THE POETIC GENIUS *of* SRI AUROBINDO

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PROLOGUE

How shall we crown Sri Aurobindo? Is he greater as a Yogi than as a philosopher? Does the literary critic in him outtop the sociological thinker? Does he shine brighter as a politician or as a poet? It is difficult to decide. Everywhere Mount Everest seems to face Mount Everest. But when we study this Himalaya of various extremes of height, the first eminence that strikes us is Sri Aurobindo the poet. Even in his teens the Muse had touched his lips and drawn from them the perfect note, at once exquisite and grand, with apt imaginative suggestion running from phrase to phrase:

> Love, a moment drop thy hands;
> Night within my soul expands.
> Veil thy beauties milk-rose-fair
> In that dark and showering hair. . . .

To be a born poet, however, does not ensure a uniform heat and light in each part of one's work. And they can be lacking even in spite of the thought being pithy and the language dignified or graceful. Weighty substance and well-ordered speech do not by themselves make first-rate poetry. A vividly worded vision, an expressively rhythmed emotion—these are what we want. When they are not often at play, the work must tend to grow tame. Though the mark of the skilled artist may be

evident, I dare say Sri Aurobindo does not escape a semi-tameness in certain scattered patches where the philosophical intellect mixes a somewhat dry breath with the flame and flush of the inner *enthousiasmos*. But whoever takes a global view of his achievement cannot help feeling that no amount of critical carping will leave him less than a poetic giant.

On the brows of this giant we must place a crown of triple triumph. For, Sri Aurobindo has done three exceedingly rare things. First, he has to his credit a bulk of excellent blank verse—a statement possible about poets we can count on our fingers. At least five thousand lines in the *Collected Poems and Plays* published a few years back are a diversely modulated beauty and power with no appreciable fall below a fine adequacy and with peak after peak of superb frenzy. They put him cheek by jowl with Keats in both essence and amount. The huge epic *Savitri*, still unfinished, is a marvel which places him at once in the company of the absolute top-rankers by a sustained abundance of first-rate quality. Add to living lengths of blank verse a large number of sublime or delicate shorter pieces, mostly in rhyme, and we have a further testimony to Sri Aurobindo's creativeness. But what is of extraordinary import is that among them we have a body of successful work in a medium that has eluded English poets: quantitative metre. Sri Aurobindo has solved once for all the problem of quantity in English—a feat which gives the language "a brave new world" of poetic effects, a revelation of strange rhythm-moulds of the inspired consciousness. Quantitative metre is the second tier in Sri Aurobindo's poetic crown. The third is not merely a revelation of strange

rhythm-moulds, but also the laying bare of a rhythmic life beyond the ranges of inspired consciousness to which we have been so far accustomed. To bring the epic surge or the lyric stream of the quantitative metres of Greece and Rome into English is not necessarily to go psychologically beyond the ranges of inspiration we find in the epic or lyric moods of England. It could very well be just an opening up of fresh movements on psychological planes already possessed by those moods. Over and above opening up such movements Sri Aurobindo discloses planes that have been secret hitherto except for stray lines here and there, occurring as if by a luminous accident. Only the ancient Vedas and Upanishads embody with anything like a royal freedom these ranges of mystical and spiritual being, hidden beyond the deepest plunge and highest leap of intuition known to the great masters. Sri Aurobindo stands as the creator of a new Vedic and Upanishadic age of poetry.

Three tiers I have distinguished in the Aurobindonian crown. But it would be wrong to think of them as sharply distinct. For, the third includes the characteristics of the two others: the Vedic and Upanishadic inspiration constituting it is caught to a considerable degree in quantitative metres and to an even larger extent in blank verse. However, when treating it we have to concentrate more on the speciality of the sheer expression-stuff of its unique planes than on its quantitative scheme or its blank-verse form. So, in treating the two other tiers it will be more appropriate to confine ourselves to poems not directly concerned with Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. The blank verse best suited for separate study is, therefore, some part of that

which he wrote in his early life, while the separate study of his quantitative poetry is best kept to his masterful handling of a Greek theme in the central and most difficult of all quantitative patterns inherited from Europe's antiquity, the hexameter.

Here probably it will be said: "Sri Aurobindo may be a fine practitioner of blank verse, the quantitative hexameter and spiritual poetry resembling the Vedas and Upanishads. But what bearing has such work on concrete life? Is he a dynamic help in our problems?" Well, it would be absurd to regard the Vedas and Upanishads as academic exercises or else gospels of escapism. They are passionately alive and seek the solution of life's most acute problem—mortal ignorance that is responsible for all our errors, weaknesses, depravities, divisions. Their solution rests on what they recognise as the central fact of the universe—the Divine; and they aim at the flowering of the Divine in the human by a process of Yoga. If we are inclined to look upon their poetry's vision as chimerical and upon its emotion as issueless for moderns, it is well to note that Jung who is our most comprehensive typically modern mind-explorer has attempted to co-ordinate the psycho-analytic integration of personality with the Yogic process and that T. S. Eliot who is said to be the chief shaper of the modern poetic impulse has not fought shy of the mystic's Dark Night of the Soul:

> I said to my soul be still and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God.

Sri Aurobindo outdoes the ancient Indian scriptures in the aspiration to suffuse and transform earth's

life with the Golden Immortal the Rishis saw everywhere pressing for manifestation. And in his care to get the aching externals into harmony by some power from within, his concern about the poor unfulfilled trivialities that are divorced from the deep springs of our consciousness, he outdoes also the modernism of Eliot no less than Jung. His main poetic work lies along this line of potent synthesis of the outermost and the innermost: so he can scarcely be put by as an anaemic denizen of dreamland fashioning clever patterns of remote sound. His hexameters too are not bare technique: they are vital, they are a body of novel construction found at length in a modern tongue to match that of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* for a new searching of human hearts and mortal fortunes. To deal with a Greek theme is not to be antiquated or obsolete. Much depends on the inner substance of the theme: when we open Herodotus or Thucydides, Plato or Aristotle, Aeschylus or Sophocles, we often light on "modern" figures, situations and attitudes, for the world-drama has many motifs common to its several acts. Besides, we must not forget that Sri Aurobindo is no scholar shut up in the past: he mixes with his insight into vanished times a broad and multifarious knowledge of contemporary living and thinking and this would subtly impregnate any theme he might adopt. The blank verse we shall select and scrutinise was written in his youth and in the comparative seclusion of the Baroda State service taken up by him on return from Cambridge. Yet, even here there is a puissant pulse and a vibrant complexity of perception within a chosen orbit, and while the "translunary things" without which poetry cannot exist are perhaps made here more kin than elsewhere to the dreamy and the fictitious

by being enveloped totally in mythological stories, the faces that move in these stories are like our own and our own heart-beats are heard and the imaged ideas are caught like flames within our own minds and illuminate the problems of desire and action that close upon us day after day.

Of course, it is not only the contents of Sri Aurobindo's poetry that we must occupy ourselves with. Manner and technique, the creation of outer form, are of paramount importance in art, and when we appreciate art we must approach the "what" of expression primarily through the "how". Unless the "how" stands in the forefront for the critical consciousness we shall miss the specific cultural influence which poetry brings. Poetry affects us by treating words not just as counters for significance and experience but also as types of sound-texture and sound-volume and as elements of design: it conveys the feel and rhythm of words and a sense of verbal patterning together with what the words express and it conveys significance and experience markedly if not mainly through this feel and rhythm and this patterning. Further, as long as the verbal body is beautifully intense with an inner glow, poetry fulfils its function for one who is receptive in the right cultural way: the nature of the "message" does not add to or detract from its essential quality. No doubt, it must have sufficient vision and emotion, but their social or anti-social character, their moral or hedonistic turn, their open-eyed or misty orientation, their optimism or pessimism do not directly determine whether it is first-rate or no. Hence to speak of Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius and not dwell upon the manner and technique and outer form of its activity is to shoot wide of the target. At the same time, it is worth

remembering that what they express and present is likely to be of all-round value since the poet in him is based in the man who has distinguished himself variously in also other matters than poetry, matters where height can be achieved only by having momentous significance and experience to offer.

I

SRI AUROBINDO'S BLANK-VERSE INSPIRATION

RUSKIN could not follow Browning's bold leap from crag to distant crag of poetic thought, even as Arnold had "come a cropper" with the sky-arches of Shelley's iridescent imagination. Francis Jeffrey, before them, uttered his notorious verdict on the lyricism of Wordsworth and Coleridge: "This will never do!" Johnson, still earlier, had found Milton's *Lycidas* commonplace if not crude. When such minds could show blind-spots, it is hardly surprising that an Indian reviewer of moderate talent should miss the mark altogether in judging Sri Aurobindo. And the divagation from the bull's eye would indeed be undeserving of special notice, did it not happen in a famous and responsible English weekly, *The Times Literary Supplement*. Sri Aurobindo the prose-writer was fairly well appraised, but the summing-up of him as a poet runs: "It cannot be said that Aurobindo shows any organic adaptation to music and melody. His thought is profound, his technical devices commendable, but the music that enchants or disturbs is not there. Aurobindo is not another Tagore or Iqbal or even Sarojini Naidu." The words fairly take one's breath away by their sweeping ineptitude. For, they deny inspiration completely and in all its modes to Sri

Aurobindo's poetry. In poetry, music does not stand just for one particular arrangement and movement of speech—a simple dance or a rich swirl, a slow gravity or a swift puissance. It can be anything and it is born fundamentally of kindled emotion and vision setting language astir and aglow so that words and phrases become intense and harmonious in a vital suggestive way and fall into suitable metrical patterns that ring significant changes on a recurrent base. In short, it is inspiration adequately expressing itself.

Can Sri Aurobindo be said to want everywhere in that expression? Take this passage from an early narrative, *Love and Death*, where a lover is represented as searching the underworld of departed spirits for his prematurely lost mate:

> O miserable race of men,
> With violent and passionate souls you come
> Foredoomed upon the earth and live brief days
> In fear and anguish, catching at stray beams
> Of sunlight, little fragrances of flowers;
> Then from your spacious earth in a great horror
> Descend into this night, and here too soon
> Must expiate your few inadequate joys.
> O bargain hard! Death helps us not. He leads
> Alarmed, all shivering from his chill embrace,
> The naked spirit here. O my sweet flower,
> Art thou too whelmed in this fierce wailing flood?
> Ah no! But I will haste and deeply plunge
> Into its hopeless pools and either bring
> Thy old warm beauty back beneath the stars,
> Or find thee out and clasp thy tortured bosom
> And kiss thy sweet wrung lips and hush thy cries.
> Love shall draw half thy pain into my limbs;
> Then we shall triumph glad of agony.

Only a deaf man with his whole aesthetic being

grown numb can refuse to find here "the music that enchants or disturbs". From the point of view of the inner music—that is, the thrill of the inspired consciousness—creating the outer that embodies it, the lines are some of the most perfect in literature, with a sustained exquisiteness of the *mot juste*, and the outer music is of such a markedly euphonious Virgilian type as to leave no excuse whatever for missing it. And again and again in *Love and Death* the music rises to the same pitch and carries the same tone. Nor, when a more austere tone has play, is there any lack of beautiful music organically adapted to the feeling and the vision:

> Long months he travelled between grief and grief,
> Reliving thoughts of her with every pace,
> Measuring vast pain in his immortal mind.

And it is eminently worth noting that either of the excerpts I have made is in blank verse. Blank verse is the hardest to infuse with poetic life: the inspiration has to balance the lack of the grace of rhyme by deft assonances and consonances, suggestive designs of stress and changing positions of the pause: a vital energy of most sensitive sound has to be at work in it if it is to pass that crucial test of poetry—exquisite enchantment or delightful disturbance by word-music. The creative pressure it demands for success is the clinching proof of the genuine poet. Sri Aurobindo's being very striking in its music gives the lie, with quintessential force, to the charge that he is less a poet than Tagore or Iqbal or even Sarojini Naidu.

None of these has produced blank verse in English. And no other Indian has anything to show

in this "tricky" medium, which would bear comparison with the Aurobindonian afflatus, the blending continued through page after page of various colours and tones, the rich flexible beauty combined with the epic *furor*. And what Englich poet would not be proud to wield the wonderfully expressive style of that speech, in *Love and Death*, of the God of Love—Madan or Kama, as Indian mythology names him—when he manifests to help Ruru regain Priyumvada from the underworld? The young mourner doubts if the apparition is not just a dream of his "disastrous soul":

> But with the thrilled eternal smile that makes
> The spring, the lover of Rathi golden-limbed
> Replied to Ruru, "Mortal, I am he,
> I am that Madan who inform the stars
> With lustre and on life's wide canvas fill
> Pictures of light and shade, of joy and tears,
> Make ordinary moments wonderful
> And common speech a charm: knit life to life
> With interfusions of opposing souls
> And sudden meetings and slow sorceries;
> Wing the boy bridegroom to that panting breast,
> Smite Gods with mortal faces, dreadfully
> Among great beautiful kings and watched by eyes
> That burn, force on the virgin's fainting limbs
> And drive her to the one face never seen,
> The one breast meant eternally for her.
> By me come wedded sweets, by me the wife's
> Busy delight and passionate obedience,
> And loving eager service never sated,
> And happy lips, and worshipping soft eyes:
> And mine the husband's hungry arms and use
> Unwearying of old tender words and ways,
> Joy of her hair, and silent pleasure felt
> Of nearness to one dear familiar shape.
> Not only these, but many affections bright

And soft glad things cluster around my name.
I plant fraternal tender yearnings, make
The sister's sweet attractiveness and leap
Of heart towards imperious kindred blood,
And the young mother's passionate deep look,
Earth's high similitude of One not earth,
Teach filial heart-beats strong. These are my gifts
For which men praise me, these my glories calm:
But fiercer shafts I can, wild storms blown down
Shaking fixed minds and melting marble natures,
Tears and dumb bitterness and pain unpitied,
Racked thirsting jealousy and kind hearts made stone:
And in undisciplined huge souls I sow
Dire vengeance and impossible cruelties,
Cold lusts that linger and fierce fickleness,
The loves close kin to hate, brute violences
And mad insatiable longings pale,
And passion blind as death and deaf as swords.
O mortal, all deep-souled desires and all
Yearnings immense are mine. . ."

Here not only is the whole intricate truth of love seized in idea but the force of it is thrilled to in every shade of passion, while an alert eye converts the complete idea-feeling to a concrete pictorial power of suggestion and each phase of it is given a perfectly representative rhythm to make it not merely glow and be seen but also vibrate and be heard in the heart of the aesthetic sense. A burst like this—and it is one among many in the nine hundred and odd lines of *Love and Death*—sums up centuries of poetic evolution of the English language. There is the phrase of swift felicity:

. . . the thrilled eternal smile that makes
The spring.

There is the phrase of power mingled with piquancy:

. . . knit life to life
With interfusions of opposing souls
And sudden meetings and slow sorceries.

There is the phrase of tense grandeur:

And the young mother's passionate deep look,
Earth's high similitude of One not earth.

There is the phrase of audacious subtlety:

Cold lusts that linger and fierce fickleness.

Last, there is the phrase of sweeping vehemence:

And passion blind as death and deaf as swords.

But it is not alone these outstanding types of verbal form that render the passage so memorable. Types which are less unexpected have also their unforgettable finality: they carry home to us with such a sure and moving touch what we have always known that they set the commonplace afire and by them the obvious attains a diamond crystallisation. Nothing specially new is said in:

. . . the husband's hungry arms and use
Unwearying of old tender words and ways,
Joy of her hair and silent pleasure felt
Of nearness to one dear familiar shape.

And yet the conclusive and unimpeachable word on the matter seems to be spoken with a happy effortless unassuming accuracy: the art is scarcely

perceived, but it is present everywhere—now focussing a particularity, as in "hungry arms" and "joy of her hair", now opening up a general view as in "nearness to one dear familiar shape". An almost casual word here and there creates the final and felicitous effect—a word like "old" or "silent". The rhythm too helps: half the point would be lost in the first line without the close alliteration of "h" which has a certain eager breath about it and without the exact assonance of the "u" accompanying and reinforcing it, while in the second line the thrice repeated "w" is suggestive of the repetitive acts that are indicated and the unwearyingness of those acts is explained as it were by the thrice-varied vowel following the "w"—an echo of the subtle freshness residing in all the wonts of love.

So much for verbal form, with its supporting rhythm. A versatile aptness of metrical technique is as important a feature in Madan's speech. The end-stopped line, compactly holding a thought or image, is companioned again and again by a leaping enjambment, lines running over and linking up by means of swift speed or strong staccato. The accent falls resolute and close-patterned to beat out a forceful meaning or convey a psychological hardness: mark how the sense is brought home by the packing together of stresses in that phrase "The loves close kin to hate" while the three spondees in "Racked thirsting jealousy and kind hearts made stone" give us the precise tension and torture and perverse rigidity that are sought to be uttered. At other places the accent leaps lightly to express quick happy emotion, or else the scattering is alternated with the clustering where more than one mood is touched and transitions are intended. In fact, the diversity of foot accompanied by a constant

shifting of the pause, is so great from line to line that —barring the syncopated unit in which one stressed syllable does duty by itself—all the resources of metrical modulation seem tapped. Four or five lines alone have throughout the normal iambic scansion, and they too are well spaced away from one another. Hardly any two verses in the whole passage scan in the same way. Still, there is no lawlessness, no loss of the basic beat in an amorphous and raw virtuosity. The rhythm is flawlessly handled both as a subtle echo of the significance and as an instrument of timed music played by changing yet harmonising voice-weights and voice-lengths. The technique, like the style, reflects a genius most sensitively complex.

Except for a few inversions which smack of the century in which the poem was composed—the date being 1899—everything in it is refreshingly modern in craftsmanship. So much modulation and change of pace connect up with the art of Lascelles Abercrombie and Gordon Bottomley. These poets have a more colloquial turn of phrase: Sri Aurobindo, free though he is from making a cult of the precious, is less inclined to the homely than they, but like them he turns his medium daringly elastic. Where he differs from them is for the better, since he avoids the modern faults arising from a penchant for the colloquial: the flat and the anaemic on the one hand, on the other the crudely impetuous. There is also a more careful harmonisation. Blank-verse artists of the twentieth century are frequently content to let just a faint touch of poetic form serve to lift the language from prose-construction and prose-pitch. The result is a spurious spontaneity: what it tries to cover up by its so-called naturalness is lack of that intensity which confers

on poetry its true distinction from prose and constitutes its true nature. Whatever heat is present is often due to a thought-stir or a nervous reaction which builds rhetoric rather than poetry. The impression in general is of a verse drawn not sufficiently from the creative inner consciousness but thrown up from the hasty surface of the excited brain. Something elemental is wanting in the main mass of modern blank verse. The defect may be caused by a predominance of thought-tendencies: contemporary poets as a rule try to get a "theory" out of things, incidents, personalities, experiences. Sri Aurobindo's later work has many puissant moments of poetic thinking, but his young blank verse is seldom charged with intellectual values—it has no conscious philosophical atmosphere, it lays bare an idealism of emotion and character rather than of intellect, and its thoughts are but glowing passions becoming mentally clear to themselves and forging arguments from that fiery self-knowledge. The temperament that has fashioned it is akin to the Elizabethans and not to the Victorians or the poets of our century. But it has also a Miltonic strain, a deliberate and collected inspiration; so it is saved from the extravagance, the conceit-coloured flamboyance into which the Elizabethans used to fall. There is not absent a large and steady discipline of the mind: only, the Miltonic note is here as an intermediary between the rich life-force of the Elizabethans and a half-mystical half-mythological plane: it does not sound the conceptual depths proper to the intellect but catches in terms and tones of thought a breath of semi-occult vistas from which the mind is visited by myths and which seem to open upwards into a first inkling of spiritual vision. In this respect Sri Aurobindo's blank verse hints the Indian in him

and affines him to the genius of Kalidasa.

It is therefore no wonder that a few years after *Love and Death* which was written when he was twenty-seven Sri Aurobindo was able to make the most perfect and vivid translation possible of *The Hero and the Nymph*, a famous play by Kalidasa. It is, however, a wonder indeed that a few years before *Love and Death* he could write a long narrative which, while treating Kalidasa's theme, far exceeds the Sanskrit play in poetic merit. Considering the age at which it was penned, it is more astonishing than even *Love and Death*. The latter is maturer, more loaded with ore and moulded with a finer grip on the medium, but when we remember that it was in his early twenties Sri Aurobindo tackled the theme of King Pururavus, a mortal hero, making Urvasie, a nymph of heaven, his bride, we are inclined to ask whether any poet has been so young and at the same time has struck such splendid chords through so considerable a length of English blank verse.

