, word and phrase. An unfailling variety or the outward appearance of it is one of the elegances of this art. But all poetry is not of this kind; its rule does not apply to poets like Homer or Valmiki or other early writers. The Veda might almost be described as a mass of repetitions; so might the work of Vaishnava poets and the poetic literature of devotion generally in India. Arnold has noted this distinction when speaking of Homer; he mentioned especially that there is nothing objectionable in the close repetition of the same word in the Homeric way of writing. In many things Homer seems to make a point of repeating himself. He has stock descriptions, epithets always reiterated, lines even which are constantly repeated again and again when the same incident returns in his narrative, *e.g.*, the line

Doupēsen de pesōm arabēse de teu h' ep' autō

## MYSTIC POETRY

“Down with a thud he fell and his armour clangoured upon him”. He does not hesitate also to repeat the bulk of a line with a variation at the end, *e.g.*

Bē de kat' oulompōio karēnōn chōōmenos kēr  
And again the

Bē de kat' oulompōio karēnōn āixāsa

“Down from the peaks of Olympus he came wrath vexing his heart-strings” and again, “Down from the peaks of Olympus she came impetuously dashing.” He begins another line elsewhere with the same word and a similar action and with the same nature of a human movement physical and psychological in a scene of Nature, here a man's silent sorrow listening to the roar of the ocean:

Be d' akcōn para thīna poluphlois boio thalassēs

“Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured ocean”.

In mystic poetry also repetition is not objectionable; it is resorted to by many poets, sometimes with insistence. I may note as an example the constant repetition of the word *Ritam*, truth, sometimes eight or nine times in a short poem of nine or ten stanzas and often in the same line. This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. He uses *avvltt*, repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. Moreover, the object is not only to present a secret truth in its true form and true vision but to drive it home by the finding of the true word, the true phrase, the *mot juste*, the true image or symbol, if possible the inevitable word; if that is there, nothing else, repetition included, matters much. This is natural when the repetition is intended, serves a purpose; but it can hold even when the repetition is not deliberate but comes in naturally in the stream of the inspiration. I see, therefore, no objection to the recurrence of the same or similar image such as sea and ocean, sky and heaven in a lone long passage

## MYSTIC POETRY

provided each is the right thing and rightly worded in its place. The same rule applies to words, epithets, ideas. It is only if the repetition is clumsy or awkward, too burdensomely insistent, at once unneeded and inexpressive or amounts to a disagreeable and meaningless echo that it must be rejected.

### II

What you have written as the general theory of the matter seems to be correct and it does not differ substantially from what I wrote. But your phrase about unpurposeful repetition might carry a suggestion which I would not be able to accept; it might seem to indicate that the poet must have a "purpose" in whatever he writes and must be able to give a logical account of it to the critical intellect. That is surely not the way in which the poet or at least the mystic poet has to do his work. He does not himself deliberately choose or arrange word and rhythm but only sees it as it comes in the very act of inspiration. If there is any purpose of any kind, it also comes by and in the process of inspiration. He can criticise himself and the work; he can see whether it was a wrong or an inferior movement, he does not set about correcting it by any intellectual method but waits for the true thing to come in its place. He cannot always account to the logical intellect for what he has done; he feels or intuitively, and the reader or critic has to do the same.

\* \* \*

Obviously, the Overmind and aesthetics cannot be equated together. Aesthetics is concerned mainly with beauty, but more generally with *rasa*, the response of the mind, the vital feeling and the sense to a certain "taste" in things which often may be but is not necessarily a spiritual feeling. Aesthetics belong to the mental range and all that depends upon it; it may degenerate into aestheticism or may exaggerate or narrow itself into some version of the theory of "Art for Art's sake". The Overmind is essentially a spiritual power. Mind in it surpasses its ordinary self and rises and takes its stand on a spiritual foundation. It embraces beauty and sublimates it; it has an essential aesthesis which is not limited by rules and canons; it sees a universal and an eternal beauty while it takes up and transforms all that is limited and particular. It is besides concerned with things other than beauty or aesthetics. It is concerned especially with truth and knowledge or rather with a wisdom that exceeds what we call