Both *Love and Death* and *Urvasie* bear traces of the influence of Stephen Phillips's *Christ in Hades* and *Marpessa*. During his Cambridge days Sri Aurobindo had seen *Christ in Hades* in manuscript—a memorable and fecundating event. *Marpessa* got even more under his skin. Stephen Phillips is at present a forgotten name because he could not keep up his early inspiration and became a weaver of thin pseudo-poetic purple, but his verse once had subtle imaginative pathos and passion. Besides, he had a living technique: he realised that in using a difficult instrument like blank verse the born poet has to be an alert artist as well. Sri Aurobindo was stirred by Phillips's poetic as well as artistic qualities and assimilated them into his

manifold genius. Where he surpasses Phillips is in energy and variety. His mind is more virile and that virile strength is not stark force alone: it has a suppleness which adapts itself to opulent no less than austere effects and often brings like Kalidasa's afflatus a sensuous and voluptuous sweep that makes him like Kalidasa a poet *par excellence* of Love. Love's countless moods colour the texture of Urvasie. In a brief quiet phrase like

> And she received him in her eyes, as earth
> Receives the rain

Sri Aurobindo can catch the whole of love's inner heart—the freshness, the surrender, the assuagement of a dream-thirst, the transforming and creative penetration of the consciousness, the humble and happy gratitude as for a gift of the Gods. The outer tumult of love he can picture with swift alterations of simile and metaphor—alterations which carry in them the unexpected and uncontrollable vehemences of the body charged with desire:

> He moved, he came towards her. She, a leaf
> Before a gust among the nearing trees,
> Cowered. But all a sea of mighty joy
> Rushing and swallowing up the golden sand,
> With a great cry and glad, Pururavus
> Seized her and caught her to his bosom thrilled,
> Clinging and shuddering. All her wonderful hair
> Loosened and the wind seized and bore it streaming
> Over the shoulder of Pururavus
> And on his cheek a softness. She o'erborne,
> Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay,
> Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail,
> Her naked arms clasping his neck, her cheek
> And golden throat averted, and wide trouble
> In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss.

> Amid her wind-blown hair their faces met.
> With her sweet limbs all his, feeling her breasts
> Tumultuous up against his beating heart,
> He kissed the glorious mouth of heaven's desire.
> So clung they as two shipwrecked in a surge.
> Then strong Pururavus, with godlike eyes
> Mastering hers, cried tremulous: "O beloved,
> O miser of thy rich and happy voice,
> One word, one word to tell me that thou lovest."
> And Urvasie, all broken on his bosom,
> Her godhead in his passion lost, moaned out
> From her imprisoned breasts, "My lord, my love!"

This no doubt is the poetry of youth, but there is nothing either callow or crude about it. It has a rich impetuosity saved by a keen psychological sense from becoming mere excess: everything is apt and in the right place though it falls into that place and achieves that aptness with a swirling force. And how exquisitely significant is each excited image of love—

> a sea of mighty joy
> Rushing and swallowing up the golden sand,

or

> Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail,

or

> So clung they as two shipwrecked in a surge.

The fierce absorbed swaying of two souls and bodies in profound perilous passion could not be hit off more vividly than by this last line. Mark also the felicity of:

> Wide trouble
> In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss,

and the sudden surprise of contrast, so packed with emotional truth, which the word "tremulous" gives here:—

> Then strong Pururavus, with godlike eyes
> Mastering hers, cried tremulous. . .

In the final phrase that tells how Urvasie moaned out

> From her imprisoned breasts, "My lord, my love!"

the four opening words suggest most intensely the close embrace of Pururavus, the deep heaving breath of Urvasie's pent-up emotion, the true impulse from the hidden conquered heart of her and not just from her outward beautiful mouth yielding to his, while the four closing words sustain and crown and reveal in full all these meanings with a delicate abandon.

Love's leaping and engulfing joy is in the whole passage. But Sri Aurobindo has an equally skilful hand in depicting love's large desolation. Immediately before that first clasp of each other King Pururavus is told by Urvasie's companion-nymph that he would have delight of his beloved so long only as he observed one law: a mortal could take a heavenly nymph to himself provided he let a profound secrecy lie for ever between the two differing natures during their love-moments:

> Either a rapture she invisible
> Or he a mystic body and mystic soul.
> Reveal not then thy being naked to hers,
> O virgin Ila's son, nor suffer ever
> Light round thy body naked to her eyes,
> Lest day dawn not on thy felicity.

But once Pururavus forgot himself: jerked out of sleep by an alarm from Urvasie, the hero in him leaped up and "on one swift stride reached to his bow." It was a night of thunder:

> Suddenly wide
> The whole room stood in splendour manifest,
> All lightning.

In a flash he realised "his weak tenure of mighty bliss", and stood like a statue where he was; but he had already lost his heaven, for his unclothed limbs had been seen by Urvasie. She vanished from him. He hoped on for a while, dreaming that she would return. He tried to engross himself in his kingly work among a great people, ruling with a kind yet powerful hand and giving

> magnanimous decrees
> Bronze against Time.

All to no avail: the face of the dreadful future kept looking at him,

> And brilliant passage of remorseless suns
> And wakeful nights wrestling with memory

wore his heart until he could bear the burden of kingship no longer. All his time he spent now in his deserted chamber. The country mourned over his inert grief and wished for the enemy's war-cry to rouse him. No battle broke upon it; but the king,

> When the bright months brought round a lustier earth,
> Felt over his numbed soul some touch of flowers,
> And rose a little from his grief, and lifted
> His eyes against the stars.

A resolution grew in him that he would not accept defeat: the warrior in him vowed that he would pursue Urvasie even to the unearthly distances where she was lost in her native light. Announcing his abdication, he left his empire to search amid the old forest-haunts where he had lived with her before bringing her as queen to his marble city.

> But all was silent; only
> Perhaps a bird darted bright-winged away,
> Or a grey snake slipped through the brilliant leaves.

Nowhere he found her; so from woods and streams he climbed to the mountains that had framed the first meeting and marriage between him and Urvasie, mountains in which was concealed the secret entrance to the heavenly worlds, her home. Nor did he linger on the inferior heights,

> But plunged o'er difficult gorge and prone ravine
> And rivers thundering between dim walls,
> Driven by immense desire, until he came
> To dreadful silence of the peaks and trod
> Regions as vast and lonely as his love.
> Then with a confident sublime appeal
> He to the listening summits stretched his hands:
> "O desolate strong Himalaya, great
> Thy peaks alone with heaven and dreadful hush
> In which the Soul of all the world is felt
> Meditating creation! Thou, O mountain,
> My bridal chamber wast. On thee we lay
> With summits towards the moon or with near stars
> Watching us in some wild inhuman vale,
> Thy silence over us like a coverlid
> Or a far avalanche for bridal song.
> Lo, she is fled into your silences!
> I come to you, O mountains, with a heart
> Desolate like you, like you snow-swept, and stretch

> Towards your solemn summits kindred hands.
> Give back to me, O mountains, give her back."
> He ceased and Himalaya bent towards him, white.
> The mountains seemed to recognise a soul
> Immense as they, reaching as they to Heaven
> And capable of infinite solitude.
> Long he, in meditation deep immersed,
> Strove to dissolve his soul among the hills
> Into the thought of Urvasie. The snow
> Stole down from heaven and touched his cheek and hair,
> The storm-blast from the peaks leaped down and smote
> But woke him not, and the white drops in vain
> Froze in his locks or crusted all his garb.
> For he lived only with his passionate heart.

These lines, written by a mere stripling, make one of the grandest passages in English literature. As love's language, they are a masterly expression of a grief that is like a god—Pururavus aches and yearns through gigantic vistas and realises in himself a massive passion which absorbs him with an absoluteness like that of "the Soul of all the world...meditating creation". As Nature-poetry, the intensity fused with the large overaweing accent has a twofold strain. There is in it the human mind giving the mountains a significant value in terms of its own lofty dream, the human heart finding in them a comradeship with its own high thrill; but over and above this process of transferred experience and imaginative symbolism, there is a sense of those altitudes being themselves alive, themselves a conscious presence independent of man and mingling with man's life a superhuman rest and a superhuman movement. The style, everywhere excellent, is a blend of different kinds: the amplitude and the intensity function on more than one psychological level. A level of effective

vigour imaginatively clothing the thought and emotion is attained by:—

> I come to you, O mountains, with a heart
> Desolate like you, like you snow-swept, and stretch
> Towards your solemn summits kindred hands.

An excellence not so overtly effective but equally powerful through a more direct and less clothed presentation of the body of idea and feeling is in:

> The mountains seemed to recognise a soul
> Immense as they, reaching as they to heaven
> And capable of infinite solitude.

The clothed and the direct are combined and transfigured into a vision and an intuitive significance that go deeper than imaginatively seized idea-feeling and bring a more mystical or spiritual vibrancy, when Sri Aurobindo writes:

> . . . he came
> To dreadful silence of the peaks and trod
> Regions as vast and lonely as his love.

The last line is a rare triumph of inward and outward grandeur. A similar way of seeing and of rhythming out the substance of a thing is practised in that line and a half at once subtly and magnificently haunting:

> And rivers thundering between dim walls,
> Driven by immense desire.

In this excerpt the phrase, "driven by immense desire", is worth noting for the inspired technique that so positions it in the passage as to point it with

a double reference: syntactically the words join up with Pururavus restlessly plunging over difficult gorge and prone ravine and huge rivers as well as with those very rivers hurling without end through gorge and ravine. A happy stroke of economical suggestion by the constructive artist at one with the creative poet!

In Sri Aurobindo's blank verse it is impossible to draw a dividing line between the artist and the poet. Surely his inspiration has grades, it is not always at the supreme pitch, but hardly anywhere do we feel a barren and lifeless decking-out or a forced technical trick. Let us glance at some of his Nature-paintings that have a precision of sight focussed on details within a harmonising all-round look. Here are verses on an enormous rain-storm:

> . . . the cloud
> Rose firmament on sullen firmament,
> As if all brightness to entomb. Across
> Great thunderous whispers rolled, and lightning
> quivered
> From edge to edge, a savage pallor. Down
> The south wind dropped appalled. Then for a while
> Stood pregnant with the thunderbolt and wearing
> Rain like a colour the monumental cloud
> Sublime and voiceless. Long the heart was stilled
> And the ear waited listening. Suddenly
> From motionless battalions as outride
> A speed disperse of horsemen, from that mass
> Of livid menace went a frail light cloud
> Rushing through heaven, and behind it streamed
> The downpour all in wet and greenish lines.
> Swift rushed the splendid anarchy admired,
> And reached, and broke, and with a roar of rain
> And tumult on the wings of wind and clasp
> Of the o'erwhelmed horizons and with bursts
> Of thunder breaking all the body with sound

And lightning 'twixt the eyes intolerable,
Like heaven's vast eagle all that blackness swept
Down over the inferior snowless heights
And swallowed up the dawn.

Movement and pace are most sensitively regulated —a speeding up here, a holding back there, a slow loosening out now, a quick breaking forth soon after, a succession of staccato urges ending in a huge rolling over. Word and phrase are animated with exact sight. For instance, the adjective "monumental" given to the piled-up nimbus connotes more than unmoving massiveness: it casts the eye back to the words—"as if all brightness to entomb". How felicitously vivid for a storm-cloud is the phrase: "wearing rain like a colour"! Then consider the simile of the horsemen: the verbal adjective "disperse" is a successful Miltonism used for the first time in English and harmonises effectively in meaning with "frail" and "light" coming later, while the cavalry-image itself, holding the suggestion of noise and bare swords or spears, represents at the same time the cloud-movement in the progress of the storm as described here and the imminence of thunder and lightning in association with that movement. Nor could thunder be more aptly expressed than by the fine extravagance in: "breaking all the body with sound". The jag and flash of lightning are caught keenly by the rhythm and vision of the phrase: "quivered from edge to edge, a savage pallor" as well as by the impact, on ear and sight, of the preposition "'twixt" in the line: "And lightning 'twixt the eyes intolerable". Only at one point I am inclined to pick fault with the expression. "Like heaven's vast eagle" is ambiguous. Sri Aurobindo, writing with the

mythological atmosphere of his theme around him, refers perhaps to Vishnu's famous bird. I think an effect poetically more telling would have been produced if he had simply said: "Like a vast eagle". If the indefinite article is not rhythmically strong enough, "some" can be put instead: either of them helps the line to stir the imagination with a clearer and closer touch.

No flaw, however, can be found in the superb picture below, somewhat analogous to that in the long description of Pururavus's quest among the Himalayas:

Snow on ravine, and snow on cliff, and snow
Sweeping in strenuous outlines to heaven,
With distant gleaming vales and turbulent rocks,
Giant precipices black-hewn and bold
Daring the universal whiteness.

A technique of the most felicitous order is brought by this inspiration. Examine the placing of the word "snow" in line one: "the universal whiteness" is created for us by that word beginning and ending the line as well as occupying its centre-foot. Again, the terminal "snow" runs the line over to the next by its connection with the word "sweeping" and sustains the idea of the icy continuity and ubiquitousness. Line two produces an effect of unrelaxing ardent stretched-forth energy by forcing us through metrical necessity to enunciate clearly all the three syllables of the adjective "strenuous" instead of facilely hurrying as we might in ordinary speech over the last two. Also, there is the reversed foot "outlines", with its accent on the first syllable—a departure from the norm, thrusting our attention upon "out" and helping the visual content of the whole word to

break more sharply into sight, so that the contour spoken of becomes etched with extra clearness. Line three makes the "vales" seem far-off, putting as it does the length of two dissyllabic epithets before the noun, while the rocks' rugged and rebellious aspect is conveyed by so fixing the adjective "turbulent" as to make its second and third syllables form with the noun "rocks" an anapaest, a foot which gives the impression of a quick stir as if the huge granite loads were actually starting out of their bases. Line four has a quartet of labials which entail the repeated opening of lips after sticking them together, thus again and again stressing the sense of depth. The long "o" in "bold", with which the line closes, keeps a note of wideness and hollowness ringing in our imagination. Simultaneously, the consonant-combination succeeding it saves that note from indicating quite untrammelled space: walls are felt to be present and their stony texture is hinted by the terminal "d". The line's general significance of a titanic drop and an aggressive abysmality is matched with a scansion audaciously commencing with the packed falling movement of two consecutive trochees and proceeding to suggest the emptiness as well as the shattering strength of precipices by means of an unresisting pyrrhic—that is, a couple of light unaccented syllables—followed by a couple of heavy ones building a hard spondee and finally by an iamb which combines the unresisting and the hard. Line 5 gives life to the gesture or attitude of "daring" by putting that word in the forefront; the word itself being a trochee makes the line open with a stress and thus reinforce that life. The life-giving is further enhanced by the stress standing out lonely and particular against a sequence of four "slacks" before the

next stress occurs in the third syllable of "universal". The word "universal" too, just and right enough in both meaning and sound, conveys an extra hint of extensiveness by having four syllables and getting, as it were, commensurate with and equated to the four quarters that space comprises. It is also distributed partly into the second and fourth feet in addition to occupying the whole of the third, so that it seems to spread either way from the centre—universally—in the direction of the line's beginning and in that of its end. An apt technique is everywhere to do justice to the marvellous aptness of the words. Excepting the best of Keats and early Tennyson I know of scarcely any descriptive writing to approach the all-round expressive power of this short passage in the "grand style".

Nor is Sri Aurobindo perfect only when his brush moves with power: perfect too are his delicate strokes—

> And here a secret opening where she stood
> Waiting in narrow twilight; round her all
> Was green and secret with a mystic, dewy
> Half-invitation into emerald worlds.

Power and delicacy are interwoven without defect when he speaks of the habitat of the Goddess, the first among several to whose heights Pururavus climbs *en route* to his attainment of Urvasie's paradise. "The Mother of the Aryans" sat by a lake under Mount Kailas,

> In a wild fairy place where mountain streams
> Glimmer from the dim rocks and meet the lake
> Amid a wrestle of tangled trees and heaped
> Moss-grown disordered stones, and all the water

Is hidden with its lotuses and sways
Shimmering between leaves or strains through bloom.

Keats and the early Tennyson would have been proud to sign also under this picture.

So finely realised are Sri Aurobindo's word-pictures that they are as if on a canvas before us, or rather in three-dimensional Nature. A poet gifted with such visualisation—nowhere the details hanging inconclusive or the totality making a complex blur—is the one best suited to tackle what may be called "inscape", the world within. For, subjective experience truly comes into its own as a reality when it is not only drawn from the innermost harmony of consciousness we are capable of but is also thrown into the outermost form and pattern of vision we can find. A concreteness of utterance, ever ready with contour and colour, image and symbol, fits Sri Aurobindo's early blank verse to be a vivid instrument for the mind of his youth. *Urvasie* and *Love and Death* are created out of a mind vibrant with an idealistic sensuousness in which body and soul mingle their fervours, a high-toned passion based on the urgent tangibilities of the flesh without the crude and the cramped which ordinarily go with flesh-impulses. This super-love is set in an atmosphere in contact with some Super-Nature: spirits and entities, both good and evil, pervade Sri Aurobindo's outer world, wearing shape and moulding movement. The outer world itself is seen as part of a gradation of planes that rise higher or sink lower than the material. The authentic mystical or spiritual vision shines out only on very rare occasions and then too it seldom does so in its own rights: either traditional mythology serves as a medium or else love between

man and woman interprets it through a self-transcending extremism that seeks to leap beyond the limits of the earth. In *Urvasie* as well as *Love and Death* there is that struggle against mortality and the fate which circumscribes mundane life. Pururavus scales an Overworld to clasp the vanished Urvasie; Ruru descends into an Underworld to bring back Priyumvada killed before she was ripe. Earth's heart storming beyond earth to gain fulfilment, either by attaining the supra-terrestrial and remaining in its light or by invading the infra-terrestrial and reclaiming from its darkness what it has snatched and submerged—this is the psychological motif behind Sri Aurobindo's two most striking masses of achievement in blank verse during early life, and it renders his many-sided poetic masteries in them a kind of foreshadowing of the blank verse of *Savitri* in which today he is embodying his Yogic explorations of the Unknown in a more luminously mystical legend and symbol of love.

II

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE HEXAMETER

I

BLANK verse, ever since Shakespeare and Milton gave it the shape of their genius, has been the mould *par excellence* of English poetry. Its unrhymed lines of five feet, variously modulating on the iambic base of a light unstressed syllable followed by a heavy stressed one (x/), have proved capable of equalling the epic effects of the Greek and Latin hexameter. English poets, however, have been haunted by the cadences of the ancient world and have often tried to transfer into their language the hexameter itself—the "heroic" blank verse of Greece and Rome. The mould which Shakespeare and Milton adopted and perfected is unlikely ever to fall into desuetude. It had its birth in the predominantly iambic nature of the English tongue and its span of five feet holds a poetic gesture admirably substantial and balanced for a language which is less polysyllabic than Greek or Latin. But though it has these advantages it has still not the swing and the structural music of the classical hexameter. A good line of Milton's is nearer the sound of prose than one of Virgil's. No matter how intense the word and the rhythm, the metrical structure is not as distinct, as markedly harmonious. When Milton writes about Satan:

> His form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appeared

> Less than archangel ruined and the excess
> Of glory obscured,

it is not impossible to mistake the description for prose of a highly patterned and euphonious order. But who with a trained ear can mistake for a snatch of prose-sound the Virgilian phrases about the priestess of Apollo?

> Sed pectus anhelum
> Et rabie fera corda tument, majorque videri
> Nec mortale sonans, afflata est numine quando
> Jam propione Dei.*

Apart from any difference due to the larger freedom in Latin for poetic word-arrangement, there is here a more outstanding metrical form without yet the least sing-song, a more striking beauty and power in the structure itself.

If the classical hexameter could be "Englishified" our poets would have two sovereign strings to their bow, each with its own special quality. So it is worth asking whence arises the marvellous metrical swing of Homer and Virgil. The classical hexameter is a run of five dactyls ending with a spondee, allowing a substitution anywhere of the first four dactyls by a spondee—the fifth being usually left untouched—and of the terminal spondee by a trochaic foot. But the dactyl, the spondee and the trochee do not mean in Greek and Latin the English / xx, / / , / x. For, poetry in the ancient world was based not on stress but on quantity.

*But her bosom heaved, her heart swelled with frenzy and she was ampler to behold. Her voice was no longer human, as she sensed the approach and breath of the divine Apollo.

Quantity is the time taken by the voice to pronounce the vowel on which a syllable is supported. It reckons syllables as short (⏑) and long (—) instead of light and heavy; a word like "widow" which in English is a trochee or heavy in the first syllable and light in the second would be according to classical quantity an iamb, the first syllable short and the second long. Quantity ruled the metre in Greek and Latin because those languages were highly inflected. Where moods, cases, tenses, genders, numbers vary a great deal, the way a syllable is pronounced alters not merely the rhythm but the actual meaning of a word or a sentence; so the quantity of a syllable gets particularly noted and becomes the most important variable and ultimately the basic determinant of metre. Stress, if any, is allotted a subsidiary role. In English, with its few inflexions, the role of quantity has been so far subsidiary to stress; it does not affect the metre but only the rhythm. It helps euphony, diversifies the pace or else enforces sense by sound, bringing out rhythmically the essence of a thing. How important to poetic effect though not to metre itself the role of quantity often is can be seen from many fine verses—these, for example, from Spenser:

> Open the temple gates unto my love,
> Open them wide that she may enter in.

The long "o" of "open" vivifies the meaning of that word, the long "a" of "gates" hints the openness which those objects are capable of and which the poet desires to be evoked from them. The long "i" of "wide" needs no explanation. Listen to Tennyson's

> And on a sudden lo! the level lake.

Here what adds to the poetic spell of the alliteration is the right sprinkling of long with short vowels in the alliterative words. In "lo!" the vowel, long as well as unclosed by any consonant, gives the broad vista revealed unexpectedly and all at once. In "level", the two short "e"'s bear out the motionless uniformity and evenness of the water that is seen, while the long "a" of "lake" shows us the same water as no small pond but a considerable expanse. Let the ear judge Sri Aurobindo's line from *Love and Death*:

> Through the great silence that was now his soul.

The hushing sibilance of it is accompanied by a series of five long vowels, most of which are driven home all the more by strong stresses: the effect is of amplitude, depth and a huge power held in suspense, a psychological effect which could never have been produced by the idea and the experience being partly couched in other vowel-values—say,

> Through the great stillness that was now his spirit.

It is clear that quantity is no negligible part of English poetry; but Sri Aurobindo in his masterly essay *On Quantitative Metre* affirms that until it is explicitly and avowedly the base the quality of the ancient hexameter cannot be reproduced. No doubt, that quality is an inner one; the very spirit of the hexameter must be caught, the poet's blood must have the surge of the *Iliad* and the broad even stream of the *Aeneid* before he can play Homer and Virgil in English. Yet a proper sense of the

outer form is also needed for the inner spirit to find natural and constant embodiment.

A proper sense: that is the desideratum. Several poets have tried to carry over into English all the rules of quantity obtaining in the classical tongues. Sri Aurobindo does not belong to their school. A Greek or Latin line is never read with primarily an attention to accents: in it the voice has to spread out more evenly, giving each syllable the full sound-value demanded by the inflected character of the language. Up to the very last syllable in the line the voice has to articulate carefully the sounds to get the accurate shade of sense. In English the stresses tend to sweep us on in jump after jump over the unstressed syllables so that those sounds that have no intrinsic length get somewhat slurred. The more uniform dwelling of the voice along a Greek or Latin line of poetry connects sound to sound in a close bond and confers on each vowel a value due not merely to its intrinsic length or shortness nor even to a shortening or lengthening of it by one or more consonants coming after in the same word, but also to the consonants with which the next word begins. In English the casting back of an influence by the consonants of the next word is not there at all: the word-units are more separate and independent. Even the invariable lengthening of a vowel by two or more consonants in the same word would be arbitrary: the word "length" itself is long by its consonant-load, while the word "shortness" remains short in both syllables in spite of it. The difference in voice-value we feel between these two short syllables arises from the stress on the first. In a noun like "transports" where the same "ort"-sound followed by a consonant is unstressed, the voice passes too rapidly to

give us any such distinct feeling. The English ear seldom notes any lingering of the voice over unstressed syllables except where the vowel possesses intrinsic length. If consonant-weight is given a *carte blanche* to lengthen quantity, the sound-effect of many lines of English poetry would suffer. Such lines are expressive in their vowels because they ignore the classical canon. Take one instance: Sri Aurobindo's *Baji Prabhou* begins with a description of an extremely hot "noon of Deccan", making nature and man alike feel

> Imprisoned by that bronze and brilliant sky.

It is because the English ear receives a deft accumulation of quantitative shorts in all the important words before that final long "sky" that there is suggested by the vowellation the intense quick-enveloping heat, the cramping unescapable glare, the parching and stifling close atmosphere, narrowing as it were so wide a thing as the sky to a prison in which one could scarcely move and breathe. The consonants in Sri Aurobindo's line, by their number as well as their individual sounds, introduce marked poetic significances: the recurrence of labials before an "r" and nasals neighboured by a sibilant make an impression of aggressive shining strength; but they do not sufficiently retard the voice to convert an intrinsic short into a long though they may create shades of shortness as they may create also shades of length among longs that are intrinsic. To forget that this is so according to almost a fundamental law in English would be, in Sri Aurobindo's view, as serious as to forget the stress-stroke. Niggling concessions like saying that mostly the doubled consonant, as in

"brilliant", does not double the sound and so must be considered single take too poor an account of the essential *differentia* of English from Greek or Latin: dominant stress. An intrinsic long cannot be wholly denied attention, but generally our voice is whisked away from a short that is without stress, no matter how many consonants may attend on it. Thus the English ear can never accept the fantastic lengthening of the vowel in an insignificant word like "of" in the phrase "of Spring" with which Robert Bridges ends a hexameter line built on classical principles. Just because the "o" is followed by four consonants, one in the word itself and three in the next, it does not lose its shortness and become equal in status to a stressed word like "Spring". As a hexameter close, the words cannot form a spondee. Bridges is not always twisting the English ear with such perversity, he has more genuine endings in a translation from Virgil, but even there the rest of the lines have false quantities too patent to be waived:

— ⏑⏑ — — — — — — — — ⏑⏑ — —
As by an|uncer|tain moon|ray sec|retly il|lumin'd
— ⏑⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ — — — — — ⏑⏑
One goeth|in the fo|rest when|heav'n is|gloomily|
— ⏑
clouded
— — — — — ⏑ ⏑ — —
And black|night hath|robb'd the co|lours and|
— ⏑ ⏑ — —
beauty from|all things.

To point out a few artificialities: the first and last syllables of "uncertain", the second of "secretly" and "colours", a flick of a word like "in" or "is" as well as a minor word like "and" or "hath" assume, when the lines are read, a quantitative

length foreign to them in spite of their queues of consonants. In fact, when the lines are read as English poetry the stresses impose themselves on the ear and weave a metrical scheme which is far from giving importance to most of the supposed quantitative longs, and records upon our tympanum no reasonable approximation to the Latin hexameter. The sole resemblance is that in the last two feet of each line accent and length coincide as in Latin. The rest of the feet fail for two reasons: in the first place, the lengths of Bridges are often spurious and, in the second, the English stress is not identical in nature with the Latin accent. Latin, richly inflected, based itself on quantity in its poetic forms, leaving accent to be a minor instrument of rhythm, a high pitch and not a downward weight of the voice. English, poorly inflected, has become stamped with stress, and stress in it can never play the second fiddle. Where the ear refuses to grow deaf to that stamp or to accept the throw-back of consonantal influence, no amount of Virgilian accent-design, artistry of diction and feel of word-atmosphere on the part of Bridges can re-create in his translation the characteristic structure and rhythm of the original measure:

*Quale per | incer|tam lu|nam sub | luce ma|ligna
Est iter | in sil|vis, ubi | caelum | condidit | umbra
Jupiter, | et re|bus nox | abstulit | atra co|lorem.

The failure of Bridges comes at the end of a long

* I am using the sign \ to distinguish the Latin from the English stress.

series of failures and drives the last nail into the coffin of strict classical quantity in English.

If quantity is to have its say it must be filled with a true English life, it must be something natural to the language and in tune with its genius of ineffaceable stress. Poets in the past have groped towards a kind of compromise, making stress coincide as much as possible with what they reckoned as length. Their experiments are vitiated by many inconsistencies, hampered as they were because of the obsession of two or more consonants giving length to a vowel preceding them. Sri Aurobindo rejects their false theory and stumbling practice. Quoting Harvey's

— ⏑ ⏑ — — — ⏑ ⏑ — — — ⏑
Fame with a|bundance|maketh a|man thrice|blessed
⏑ — ⏑
and|happy

he points out that the word "and" ought by classical rules to be an inexorable long and yet Harvey treats it as a short. Sidney's

— ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ — — — ⏑ ⏑
These be her|words but a|woman's|words to a|
— ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑
love that is|eager

draws from him the pertinent query: By what classical rule can the first syllable of "woman's" be regarded as long? By stress alone and not either by intrinsic or indirect dwelling of the voice does it acquire length. Quantity, with Sidney and Harvey, seems fickle and it does not serve any vital purpose: it merely misguides them into scanning syllables like those of "woman's" and the last two of "abundance" as spondaic though the ear flatly contradicts

the eye's illusion of a retarding of the voice by a clutter of consonants. When this illusion gets the better of the stress-sense it mars the intended rhythm, as in the line of Sidney's protégé, Abraham Fraunce:

— — — — — — — — — ⏑ ⏑
Whom nei|ther Sat|han could|daunt nor| company|
— ⏑
hellish.

The first three feet can admit of no hexametrical reading of the classical type (dactyls or spondees) if we observe the stresses as indeed we must above anything else in English. Sheer quantity, without the slightest plausible stress, cannot accumulate the voice in the main syllable of a hexameter foot in English: not even intrinsic length has the power to do it, much less a fiction foisted on the language by an exotic analogy. Fraunce's line is more or less a brother to those of Bridges and convinces us that to run with an utterly alien hare and yet try to hunt with a thoroughly English hound produces often a weird medley of movements.

Why not then accept only clear intrinsic length and always fuse stress with it? Will not that give us the perfect English hexameter? The answer is that the demands of such a hexameter will be impossible to fulfil if we are to write with spontaneous ease and not be hindered at every step by an exclusive vocabulary. It may not be beyond a poet's compass to fashion occasional lines to the tune of

— — — ⏑ ⏑ — — — —
Green seas|glooming be|low now,|gray clouds|
— ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑
darkening|over.

Surely a poet would be gloomed into dejection and darkened by weariness, were he permitted nothing save to dance to a tune so exacting. Words with clear intrinsic length do not strew like Vallombrosan leaves even Greek and Latin: if the help of consonant-load had been swept away, Homer would have been left dumbly twiddling his fingers at his harp and Virgil impotently biting his quill. To dispense with that help and add stress as a *sine qua non* is to hag-ride the poor English hexametrist.

Impatient of preposterous curbs no less than fictitious values and haphazard movements, most poets have chosen to throw overboard all classicism and to construct their hexameters according to the English prosody of heavy and light instead of long and short. Sri Aurobindo recognises the naturalness and flexibility thus brought into the technique, but he is not satisfied with the results offered by the practitioners of the accentual hexameter. There are many reasons why they have not created sustained poetry. Most of them were not men of first-rate genius. And whatever gifts capable of being kindled to genius at rare moments they had were dimmed by the themes they chose, trivial themes alien to the spirit of the ancient measure, and by the defective metrical form accepted as the stress equivalent of that quantitative mould. The Greek and Latin poets had dealt with subjects evoking naturally the high seriousness, the dynamic vision, the intense aesthesis that were the constituents of their genius. Thus, a medium technically full of rhythmic resources of beauty and power got lifted to climax after climax of epic and pastoral and satire. Where in Longfellow or Clough, the two most famous among the accentual hexametrists, is any burst of climaxes in an adequate medium?

Even Kingsley who is better at construction and metre-management has mostly a tenuous rhythm: his meagre talent could not touch his constructive instinct to supreme issues. His constructive instinct itself was impeded at times by the inadequate idea he shared with the others of what the English hexameter should be. The majority of the experimenters do not scruple to make use of weak accents as if they were full stresses: words like "but" and "in" and "if" (intrinsic shorts) can bear a slight accentual pressure in feet of two syllables but in feet of three they prove their weakness too openly unless filled with importance by a peculiar position. Tribrachs (three light syllables) are thus cooked up as dactyls without discrimination or limit. Then again, since spondees are none too easily found in English to replace dactyls, trochees run riot as modulations; but the trochee, if it comes in too frequently without being justified by the sense and by a subtle rhythmic need, ruins the metre and substitutes the variety of a lifeless jogtrot for the monotony of a mechanical canter. A modulation other than the spondee or trochee to substitute the dactyl was never consciously admitted as part of the technique: hence, thóugh employed here and there, it could not be utilised to the top of its potentialities. Even in the hands of a poet finer than Kingsley, Clough or Longfellow, the movement lacks ease and power except for a few almost accidental steps. Here is a translation from the *Iliad* by George Meredith:

> Now, as when fire voracious catches the unclippèd woodland,
> This way bears it and that the great whirl of the wind and the scrubwood
> Stretches uptorn, flung forward alength by the fire's fury raging,

So beneath Atreides Agamemnon heads of the scattered
Trojans fell, and in numbers amany the horses, neck-stiffened,
Rattled their vacant cars down the roadway gaps of the warfield,
Missing their blameless charioteers, but for these, they were outstretched
Flat upon earth, far dearer to vultures than to their home-mates.

Another passage by the same poet is about Zeus speaking to the weeping horses of Achilles:

Now when the issue of Kronos beheld that sorrow his head shook
Pitying them for their grief, these words then he spoke in his bosom:
"Why, ye hapless gave we to Peleus, you to a mortal
Master; ye that are ageless both ye, both of you deathless!
Was it that ye among men most wretched should come to have heart-grief?
'Tis most true, than the race of these men is there wretcheder nowhere
Aught over earth's range found that is gifted with breath and has movement."

Some lines are definitely good, their rhythm comes living to us and their structure is firm yet flexible. But the general impression both the quotations give is of a deliberate artificial rush or run and there is considerable jolting if not limping. Meredith introduces with success a large number of spondees, especially at the end of his lines: spondees either by stress alone or stress and quantity. He has also a skilful enjambment, a running-over from line to line. Admirable is the effect of mobile force and volume in the second

line overlapping the third in the account of Agamemnon in the fight. Almost as fine in its own way is the note of pathos, pausing and progressing, with a suggestive burden of repetition, in the two opening lines, beautifully enjambed, of the speech of Zeus—"Why, ye hapless...". The sixth line of the first excerpt and the last of the second are not unsatisfying. Nevertheless we are left disappointed with the sum-total. If we were to give a summary description, no better would be to hand than two phrases picked out from the passages themselves: the first passage seems on the whole "neck-stiffened", the second "flat upon earth".

These labels can be attached to nearly all the accentual hexameters written by English poets. Sri Aurobindo believes that there is a flaw at the very source of them: the mould through which the poetry flows is ill-fitted for sustained inspiration. He declares that though whatever is radically un-English in the classical rules has to be brushed aside and though we cannot ignore stress in forming our feet we still cannot catch the characteristic structure and rhythm of the old hexameter without keeping quantity as the base. A veritable paradox, this—until we realise how Sri Aurobindo views stress.

Perhaps the best approach to Sri Aurobindo's view is by way of his pronouncement on the backward influence of consonants. An intrinsic short becomes long in the classical languages by being buttressed up with consonants, but, as we have seen, the English stress whips away our voice from all places that are unstressed and at the same time have no intrinsic length to make the voice linger. The special force of the ictus robs unstressed short syllables from getting the length they would if the

ictus did not operate, if it did not take to itself the mass of voice which would otherwise go to them. This means that there is a transference of voice-mass, the stressed syllable appropriating what would render the unstressed intrinsic short a long one in languages that are not governed primarily by stress. An equivalent, therefore, of length which was caused by consonantal crowding in Greek or Latin is in English collected wherever stress falls. Stress appears from this angle a quantity-builder, a creator of metrical length independent of the intrinsic value of the syllable which stands under it. That it should be a quantity-builder is but natural; for what after all is stress in terms of voice-value? It is like a hammer-stroke driving a syllable firmly in for other syllables that are unstressed to hang or take support on in a metrical foot. Its function is not dissimilar to that of length in a Greek or Latin foot; it confers importance and strength on a syllable. The sole difference is that stress gives strength and importance from above, by a vertical pressure or weight of the voice, and length in the classical sense does it by a stretching of the voice, by laying a horizontal weight-bar. Even an intrinsically short syllable becomes through stress a support for unstressed longs: if no special strength, weight or mass of voice accrued to it, foot-building upon it would be impossible. Quantity makes the voice dwell more on a syllable, stress does the same, though by a different method and though that kind of increased dwelling has nuances according as the stressed syllable is intrinsically short or long. Such nuances often serve to create subtle psychologies of sound which render the sense inwardly vibrant and vivid to our consciousness. They do not change the fundamental

mass of voice collected by stress. Longs and shorts place themselves under one general category of metrical length when the ictus falls on them fully and emphatically and is no mere voice-inflexion as in words like "is" and "have" which carry a weak accent except by a certain pattern of the syntax. Sri Aurobindo is the first to look on stress in a quantitative light with a confident sweeping gesture of finality, even as he is the first to crush uncompromisingly the fallacy of the general throw-back of consonantal influence on quantity in English—and that is what makes really original his loosening of the knot of the hexameter. His view is not just a juggling with names, an arbitrary and otiose re-labelling. The quantitative light leads to a form other than the current accentual one. The accentual hexameter takes no stock of the unstressed intrinsic long: it sets out to deal only with stress. Sri Aurobindo builds with two factors: the length of stress and the length of the unstressed natural long. The former must always take precedence in English and constitute the main syllable of a hexameter foot, but if the latter is consciously acknowledged as having a say in the metre, then a principle of construction is brought out, which is obscured in the conventional mould but which is absolutely essential in order to catch the spirit of the old hexameter, for, without letting intrinsic longs come by their due we cannot hope to catch fully that quantitative spirit.

Not that we must have unaccented longs everywhere: Swinburne's

> Sudden and steady the music as eight hoofs trample
> and thunder

is as perfectly Virgilian in its ring as Virgil's own

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum,*

and Virgilian too is Whitman's cadence—

Silent, avoiding the moon-beams, blending myself with the shadows.

The unaccented long is not at play in the Swinburne line, while in the Whitman it comes only in the final syllable but does not bring out any revolutionary principle. Here the classical structure-music and rhythm-soul are kept by means of the sheer quantity-building of stress. The field of construction, however, is much narrowed down if we do not see that when the Biblical

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning?

or that verse detachable from the semi-burlesque mock-heroic context of Clough's *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*,

He like a god came leaving his ample Olympian chamber,

has the true Homeric note in movement and rhythm and structural swing, another quantity-value than stress-length also claims our notice. In the quotation from Clough the first foot has the word "like" which is intrinsically long: in combination with the stressed "he" and the unstressed "a" it forms to the ear a quantitative anti-bacchius (— — ⏑). Similarly, in the apostrophe to Lucifer,

* With a four-footed din the horse-hooves trample the crumbling plain.

the sound-value of "thou" and "art" join with the stressed "how" to create on a quantitative basis a light molossus (— — —), light because there is not the same weight of accent on the three words. We thus have modulations unrealised in the accentual scansion. The accentual hexameter accepts the dactyl as the only trisyllabic foot permissible. No doubt the dactyl must predominate, but the quantitative nature of the true hexameter compels us to reckon with the unstressed long as part of the metre and on that reckoning the dactyl cannot ever in Engilsh be the all-sufficient foot. And once we accept non-dactylic trisyllable modulations there is no reason why the new feet should have only the unstressed long as their part determinant. There is room too for other stresses than the main one at the beginning of the foot. Such modulations are even less realised in the accentual mould. The quantitative basis leads to them as an inevitable logical result and opens a wide avenue of escape from the monotony to which the accentual hexametrists have condemned their mould by the somewhat paradoxical procedure of trying not a whit to preserve the quantitative spirit of the classical hexameter and trying their utmost to imitate the type of feet prevalent in it. Save for the licence of using a trochee anywhere in lieu of a spondee, they have worshipped blindly the classical norm. The hexameter of Homer and Virgil, like all other metrical forms in Greek and Latin, is narrow in its range of substituted feet because the spirit of the old languages does not clamour for them. In constructing the English hexameter we should boldly enlarge that range, since English poetry has had from the beginning an extreme elasticity in foot-substitution. English metres do not obey a

fixed pattern so faithfully as Greek and Latin do; the genius of the language invites a wider play of modulation and to un-English the hexameter by denying it that natural elasticity on the ground that it will not duplicate the classical type is to see the structure and form of poetry with a scholarly instead of a creative eye. Just as the English element of stress cannot be blinked, so too the English penchant for varied modulation is unavoidable. Most of the modulations current in English poetry are dissyllabic except for the anapaest (x x /) which is a frequent occurrence, especially in a glide-form, and the dactyl which appears on rare occasions; yet where the language is apt to modulation there is no reason why a less thumbed variety should not be exploited. In fact, such a variety does intrude itself with significant force in several lines among the Elizabethans. The most celebrated is Webster's

Cover | her face; | my eyes dáz|zle; she | died young.

This revealing of abrupt surcharged unexpressed emotion by an unusual foot is almost rivalled in Marlowe's note of dread by means of a cretic (/ x /):

. . . and see where God
Stretcheth out | his arms and bends his ireful brows.

In later times, Browning has dared in his *Saul*:

And the stars | of night beat | with emotion, and tingled
and shot

Out in fire | the strong pain | of pent know|ledge : but
I fainted not,

and elsewhere:

God's own speed | in the one | way of love.

Even the accentual hexameter does not always stick to its norm. Take the two best lines from Meredith's Homer-translation already quoted:

This way | bears it and | that the great | whirl of the
wind and the | scrubwood
Stretches up|torn flung | forward a|length by the |
fire's fury | raging.

We are faced here as in most of his other hexametrical successes with a telling departure from the conventional modulations of the accentual mould.

The third foot—"that the great"—is no dactyl or spondee or trochee. It is a cretic and both by its extra weight and its originality of movement it adds to the vitality and suggestion of the initial spondee and the hurling dactyls in the rest of the line. The next line is also expressively "footed": a strong spondee and two dactyls, one on either side of it, represent in the first half the ravage of the trees and their heavy falling and being flung out on the ground, while in the second half there is an anti-bacchius—"fire's fury"—between a dactyl and a trochee, making us feel a fierce dense power which is intensified by the alliteration and the intrinsic vowel-lengths. But these wonderful effects happen freakishly in the accentual system, they are no acknowledged feature of the technique.

And where they do happen, not even the strong stresses prevent them from losing a little of their sound-values. "That the great" takes the primary stress according to the norm of dactylic accentuation on "that". Neither the intrinsic nor the stress length of "great" is brought out *in toto*. We are led somewhat to muffle them in order to make the foot a dactyl. If an instrument like the kymograph which measures speech in hundredths of a second recorded this foot as part of the accentual dactylic line in which it occurs, it would show the time of 'that' as longer than the time of 'great' even though the ictus falls on both and the intrinsic quantity of the former is short and of the latter long. A quantitative system in which stress remains effective in the main syllable of a foot but without the dactylic tyranny of the accentual base would stop this falsification. Unstressed longs in clear metrical power are needed by the English hexameter to achieve a rhythmic kinship to the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*; unusual stress-combinations are needed by it to acquire a pliancy in keeping with all other metrical patterns in English. To give these two factors of foot-construction a many-shaded naturalness and a thorough sound-value Sri Aurobindo's vision of the hexameter with a quantitative light on stress is ideally called for.