knowledge; its truth goes beyond truth of fact and truth of thought, even the higher thought which is the first spiritual range of the thinker. It has the truth of spiritual thought, spiritual feeling, spiritual sense and at its highest the truth that comes by the most intimate spiritual touch or by identity. Ultimately, truth and beauty come together and coincide, but in between there is a difference. Overmind in all its dealings puts truth first; it brings out the essential truth (and truths) in things and also its infinite possibilities; it brings out even the truth that lies behind falsehood and error; it brings out the truth of the Inconscient and the truth of the Superconscient and all that lies in between. When it speaks through poetry, this remains its first essential quality; a limited aesthetical artistic aim is not its purpose. It can take up and uplift any or every style or at least put some stamp of itself upon it. More or less all that we have called Overhead poetry has something of this character whether it be from the Overmind or simply intuitive, illumined or strong with the strength of the higher revealing Thought; even when it is not intrinsically Overhead poetry, still some touch can come in. Even Overhead poetry itself does not always deal in what is new or striking or strange; it can take up the obvious the common, the bare and even the bald, the old, even that which without it would seem stale and hackneyed and raise it to greatness. Take the lines:

*I spoke as one who ne'er would speak again  
And as a dying man to dying men.*

The writer is not a poet, not even a conspicuously talented versifier. The statement of the thought is bare and direct and the rhetorical device used is of the simplest, but the Overhead touch somehow got in through a passionate emotion and sincerity and is unmistakable. In all poetry a poetical aesthesis of some kind there must be in the writer and the recipient; but aesthetics is of many kinds and the ordinary kind is not sufficient for appreciating the Overhead element in poetry. A fundamental and universal aesthesis is needed, something also more intense that listens, sees and feels from deep within and answers to what is far behind the surface. A greater, wider and deeper aesthesis than which can answer even to the transcendent and feel too whatever of the transcendent or spiritual enters into the things of life, mind and sense.

The business of the critical intellect is to appreciate and judge and here too it must judge; but it can judge and appreciate rightly here only if it first learns to see and sense inwardly and interpret. But it is dangerous for it to lay down its own laws or even laws and

## MYSTIC POETRY

rules which it thinks it can deduce from some observed practice of the Overhead inspiration and use that to wall in the inspiration; for it runs the risk of seeing the Overhead inspiration step across its wall and pass on leaving it bewildered and at a loss. The mere critical intellect not touched by a rarer sight can do little here. We can take an extreme case, for in extreme cases certain incompatibilities come out more clearly. What might be called the Johnsonian critical method has obviously little or no place in this field,—the method which expects a precise logical order in thoughts and language and pecks at all that departs from a matter-of-fact or a strict and rational ideative coherence or a sober and restrained classical taste. Johnson himself is plainly out of his element when he deals crudely with one of Gray's delicate trifles and tangles and flounders about in the poet's basin of goldfish breaking it with his heavy and vicious kicks. But also this method is useless in dealing with any kind of romantic poetry. What would the Johnsonian critic say to Shakespeare's famous lines

*O! take up arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them . . . .*

He would say, "What a mixture of metaphors and jumble of ideas! Only a lunatic could take up arms against a sea! A sea of troubles is a too fanciful metaphor and, in any case, one can't end the sea by opposing it, it is more likely to end you." Shakespeare knew very well what he was doing; he saw the mixture as well as any critic could and he accepted it because it brought home, with an inspired force which a neater language could not have had, the exact feeling and idea that he wanted to bring out. Still more scared would the Johnsonian be by any occult or mystic poetry. The Veda, for instance, uses with what seems like a deliberate recklessness the mixture, at least, the association of disparate images, of things not associated together in the material world which in Shakespeare is only an occasional departure. What would the Johnsonian make of this *Rik* in the Veda: "That splendour of thee, O Fire, which is in heaven and in the earth and in the plants and in the waters and by which thou hast spread out the wide mid-air, is a vivid ocean of light which sees with a divine seeing"? He would say, "What is this nonsense? How can there be a splendour of light in plants and in water and how can an ocean of light see divinely or otherwise? Anyhow, what meaning can there be in all this, it is a senseless mystical jargon." But, apart from these extremes, the mere critical intellect is likely to feel a distaste or an incomprehension with mystical poetry

even if that poetry is quite coherent in its ideas and well-appointed in its language. It will be bound to stumble over all sorts of things that are contrary to its reason and offensive to its taste, association of contraries, excess or abruptness or crowding of images, disregard of intellectual limitations in the thought, concretisation of abstractions, the treating of things and forces as if there were a consciousness and a personality in them and a hundred other aberrations from the straight intellectual line. It is not likely either to tolerate departures in technique which disregard the canons of an established order. Fortunately here the modernists with all their errors have broken old bounds and the mystic poet may be more free to invent his own technique.