Suitable foot-changes, of course, are not the only things required for breathing life into the hexameter. The accent-stroke must fall suggestively now on intrinsic longs, now on intrinsic shorts. There must be a sensitive placing of the pauses and occasional overflow from one line to another. Word-grouping and sentence-structure must be attended to. A subtle play of vowellation and consonant harmonies must bring the ear relief and pleasure. Indeed,

there is no end of technical skill wanted or practicable. But nowhere should the technique be handled mechanically. An inner cry for variety must get answered wherever the poet takes the help of the artist. It is the unrestricted and unjustified trochaic modulations in Clough that kill the soul of the hexameter rhythm in his verse. What makes Longfellow tame and feeble is the insensitive plethora of basic beats. Kingsley is spoiled by his thinness of inspiration, his instinctive skill as technician counterbalanced by his inanity as poet. All of them and many others like Meredith suffer to a more or less degree from a low level of poetic afflatus on the one hand and on the other an unconsciousness of the true nature and art of the hexameter in its English rebirth. The level is to a considerable extent dragged down by the feeling of fumbling in a half-realised medium, the incubus of conducting an experiment under semi-artificial conditions. Skill without proper insight into what the character and possibilities of the medium are, inspiration without the power either to sustain it or to apply it rightly—these have been the defects of all the past endeavours. Sri Aurobindo's eminence in this field lies in his fusing a deep and plenary breath of inspiration with a wide-eyed artistry that is attuned to the soul both of classical and English poetics.

It is not in the hexameter alone that Sri Aurobindo succeeds. Many kinds of quantitative verse he has revived in forms natural to English. Alcaics, Sapphics and several less known varieties make up the series of examples that follow his essay on quantitative metre. His hexametrical composition, however, is the most important, for it tackles the chief knot of the quantitative problem. To loosen that knot for good, an actual masterpiece must be brought

forth—harmonies that live before us and can lay an impregnating touch on future poets. It is one thing to theorise brilliantly, quite another to embody the theory in poetic practice and roll out grand rhythms. But Sri Aurobindo laughs at difficulties. With supreme audacity he evokes the name of Homer himself by calling his poem *Ilion*. *Ilion* is a fragment of 374 lines—a first glimpse given us of a long epic lying unfinished among the manuscripts of Sri Aurobindo the poet for whom Sri Aurobindo the Yogi is able to find meagre time. But certain facts serve to focus our scrutiny upon it almost as if it were a full-blown epic. It is written in a metre whose large promise has scarcely been fulfilled so far; this would render an inspired use of that metre for a few hundred lines a major achievement. Further, its deliberate choice of Homer's theme in a metre that reached its acme in the *Iliad* challenges antiquity's loftiest poetic creation and leads us to dwell on quality and ignore bulk, since to Homerise for even a few hundred lines would be to sit among the utterly elect.

2

Can *Ilion* be called Homeric in any valid connotation of the term? The term may be taken to mean two things—the mind of Homer and the poetic art of Homer. To both must Sri Aurobindo bring a basic resemblance if his *Ilion* is to be Homeric to the full. Basic—and not superficial: that point is important. Sri Aurobindo need not ask himself at every turn: Am I thinking and feeling precisely as Homer would *vis-à-vis* the same object, event or situation? Such a similarity is neither possible nor desirable: it would impair the spontaneous evolving of a poetic work. What Sri

Aurobindo, having picked out Homer's theme for new treatment, must do is to preserve in the midst of his own individual psychology Homer's fundamental bent of mind and Homer's general world-view. One cannot, with a mental bent and a world-view poles apart from Homer's, write naturally about the Heroic Age of the *Iliad*. Whatever differences there may be should be delicately adjusted. Sri Aurobindo's mind is complex and many-dimensioned, at once more sensuous, more philosophical and more spiritual than Homer's. But there is in it an insistent objectivity which, for all the un-Homeric spheres of consciousness objectified or symbolised by him, kins him to the ancient bard's constant look outward on clear-cut shape and gesture, attitude and motion. As a rule, Sri Aurobindo's imagination is subtler, seeking comparisons and contrasts in rarer nuances of life's and Nature's moods, in less familiar phenomena than are caught in Homer's celebrated similes. Still, there is no taint of conceit or sophistication: the images have an untortured appeal, a fine elemental touch across their subtlety. He has also a less austere and less limited use of colour; and his colour comes from a gaze thrown outward from a more inward consciousness, so that, though he loses no jot of the breadth and vehemence and poignancy of physical existence, he wraps them in an atmosphere of the Unknown and the Divine in an intenser and deeper way than Homer. He takes care, nevertheless, not to exceed the Greek sense of the deific. Within that sense he gives rein to his profound Indian awareness and understanding of the Spiritual. The Greek *theos* is not merely a super-splendid form acting from without on human beings; he is also a super-conscious force

acting from within—and he is more than a personal entity. Behind the anthropomorphic and the divinely statuesque, behind the impalpable and the divinely psychological, there are vastnesses, pervasive world-wills employing the outward or the inward as a focus for their mysterious rule over all the desires and emotions of men and the vicissitudes of life. This mysterious rule, this overshadow of Fate Sri Aurobindo expresses more consciously and with greater explicitness than Homer. Not that he lets the Indian insight obtrude upon the Greek vision: only, this insight helps the essence of that vision to emerge more luminously. He is, therefore, Aurobindonian without ceasing to be basically Homeric. The same applies to his poetic art. If the style is anything of the man, we cannot expect Sri Aurobindo to duplicate Homer's precise brand of epic expression. It is a certain essence of Homer that he must retain. The texture of the language, the quality and rhythm of the words, separate as well as combined, must not be thin or cheap or crude; neither must it be affected. The metrical workmanship must not be rough and loose on the one hand, nor too smart and regimented on the other. Everywhere there must be splendour and smoothness—and yet a certain simplicity and strength. No exotic exclusiveness in the splendid language-texture, no over-artistry or exquisite monotony in the smooth metre-movement; both must have a strong direct varied life, they must seem to belong to Nature, the free and large and open stretches of wind and wave. So long as Sri Aurobindo does not lack these essentials he remains Homeric, even if he has more multiplicity within his unity than Homer and his wind blows from directions uncommon to Hellas and his

wave has more complex curves than the Aegean Sea.

Ilion commences with a new day breaking over the besieged city:—

Dawn in her journey eternal compelling the labour of mortals,
Dawn the beginner of things with the night for their rest or their ending,
Pallid and bright-lipped arrived from the mists and the chill of the Euxine.
Earth in the dawn-fire delivered from starry and shadowy vastness
Woke to the wonder of life and its passion and sorrow and beauty,
All on her bosom sustaining, the patient compassionate Mother.
Out of the formless vision of Night with its look on things hidden,
Given to the gaze of the azure she lay in her garment of greenness
Wearing light on her brow. In the dawn-ray lofty and voiceless
Ida climbed with her god-haunted peaks into diamond lustres,
Ida first of the hills with the ranges silent beyond her
Watching the dawn in their giant companies, as since the ages
First began they had watched her, upbearing Time on their summits.
Troas cold on her plain awaited the boon of the sunshine.
There, like a hope through an emerald dream solepacing for ever,
Stealing to wideness beyond, crept Simois lame in his currents,
Guiding his argent thread mid the green of the reeds and the grasses.
Headlong, impatient of Space and its boundaries, Time and its slowness,

Xanthus clamoured aloud as he ran to the far-surging waters,
Joining his call to the many-voiced roar of the mighty Aegean,
Answering Ocean's limitless cry like a whelp to its parent.
Forests looked up through their rifts, the ravines grew aware of their shadows.
Closer now gliding glimmered the golden feet of the goddess.
Over the hills and the headlands spreading her garment of splendour,
Fateful she came with her eyes impartial looking on all things,
Bringer to man of the day of his fortune and day of his downfall.
Full of her luminous errand, careless of eve and its weeping,
Fateful she paused unconcerned above Ilion's mysteried greatness,
Domes like shimmering tongues of the crystal flames of the morning,
Opalesque rhythm-line of tower-tops, notes of the lyre of the sungod.
High over all that a nation had built and its love and its laughter,
Lighting the last time highway and homestead, market and temple,
Looking on men who must die and women destined to sorrow,
Looking on beauty fire must lay low and the sickle of slaughter,
Fateful she lifted the doom-scroll red with the script of the Immortals,
Deep in the invisible air that folds in the race and its morrows
Fixed it, and passed on smiling the smile of the griefless and deathless,
Dealers of death though death they know not, who in the morning

Scatter the seed of the event for the reaping ready at night-fall.
Over the brooding of plains and the agelong trance of the summits
Out of the sun and its spaces she came, pausing tranquil and fatal,
And, at a distance followed by the golden herds of the sungod,
Carried the burden of Light and its riddle and danger to Hellas.

No doubt can be entertained about the magnificence of these lines. The Olympian measure of the ancients is once more abroad. It is not the use of Homeric locutions like "god-haunted peaks" and "the many-voiced roar" that affine these verses to Homer: it is the majestic energy of the words and the speed and sinuousness and sonority of their rhythms that put them on a par with the spirit of the *Iliad*. And these elements preserve that spirit even though Homer, treating the same scene, would have had a less "inward" description of things nor dwelt so much with a revealing eye on the divinity of his "rosy-fingered Dawn". At last the power and beauty of the old quantitative hexameter has come into its own in the English language. At last there is the absolute control which incessantly varies the music without hurting the instrument. Each line is alert with its undulating or bounding life and all the lines hang together with an underlying master-note building up a significant sum-total of harmony. The dactyls ring out clear and full, there is no shirking their insistence, they get all the strength they can by emphatic stresses and all the variety they need by the meaningful stroke of the stress on intrinsic longs or intrinsic shorts. Where they yield to modulations it is not just to placate

an academic law. The spondaic and trochaic units are spontaneous and purposeful. Here is the former endowing by a double accent-weight plus a double intrinsic length the words with a poised portentousness in almost the middle of a line otherwise normal except for a slight divergence in the penultimate foot:

Fateful she | lifted the | doom-scroll | red with the
script of the Im|mortals.

No better instance of the suggestive trochee can be demanded than

Looking on | men who must | die and | women | des-
tined to | sorrow,

where in fact two trochees are next to each other, a perilous situation which yet saves itself most triumphantly by rhythmically inducing a keen feeling the normal dactyls would quite destroy. Remove the unusual turn of sound, rewrite either

Looking on men who must | die and on | women |
destined to sorrow

or

Looking on men who must | die and |
women pre|destined to sorrow

or else

Looking on men who must | die and on |
women pre|destined to sorrow

and what you have is in different degrees of formality a metricised statement instead of moving poetry.

The dropped syllables which cause the trochees in the place of dactyls are here like a catch in the breath followed by a missed heart-beat: they create unexpectedly a depth of emotion. Equally appropriate are other departures from the base, daring trisyllabic departures which get their whole significant and rhythmic value in a quantitative system. A line early in the passage,

Earth in the | dawn-fire de|livered from | starry and |
shadowy | vastness,

possesses its superb poetic quality with the help not only of imaginative words playing alliteration and assonance but also of its stressed and unstressed intrinsic longs one after another and its two modulations. The modulations are in both places the anti-bacchius. The characteristic of the anti-bacchius (— — ⏑) is a massing without any curbed or thickened effect. If spondees had been used, the line would have lost all its joint sense of vastness and deliverance. Neither dactyls nor trochees would have done the necessary massing which the two anti-bacchiuses carry out in their own dissimilar ways. The anti-bacchius of "shadowy" indicates the mass of night, the huge star-sprinkled and star-distanced gloom, but since the mass is not close-packed and the gloom has a tenuous largeness their peculiarity is rhythmed to us by the stress being only on one syllable and that syllable an intrinsic short while the intrinsic long is left unstressed like the short immediately after and, besides being left unstressed, made perhaps to have even its length slightly shaded off by the vowel-sound following its "o"-sound. A different

psychology is held by the anti-bacchius in which "dawn-fire" makes the massing. Both the words are natural longs and both are stressed: an intense concentration is indicated in keeping with the idea of the gathering dense light of the sun. The final unstressed short which thins out or loosens out the foot brings the delivering movement whereby the earth emerges into day from the ambiguous infinity of the dark hours—a movement which is continued in the next foot, a dactyl, in which even the stressed syllable is a natural short like the others that are without the accent. What adds to the suggestive metrical architecture is that the two anti-bacchiuses with their differing psychological burdens are balanced against each other by being made to stand as the second foot from either end of the line.

Art alone cannot introduce such technical subtleties: it is the afflatus, the poetic frenzy which mostly bears art with it to felicitous goals. An awareness, however, of technical resources is needed when handling a difficult measure. The anti-bacchius is a very natural substitute for a dactyl and is likely to be the most frequent—the artist can depend upon the poet to employ it almost automatically at the dictate of inspiration. The cretic (— ⏑ —) is not so easy to throw in and the artist has to aid the poet in giving it birth successfully. In

— ⏑ —
Looking on | beauty | fire must lay | low and the |
sickle of | slaughter

it stands with a special ferocity after a delicate trochee: a relentless and unescapable force is felt in it as though the devastation in wait for delicate and beautiful things were exemplified in that

hemming in of a short syllable between two emphatic longs. The line—

— ⏑ —
Forests looked | up through their | rifts, the ra|vines
grew a|ware of their | shadows—

has a suddenness in its opening cretic perfectly in tune with the meaning. The green darkness discovers that light comes in through the spaces between tree and tree, branch and branch, spaces the night had seemed to efface with its obscurity. The surprise of the discovery draws the sight upward through those forgotten spaces and the suddenness of that upward look is caught in the stressed syllable occurring where an unstressed one was expected to finish a dactyl.

The entire passage teems with technical felicities. Nowhere do they appear mechanical. They are fused indissolubly with the poetic urge. Even the initial tribrach in

And, at a | distance | followed by the | golden | herds
of the | sungod,

justifies itself as it rarely does in past experiments with the English hexameter. Now the three shorts coming close together before the first stress-long produces precisely the impression of an unfilled gap, a distance, between Aurora and the sungod's golden herds. How well also is the rest of the line "footed"! The words "followed by the" form what is known as the ionic *a majore* (— — ⏑ ⏑). The extreme length of the foot with its equal division into two longs and two shorts hints to the ear the massed herds crowding forward from afar to the empty air-fields ahead.

A level of inspiration and technique like that of the prelude of *Ilion* is beyond the compass of any poet to maintain over hundreds of lines. But it is not beyond the compass of the truly great to link up such heights by verse sufficiently strong and rhythmic in between. In Sri Aurobindo's hexameters there is never a drop into flatness and atony. Fresh and happy effects are never lacking and from them he soars again and again to climaxes. Perhaps a typical passage showing the small variations of his poetic level is the one in which he prepares the coming of the herald from Argos to Troy in the first daylight. After a memorable line which says that when a mighty moment loaded with a catastrophic future arrives,

> Only its face and its feet are seen, not the burden it carries,

there is a patch of slightly mixed inspiration about the significance of coming events being hidden from us by life's superficial clamour, hidden to such a degree that at times "least knows the messenger chosen for the summons":

> Only he listens to the voice of his thoughts, his heart's ignorant whisper,
> Whistle of winds in the tree-tops of Time and the rustle of Nature.
> Now too the messenger hastened driving the car of the errand:
> Even while dawn was a gleam in the East, he had cried to his coursers.
> Half yet awake in light's turrets started the scouts of the morning,
> Hearing the jar of the wheels and the throb of the hooves' exultation,

> Hooves of the horses of Greece as they galloped to Phrygian Troya.
> Proudly they trampled through Xanthus thwarting the foam of his anger,
> Whinnying high as in scorn crossed Simois' tangled currents,
> Xanthus' reed-girdled twin, the gentle and sluggard river.

Then comes a high peak of poetry—not so brilliant as the Dawn-description but austerely effective with its few bold antithetical strokes. A momentous picture is drawn before our eyes:

> One and unarmed in the car was the driver; grey was he, shrunken,
> Worn with his decades. To Pergama cinctured with strength Cyclopean,
> Old and alone he arrived, insignificant, feeblest of mortals,
> Carrying Fate in his helpless hands and the doom of an empire.

The picture is authentic Homer, the same directness and the same depth. The rhythm has a full vitality whether in its curbed or its sweeping form. The pauses are varied in each line, their number and position determined by an inspiration that knows how to match the outer with the inner movement. The next line is as fine in suggestion and as Homeric:

> Ilion, couchant, saw him arrive from the sea and the darkness.

With the mention of Ilion, the picture shifts to the city itself and to the faint slow stirrings of life in it. The news that Talthybius the herald stands parleying at the Trojan gates goes to Deiphobus, one of

Priam's sons. He is wrapt in "scenes of a vivider world", the grandiose dreams natural to the slumber of a warrior-soul, but suddenly he is drawn back from them by the high and insistent call of the warders. The lines which show him awaking to "the pull of the conscious thread of the earth-bond" throw up by a masterly final phrase the whole figure and being of Deiphobus:

> Warned by his body, Deiphobus, reached in that splendid remoteness,
> Touched through the nerve-ways of life that branch to the brain of the dreamer,
> Heard the terrestrial call and slumber startled receded
> Sliding like dew from the mane of a lion.

The effect of this Shakespearian simile* is reinforced a little later by a line wholly trochaic save for the opening foot. The row of trochees here is not as in Clough a crude meaningless modulation: it is significant of the big bulk of Deiphobus firmly yet gradually leaving his royal bed:

> He from the carven couch upreared his giant stature.

The aptness of this metrical movement is rivalled by a line at almost the close of *Ilion*. There it is Aeneas who is spoken of, called out to attend the assembly planned by Deiphobus for hearing the secret message which Talthybius bears. There it is spondees in succession, representing the move-

* *Cf.* TROILUS & CRESSIDA, Act III, Scene 3, Patroclus tells how Cupid will unloose his "amorous fold" from Achilles's neck

> And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane
> Be shook to air.

ment of Aeneas's powerful body filled with heavy brooding on high matters:

> Fate-weighed up Troy's slope strode musing strong Aeneas.

Sri Aurobindo is expert at wedding his metrical rhythm no less than his language to the substance of his thought. The physical and the psychological are also a unity with him or else they run suggestively parallel as when

> Deiphobus slowly,
> Measuring Fate with his thoughts in the troubled vasts of his spirit,
> Back through the stir of the city returned to the house of his fathers,
> Taming his mighty stride to the pace infirm of the Argive.

The second line where the long and large-breath'd delivery of the hexameter is sublimely utilised to describe the mind of Deiphobus finds a sort of paradoxical correspondence in the last where the inner process of measuring Fate seems carried to the outer act of walking in step with the frail Talthybius who is the messenger of unknown destiny.

Not only the acts of human beings but the appearances of places too Sri Aurobindo can press to psychological ends. Thrasymachus, "the fleetest of foot in the gateway", is commissioned by Deiphobus to bring Aeneas: reaching Aeneas's house,

> on the threshold Thrasymachus halted
> Looking for servant or guard, but felt only a loneness of slumber
> Drawing the soul's sight within away from its life and things human;

Soundless, unheeding, the vacant corridors fled into darkness.

A symbol poetically arresting and yet most naturally arising in the course of the narrative is created here, making concrete to the most material point of outwardness a mental state. Nor could anything except the spirit and sound of the hexameter have caught so well the symbolic substance of that closing line. The extensive corridors' unheeding flight into the unseen could not have been given its inevitable word-value and sound-value in a shorter span of line and another foot-pattern. It is the length of the hexameter and the characteristic motion of it towards that final trochee's indefinite dying away on an unstressed syllable—it is these qualities alone that have captured in one single revealing line the precise sense and psychological atmosphere Sri Aurobindo had in view. This verse like several others in *Ilion* is proof of Sri Aurobindo's bringing forth his hexameters from a genuine seizing of the very soul of that measure. When we feel that no form but the one adopted could have been adequate we have a disclosure of the poet's absolute intimacy with the essence of his medium.

The psychological subtlety which, without the least trace of the involved or the ingenious, pervades Sri Aurobindo's hexameters widens and deepens into a mystical seerhood when he speaks of the invisible hands pressing the balance of war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The Gods of Hellas stand now in the full glory of their occult presences—occult but still concrete, held in a living poetic realisation. The passage about them equals the Dawn-prelude by an afflatus sustained through most of it on a supreme height. There are

three movements in this symphony. First the superhuman beings are pictured in their dynamic forms and outward activities: from the peaks of Olympus and Ida—

Gleaming and clanging the gods of the antique ages descended.
Hidden from human knowledge the brilliant shapes of the Immortals
Mingled unseen in the mellay, or sometimes, marvellous, maskless,
Forms of undying beauty and power that made tremble the heart-strings
Parting their deathless secrecy crossed through the borders of vision,
Plain as of old to the demigods out of their glory emerging,
Heard by mortal ears and seen by the eyeballs that perish.