### III

Something more might need to be said in regard to the overhead note in poetry and the overmind aesthesis; but these are exactly the subjects on which it is difficult to write with any precision or satisfy the intellect's demand for clear and positive statement.

I do not know that it is possible for me to say why I regard one line or passage as having the overhead touch or the overhead note while another misses it. When I said that in the lines about the dying man the touch came in through some intense passion and sincerity in the writer, I was simply mentioning the psychological door through which the thing came. I did not mean to suggest that such passion and sincerity could of itself bring in the touch or that they constituted the overhead note in the lines. I am afraid I have to say what Arnold said about the grand style; it has to be felt and cannot be explained or accounted for. One has an intuitive feeling, a recognition of something familiar to one's experience or one's deeper perception in the substance and the rhythm or in one or the other which rings out and cannot be gainsaid. One might put forward a theory or a description of what the Overhead character of the line consists in, but it is doubtful whether these could be always applicable. You speak, for instance, of the sense of the Infinite and the One which is pervasive in the Overhead planes; that need not be explicitly there in the overhead poetic expression or in the substance of any given line: it can be expressed indeed by overhead poetry as no other can express it, but this poetry can deal with quite other things. I would certainly say that Shakespeare's lines

## MYSTIC POETRY

Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

have the overhead touch in the substance, the rhythm and the feeling; but Shakespeare is not giving us here the sense of the One and the Infinite. He is as in the other lines of his which have this note, dealing as he always does with life, with vital emotions and reactions or the thoughts that spring out in the life-mind under the pressure of life. It is not any strict adhesion to a transcendental view of things that constitutes this kind of poetry, but something behind not belonging to the mind or the vital and physical consciousness and with that a certain quality or power in the language and the rhythm which helps to bring out that deeper something. If I had to select the line in European poetry which most suggests an almost direct descent from the overmind consciousness there might come first Virgil's line about "the touch of tears in mortal things":

Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.

Another might be Shakespeare's

In the dark backward and abysm of Time

or again Milton's

Those thoughts that wander through eternity.

We might also add Wordsworth's line

The winds come to me from the fields of sleep.

There are others less ideative and more emotional or simply descriptive which might be added, such as Marlowe's

Is this the face that launched a thousand ships

And burnt the topless towers of Iliou?

If we could extract and describe the quality and the subtle something that mark the language and rhythm and feeling of these lines and underlie their substance we might attain hazardously to some mental understanding of the nature of overhead poetry.

The Overmind is not strictly a transcendental consciousness, that epithet would more accurately apply to the supramental and to the Sachchidananda consciousness—though it looks up to the transcendental and may receive something from it and though it does transcend the ordinary human consciousness and in its full and native self-power, when it does not lean down and become part of mind, is superconscious to us. It is more properly a cosmic consciousness, even the very base of the cosmic as we perceive, understand or feel it. It stands behind every particular in the cosmos and is the source of all our mental, vital or physical actualities and possibilities which are diminished and degraded derivations and variations from

it and have not, except in certain formations and activities of genius and some intense self-exceeding, anything of the native overmind quality and power. Nevertheless, because it stands behind as if covered by a veil, something of it can break through or shine through or even only dimly glimmer through and that brings the overmind touch or note. We cannot get this touch frequently unless we have torn the veil, made a gap in it or rent it largely away and seen the very face of what is beyond lived in the light of it or established some kind of constant intercourse. Or we can draw upon it from time to time without ever ascending into it if we have established a line of communication between the higher and the ordinary consciousness. What comes down may be very much diminished but it has something of that. The ordinary reader of poetry who has not that experience will usually not be able to distinguish but would at the most feel that here is something extraordinarily fine, profound, sublime or unusual, —or he might turn away from it as something too high pitched and excessive; he might even speak depreciatingly of “purple passages”, rhetoric, exaggeration or excess. One who had the line of communication open, could on the other hand feel what is there and distinguish even if he could not adequately characterise or describe it. The essential character is perhaps that there is something behind of which I have already spoken and which comes not primarily from the mind or the vital emotion or the physical seeing but from the cosmic self and its consciousness standing behind them all and things then tend to be seen not as the mind or heart or body sees them but as this greater consciousness feels or sees or answers to them. In the direct overmind transmission this something behind is usually forced to the front or close to the front by a combination of words which carries the suggestion of a deeper meaning or by the force of an image or, most of all, by an intonation and a rhythm which carry up the depths in their wide wash or long march or mounting surge. Sometimes it is left lurking behind and only suggested so that a subtle feeling of what is not actually expressed is needed if the reader is not to miss it. This is oftenest the case when there is just a touch or note pressed upon something that would be otherwise only of a mental, vital or physical poetic value and nothing of the body of the overhead power shows itself through the veil, but at most a tremor and vibration, a gleam or a glimpse. In the lines I have chosen there is always an unusual quality in the rhythm, as prominently in Virgil’s line, often in the very building and constantly in the intonation and the association of the sounds which meet in the line and find themselves linked together by a sort of inevitable felicity. There is also an inspired



limpidly straight from the psychic source. The same characteristics are found in another short lyric of Shelley's which is perhaps the purest example of the psychic inspiration in English poetry:

I can give not what men call love,  
 But wilt thou accept not  
 The worship the heart lifts above  
 And the heavens reject not,—

The desire of the moth for the star,  
 Of the night for the morrow,  
 The devotion to something afar  
 From the sphere of our sorrow.

We have again extreme poetic beauty there, but nothing of the overhead note.

In the other lines I have cited it is really the overmind language and rhythm that have been to some extent transmitted; but of course all overhead poetry is not from the Overmind, more often it comes from the higher thought, the illumined mind or the pure intuition. This last is different from the mental intuition which is frequent enough in poetry from the mental level. The language and rhythm from these other overhead levels can be very different from that which is proper to the Overmind; for the Overmind thinks in a mass; its thought, feeling, vision is high or deep or wide or all these things together: to use the Vedic expression about fire, the divine messenger, it goes vast on its way to bring the divine riches, and it has a corresponding language and rhythm. The higher thought has a strong tread often with bare unsandaled feet and moves in a clear-cut light: a divine power, measure, dignity is its most frequent character. The outflow of the illumined mind comes in a flow brilliant with revealing words or a light of crowding images, sometimes surcharged with its burden of revelations, sometimes with a luminous sweep. The intuition is usually a lightning flash showing up a single spot or plot of ground or scene with an entire and miraculous completeness of vision to the surprised ecstasy of the inner eye; its rhythm has a decisive inevitable sound which leaves nothing essential unheard, but very commonly is embodied in a single stroke. These however are only general or dominant characters; any number of variations is possible. There are besides mingled inspirations, several levels meeting and combining or modifying each other's notes, and an overmind transmission can contain or bring with it all the rest, but how much

## MYSTIC POETRY

of this description will be to the ordinary reader of poetry at all intelligible or clearly identifiable?

There are besides in mental poetry derivations or substitutes for all these styles. Milton's "grand style" is such a substitute for the manner of the Higher Thought. Take it anywhere at its ordinary level or in its higher elevation, there is always or almost always that echo there:

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree

or

On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues

or

Blind Thamyras and blind Maenides  
And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old.

Shakespeare's poetry coruscates with a play of the hues of imagination which we may regard as a mental substitute for the inspiration of the illumined mind and sometimes by aiming at an exalted note he links on to the illumined overhead inspiration itself as in the lines I have more than once quoted:

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
Seal up the shipboy's eyes and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge?

But the rest of that passage falls away in spite of its high-pitched language and resonant rhythm far below the overhead strain. So it is easy for the mind to mistake and take the higher for the lower inspiration or *vice versa*. Thus Milton's lines might at first sight be taken because of a certain depth of emotion in their large lingering rhythm as having the overhead complexion, but this rhythm loses something of its sovereign right because there are no depths of sense behind it. It conveys nothing but the noble and dignified pathos, of the blindness and old age of a great personality fallen into evil days. Milton's architecture of thought and verse is high and powerful and massive, but there are usually no subtle echoes there, no deep chambers: the occult things in man's being are foreign to his intelligence,—for it is in the light of the poetic intelligence that he works. He does not stray into "the mystic cavern of the heart", does not follow the inner fire entering like a thief with the Cow of Light into the secrecy of secrecies. Shakespeare does sometimes get in as if by a splendid

psychic accident in spite of his preoccupation with the colours and shows of life.

I do not know therefore whether I can speak with any certainty about the lines you quote; I would perhaps have to read them in their context first, but it seems to me that there is just a touch, as in the lines about the dying man. The thing that is described there may have happened often enough in times like those of the recent wars and upheavals and in times of violent strife and persecution and catastrophe, but the greatness of the experience does not come out or not wholly, because men feel with the mind and heart and not with the soul; but here there is by some accident of wording and rhythm a suggestion of something behind, of the greatness of the soul's experience and its courageous acceptance of the tragic, the final, the fatal—and its resistance; it is only just a suggestion, but it is enough: the Overhead has touched and passed back to its heights. There is something very different but of the same essential calibre in the line you quote—

Sad eyes waiting for feet that never come.