Then the inner consciousness which these shapes symbolise and focus is evoked, with all its tremendous breadth and plunge:

Mighty they came from their spaces of freedom and sorrowless splendour.
Sea-vast, trailing the azure hem of his clamorous waters,
Blue-lidded, maned with the Night, Poseidon smote for the future,
Earth-shaker who with his trident releases the coils of the Dragon,
Freeing the forces unborn that are locked in the caverns of Nature.
Calm and unmoved, upholding the Word that is Fate and the order
Fixed in the sight of a Will foreknowing and silent and changeless,

Herè sent by Zeus and Athenè lifting his ægis
Guarded the hidden decree. But for Ilion, loud as the surges,
Arès impetuous called to the fire in men's hearts, and his passion
Woke in the shadowy depths the forms of the Titan and demon;
Dumb and coerced by the grip of the gods in the abyss of the being,
Formidable, veiled they sit in the grey subconscient darkness
Watching the sleep of the snake-haired Erinnys. Miracled, haloed,
Seer and magician and prophet who beholds what the thought cannot witness,
Lifting the godhead within us to more than a human endeavour,
Slayer and saviour, thinker and mystic, leaped from his sun-peaks
Guarding in Ilion the wall of his mysteries Delphic Apollo.
Heaven's strengths divided swayed in the whirl of the Earth-force.

The first five lines lift the hexameter to a *ne plus ultra* of poetically intense as well as mystically vivid grandeur. An ether, immense and luminous, seems to draw near and envelop us, bringing the God-forms closer and closer, with Poseidon looming large in the forefront and growing more and more clear both to the outer eye and the inner perception until we enter into his very self and discover the strange dynamis of him and at the same moment the unknown regions of our own psychology and of world-consciousness break open to our occult senses. The subliminal of Freud and Jung is lit up, the weird enormous potencies of the primitive and the elemental are touched, by a might and a

majesty out of some supraliminal undreamt of by our psycho-analysts. A revelation as powerful and profoundly realistic but of a different realm of the subliminal is upon us in the poetry that seizes the secret of Arès. Each word, each phrase, each line is packed with the occult life and the hidden hungers below our day-to-day normal mind, volcanic secrets at a tension within us waiting to snap the bonds of reason and fling up their wild lava. Sri Aurobindo is at his most overwhelming in these wide yet accurate plumbings of the psycho-analyst's domain by means of a poetry kindled as if on an altitude that sees things from beyond the mind's imagination and sends down rhythmic reflections of them with a moving and penetrating power impossible except to a Yogi. Here we have Homeric figures driven with a Homeric energy to an Aurobindonian goal. Less Yogic however, is the light thrown on Herè and Athenè and Apollo. The tone and texture of the language presenting them is in keeping with their call to and contact with more evolved strata of our consciousness: it is not the dense and dreadful subliminal that is wakened but the brighter parts of our nature, the high and subtle thought, the keen and ecstatic heart-impulse. Still, one cannot help wishing that an intenser vision from a mystical standpoint had brought those deific presences home to these parts. No criticism can be made of the poetry: the sole regret we can allow ourselves is that though the poetry is Homeric enough it is not sufficiently Aurobindonian.

The third movement of the apocalypse gives us the occult reason why the siege of Troy lasted all those ten long years. Long for the human participants, not for "heaven's strengths" dividing

themselves between Greece and Troy. No issue seemed forthcoming for the human fighters, since the divine forces were working out their own play:

> All went backwards and forwards tossed in the swing of the death-game.
> Vain was the toil of the heroes, the blood of the mighty was squandered,
> Spray as of surf on the cliffs when it moans unappeased, unrequited
> Age after fruitless age. Day hunted the steps of the nightfall;
> Joy succeeded to grief; defeat only greatened the vanquished,
> Victory offered an empty delight without guerdon or profit.
> End there was none of the effort and end there was none of the failure.
> Triumph and agony changing hands in a desperate measure
> Faced and turned as a man and a maiden trampling the grasses
> Face and turn and they laugh in their joy of the dance and each other.
> These were gods and they trampled lives.

The simile at the close is at once charming and sinister. The beautifully radiant and yet, from the human angle, heartless omnipotence of the gods gets perfectly embodied and becomes all the more striking by contrast with the dubious perplexing aspect of the war presented in the first half of the passage.

Fine as this simile is, it is not the top of Sri Aurobindo's figurative bent. The magnitude his imagery can attain is best laid bare when he tells us of Deiphobus as seen by the Immortals after

they had stopped their play with Troy and withdrawn from the battle, the issue already decided by them, the heroes "slain in their minds, Troy burned, Greece left to her glory and downfall". The protagonists on both sides felt a respite from the burden of the gods, a relief from the tireless energy goading them on, but the old zest went out, the support of the divine content departed. Wearily now the combat swayed and a sullenness hung on the besieging tents:

> But not alone on the Achaians the steps of the moments fell heavy;
> Slowly the shadow deepened on Ilion mighty and scornful :
> Dragging her days went by; in the rear of the hearts of her people
> Something that knew what they dared not know and the mind would not utter,
> Something that smote at her soul of defiance and beauty and laughter,
> Darkened the hours. For Doom in her sombre and giant uprising
> Neared, assailing the skies: the sense of her lived in all pastimes;
> Time was pursued by unease and a terror woke in the midnight:
> Even the ramparts felt her, stones that the gods had erected.
> Now no longer she dallied and played, but bounded and hastened,
> Seeing before her the end, and imagining massacre calmly,
> Laughed and admired the flames and rejoiced in the cry of the captives.
> Under her, dead to the watching immortals, Deiphobus hastened
> Clanging in arms through the streets of the beautiful insolent city,

Brilliant, a gleaming husk but empty and left by the dæmon.
Even as a star long extinguished whose light still travels the spaces,
Seen in its form by men, but itself goes phantom-like fleeting
Void and null and dark through the uncaring infinite vastness,
So now he seemed to the sight that sees all things from the Real.
Timeless its vision of Time creates the hour by things coming.
Borne on a force from the past and no more by a power for the future
Mighty and bright was his body, but shadowy the shape of his spirit
Only an eidolon seemed of the being that had lived in him, fleeting
Vague like a phantom seen by the dim Acherontian waters.

It is a question whether in the entire range of similes there has been one so grandly apt and penetrating, so cosmic in its beauty and its glimpse of the supra-terrestrial. Elaborated in true Homeric style the comparing of the extinct star, still visible because of the years taken by light for reaching us, to Deiphobus as viewed by the gods and as viewed by men fills us not only with its own sublimity but also with a sense of the far stretch and clairvoyant depth of a time-transcending Consciousness beyond the human. Francis Thompson in *Sister Songs* has an analogous astronomical figure to suggest the poet being survived by his poetry. A moving use, this, yet not equal to Sri Aurobindo's in aura and overtone of imagination. What Sri Aurobindo conveys is a profounder meaning than Art's effective continuity in men's remembrance

and in their lives after the artist's personal disappearance from the earth; some deathless Artist Power that has fashioned the whole universe is conjured up in its immense supremacy. And how inevitably the spacious speed of the hexameter rolls into our mind all the suggestions! Every help the peculiarity and uniqueness of the medium can give is taken. The line, for instance, in which the simile is stated would not be so impressive and expressive if it were not a running on and on for seventeen syllables and if it did not scan with a most felicitous variety:

— ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ | — — ⏑ | — ⏑ | — | — | —
Even as a | star long ex|tinguished whose | light still |
— ⏑ | — ⏑
travels the | spaces.

What is called the first paeon (— ⏑ ⏑ ⏑) is the opening foot; its initial long pushes upon us through three consecutive short syllables a suggestion of nullity and vacuity which the next few words bear out. The second foot, an anti-bacchius, provides metrically the magnitude and length needed by the meaning and leads significantly by its last unobtrusive syllable to the idea of effacement and extinction. The third foot is a cretic in quantity: a dactyl would have emphasised simply the effacement and extinction, without preparing the next idea which qualifies this—the idea of the light still living on in spite of its source being dead and obscured: the long "whose" does that preparation. Then comes a spondee in which the living prolongation of that light is caught by the two stress-weighted lengths. The next dactyl echoes the plunge of light through the unresisting ether, while the last trochee has the subtle onomatopoeia

of indefinite wideness. Of course it is not the mere metrical pattern that works upon our aesthetic perception: the word-rhythm has a creative quality of its own and there is an effective harmony of vowels and consonants, but without the structure provided by this precise manipulation of the metre they would not embody so perfectly the poetic stuff of the line. And it is worth noting that none of the departures from the base mars the typical hexameter flow: every foot starts with the impulsion of a distinct long and all of them combined keep time with the lines before and after.

It would be purblind to inveigh on a theoretical score against taking liberties with the mould handed down from Greece and Rome. *Ilion* seems to present once for all the authentically inspired model in English of that august measure. A Homerophile like H. B. Cotterill might deem his own translation of the *Odyssey* a truer equivalent. But the equivalence goes a very little way in reality. The unstressed long syllable which Professor Gilbert Murray considers one of the characteristics of the ancient hexameter does not get its entire value realised in a strict accentual system. Also, the demand innate to English poetry for diverse modulation is ignored. Hence Cotterill's work which is perhaps the most gigantic undertaken in the accentual hexameter remains thin and monotonous, in spite of a lively use of pause and enjambment. Something of Homer's impetuous nobility is conveyed in brief moments of brilliant inspiration; at other moments something of Homer's structure imparts the music of his movement even though the Olympian speech be lacking. But the majority of the verse has missed the soul of Homer's language as well as rhythm. And the fault is not confined

merely to an imperfect base; it extends to the very quality of the mind by which the base is used. Numberless lines of Sri Aurobindo's can be scanned on purely the accentual count and they are just as "noble" as those that need a quantitative scansion. A line with no unconventional modulation is not bound to be tame or blunt or heavy. If Cotterill had been more of a poet he would not have taken Homer's majestically natural

*Zēnos men pais ēa Kronionos autar oixun

Eikhon apeiresien,

and knocked half of the world-cry out of it by a somewhat pompous and ill-balanced turn at the end:

Son of Cronion, of Zeus the Almighty was I—but afflictions
Ever-unending I knew.

Surely it was nothing save defect of the poetic afflatus that could not strike upon a more moving approximation like

Son of Kronion, of Zeus the Supreme was I, yet have I suffered
Infinite pain.

Sri Aurobindo's sovereign mark is his unfailing inspiration. Unconventionally modulated or no, his lines have the conquering nobility of Homer's hexameter. It is, for instance, hard to imagine any one except the Bard of Scio in the tone of Deiphobus's query to Talthybius, beginning with

* The sign (-) has been used here to show certain long vowel values which might be lost in the English transliteration.

Messenger, voice of Achaia, wherefore confronting the daybreak
Comest thou driving thy car from the sleep of the tents that besiege us?

and closing with the equally elevated, the equally rhythmical and at the same time simple and direct

What in the dawning bringst thou to Troya the mighty and dateless
Now in the ending of Time, when the gods are weary of struggle?
Sends Agamemnon challenge or courtesy, Greek, to the Trojans?

Even more Homeric is the reply of Talthybius:

High like the northwind answered the voice of the doom from Achaia:
"Trojan Deiphobus, daybreak, silence of night and the evening
Sink and arise and even the strong sun rests from his splendour.
Not for the servant is rest nor Time is his, only his death-pyre.
I have not come from the monarch of men or the armoured assembly
Held on the wind-swept marge of the thunder and laughter of ocean.
I am a voice out of Phthia, I am the will of the Hellene.
Peace in my right I bring to you, death in my left hand. Trojan,
Proudly receive them, honour the gifts of the mighty Achilles.
Death accept if Atè deceives you and Doom is your lover,
Peace if your fate can turn and the god in you chooses to hearken."

Here at least the substance is charged with momentousness, but see how even the most common stuff of thought is transfigured and woven without any seam into the general poetic texture. What can be less abnormal in idea and language than the envoy's

Full is my heart and my lips are impatient with speech undelivered

or Deiphobus's

Vain is the offer of peace that sets out with a threat for its prelude

and yet the same lifting musical breath is in them as at its strongest renders Olympian the words with which Thrasymachus greets Aeneas with the news that Deiphobus has sent him:

Hero Aeneas, swift be thy stride to the Ilian hill-top.
Dardanid, haste! for the gods are at work; they have risen with the morning,
Each from his starry couch, and they labour. Doom, we can see it,
Glows on their anvils of destiny, clang we can hear of their hammers.
Something they forge there, sitting unknown in the silence eternal,
Whether of evil or good it is they who shall choose who are masters
Calm, unopposed; they are gods and they work out their iron caprices,
Troy is their stage and Argos their background; we are their puppets.
Always our voices are prompted to speech for an end that we know not,
Always we think that we drive but are driven. Action and impulse,

Yearning and thought are their engines, our will is their shadow and helper.
Now too, deeming he comes with a purpose framed by a mortal,
Shaft of their will they have shot from the bow of the Grecian leaguer,
Lashing themselves at his steeds, Talthybius sent by Achilles.

It would be interesting to analyse the masterly technique turning each line unlike any other and binding all into a single swaying music. But what would mere technique of construction be if the creative fire were not behind it? What catches us immediately in Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion* is the burning breath. We would not even feel the dexterous swing of the lines and their unwearying variety if we did not primarily stir to the *élan vital* that glorifies the metrical medium. Artistic devices are dead things by themselves, the finest words can become garish inanities. Neither structural skill nor choice locution is the stuff of poetry: that stuff is drawn from the inner heart and the inner eye. To adapt the figures of a line already cited from Sri Aurobindo, those are but the face and feet of the poetic moment and all can see them, while the invisible burden which it carries and which alone confers meaning as well as magic on them are these inner forces of creation. These give the glowing pulse to what would otherwise be just an ingenious machine. All that Sri Aurobindo expounds in his theory of the hexameter would be wasted unless the poetic soul of the ancient measure be gripped from within. Homer and Virgil must reincarnate in us before we can write like them. Command of words and manipulation of pauses cannot suffice to supply the complex concentrated energy that tells us how dire

were the eyes of Talthybius on the beauty of Troy:

All Greece gazed in them, hated, admired, grew afraid, grew relentless

or the felicitous glamour that calls Paris

Ever a child of the dawn at play near a turn of the sun-roads,
Facing destiny's look with the careless laugh of a comrade.

Sri Aurobindo has succeeded in making his conception of true English quantity and his vision of the hexameter a force for the future because he has built them out of deep oneness with the spirit of poetry both classical and English. No "brilliant husk" empty of the daemon, like the body of Deiphobus when the gods withdrew from him, is here. Sri Aurobindo has taken up the hexameter with a consciousness unfettered by the labourer brain, a consciousness whole-heartedly given in all its intricate potency to his sense of secret superhuman rulers of art no less than life. Without contacting their unknown depths, and feeling that

Silent they toil, they are hid in the clouds, they are wrapped with the midnight

the poet, especially one who seeks to revive a medium steeped in antiquity's "high seriousness" and its instinct of the deific, will always find it difficult to sustain in his speech the fire and the light that waken to rapture our "infinite pain".

III

SRI AUROBINDO— A NEW AGE OF MYSTICAL POETRY

I

EVERY poet is in essence a Platonist. No poet but feels he is serving a sacred mission beyond his own self, the mission of some perfect beauty waiting to be revealed. He may be as poignantly personal and fired with the body's hunger as Sappho and Catullus, yet the urge to his lyrical self-expression is not merely the joys and griefs of a personal libido: it is also an aspiration for a flawless magic of verbal form. Sappho and Catullus were not lovers grown vocal and nothing more: they were pre-eminently idealists of speech, their passion was for an irreproachable word-music and they perpetuated their loves in a language whose phrases and rhythms gave their personal desires a faultless mould wrought by a functioning of the senses, the feelings and the thoughts as though some concealed godhead were taking body through each poem. By answering that mysterious call of inspiration and not just the voice of Atthis or Lesbia, Sappho and Catullus wrote poetry. Whether they were intellectually conscious of serving a divinity in which they believed, is immaterial. All that was necessary for art was that they should be conscious

of an overwhelming urge to fashion a piece of utter and unsurpassable beauty.

We have actually in Lucretius a poet who was an atheist and yet embodied the godlike presence which makes poetry the revelation that it is. Such a paradox is possible because inspiration is from beyond the machinery of logic and does not depend on the intellect's arguing for God and against God: if there is the right susceptibility in the depths of a man's nature, it rushes through, no matter how averse to religious belief may be his outward mind. The unreligious concepts of the mind it seizes as though with superhuman hands and builds out of them "topless towers" of loveliness. What is more, it envelops these concepts with a sort of cosmic grandeur that only differs from the infinitude haunting the religious spirit by being dark instead of luminous, an empire of everlasting night and death instead of an empire of everlasting day and life. Lucretius's *summum bonum* is the acceptance of that unconscious eternity to which our flesh returns after the brief interval of living, the immense inanimate within which our few feverish years seem to make a small noise and cease to be. A profound awe, a solemn sense of universal Nature blindly and inexorably at work in its immeasurable reaches of space and time, pervade his philosophical epic like a religion *manqué*, even as the presence of an "unweeting" power, absolute and endless in "crass casualty", is perceived in the world of Thomas Hardy. The atheisms of Lucretius and Hardy are really special forms, heroic or morbid according to temperament, of the mystical belief all ages have had in an utter Unknown that rules above the desires and imaginings of men the totality of things: the Greeks called it *Ananke*, the

Fate and the Necessity that is greater than even the Gods. Steeped in the conception of that dark Supreme, poets like Hardy and Lucretius create their masterpieces and disclose in spite of themselves the real origin of inspiration. It is also significant that even atheists like them break forth on occasion into chants about living forces more than human, one divine Spirit or many divine or at least supernatural presences. Thus Lucretius at his most inspired hails as all-fostering Venus, " delight of Gods and men", the procreative energy that is abroad in Nature; he invokes it as a Goddess to aid his exploration of "the secret ways of things." Hardy brings in a whole troop of presiding powers, spirits of pity and irony pressing onward from above the Napoleonic drama depicted in *The Dynasts*. An instinct of the true source of the magnificence that is poetic expression appears to have compelled both the Roman poet and the English to conjure up an atmosphere of the Divine and the Superhuman around their highest moments, an instinct aligning itself with the inward impulsion that led Homer to appeal to his *Thea* and Milton to cry "Sing Heavenly Muse."

A sense of the mysterious Divine is always leaping out in this manner through great poetry. In general, it is the unformulated background whose presence is felt primarily in the perfection of word and rhythm making a sheer absolute, an unsurpassable ultimate of beauty which can be perceived as much in what is intellectually understood to be an atheistic passage as in one that yields mystical meaning. Because of the touch of this absolute and ultimate we respond to poetry as to a statement of incontrovertible truth, an expression that compels belief as if by a God's dictate, even though what is stated and expressed

may run quite counter to our own accepted notions about the universe. We may be scientifically-minded and see nothing beyond a swirl of electrons; still when A.E. sounds his crystal note of the Undying Ones that are not clay, we feel caught up into a realm of crowned souls, a world of wizardry uncharted by Planck and Schroedinger. And paradoxical though it may seem, our firmest faith in A. E.'s occult "Candle of Vision " will not drive back the shadow that falls upon us from Housman's exquisite agnosticism: like a final truth the omnipotence of the dust encompasses us through his lyrical inevitabilities of despair and denial. Every mood that finds faultless poetic Form lords it over us like a deity. What invests it with that gospel-glow is not merely our willingness to make-believe. The true aesthetic response is no playful assent to a pleasing verbal legerdemain; it is a seizure of the being by a magic and a mystery that has no scar of defect, it is a surrender by us, willy-nilly, to an assault from some realm of archetypes. In order to realise the assault, we do not need a Gabriel's trumpet like D. H. Lawrence's cry to the Mexican eagle:

> You never look at the sun with your two eyes.
> Only the inner eye of your scorched broad breast
> Looks straight at the sun.

Poetry in a subdued style will serve equally. If we take those lines from W. H. Davies's poem to the moon—

> Though there are birds that sing this night
> With thy white beams across their throats—

it is inadequate to say we have merely a sense of pleasure produced by significant sounds arranged

in a cunning pattern. We may even call that pleasure, as I. A. Richards does, a rest, a balance, an integration of our impulses so that they are no more in conflict among themselves. We still leave unmeasured the effect of Davies's subtly beautiful picture of the moon inspiring the nightingales. Indeed there seems no point in speaking of beauty if the terms "pleasure, rest, balance, integration" are enough. Beauty in its full and final meaning implies a Form through which some absolute perfection impinges on us. Virginia Woolf, in her biography of Roger Fry, quotes from a letter by that famous art-critic to Robert Bridges: "One can only say that those who experience the aesthetic emotion feel it to have a peculiar quality of 'reality' which makes it a matter of infinite importance in their lives. Any attempt I might make to explain this would probably land me in the depths of mysticism". Modern art-critics fight shy of those depths, yet they cannot help hovering on their verge. Even Richards, with his equilibrium of impulses, is pointing to a quality in art which lifts us for the moment above the turmoil of want and desire, striving and seeking and frustration, and which gives the feeling of an ultimate wherein we can repose with a positive peace distinguished from inactive irresolution or unconsciousness: in short, a quality which is a kind of second cousin to that of mystical experience. Unless we describe poetry as a window opening through Form on the Divine, on a realm of archetypes, we shall never convey accurately the secret of its spell.

Yes, through Form and not Matter. But by Form we must not understand exclusively the turn of phrase and the movement of rhythm: the language-mould is all in all but it comes fused with a

cast of consciousness—a form of vision and a form of emotion. Metrical speech without that vivid cast is the ghost of poetry. Neither does mere substance of consciousness, however weighty or profound, make on us the art-impact that is revelation: the consciousness has to take a particular pattern before it can become the poetic word. The philosophy of Epicurus is the substance, the matter, of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, but not till it has been stamped with the Lucretian sight and feeling, no less than shaped into the Lucretian word and rhythm, is the force of the archetypal received by us. Form in that fourfold sense has the archetypal touch which Matter by itself lacks just as much as do emptily resounding language and mechanically modulated metre. And it is because Form is the priest of the poetic revelation that all substance of consciousness, even the most profane, can be brought by the poet to stand before us like a godhead which will brook no "Nay" to its utterance. What is the source of poetry's convincing charm? Not the ideas expressible by the intellect and endlessly debatable by the logical faculty but a gleam and image, a hint and echo of some reality living hidden from us in its own self-world of absolute loveliness and holding there a manifold harmony of truth which our ideas cut up into a thousand conflicting aspects. As soon as flawless Form is achieved, that hidden reality shines out; it cares not if the Matter of a poem be spiritual or secular, God-affirming or God-denying, covered with holy incense or reckless rose-leaves. If somehow the path of inspiration keeps clear in a poet, the archetypes journey along it and the mysterious Divine trysts with the human.

Explaining Art as a journey and a tryst by the Highest, we are led—while we depreciate by no

jot the perfection of poems that are concerned with things mortal—to prepare a special place for the *lyra mystica*. For, if the archetypal touch is everywhere through the Form of poetry, the mystic who invokes the Muse to convert his intuitions into song becomes her instrument in a double way: both Matter and Form are lit up by the archetypal. Openly, and not through themes that are no more than human, the Divine presses forward through the mystic's inspiration to lay hands on the world. Not the acme of the fictitious in the poet's mind, calling for a peak of make-believe in ours, but an immediate revealing of what is revealed remotely by other kinds of verse: this is mystical inspiration. When the Matter is remote from mysticism, the poetic value gets no less: the Form determines that value. But provided the Form remains equally intense, a mystical immediacy in the Matter renders poetry a revelation *in excelsis* of the Real and the True. All great poetry has a body that is divine, but mostly the soul of it is divine with a human mask; the mystical poet's work is the unmasking of the divine spirit in that divine body.

The unmasking, however, is no simple and uniform act. Nor is it determined alone by a poet's individual style. Herbert has a religious simplicity, at once piquant and passionate; Crashaw a rich sensuousness kindling into spirituality; Donne a nervous intricate power troubling the Unknown; Vaughan a half-obscure half-bright straining beyond thought into mystical vision; Patmore a pointed polished ardour of the intellect for the veiled Wonder; Francis Thompson a restless and crowded and colourful heat of response to "the many-splendoured Thing". All of them have flights of fine poetry, but their styles, standing out one

from another, have yet a common element: the mask on the face of the Divine Spirit is diversely thinned and made translucent instead of being removed. Their unmasking is indirect. Only at rare moments something of the sheer reality shows itself. These poets have considerable vividness of mystical meaning: what they do not have enough is the language and rhythm of the mystical planes. The mystical planes are classified by Sri Aurobindo broadly as occult, psychic and spiritual. The occult language and rhythm have something of a Coleridgean, Blakean or Yeatsian stamp. They are not always instinct with the Divine, they have often a Celtic atmosphere, weird or fairylike. But when the mystical vision and emotion possess them, they transmit baffling buried heavens of Beauty like Yeats's

> Throne above throne where in half sleep,
> Their swords upon their iron knees,
> Brood her high lonely mysteries.

The psychic speech has a deeply delicate radiance moving the heart to some far sweetness or suffusing it with an exquisite ecstasy of God's love. Its yearning cry is heard in Blake's

> Ah, sunflower! weary of Time

as well as in Geoffrey Faber's

> O moon, that your light had lips and hands!

while the note of fulfilment steals into Robert Nichols's picture of "the Secret Garden" when the unseen gardener goes through it:

> Humbled and hushed and happy falls each bird.

Vaughan hints the psychic plane in his image of the paradise felt by him in childhood:

> That shady city of palm trees.

The spiritual inspiration, as distinguished from the occult and the psychic, has a wide-winging power: Sri Aurobindo calls it "overhead" because it arrives as if by a descent from spaces of light above the mind-level. Often it gets mixed with planes that are but mental: then its typical afflatus gets considerably subdued and comes out in no more than a few scattered breaths. Read carefully Vaughan's

> I see them walking in an air of glory,
> Whose light doth trample on my days,
> My days which are at best but dull and hoary,
> Mere glimmerings and decays.

The impression as a whole is of an excellent thinning and translucence of the Divine's mask, but a steadier scrutiny unravels three strains of poetry. The third line is nothing save a thinking-out, an ideative statement just lifted from prose-level by a stir of sight and a musical breath. The first and last lines have a more felicitous, more intense articulation: still they are the imaginative mind tossing its ideas into the Unknown, theirs is not the true freedom, the large radiance, the direct throb of what is above imaginative mysticism. Only the second line of the quatrain—"whose light doth trample on my days" —breaks somewhat loose from the tether of thought and contacts a consciousness more than mental. Perhaps the really accurate description of it is not that it ceases to be thought but that its thinking is

taken up into a spiritual clarity and amplitude. This is more than a thinning or translucence of the mask: it begins to remove it, though the removal is partial, just by one-fourth, we might say. Beyond this liberation from mental into spiritual thought a purer mystical intensity awaits the poet, but it is no more than once in a long while that English singers attain it. A magnificent unmasking by one-half is done by Vaughan himself:

> I saw Eternity the other night
> Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
> All calm as it was bright.

The thing-in-itself is sensed, the spiritual mystery is mirrored in an eye from which all effort of thought has fallen away, the effort that is the mask between the human and the Divine. It may not yet be the most intimate expression of the mystical: the intimacy grows as the thought-effort falls further and further away, but here it has sunk sufficiently far to let the Spirit disclose in some super-conscious ether of keen illumination its own being-stuff through a significant symbol of the complete and the unending. We feel the power of the disclosure not only in the vision and the word but also in the rhythm. The rhythm has a vibrant wideness belonging to a consciousness that is not human though caught in language through a human medium.

Poetry packed with a mask-removing quality is holy scripture in a special way. Whatever wakes in us a feeling of the Divine is scriptural and yet there is a sense in which the ancient Vedas and Upanishads stand apart from the other bibles of the world. The latter have a good deal of moving

God-intoxicated lyricism, also a mass of forceful God-haunted meditation, but the note of the Indian Rishis is infrequent in them as in the majority of mystical poetry written hitherto in English or for that matter any language save Sanskrit. No poet has proved a constant channel of its peculiar intensity. It is sporadic, almost accidental, in English literature. Where, however, it appears, it bears an unmistakable halo. It may not mention even the name of God, it may speak of things that lie about us every day, and yet we recognise in it a spiritual creativity of the most puissant order. Put beside lines with a similar drift of meaning but drawn from less supernormal "planes" of consciousness, it is as if a prophet instead of his ministers, wonderfully gifted though they might be, stood before us and laid a transfiguring hand in benediction on our heads. A great minister is what we meet in Browning's

Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of.

Fine poetry, this, and suggestive of the Unknown through a symbol of night; but it is the poetry of imaginative thought, it does not come sheer from a mystical plane. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's

The silence of the midnight many-starred

has a more ample "atmospheric" touch; nevertheless, it is a touch of something splendid and secret rather than concretely mystical or spiritual. Wordsworth's much simpler line,

The silence that is in the starry sky

conveys the Unknown and the Ineffable with an

intense intimacy, a state of high trance seems to be made actual, a lofty consciousness glimmering beyond mere imaginative thought makes its presence felt because both the expression and the rhythm come straight from a Vedic and Upanishadic source. A Rishi or a prophet is this line, the Divine in the act of unmasking.

Though not so impressive as the verse quoted from Vaughan it has a profounder vibration. If Vaughan's unmasking took place in a high ether of keen illumination, Wordsworth's is part of a yet higher domain from the mystical standpoint: a more penetrating spirituality is here, not keenly illuminative so much as raptly intuitive, not shedding the Divine's radiance upon us but rather making us enter into it and dwell in its midst. What may haze for us its extraordinary revelation is precisely that entry and indwelling: the light that is above the mind is here like home, a natural and familiar thing: the line makes no "display" of the Spirit's marvellousness, it simply gives it to us with an utterly unassuming intimacy. I do not mean that the intuitive speech is always divorced from richness: it can have a rich body as in another night-vision of Chattopadhyaya's:

The diamond dimness of the domèd air.

It can, however, dispense with the impressive and complex, since its essence is independent of that quality. The same intuitively vibrant simplicity as in the line of Wordsworth already quoted is in the one with which he companions it:

The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

Without any open declaration, it presents to us

through a familiar symbol a peace of in-drawn power of some lordly consciousness stretching wide across earth's being and into the Beyond or standing as a firm imperturbable intermediary between the terrestrial and the transcendental. Perhaps equally poetic are Abercrombie's

> Tall hills that stand in weather-blinded trances
> As if they heard, drawn upward and held there,
> Some god's eternal tune,

but the direct spiritual rhythmic turn is absent. Apt and euphonious language carrying a mystically pointed thought and image is achieved by Abercrombie: what Wordsworth has done is to catch, in the very rhythm of the line, "some god's eternal tune" instead of speaking about it. The result is that the sleep he does speak of has the stuff of some god's experience while Abercrombie's weather-blinded trances are only a felicitous thought-reflection of the godlike.

It is the rhythm that most decisively distinguishes one plane of conscious being from another. For, rhythm is not just a play of ordered sound; it is the thrill of the consciousness translating itself into sound-vibration. That thrill gives us more than the mood: it gives too the psychological level on which the mood arises. And the poetic outbursts of the various levels differ not in degree but in kind. Difference in degree would imply poetic superiority and inferiority, whereas the fact is that each level can have its perfection of poetic outburst. Difference in kind enables us to see how the quotation from Wordsworth, without necessarily being superior *qua* poetry to that from Abercrombie, is more close to the hidden Divine by deriving its

rhythm from a more spiritual plane. And it is also by a different kind of rhythm, more even than of vision and expression, that we perceive how that line of Wordsworth's is still not the intensest spirituality. The Divine is unmasked by it three-fourths and not whole. Beyond the intuitively intimate, there remains the complete identity. Poetry can descend into us from a level where the spiritual light does not merely carry us into the midst of the deific but makes us one with it. Then we have an expansion of the meaning to a supreme massiveness of immeasurable suggestion, an endlessness of overtone and undertone as though the line which seems to terminate went really sounding on from everlasting to everlasting because what it embodies is, without any mask at all, the Divine, the Deathless, the Infinite. When on a sudden a sonnet of Shakespeare's breaks into that extraordinary phrase:

> the prophetic soul
> Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,

our mind loses its customary bearings and flounders in a strange element we can scarcely plumb. The phrase is a grand intrusion in Shakespeare, the rhythm and rapture of another world than his tense quivering sonorities of sensation and passion. Not that those sonorities are absent or that a mystical idea deeper than any he was otherwise capable of has made its appearance. The phrase has a fathomlessness of word-suggestion and sound-suggestion other than the significant breadth and vivid plangency of not only his usual inspiration but also of lines like

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we may.

This is as penetrating in thought, the idea of it moves as puissantly upon our pulses: what it lacks is the immense profundity and wide supernatural presence which the words about the prophetic world-soul possess. The poetry is equally perfect, yet its plane of inspiration is not quite the same as of the Dreamer of things to come. There is something in common—Shakespeare's habitual thinking with his senses and his nerves and his entrails—but, merging in it or absorbing it, an immediacy of some spiritual vastitude is there, whose vibration of consciousness is dissimilar to what is native to the thought-thrill and the passion-gusto that are Shakespeare's wont. The unmasking of the secret Divine is direct instead of indirect and the revelatory impulse is from a plane where the Spirit stands wholly bare. If we can hold the feel and rhythm of it intensely within us, we shall distinguish that utter "wholeness" from the high spirit-stuffed ideation of Frederic Myers's urge to

> Leap from the universe and plunge in Thee

or Wordsworth's apostrophe to the unclouded soul of innocent clairvoyant childhood—

> Thou over whom thy immortality
> Broods like the Day,

as well as from that astonishing spirit-illumined line of Rimbaud's:

> Millions d'oiseaux d'or, ô futur vigueur!—

a line whose prophetic superhuman *élan* is perhaps just caught in the rendering:

> Millions of golden birds, O vigour unborn!

Shakespeare's accidental unmasking of the Divine by a Word one with some cosmic Truth-Consciousness exceeds as spiritual poetry even the large magnificence deepening into mystery that we contact in that Wordsworthian Being

> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.

Wordsworth seems here on the verge of the unmasking by identity; only a certain difference in the basic rhythm keeps the verse Spirit-intuitive instead of Spirit-identical. Possibly I am wrong, since it is very difficult to mark shades in a field so little explored, and Wordsworth here may be employing the accent which is at the top of the Vedic and Upanishadic grade and which the Rishis called the *Mantra*. There is, however, no doubt that the *Mantra* is uttered by a contemporary Indian poet writing in English in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, Dilip Kumar Roy, when he coins that phrase about God's guardianship:

> His sentinel love broods o'er the universe.

A modern English poet who died too young and whose work though published awaits the recognition it deserves utters it also through a vision of the grandiose triviality of the Cosmos in comparison to the unmanifest Divine:

> This patter of time's marring steps across the solitude
> Of Truth's abidingness, Self-blissful and alone.

It was John Chadwick, known to his friends in India as "Arjava", who wrote those profoundly haunting lines. A disciple of Sri Aurobindo's, he drew at several places in his work from the planes which his Master is the first to embody *en masse* in a poetic language that stands on a par with the plenary apocalypse of the Vedas and Upanishads and surpasses it in an application of the luminous look not only to what is beyond the world and calls the soul thither but also to what the soul can call down from there to transform and fulfil earth-life.

2

Sri Aurobindo's mystical inspiration is a New Age of poetry. The New Age consists to some extent in a fuller emergence of the occult and the psychic, either pure or mingled with the mind's thought-stuff; to a greater extent in a blending of the occult, the psychic and the mysticised mental with the overhead afflatus; to the largest extent in the overhead afflatus sheer and undisguised, rising higher and higher towards the *Mantra* and frequently attaining it. Everywhere, Sri Aurobindo brings out living symbols from the mystical planes—a concrete contact with the Divine's presence. Even when realities that are not openly divine are viewed, the style is of a direct knowledge, direct feeling, direct rhythm from an inner or upper poise: the mundane scene and the supra-mundane principalities and powers are given their image and value and secret life-throb as realised from a consciousness aware directly of the supreme Spirit. That consciousness covers all phenomena with significances and suggestions which the mere mind cannot adequately gauge. It is necessary, therefore, for

us readers to develop our aesthetic sense to a pitch subtler than in our normal response to poetry; else we shall often get no more than a run of disconnected flashes or, worse still, a jostle of grandiose abstractions; in either case we shall miss the concrete revelation, the living actuality. A twofold method of approach is desirable. There must be as much as possible a stilling of ourselves, an in-drawn hush ready to listen to the supernormal speech; and we must help the hush to absorb successfully the new tone by reading the verse aloud. All poetry requires to be read aloud for the final force of its meaning to go home and the deepest implications to be evoked. But in Sri Aurobindo's work the ear's attention is all the more needed because we have not merely to get out of him the subtle secret of his meaning: we have also to get something which will convey to us a feel of reality without the meaning being adequately grasped by our mind. His poetry is drawn from regions so far behind or beyond the human level that the mind is frequently baffled and even when it sees the drift of the significance it fails to hold it enough to experience the concreteness of what is implied. To experience that substantiality the rhythm is of paramount help, for it makes the state of consciousness that is a-thrill in the poem live and vibrate within us, however difficult it may be for the intellect to pierce into that state. The substantiality, the harmony and consistency, the massed grandeur of the many-sided mystical vision and experience disclose themselves with a seizing directness when the poem is read aloud—a seizing directness which is likely on occasion to be absolutely absent if only the eye dwells on the words and notes their meaning without our letting in their haunting body

of sound. The sound of mystical poetry, especially of the overhead order, is three-fourths of its efficacy: hence the old custom of audibly uttering the *Mantra* in order to liberate in one's being the godhead held within the words. This is not to say that spiritual poetry is glorious gibberish—it has a massive vision and an ample meaning, but the main gate of entry for these things into us is the rhythm, the sound-reflex of their hidden life-throb, their inner force of existence. Once the rhythm has transmitted to us that throb and that force, the eye will open wider and wider and our thought begin to shape itself according to the truth of the Spirit.

The ear's importance can be easily shown by reading a stanza like the following from Sri Aurobindo's quantitative Alcaics, *Jivanamukta*, first with the eye alone and then loudly:

> He who from Time's dull motion escapes and thrills
> Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal's breast,
> Unrolls the form and sign of being,
> Seated above in the omniscient Silence.

Something in the vitality of the style is felt to build for us more than a philosophical structure, yet the full lift and ecstasy gets clipped, so to speak, unless we roll out the lines with a deliberate intoning. The slowly breaking suspense at the start, the sudden speeding up, the strange mixture of calm widening and intense penetrating, the grave and ample revealing movement, the tremendous tranced poise—all these become a profound sensation to the soul when the words ring forth in the spaces of consciousness. A latent faculty deeper than thought and imagination is struck awake. The

stresses, quantities, vowel-adjustments, consonant-combinations become instruments in the hands of an overhead inspiration to create in us a rhythm of being, an emotional vibration, a soul-stir that echo the self-experience of a divine plane. That self-experience lives most strongly in the second and fourth lines; a powerful pulsing away of mind and heart into the Divine's depth, a quiet plucking and largening out of them from human nature into the Divine's height. When these lines are made resonant by the voice, the concrete suggestions of words like "into" and "breast" and "seated" and "above" are perceived as no poetic devices but exact modes of rendering Yogic realisations.

Audible reading, repeated many times, would also tend to save us from falling foul of a poem like *Thought the Paraclete*, where Sri Aurobindo works into a novel quantitative scheme the experience of an upward movement of the mind as an intermediary between our consciousness and the Unknown. He depicts the mind as caught up into layer after layer of what is beyond, leaving behind in the consciousness here a superb calm unbounded by the brief and the finite, a sense of some ultimate Self without personal confines. The poetic expression is packed with symbols and visions straight from the spiritual planes :

> The face
> Lustred, pale-blue-lined of the hippogriff,
> Eremite, sole, daring the bourneless ways,
> Over world-bare summits of timeless being
> Gleamed; the deep twilights of the world-abyss
> Failed below. Sun-realms of supernal seeing,
> Crimson-white mooned oceans of pauseless bliss
> Drew its vague heart-yearning with voices sweet.
> Hungering, large-souled, to surprise the unconned

Secrets white-fire-veiled of the last Beyond,
Crossing power-swept silences rapture-stunned,
Climbing high far ethers eternal-sunned,
Thought the great-winged wanderer paraclete
Disappeared slow-singing a flame-word rune.
Self was left, lone, limitless, nude, immune.

The ordinary critic is likely to be puzzled. He cannot quite lump it with Surrealism as a chaotic transcription of the Subconscious, for there are evident a process and a *dénoument*, but this control and guidance of the abnormal paints no picture that can be understood like Francis Thompson's gorgeous fantasy of unrest:

Across the margent of the world I fled,
And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,

or his mightily imagined call from the Inscrutable:

Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity.

Sri Aurobindo is not mentally conceiving and visualising: he is recording realities that belong to some Super-Nature, without any effort to clothe his perceptions in emblems we can readily recognise from our contacts with the universe around. He is writing as a Yogi, letting spiritual facts seen in dimensions other than our universe take shape in poetry, and the poetry springs from those dimensions, throbbing with the strange tangibilities there and not throughout aided by an interpretative glow from our experience of material objects. Poetry must always be objective in order to convey a feel of actuality, but the outward world we know by our physical senses is not everything: Yoga reveals

subtle senses that put us in touch with other worlds, other outwardnesses as real as those to which we are habituated and considerably divergent from them in spite of a certain correspondence between the two. The mind lifted by Yoga towards the Eternal does not just shoot up ideas, does not just think of the Divine and imagine what the Divine must be like. It clearly separates from the body, rises as a distinct entity into a new consciousness and a series of supra-physical worlds. Passionate with God-hunger it is a living creature inwardly lit by a lust for the Eternal's empyrean, "pale-blue-lined" and wearing a symbolic form to its own inner eye according to what aspect of the consciousness has winged upward: the hippogriff—half-horse and half-eagle—is a form of this kind and no arbitrary futuristic figuration. And the worlds explored by that dynamic denizen of the inner being are real, concrete, objective. Sri Aurobindo transmits his experience of them to us in words charged with the very vision and vibration of the consciousness pervading those worlds. That is why the shapes and scenes are so incalculable, so bewildering—until we draw ourselves back from our habitual mind into a receptive hush and quicken that hush by reading aloud the strangely worded and strangely rhythmed lines. The rhythmical scheme is not any of the accepted metres—the stresses and the quantities are a pattern demanding all sorts of unusual word-combinations and sound-effects; the massed accents and lengths call for an abundant use of the compound, and the necessity to hold together in short but accurate phrases the manifold grandeurs of Super-Nature amply justifies it. Seerhood and vitality are constant features of the style, and they possess us most forcefully through an audible

reading. Whether we fully understand or no, the pictures and the sound-suggestions make an impact as of undeniable reality:

Crimson-white mooned oceans of pauseless bliss

is a line of extreme subtle-sensuous energy, as is also

Crossing power-swept silences rapture-stunned,

and they strike upon the aesthetic faculty in us with a splendour of poetry equal to the best of Francis Thompson and an immediacy of mystical perception more direct and concentrated than anything he could command.