It is still more difficult to say anything very tangible about the Overmind aesthesis. When I wrote about it I was thinking of the static aesthesis that perceives and receives rather than of the dynamic aesthesis which creates; I was not thinking at all of superior or inferior grades of poetic greatness or beauty. If the complete Overmind power or even that of the lower Overhead plane could come down into the mind and entirely transform its action, then no doubt there might be greater poetry written than any that man has yet achieved. Just as a greater superhuman life might be created if the supermind could come down wholly into life and lift life wholly into itself and transform it. But what happens at present is that something comes down and accepts to work under the law of the mind and with a mixture of the mind and it must be judged by the laws and standards of the mind. It brings in new tones, new colours, new elements, but it does not change radically as yet the stuff of the consciousness with which we labour. Whether it produces great poetry or not depends on the extent to which it manifests its power and over-rides rather than serves the mentality which it is helping. At present it does not do that sufficiently to raise the work to the full greatness of the worker.

And then what do you mean exactly by greatness in poetry? One can say that Virgil is greater than Catallus and that many of Virgil's lines are greater than anything Catallus ever achieved. But poetical perfection is not the same thing as poetical greatness. Virgil is perfect at his best, but Catallus too is perfect at his best: even, each has a

## MYSTIC POETRY

certain exquisiteness of perfection, each in his own kind. Virgil's kind is large and deep, that of Catallus sweet and intense. Virgil's art reached or had from its beginning a greater and more constant ripeness than that of Catallus. We can say then that Virgil was a greater poet and artist of word and rhythm but we cannot say that his poetry, at his best, was more perfect poetry and that of Catallus less perfect. That renders futile many of the attempts at comparison like Arnold's comparison of Wordsworth's skylark with Shelley. You may say that Milton was a greater poet than Blake, but there can always be people, not aesthetically insensitive, who would prefer Blake's lyrical work to Milton's grander achievement, and there are certainly things in Blake which touch deeper chords than the massive hand of Milton could ever reach. So all poetic superiority is not summed up in the word greatness. Each kind has his own best which escapes from comparison and stands apart in its own value.

Let us then leave for the present the question of poetic greatness or superiority aside and come back to the Overmind aesthesis. By aesthesis is meant a reaction of the consciousness mental and vital and even bodily which receives a certain element in things, something that can be called their taste, *rasa*, which passing through the mind or sense or both awakes a vital enjoyment of the taste, *bhoga*, and this can again awaken us, awaken even the soul in us to something yet deeper and more fundamental than mere pleasure and enjoyment, to some form of the spirit's delight of existence, Ananda. Poetry, like all art, serves the seeking for these things, this aesthesis, this *Rasa*, *Bhoga*, Ananda; it brings us a *Rasa* of word and sound but also of the idea and, through the idea, of the things expressed by the word and sound and thought, a mental or vital or sometimes the spiritual image of their form, quality, impact upon us or even, if the poet is strong enough, of their world-essence, their cosmic reality, the very soul of them, the spirit that resides in them as it resides in all things. Poetry may do more than this, but this at least it must do to however small an extent or it is not poetry. Aesthesis therefore is of the very essence of poetry, as it is of all art. But it is not the sole element and aesthesis too is not confined to a reception of poetry and art; it extends to everything in the world: there is nothing we can sense, think or in any way experience to which there cannot be an aesthetic reaction of our conscious being. Ordinarily, we suppose that aesthesis is concerned with beauty, and that indeed is its most prominent concern: but it is concerned with many other things also. It is the universal Ananda that is the parent of aesthesis and the universal Ananda takes three major and original forms, beauty, love and delight, the delight of all existence, the delight in things, in all things. Universal Ananda

is the artist and creator of the universe witnessing, experiencing and taking joy in its creation. In the lower consciousness it creates its opposites, the sense of ugliness as well as the sense of beauty, hate and repulsion and dislike as well as love and attraction and liking, grief and pain as well as joy and delight; and between these dualities or as a grey tint in the background there is a general tone of neutrality and indifference born from the universal insensibility into which the Ananda sinks in its dark negation in the Inconscient. All this is the sphere of aesthesis, its dullest reaction is indifference, its highest is ecstasy. Ecstasy is a sign of a return towards the original or supreme Ananda: that art or poetry is supreme which can bring us something of the supreme tone of ecstasy. For as the consciousness sinks from the supreme levels through various degrees towards the Inconscience the general sign of this descent is an always diminishing power of its intensity, intensity of being, intensity of consciousness, intensity of force, intensity of the delight in things and the delight of existence. So too as we ascend towards the supreme level these intensities increase. As we climb beyond Mind, higher and wider values replace the values of our limited mind, life and bodily consciousness. Aesthesis shares in this intensification of capacity. The capacity for pleasure and pain, for liking and disliking is comparatively poor on the level of our mind and life; our capacity for ecstasy is brief and limited; these tones arise from a general ground of neutrality which is always dragging them back towards itself. As it enters the overhead planes the ordinary aesthesis turns into a pure delight and becomes capable of a high, a large or a deep abiding ecstasy. The ground is no longer a general neutrality, but a pure spiritual ease and happiness upon which the special tones of the aesthetic consciousness come out or from which they arise. This is the first fundamental change.

Another change in this transition is a turn towards universality in place of the isolations, the conflicting generalities, the mutually opposing dualities of the lower consciousness. In the Overmind we have a first firm foundation of the experience of a universal beauty, a universal love, a universal delight. These things can come on the mental and vital plane even before those planes are directly touched or influenced by the spiritual consciousness; but they are there a temporary experience and not permanent or they are limited in their field and do not touch the whole being. They are a glimpse and not a change of vision or a change of nature. The artist for instance can look at things only plain or shabby or ugly or even repulsive to the ordinary sense and see in them and bring out of them beauty and the delight that goes with beauty. But this is a sort of special

## MYSTIC POETRY

grace for the artistic consciousness and is limited within the field of his art. In the Overhead consciousness, especially in the Overmind, these things become more and more the law of the vision and the law of the nature. Wherever the overmind spiritual man turns he sees a universal beauty touching and uplifting all things, expressing itself through them, moulding them into a field or objects of its divine aesthesis; a universal love goes out from him to all beings; he feels the Bliss which has created the worlds and upholds them and all that is expresses to him the universal delight, is made of it, is a manifestation of it and moulded into its image. This universal aesthesis of beauty and delight does not ignore or fail to understand the differences and oppositions, the gradations, the harmony and disharmony obvious to the ordinary consciousness: but, first of all, it draws a *rasa* from them and with that comes the enjoyment, *bhoga*, and the touch or the mass of the *Ananda*. It sees that all things have their meaning, their value, their deeper or total significance which the mind does not see, for the mind is only concerned with a surface vision, surface contacts and its own surface reactions. When something expresses perfectly what it was meant to express, the completeness brings with it a sense of harmony, a sense of artistic perfection; it gives even to what is discordant a place in a system of cosmic concordances and the discords become part of a vast harmony, and wherever there is harmony, there is a sense of beauty. Even in form itself, apart from the significance, the Overmind consciousness sees with a totality which changes its effect on the percipient even while it remains the same thing. It sees lines and masses and an underlying design which the physical eye does not see and which escapes even the keenest mental vision. Every form becomes beautiful to it in a deeper and larger sense of beauty than that commonly known to us. The Overmind looks also straight at and into the soul of each thing and not only at its form or its significance to the mind or to the life; this brings to it not only the true truth of the thing but the delight of it. It sees also the one spirit in all, the face of the Divine everywhere and there can be no greater *Ananda* than that; it feels oneness with all, sympathy, love, the bliss of the Brahman. In a highest, a most integral experience it sees all things as if made of existence, consciousness, power, bliss, every atom of them charged with and constituted of *Sachchidananda*. In all this the overmind aesthesis takes its share and gives its response; for these things come not merely as an idea in the mind or a truth-seeing but as an experience of the whole being and a total response is not only possible but above a certain level imperative.