A mystical immediacy akin to *Thought the Paraclete*'s in symbol-colour but directed towards a different end meets us in another quantitative experiment by Sri Aurobindo—*Flame-Wind*. Here too the mental imagination does not hold the seat of honour. It comes to the fore, however, in important places as interpreter, so that the bulk of the poetry which is constituted by an excitement of the occult and a smoulder of the psychic, with widening puissances blown into them from the overhead spiritual, is not quite removed from the accent of Thompson:

A flame-wind ran from the gold of the east,
Leaped on my soul with the breath of a sevenfold noon.
Wings of the angel, gallop of the beast!
Mind and body on fire, but the heart in swoon.

O flame, thou bringest the strength of the noon,
But where are the voices of morn and the stillness of eve?
Where the pale-blue wine of the moon?
Mind and life are in flower, but the heart must grieve.

Gold in the mind and the life-flame's red
Make of the heavens a splendour, the earth a blaze.
But the white and rose of the heart are dead.
Flame-wind, pass! I will wait for Love in the silent ways.

The style here joins hands in some respects with such Thompson-utterances as

I said to Dawn: Be sudden—to Eve: Be soon;
With thy young skiey blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous Lover,

and the one about Nature:

Let her, if she would owe me,
Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky and show me
The breasts o' her tenderness.

Where it differs is essentially in a certain directness of the symbols: Thompson, for all his power and poignance, gives the impression of trying to suggest the supernatural by similes and metaphors moulded from natural appearances, his images remain images, his "young skiey blossoms" and "blue bosom-veil of sky" are a figurative play of beautiful ideas whereas Sri Aurobindo's "pale-blue wine of the moon" and his "white and rose of the heart" come as statements of actualities, bearing directly the concreteness of some occult, psychic or spiritual truth. This difference does not lie only in the particular phrases, it is focussed in them by the light and atmosphere of the entire poem, by the plane on which it moves. With a more simple economical beauty and energy than Thompson's, the symbols of Sri Aurobindo take on a direct life, become themselves mystical states of being and consciousness instead of their hints and echoes.

Thompson takes five lines to give us his Hound of Heaven:

> Still with unhurrying chase,
> And unperturbèd pace,
> Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
> Came on the following Feet,
> And a Voice above their beat—

five lines poetically necessary for building the constant mighty accumulating pursuit, but none of them has the sheer direct supernatural impetus of Sri Aurobindo's

> Wings of the angel, gallop of the beast!

It may be said that Thompson's general meaning is more clear and in that sense his style is the more direct of the two. Yes, but the directness is not of the mystical species: it is nearer the intellect's explanatory method. Sri Aurobindo is not devoid of that method; no poem of his is pure Dada, in fact no poem worth the name can abolish connection between its parts and dispense with being felt as a whole by the understanding. The intellect by itself may not be able to get the full "hang", it must take the aid of the imagination, the visionary and the aesthetic powers; still, if the work has "form" it cannot be absolutely blank and chaotic in the impression made by its parts as well as by its totality on the intellect. The mind has many types of logic, it knows how to link section to section and embrace the linked sections as a single organic unit by means not always strictly argumentative *à la* Aristotle, it has also a Platonic dialectic, driven forward by pregnant analogies, suggestive similarities, picturesque parables in which the constructive artist with

his harmonising eye and proportioning hand runs side by side with the abstract deducer. In poetry the Platonic dialectic keeps abstract deduction very much in the shade and develops the artistic sequence by devices not easily assimilable in prose : poetry often "argues" by alliteration and cadence, "clinches" by rhyme, at least by echo, and jumps from point to point by merging differences through metaphor and transferred epithet or even through transfigured punning. Its logic is more imaginative than intellectual, but logic it certainly has—a relation, a synthesis, a fusion, a unity. In mystical poetry of the Aurobindonian order this logic goes further away from the intellectual method than in the Thompsonian inspiration, and that extra distance is due to the planes from which Sri Aurobindo creates —planes of God-realisation held by his consciousness in their own substance and atmosphere instead of being reflected in normal human ignorance as happened with Thompson. Hence the mystical planes are directer in his work than in that Catholic poet's and such a phenomenon makes for less kinship to intellectual directness since the contents of those planes are not quite like Nature and life as known to us, their behaviour is alien, their laws unexpected and the logic of their interconnection and harmony more difficult to grasp. However, it must be remembered that a greater mystical directness does not imply an inferiority in Sri Aurobindo's intellect to Thompson's : the intellect can be richer and mightier at the same time that one is more mystically direct but it will not deploy itself on its own level or cast its argumentative tendency on the poetic performance, it will surrender itself to the mystical consciousness and allow its resources and movements to be marshalled by that

consciousness. Nor is the mystic's distance from intellectual directness to be confused with the complicated density or obscurity resulting from a many-strained, multi-motioned play of the intellect as in Donne, Browning and sometimes Thompson. That distance consists simply in the revelation of secret presences and experiences straight from the hidden planes which are charged with the Superhuman and the Divine—the revelation that is carried to its closest and its widest by Sri Aurobindo in the still unfinished epic growing daily under his hand—*Savitri*.

Flame-Wind is a sort of half-way house between the mystical poetry of the past and the unique Aurobindonian afflatus. It is not an extreme example of the naked light of the occult, the psychic, the spiritual, and its meaning is brought out with a considerable degree of reliance on the mind's ordinary method of speech. Its meaning, of course, is that Sri Aurobindo is for an integral union with the Divine, a wholeness fulfilling every part of him: he will not rest with a sudden dynamic realisation of the Spirit-seized mind ruling the body and driving the life-impulse with superhuman energy of thought and will, yet without those subtle delicate influences of the Divine that are received when the being is bent not only on God-knowing but also on God-loving, on growing the devotee and saint as well as the sage and prophet. This meaning, however, unfolds for all its reliance on the mind's ordinary method of speech less through a number of illustrative images concretising the ideas than through touches on our imagination from objects and beings belonging to other dimensions than the world from which a poet usually borrows his figures. The rhythm too has something of another

space and time. All poetry imposes a new space and time on our world, mixing "unknown modes of being" with things that are familiar: that is why it is full of magic and mystery. Even a subtle fancy like Stephen Spender's

> Eye, gazelle, delicate wanderer,
> Drinker of horizon's fluid line

suggests a strange entity living in an uncommon world interpenetrating and exceeding the outward physical and even the inward mental to which we are accustomed, but neither the meaning nor the rhythm takes us deep into the mystical spheres that are contacted in their concrete substance and form by Sri Aurobindo's poetry. That substance and form need not be always a definite symbol, a walking out into our midst by a hippogriff; it can just as well be a particular state of consciousness conveyed vividly by the impact of words plucked from the unknown and the deific, as in Sri Aurobindo's phrase:

> My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight.

Before speaking of the complete and sustained outburst of this style, with its overhead uniqueness, in *Savitri*, it will perhaps not be out of place to look at a poem conveying the Yogic process of which a part is the coming down of the new inspiration from its spiritual altitudes. *Descent* is written in Sapphics, the only experiment in English comparable to those of Swinburne and John Addington Symonds. The classical Sapphic quatrain has in three lines a spondee and a dactyl between a single trochee at the beginning and two at the end, while

the fourth line is a dactyl followed by either a spondee or a trochee. Swinburne uses often a trochaic instead of a spondaic foot and introduces a few other minor variations here and there; Symonds does likewise but he mostly keeps a spondaic close in the last line. Sri Aurobindo follows Swinburne rather than Symonds, adding, however, the privilege of a more marked modulation anywhere of the dactyl in the first three lines by an anti-bacchius, cretic or molossus; at one place he substitutes their terminal trochee with a spondee and the dactyl of the last line with a cretic; at one or two points he employs elision to get his effect right. The values he ascribes to his syllables are, of course, quantitative according to the system illustrated at length in his hexameters. We have in *Descent*, therefore, not a strict imitation of the Greek pattern but a living response to it by English prosody without sacrificing the basic spirit and rhythm-movement of the original. Over and above technical departures there is also one in the lyrical quality which demands notice. Swinburne and Symonds retain, almost throughout, Sappho's poignant picturing tone, at once simple in expression and rich in sound-texture. Sri Aurobindo, though preserving the gorgeous-sounding yet clear-phrased power of Sappho, introduces in the poignancy and the picturisation another note which is due not alone to the theme and experience being different. Sappho was passionate in a piercingly human way of love; Sri Aurobindo the mystic and the Yogi has turned the cry of the heart towards the mystery of God, but this difference in the emotive trend need not diminish any essential warmth and indeed with an integral Yogi like Sri Aurobindo it does not; what is non-Sapphic in his verse is not the mysticising of the lyricism so much

as on occasion a style that is Pindar rather than Sappho. A general Pindaresque atmosphere is not inconsistent with the Sapphic style: Pindar is intensely religious, a priest of the Gods, when he is not intensely secular, a celebrant of games and feasts, but that is a matter of temperament and it can express itself in a style of *sévère douceur*, of grave delicacy, as in Simonides among the Greeks and Wordsworth among the English and as in Sappho herself at certain moments when she is more the artist conscious of self-consecration to the divine Muse than the lover shaken by the human beauty of an Anactoria. The non-Sapphic element in Sri Aurobindo's poem is not just the religious temperament of Pindar but something of the grandiose uplift and triumphant crash of sound that is in Pindar's odes. Blended as it is with Sri Aurobindo's usual self-mastery this magnitude and momentum goes free of the intricate violence of word and image accompanying it in Pindar, balancing it fearfully on the verge of the grotesque and the monstrous and even at times toppling it over. The best of Pindar's style and Sappho's is in *Descent*, coloured by a mystical experience of the "overhead" type:

> All my cells thrill swept by a surge of splendour,
> Soul and body stir with a mighty rapture,
> Light and still more light like an ocean billows
> Over me, round me.
>
> Rigid, stone-like, fixed like a hill or statue,
> Vast my body feels and upbears the world's weight;
> Dire the large descent of the Godhead enters
> Limbs that are mortal.

Voiceless, thronged, Infinity crowds upon me;
Presses down a glory of power eternal;
Mind and heart grow one with the cosmic wideness;
Stilled are earth's murmurs.

Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces
Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings;
Thoughts that left the Ineffable's flaming mansions
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow the heart-beats' rhythm like a giant hammer's;
Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,
Ecstasy's chariots.

All the world is changed to a single oneness;
Souls undying, infinite forces, meeting,
Join in God-dance weaving a seamless Nature,
Rhythm of the Deathless.

Mind and heart and body, one harp of being,
Cry that anthem, finding the notes eternal,—
Light and might and bliss and immortal wisdom
Clasping for ever.

Read aloud, the poem shows a pervading overhead tone which forms an overwhelming mass in stanzas four and five. Their purely poetic quality is on a par with the two stanzas in Symonds's translation, where Sappho's crystalline keenness finds an English equivalent: hearing Anactoria "silverly" laughing, Sappho's heart quivers and her voice is hushed:

Yea, my tongue is broken and through me and through me
'Neath the flesh palpable fire runs tingling;
Nothing see my eyes, and a noise of roaring
Waves in my ear sounds;

Sweat runs down in rivers, a tremor seizes
All my limbs, and paler than grass in autumn
Caught by pains of menacing death I falter,
Lost in the love-trance.

If physical passion could have a mysticism of its own, it is well-nigh here, rendering in terms of sensuality the Aurobindonian

Light and still more light like an ocean billows
Over me, round me.

The "roaring waves" in Sappho's ear, which bring her the love-trance and afterwards the music whereon her experience floats through the ages, transfigure themselves on Sri Aurobindo's plane into "a torrent of rapid lightnings" by which knowledge of the deathless Divine leaps on the human consciousness and by whose thronged and glittering invasion the revelatory speech of the overhead spiritual is born:

Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,
Ecstasy's chariots.

These three lines make a most magnificent picture, Vedic and Upanishadic in its symbolism and the sound-strokes of the words leave reverberations that are mantric: the impulsion of the supreme Spirit is poetised in language and rhythm which are themselves received from the immense Overworld known to the ancient Rishis. They are the aptest and most inwardly representative summing-up possible of the afflatus that creates Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and of the impression left by that afflatus on the sensitive reader.

3

When we speak of *Savitri* we speak of a unique adventure in poetic creation. From a certain standpoint the only parallel to its development is the second part of Goethe's *Faust*. Goethe kept it with him for several decades, adding to it, revising it, making it run along with the growth of his own mind, and the last touch was given just a few days before his death. Here the parallel ends. Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is not merely a work drawn out over a great number of years: it is a work re-written more than half a dozen times and each time re-written not simply because of poetic defects. Each version might be poetically satisfying: the difference was of the plane of consciousness from which the writing took place. Nor was Sri Aurobindo growing and maturing only as Goethe did during the composition of the second part of *Faust*; he was moving from plane to plane of Yoga. Not alone the ideas and the emotions were undergoing a change and reaching to ripeness as with Goethe: the very stuff of consciousness was turning increasingly from human to superhuman. *Savitri* was originally composed with a good deal of the kind of inspiration which flows through Sri Aurobindo's early narratives *Urvasie* and *Love and Death*, the inspiration of the life-force with its surge of passion and emotion, the mind energy with its lucid or recondite sweep of thought and here and there an outbreak of occult sight, a piercing by the bright poignancies of the psychic, a lifting into the large ideation of the Higher Mind. In *Savitri* the last three elements were more active than before, since the poet was now deep in Yoga. More frequent too were sudden visitations by the rhythm which passes through lines like the

one from *Love and Death*:

> Measuring vast pain in his immortal mind,

or by the vision as of that other from *Urvasie*:

> Time like a snake coiling among the stars.

But Sri Aurobindo soon struck beyond the level from which he had written the original poem. He grew master—at all moments and not solely in the trance-state—of the plane the traditional Yogas posit above the mind-centre in the brain, the famous "thousand-petalled lotus" of spiritual light. A recast was made in the terms of this poise of consciousness. Another became necessary when he rose to an illumination yet more profound—and whenever definitely higher levels were his he infused the poem with fresh values of significance and sound. Sometimes, from one and the same level differing versions were set forth—on every occasion the scope extended and the writing laden with more matter. The last few, spread across thirty-five years or so, have been such ramifications and "pithings". The very final, which for want of leisure is still incomplete, is an endeavour to be comprehensive to the maximum with a continual command of the intense and immense spiritual directness of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

The ancient Indian scriptures are pervaded by an ever-present awareness of a living Infinity, an illimitable Oneness deploying itself in a myriad modes, remaining not only transcendental and static but throwing itself out in a cosmic dance, a dance that is divine on the higher planes but shot with shadows on the lower. On the lower there is a tremendous hide and seek, the soul has to pierce

through masks and meet its own white truth. Once the piercing is done, the light is seen even here as ubiquitous and all Nature as secretly bathed in an ether of bliss. The Vedas and the Upanishads were chanted by those in whom the veil of division had fallen away. They spoke from the depths of the all-suffusing Spirit and from the heights of the Spirit's Truth-world whose dim reflex is in our space and time. These scriptures, therefore, brim with a concrete seeing and complex manifestation of forms which the mind cannot wholly explain but which seize at once the inner heart, or a mighty burst of harmonious intuitions in which the mind discovers the consummation, the absolute of its own fumbling concepts. In either case, what is found is, as it were, three-dimensional—far from the merely abstract: there is a solid touch of revelation, a burning throb of realisation. All poetry deals in the tangible and the pulsing; but here what is supposed to be immeasurably remote comes intimately near, impinges on our members and affects our blood-stream. The whole body of us seems to thrill to the Eternal, feel itself as a play of the Eternal, in contact with the Eternal's luminous stuff, the Eternal's rhythm of vastitude. Yes, a new stuff of being, a new rhythm of experience press to incarnate themselves, so that our limited consciousness may not view the Beyond as from behind unbreakable glass but find windows and doors flung open in the crystal walls of the imagination for the breath of the shining Mystery to blow in and our mind and heart to rush out. That gigantic intercommunion and that boundless freedom are what the Vedic and Upanishadic poetry is composed of. It is these things that are also *Savitri*.

But Sri Aurobindo brings again and again the accent and vibration of the *Mantra* and a general mantric atmosphere playing round whatever other overhead planes find voice, to convey him to a goal further than any the Vedas and the Upanishads envisaged. His poetry traverses regions on which the steps of the ancients never fell. The afflatus of the planes from which the Rishis chanted serves him to reveal a knowledge unattained by the Rishis. *Savitri* is at the same time a harking back and a springing forward. Its very conception shows this double movement. In the *Mahabharata* the story of Savitri depicts a fight between love and death somewhat similar in outward intention to the episodes of Priyumvada and Ruru as well as Urvasie and Pururavus which Sri Aurobindo had already poetised. The *Mahabharata* relates that when Savitri chose Satyavan for her bridegroom she was told of the prophecy that his life would be short and that soon she would be widowed. She clung to her choice, resolved within herself to pit her love against the fatality by which she was being dogged. Knowing the heartbreak concealed for her behind the rapture of love she faced the future: hers was the hope of triumphing over the dread Adversary of man's existence. At the back of this tale of conjugal devotion armed with an extreme Will to Life, Sri Aurobindo intuited a wealth of symbol; for the name "Savitri" the Rig Veda had given to the supreme creative consciousness emblemed forth as the Sun. It means the Truth-force of the divine Light, and by analogy "Satyavan" would mean that Light's Truth-being. So the carrying away of Satyavan by Yama the God of Death and the combat of Savitri's heart and mind with that inscrutable darkness

were felt by Sri Aurobindo to be hinting vaguely the effort celebrated in the Vedic hymns to reclaim by means of Yoga what they called the lost Sun, the divine Light that has got submerged in a material Nature which seems to begin as a blind unconsciousness and out of which evolve various forms of Ignorance struggling to live and see. In Sri Aurobindo's poem the term Death regains its Vedic and Upanishadic connotation. Death, in the Vedas and the Upanishads, is the world's ignorance of its own divine Self: the falling asunder of the body and the blowing out of its little day are only the most external aspect of the mortal Night that has hidden from us our own Godhead. But Sri Aurobindo does not rest with this connotation. He goes beyond the old Indian idea of what God-attainment is. The Rishis spoke of liberating the soul from its bondage and of the liberated soul bringing the light of the Infinite into its erstwhile prison. They, however, put a limit to that enlightenment. A certain mixture of shadow was accepted as inevitable. At rare moments a flashing doubt about this grey inevitability escapes their lips: Earth then appears to be a divine Mother waiting for some final apocalypse of herself. But the vision of that perfect life is never clearly held before the consciousness: fugitive symbols of its possibility float down from the high trances of the seers without yielding their inmost essence or becoming dynamic. Though sufficient support is given to regarding the cosmic scene as a field for manifesting the Spirit, complete spiritual fulfilment is said to come only after the gross body has been doffed and a status reached outside the cosmic round of rebirth. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Supreme must be possessing the basic

and perfect reality, the flawless archetype, of everything set going in our space and time. To couple with a liberation into the Self of selves an attainment of this archetypal Truth and to evolve the divine counterpart of each side of our complex constitution is the full aim of Yoga: in such an aim, even the gross body with its energies cannot be neglected as untransmutable into a luminous and immortal vehicle. Consequently, Sri Aurobindo, while reading the Vedic and Upanishadic sense in the term Death, does not overlook its common physical sense which the *Mahabharata* kept in view. Unlike the old scriptures, he refuses to recognise the physical breaking-up as an unescapable destiny. The Aurobindonian Yogi does more than transmute his inward instruments: he conquers too the limitations imposed on the corporeal frame at present by age, disease or accident: he incarnates a divine body-archetype, his very stuff of matter flowers into a miraculous novel substance. So Savitri, fighting Satyavan's death, is in Sri Aurobindo's hands an avatar of the immortal Beauty and Love plunging into the trials of terrestrial life and seeking to overcome them not only in herself but also in the world she has embraced as her own: she is sworn to put an utter end to earth's estrangement from God. Her story grows a poetic structure of incident and character, in which he houses his special search and discovery, his unique exploration of hidden worlds, his ascent into the deific ranges of the Spirit and his bringing down of their power to divinise man's total nature.

The technique of *Savitri* is attuned to the scriptural conception at work. It accepts the principle of metre and does not cut any modernistic zigzag of irregularity. Sri Aurobindo is not an enemy to

free verse, but he does reject the free verse that has no underlying rhythm to unify its wanderings. A unifying norm, no matter how inexplicit, is the *sine qua non* of successful poetry, particularly in rendering overhead values. For, unity of measure is not just our mind's arbitrary demand: Nature operates on such a basis, all her multiplicities have fundamental types behind them—individuals grounded in species, species grounded in genera. A wide variation playing upon a persistent pattern is her creative mode everywhere. The overhead planes hold that basic oneness most intensely. Conscious being there does not forget as in our lower hemisphere the universal Self: every movement is fraught with awareness of the Infinite. The principle of metre translates most strikingly into speech Nature's law of manifestation, the Spirit's method of self-deployment: the Many modulating upon the basis of the One. *Savitri* adopts the iambic five-foot line of English blank verse as the most apt and plastic for harmonies like those of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Its blank verse, however, has certain special characteristics affining it still further to them. It moves in a series of blocks formed by a changing distribution of correctly proportioned sentence-lengths—lengths of one line, two lines, three or four or five lines, many lines. Scarcely any block breaks off in the middle of a line; the sentence seldom makes a full pause except when its last line is complete. Hence the blocks, connected as they are, have still an independence, a kind of self-sufficient structure like stanzas distinct without being equally long. And what applies to the sentence-unit applies in a general way to every part of it. Each line-unit seems itself a block on a small scale—telling

in its own mass and force as if it could stand *in vacuo* and at the same time join in a concordant sentence-totality to develop the story and its spiritual perspective. Though enjambment is not avoided on any strict principle, it is less ingenious and precipitate than in *Urvasie*, *Love and Death* or *Baji Prabhou*. The scriptural mood demands a graver, more contained movement. To such a mood end-stopping comes with greater naturalness. But Sri Aurobindo does not make a fetish of end-stopping. What he does is a most careful moulding of the individual line so that it may not merely serve the broad scheme as in much present-day verse but be as well a power and perfection in its own rights, without of course the least rhythmic monotony occurring in the passage and impairing the vitality of the broad scheme.