I have said that aesthesis responds not only to what we call beauty

and beautiful things but to all things. We make a distinction between truth and beauty; but there can be an aesthetic response to truth also, a joy in its beauty, a love created by its charm, a rapture in the finding, a passion in the embrace, an aesthetic joy in its expression, a satisfaction of love in the giving of it to others. Truth is not merely a dry statement of facts or ideas to or by the intellect; it can be a splendid discovery, a rapturous revelation, a thing of beauty that is a joy for ever. The poet also can be a seeker and lover of truth as well as a seeker and lover of beauty. He can feel a poetic and aesthetic joy in the expression of the true as well as in the expression of the beautiful. He does not make a mere intellectual or philosophical statement of the truth; it is his vision of its beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm. If he has the passion, then even a philosophical statement of it he can surcharge with this sense of power, force, light, beauty. On certain levels of the Overmind, where the mind element predominates over the element of gnosis, the distinction between truth and beauty is still valid. It is indeed one of the chief functions of the Overmind to separate the main powers of the consciousness and give to each its full separate development and satisfaction, bring out its utmost potency and meaning, its own soul and significant body and take it on its own way as far as it can go. It can take up each power of man and give it its full potentiality, its highest characteristic development. It can give to intellect its austere intellectuality and to logic its most sheer unsparing logicity. It can give to beauty its most splendid passion of luminous form and the consciousness that receives it a supreme height and depth of ecstasy. It can create a sheer and pure poetry impossible for the intellect to sound to its depths or wholly grasp much less to mentalise and analyse. It is the function of Overmind to give to every possibility its full potential, its own separate kingdom. But also there is another action of Overmind which sees and thinks and creates in masses, which reunites separated things, which reconciles opposites. On that level truth and beauty not only become constant companions but become one, involved in each other, inseparable: on that level the true is always beautiful and the beautiful is always true. Their highest fusion perhaps only takes place in the Supermind; but Overmind on its summits draws enough of the supramental light to see what the Supermind sees and do what the Supermind does though in a lower key and with a less absolute truth and power. On an inferior level Overmind may use the language of the intellect to convey as far as that language can do it its own greater meaning and message but on

## MYSTIC POETRY

its summits Overmind uses its own native language and gives to its truths their own supreme utterance and no intellectual speech, no mentalised poetry can equal or even come near to that power and beauty. Here your intellectual dictum that poetry lives by its aesthetic quality alone and has no need of truth or that truth must depend upon aesthetics to become poetic at all, has no longer any meaning. For there truth itself is highest poetry and has only to appear to be utterly beautiful to the vision, the hearing, the sensibility of the soul. There dwells and from there springs the mystery of the inevitable word, the supreme immortal rhythm, the absolute significance and the absolute utterance.

I hope you do not feel crushed under this avalanche of metaphysical psychology; you have called it upon yourself by your questioning about the Overmind's greater, larger and deeper aesthesis. What I have written is indeed very scanty and sketchy, only some of the few essential things that have to be said; but without it I could not try to give you any glimpse of the meaning of my phrase. This greater aesthesis is inseparable from the greater truth, it is deeper because of the depth of that truth, larger by all its immense largeness. I do not expect the reader of poetry to come anywhere near to all that, he could not without being a Yogi or at least a sadhak: but just as the overhead poetry brings some touch of a deeper power of vision and creation into the mind without belonging itself wholly to the higher reaches, so also the full appreciation of all its burden needs at least some touch of a deeper response of the mind and some touch of a deeper aesthesis. Until that becomes general the Overhead or at least the Overmind is not going to do more than to touch here and there as it did in the past, a few lines, a few passages, or perhaps as things advance, a little more, nor is it likely to pour into our utterance its own complete power and absolute value.

I have said that overhead poetry is not necessarily greater or more perfect than any other kind of poetry. But perhaps a subtle qualification may be made to this statement. It is true that each kind of poetical writing can reach a highest or perfect perfection in its own line and in its own quality and what can be more perfect than a perfect perfection or can we say that one kind of absolute perfection is "greater" than another kind? What can be more absolute than the absolute? But then what do we mean by the perfection of poetry? There is the perfection of the language and there is the perfection of the word-music and the rhythm, beauty of speech and beauty of sound, but there is also the quality of the thing said which counts for something. If we consider only word and sound and what in themselves they evoke, we arrive at the application of the theory of

art for art's sake to poetry. On that ground we might say that a lyric of Anacreon is as good poetry and as perfect poetry as anything in Aeschylus or Sophocles or Homer. The question of the elevation or depth or intrinsic beauty of the thing said cannot then enter into our consideration of poetry; and yet it does enter, with most of us at any rate, and is part of the aesthetic reaction even in the most "aesthetic" of critics and readers. From this point of view the elevation from which the inspiration comes may after all matter, provided the one who receives it is a fit and powerful instrument; for a great poet will do more with a lower level of the origin of inspiration than a smaller poet can do even when helped from the highest sources. In a certain sense all genius comes from Overhead; for genius is the entry or inrush of a greater consciousness into the mind or a possession of the mind by a greater power. Every operation of genius has at its back or infused within it an intuition, a revelation, an inspiration, an illumination or at the least a hint or touch or influx from some greater power or level of conscious being than those which men ordinarily possess or use. But this power has two ways of acting: in one it touches the ordinary modes of mind and deepens, heightens, intensifies or exquisitely refines their action but without changing its modes or transforming its normal character; in the other it brings down into these normal modes something of itself, something supernormal, something which one at once feels to be extraordinary and suggestive of a superhuman level. These two ways of action when working in poetry may produce things equally exquisite and beautiful, but the word "greater" may perhaps be applied, with the necessary qualifications, to the second way and its too rare poetic creation.

The great bulk of the highest poetry belongs to the first of these two orders. In the second order there are again two or perhaps three levels; sometimes a felicitous turn or an unusual force of language or a deeper note of feeling brings in the overhead touch. More often it is the power of the rhythm that lifts up language that is simple and common or a feeling or idea that has often been expressed and awake something which is not ordinarily there. If one listens with the mind only or from the vital centre only, one may have a wondering admiration for the skill and beauty of woven word and sound or be struck by the happy way or the power with which the feeling or idea is expressed. But there is something more in it than that; it is this that a deeper, more inward strand of the consciousness has seen and is speaking, and if we listen more profoundly we can get something more than the admiration and delight of the mind or Housman's thrill of the solar plexus. We can feel perhaps the

## MYSTIC POETRY

Spirit of the universe lending its own depth to our mortal speech  
or listening from behind to some expression of itself, listening  
perhaps to its memories of

Old unhappy far-off things  
And battles long ago

or feeling and hearing it may be said the vast oceanic stillness and  
the cry of the cuckoo

Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides

or it may enter again into Vyasa's "A void and dreadful forest ringing  
with the crickets' cry"

Vanam pratibhayam śūṇyam jhillikagaṇanāditam

or remember its call to the soul of man

Anityam asukham lokam imam pṛāpya bhajasva mām

"Thou who hast come to this transient and unhappy world, love and worship Me." There is a second level on which the poetry draws into itself a fuller language of intuitive inspiration, illumination or the higher thinking and feeling. A very rich or great poetry may then emerge and many of the most powerful passages in Shakespeare, Virgil or Lucretius or the Mahabharata and Ramayana, not to speak of the Gita, the Upanishads or the Rig Veda have this inspiration. It is a poetry "thick inlaid with patines of bright gold" or welling up in a stream of passion, beauty and force. But sometimes there comes down a supreme voice, the overmind voice and the overmind music and it is to be observed that the lines and passages where that happens rank among the greatest and most admired in all poetic literature. It would be therefore too much to say that the overhead inspiration cannot bring in a greatness into poetry which could surpass the other levels of inspiration, greater even from the purely aesthetic point of view and certainly greater in the power of its substance.

A conscious attempt to write overhead poetry with a mind aware of the planes from which this inspiration comes and seeking always to ascend to those levels or bring down something from them, would probably result in a partial success; at its lowest it might attain to what I have called the first order, ordinarily it would achieve the

two lower levels of the second order and in its supreme moments it might in lines and in sustained passages achieve the supreme level, something of the highest summit of its potency. But its greatest work will be to express adequately and constantly what is now only occasionally and inadequately some kind of utterance of the things above, the things beyond, the things behind the apparent world and its external or superficial happenings and phenomena. It would not only bring in the occult in its larger and deeper ranges but the truths of the spiritual heights, the spiritual depths, the spiritual intimacies and vastnesses as also the truths of the inner mind, the inner life, an inner or subtle physical beauty and reality. It would bring in the concreteness, the authentic image, the inmost soul of identity and the heart of meaning of these things, so that it could never lack in beauty. If this could be achieved by one possessed, if not of a supreme still of a sufficiently high and wide poetic genius, something new could be added to the domain of poetry and there would be no danger of the power of poetry beginning to fade, to fall into decadence, to fail us. It might even enter into the domain of the infinite and inexhaustible, catch some word of the Ineffable, show us revealing images which bring us near to the Reality that is secret in us and in all of which the Upanishad speaks.

Anejad ekam manaso javīyo nainad devā āpnuvan pūrvam  
arshat . . . .

Tad ejaṭi tan naijaṭi tad dūre tad u antike

“The One unmoving is swifter than thought, the gods cannot overtake It, for It travels ever in front; It moves and It moves not, It is far away from us and It is very close.”

The gods of the Overhead planes can do much to bridge that distance and to bring out that closeness, even if they cannot altogether overtake the Reality that exceeds and transcends them.

*Sri Aurobindo*