The power and perfection of each line of *Savitri* lies in utter faithfulness to the fact, the atmosphere, the life-throb found on the overhead planes. Not that the poetry refuses to descend anywhere: there are lines which the ordinary mind recognises as akin to its coinage, but these are deliberately introduced as helpful connecting-links between flight and flight on the supernormal levels. Even these have usually a vague breath of the Overworld about them. In any case they are so few that the generalisation about overhead power and perfection is practically unaffected. From the very start we have the full grip on profound realities, the expanse and richness of a revelation beyond the mental meaning. *Savitri*, like *Ilion*, that experiment by Sri Aurobindo of three hundred and odd lines in the quantitative hexameter, begins with a picture of darkness passing into day: here it is the last dawn in Satyavan's life, a phenomenon packed with significance of the immortal

light which Savitri has to win for earth by challenging the decree of death so long accepted by man. The daybreak of *Ilion* combines the spirit of Greek myth and epic with the spirit of Indian Yoga. It is a vision charged with the illumination of the occult Orient but naturalising itself to the atmosphere of heroic Hellas. *Savitri* knows no such tempering: its mysticism is naked to the depths, the Orient shows its true inward colour, India's Yogic antiquity lives again to fill out with enormous rhythmic suggestions the Aurobindonian message. But the poem's prelude is too long to quote in uninterrupted sequence; only a number of "views", brief or extended, can be set together to limn the chief features of the symbolic 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. . . .
The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still.
Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
Something that wished but knew not how to be
Gave room for an old tired want unfilled
At peace in its subconscient 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. . . .
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. . . .

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. . . .
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 borders 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.
Ambassadress twixt eternity and change,
The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths
That wrap the fated journeying of the stars
And saw the spaces ready for her feet.
Once she half-looked behind for her veiled sun,
Then, thoughtful, turned 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,
And, scattered on sealed 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. . . .

The impression is at first as of music afar and above—beautiful but not very distinguishable in its notes. There is, however, a pervading intensity which cannot be missed even at a distance: the notes may not be clear at once but they are no blur, they stand fully formed, diminished without being dissolved. A little concentrated hearing—and the music takes a grip on us, stirring strange secret

places within to echo the rhythms that float down and to mirror the visions that fall across gigantic spaces. When our consciousness grows receptive enough, we observe that the spiritual and the material move here as one. Most of us who, when the night had run a long course but was still thick, have waited in the ambiguous atmosphere with our faces to the East, have had an inkling of a vigil by some cosmic Ignorance and have been faintly filled with the unplumbed prevision of a deific change because of both a tendency in the gloom and a beckoning from some masked splendour. Also, when watching daybreak, we have felt a deific revelation in the making, a beauty that was too great to be borne by earth-eyes and was soon lost in the familiar bright outlines of our world. Either of these two perceptions is caught by Sri Aurobindo with the utmost suggestive precision; we face occurrences we might see with our physical eyes and touch with our physical hands. It is the combined sense of the closely possessed and the supremely illimitable that is the mark of true overhead poetry. For, the Spiritual is never tenuous or empty: it is dense and rich, containing the essence of all that we regard as substantial: whatever has shape and colour can therefore interpret it, bring it to a focus for our minds, be its revelatory figure. But shape and colour so often tend to overlay the Spirit's secret values. Sri Aurobindo's art is free from that tendency: he nowhere loses in the terms of Nature the stuff of Super-Nature. A striking example of his success are the lines:

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.

A keen atmosphere of Super-Nature bathes what we are accustomed to look upon as natural objects —hand, panel, hinge, gate. And they are thus bathed not merely by being used as metaphors. There has happened a merging of them in realities of planes beyond the earth, a spiritual concreteness fuses with their material concreteness and makes them affect our senses with forms instinct with an unearthly significance. Perhaps it will be easiest to appreciate this art of mystical fact by noting the lines immediately preceding the above:

> 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.

It is possible to play the critic and ask: "Should there not be a restraint in the double adjective? On top of a general teeming of single 'qualifiers' two epithets are put before a noun in the same way twice in three lines here and two lines further one more pair of similarly yoked adjectives is seen in 'pale enchanted light': would it not be an improvement if some variety were introduced and a less obvious method followed?" Sri Aurobindo, in a private letter, makes a most enlightening statement on the point at issue: "If a gradual wealth-burdened movement is the right thing, as it certainly is here in my judgment, the necessary means have to be used to bring it about—and the double adjective is admirably suited for the purpose. Do not forget that *Savitri* is spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure. Done on this rule, it is really a new attempt and cannot be hampered by old ideas of technique

except when they are assimilable. Least of all by a standard proper to a mere intellectual and abstract poetry which makes 'reason and taste' the supreme arbiters, aims at a harmonised poetic intellectual balanced expression of the sense, elegance in language, a sober and subtle use of imaginative decoration, a restrained emotive element. The attempt at mystic spiritual poetry of the kind I am at demands above all a spiritual objectivity, an intense psycho-physical concreteness. According to certain canons, epithets should be used sparingly, free use of them is rhetorical, an 'obvious' device, a crowding of images is bad taste, there should be subtlety of art not displayed but severely concealed—*Summa ars est celare artem.* Very good for a certain standard of poetry, not so good or not good at all for others. Shakespeare kicks over these traces at every step, Aeschylus freely and frequently, Milton wherever he chooses. Such lines as

> With hideous ruin and combustion down
> To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
> In adamantine chains and penal fire

or

> 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

(note two double adjectives in three lines in the last)—are not subtle or restrained or careful to conceal their elements of powerful technique, they show rather a vivid richness or vehemence, forcing language to its utmost power of expression. That has to be done still more in this kind of mystic

poetry. I cannot bring out the spiritual objectivity if I have to be miserly about epithets, images, or deny myself the use of all available resources of sound-significance. The double epithets are indispensable here and in the exact order in which they are arranged by me. The rich burdened movement might be secured by other means, but a rich burdened movement of any kind is not my primary object, it is desirable only because it is needed to express the spirit of the action here; and the double epithets are wanted because they are the best, not only one way of securing it. The 'gesture' must be 'slow miraculous'—if it is merely miraculous or merely slow, that does not create a picture of the thing as it is, but of something quite abstract and ordinary or concrete and ordinary—it is the combination that renders the exact nature of the mystic movement, with the 'dim appeal' completing it, so that 'gesture' is not here a metaphor but a thing actually done. Equally a 'pale light' or an 'enchanted light' may be very pretty, but it is only the combination that renders the luminosity which is that of the hand acting tentatively in the darkness. That darkness itself is described as a quietude which gives it a subjective spiritual character and brings out the thing symbolised, but the double epithet 'inert black' gives it the needed concreteness so that the quietude ceases to be something abstract and becomes something concrete, objective but still spiritually subjective. Every word must be the right word, with the right atmosphere, the right relation to all the other words, just as every sound in its place and the whole sound together must bring out the imponderable significance which is beyond verbal expression. One can't chop and change about on the principle

that it is sufficient if the same mental sense or part of it is given with some poetical beauty or power. One can only change if the change brings out more perfectly the thing behind that is seeking for expression—brings out in full objectivity and also in the full mystic sense. If I can do that, well, other considerations have to take a backseat or seek their satisfaction elsewhere."

A free diversity of style is practised by Sri Aurobindo to attain his goal. He does not immure himself in any one formula—not even the formula of lavish technique which he has defended. Where the spiritual mood and situation demand it, he can be quite sparing in epithet and image and sound. And not only differences in the texture of style does he exploit: he has in addition different tempers of it. The texture consists in simplicity or complexity, austereness or lavishness, concision or diffusion: the temper lies in a particular receptive attitude and exploratory process of the visioning word. One sort of temper may run through many sorts of texture, for its quality resides behind the obvious characteristics of the word-body. Roughly, there are four kinds of temper that can be described to some extent, while a fifth eludes all analysis and is the inmost circle of style, the magic of inevitability at its diamond point. The other kinds also can be inevitable, but here is, as it were, the sheer quintessence of their inevitabilities and we can say about it when we meet it that there it is but what exactly it is we cannot say. In the field of the definable style-tempers we have first the visioning word doing no more than equate itself to a mood and a situation: it accepts the mood, acknowledges the situation and gives them a just expression with any style-texture the poet is moved

to adopt. Thus Sri Aurobindo writes:

> Something that wished but knew not how to be,

or

> All can be done if the God-touch is there.

This stylistic temper is mixed with a second type in the lines about "an old tired want" being given room

> 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.

Now the visioning word is not merely just, not merely equated to its contents: it has pressed out of them a vigorous subtlety: it does not stop with a felicitous possession of their appearance, it goes under the skin, so to speak, and startles them into throwing up effective suggestions of their inner vitality. A third temper of style is shown us, infused into the second, when Sri Aurobindo comes with:

> A long lone line of hesitating hue
> Like a vague smile tempting a desert heart
> Troubled the far rim of life's obscure sleep.

The visioning word has begun to quicken with an inside glow—there is, besides the vividness and the subtlety from under the skin of mood and situation, a kindling in which many nuances from within arise and play and merge, the pulse of things becomes a gleaming varied flow of intense significances and not only a strong suggestive leap. This

process arrives at its acme in a passage like:

> 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.

Nor is the process, of which I have spoken, the sole element in the above passage. Joined with it is another which bears the visioning word in a spelled exaltation of deep discovery, a fourth temper of style instilling into the theme a rapt self-transparency of meaningful design and vital inwardness. It is not easy to disengage this temper: more than the rest it must be felt by an instinct, for it is nearest the absolute style which refuses to be analysed. That absolute style is in the exquisite lines already cited about the fixing of "a gate of dreams". There it comes into being with a kinship to the third temper, while it confronts us with a kinship to the fourth in the poignant wizardry of:

> 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,

or the august enchantment of:

> Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm
> Parted the eternal lids that open heaven.

It can also have a kinship to the first and second tempers. The first seems quietly alchemised into it by

> An errant marvel with no place to live.

One of the lines from a group omitted in our quotation of *Savitri*'s prelude illustrates a mighty mutation into it from the second:

> The abysm of the unbodied Infinite.

Of course this indefinable super-inevitable style is poetically the *ultima thule*, just as the *Mantra* is spiritually so. But in an epic of great length it cannot be present everywhere "neat"; nor can the *Mantra*. And the very plan of *Savitri*, comprising as it does the entire expanse of evolution into deity and covering most subjects of philosophical search and every possible aspect of mystical living, demands for the richness and completeness of the treatment variation of style-temper no less than of style-texture and inspiring plane. The only condition which cannot be waived is the overhead afflatus: it must be there in one form and degree or another if a direct poetising of the Divine is to be accomplished.

A direct poetising of the Divine runs through *Savitri* from end to end. But that does not imply a rejection of human interest: what is implied is an "unmasked" pervasion and interpenetration of it by the beyond-human. In fact the human element is unavoidable, since the figure from which the poem derives its name is the divine Consciousness descended into flesh. Her work is among terrestrial creatures: it is among their joys and travails that she awakes on that fateful morning. Trees and animals and humans hold her in their midst, an Immortal prisoned in mortality, the high potencies of her soul wedded to a living that is but a slow dying:

> At first life grieved not in her burdened breast . . .
> In a deep cleft dug by 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.

The origin of these lines is not the sheer overhead, they have not the masterful seeing through an amplitude of light. Still, they have a general overhead influence and their difference from fine poetry of the mental order can be marked if we put side by side with their last three verses a snatch from Keats which has a similar motive. In *Hyperion* an action almost identical with Savitri's is given to Thea, the companion of Saturn during his fallen days:

> One hand she pressed upon that aching spot
> Where beats the human heart, as if just there,
> Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain.

Sri Aurobindo has a more profound tone; the language is charged with suggestions that go below the thought-meaning; the tragedy of a luminous soul enduring the darkness of earth, taking upon itself the heartbreak that is mortal existence, finds voice in the very rhythm, so to speak, of that ancient heartbreak. The emotion in the excerpt from Keats does not draw upon this intense psychic sadness, it neighbours it in the phrase, "that aching spot where beats the human heart", but passes on to the imaginative idea of the Immortal's pain instead of plumbing the actual pathos of the entombed sweetness. Nor is there in it the sense of the height from which the celestial sweetness has fallen: the mere words, "though an Immortal", convey no more than the conception, while Sri Aurobindo

infuses into his less explicit yet keener turns some breath of the overhead atmosphere. The poetic seeing is from some psychic centre, and therefore not sweepingly large, yet like a sharp flame the poetry rises to touch the air of the Overworld and burn a little with a colour beyond its own mood.

This phenomenon plays in and out of *Savitri*. At times an occult feature joins in and assumes prominence, as when Savitri is further described as remembering the wrestle, within her heart, of huge dim figures—earth and love and doom—and then the image of some cryptic greatness emerges, with a psychic effluence of sweetness and light falling across the dread and the secrecy and with also a hidden sense of the Spirit's overhead amplitude, but the main impression is of the puzzling occult:

> At the sombre centre of the dire debate
> A guardian of the unconsoled 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.

A similar composite inspiration of three-planed poetry is offered us a little later when another vision, picking up the abyss-element, is brought forward, a vision even more mysterious whom Sri Aurobindo gives no name:

> One dealt with her who meets the burdened great. . .
> Assigner of the ordeal and the path
> Who uses in this holocaust of the soul
> Death, fall and sorrow for the spirit's goads,
> The dubious Godhead with his torch of pain
> Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world
> And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.

But in these lines there is a crescendo of the overhead seizing the occult and the last three are tremendous both in sight and vibration. They conjure up from royal heights of the overhead the scene of the earth-drama in which Savitri is the chief protagonist. The rhythm travels with a huge intensity and makes us actually hear the workings of the divine mysteries which the language puts into the picture of Savitri as well as of the dark evolving universe she has come to help. Just as we compared Keats's lines with Sri Aurobindo's in order to feel the latter's *differentia*, so we can best note the peculiar overhead envelopment and absorption of the occult by comparing to the style and the sound here those of the famous *finale* of Francis Thompson's sonnet *The Heart*. Thompson recalls the act of that fierce Roman patriot Sextus Curtius who jumped, horse-backed and full-armoured, into the deep trench which according to the augurs had to be filled with what Rome deemed most precious if she was to escape heavenly punishment. Thompson creates an image magnificently profound about the human heart's unrealised grandeur:

> The world, from star to sea, cast down its brink—
> Yet shall that chasm, till He who these did build
> An awful Curtius make Him, yawn unfilled.

As sheer poetry this is equal to the Aurobindonian lines and the spiritual word-significance is as admirable. Word-significance, however, is not the sole ingredient of poetry. There is what Sri Aurobindo calls the imponderable significance beyond verbal expression. The rhythm set up by the words brings it home and awakes in us the reality they strive to portray. Thompson's rhythm, like his expression,

has grip and strength, it shakes up broad tracts of the mind but except a little at the end it does not break through the mind into the infinite overhead. A precisely moulded and forcefully imaged thought goes winging through us, stirring mystical suggestions with the aid of an historical incident. We are moved by the brilliant originality which enlarges that incident and strikes into it an inward spiritual truth, yet save for the effect produced by the sound and the meaning of the words "awful" and "yawn" we miss the cosmic unfathomable reverberations Sri Aurobindo induces in some concealed spaciousness of divine being. Technically we might say that the second line in Thompson fails to be overhead because of the crowdedly repetitive clipped sounds "till" and "did" and "build". The overhead rhythm needs a different art—and behind the art a different psychological disposition. Thompson's opening line has nothing markedly counter to the overhead art; somehow the right psychological disposition is still lacking. In the last line he is on the verge of both, yet comes short because there is not the overhead lift completing the semi-overhead wideness; so the imponderable significance beyond verbal expression is much less spiritual than in Sri Aurobindo's

> And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.

Unmistakably mantric seems this note—and that too in full measure. The pinions of the *Mantra* beat often in *Savitri*, but everywhere they are not completely unclosed to occupy the entire line. They mingle with wafts of other overhead utterances—the Spirit ideative or illuminative or intuitive. The Spirit in nothing else than its identity is difficult

to sustain for more than a few lines. Though in the Dawn-description it is a frequent presence, even there it is interspersed with less direct substantiality of the Spirit. The passage, however, where the avatarhood of Savitri is painted keeps the unalloyed *Mantra* ringing for dozens of lines! It is worth special attention both for this reason and for being poetically the longest and most comprehensive mystical portrait in all literature.

To lead from darkness into light, from ignorance of God to knowledge of Him is the work assigned by many poets to woman. There is the praise by Goethe of the Eternal Feminine calling us onward and upward. And there is Dante's music about the *santo riso*, the saintly smile, of Beatrice which guided him from the sins of the flesh to the soul's ecstasy of worship. Crashaw wrote a hymn in honour of St. Teresa, lauding her devotion to Christ and her transforming influence on men. Francis Thompson made a shrine for Alice Meynell: she was the religious calm-centre to the storm of his much-tossed and vagrant career. Wordsworth imagined how the "overseeing power" of Nature would build up the child Lucy into a woman aglow with a soulful beauty and character that would be in tune with pantheistic harmonies of wind and water. But none of these poets has left us a sustained mystical portrait. A few phrases pregnant with mysticism are all we have from them in the midst of a general diffused suggestion of goodness or else of religious zeal. There is also the imaginative picture drawn by Shelley from brief glimpses of Emilia Viviani in a convent, no nun herself but kept as a charge of the nuns by a tyrannical parent. Who among us, in the days of youthful dreaming, has not been intoxicated by the romantic idealism

shot with Platonic mysticism in the apostrophe?—

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of light and love and immortality!
Sweet benediction in the eternal Curse!
Veiled glory of the lampless Universe!

or in the description?—

. . . the brightness
Of her divinest presence trembles through
Her limbs, as underneath a cloud of dew
Embodied in the windless heaven of June,
Amid the splendour-wingèd stars, the Moon
Burns inextinguishably beautiful.

But such passages are rare in *Epipsychidion*: most of the poem is idealistically romantic rather than mystically Platonic. And even in the exceptional places the mysticism is not what I have designated as direct. The language is of the poetic intelligence visited by the rapture and radiance of an occult sphere of mentality behind it: both vision and rhythm are, for all that occult visitation, indirect in their mystical import and impact: they are the outward mind thrilling to the occult yet rendering it in terms not altogether native to it. Nor does the attraction of the overhead, which is marked in patches, get full response. Indirect also are the excellent lines by a poet of our own day, Robert Hugh Benson, depicting a contemplative of St. Teresa's Order:

She moves in tumult; round her lies
  The silence of the world of grace;
The twilight of our mysteries
  Shines like high noonday on her face;
Our piteous guesses, dim with fears,
She touches, handles, sees and hears.

In her all longings mix and meet;
  Dumb souls through her are eloquent;
She feels the world beneath her feet
  Thrill in a passionate intent;
Through her our tides of feeling roll
And find their God within her soul.

It is again the poetic intelligence speaking—with a difference in two respects from Shelley's passages. First, the inner mind has contributed a certain intuitive intimacy of touch on mystical experience rather than a wash of bright and colourful vision. Second, the emotion does not so much rise upward to echo something of the wide overhead power as plunge inward to contact a little the profound delicacy of the psychic.

All that is indirect in Shelley and Benson grows a directness the most complete and at a stretch not found in either the Vedas and the Upanishads, when Sri Aurobindo builds up the portrait of Savitri as one in whom the Godhead of Love finds perfect incarnation. Everything in her pointed to a nobler kind than the human:

Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Winging through worlds of splendour and of calm
O'erflew the ways of Thought to unborn things.
Ardent was her self-poised unstumbling will,
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave.
As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
Moves in some prophet cavern of the Gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn

That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple-door to things beyond.
Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.
A wide self-giving was her native act;
A magnanimity as of sea or sky
Enveloped in her greatness all that came.
Her kindly care was a sweet, temperate sun,
Her high passion a blue heaven's equipoise. . . .
So deep was her embrace of inmost help,
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.
The great unsatisfied godhead here could dwell.
Vacant of the dwarf self's imprisoned air,
Her mood could harbour his sublimer breath
Spiritual that can make all things divine:
For even her gulfs were secrecies of light.
At once she was the stillness and the word,
A continent of self-diffusing peace,
An ocean of untrembling virgin fire. . . .
In her he met a vastness like his own;
His high warm subtle ether he refound
And moved in her as in his natural home.

It is not necessary to understand the passage in detail in order to feel its magnificence. The phrases have an enormous weight of vision that strikes us to our knees, as it were, impressing us with a finality we dare not question. The rhythm has an overpowering fidelity to the inner thrill of the experience suggested and symbolised. Here are the figures and values of a superhuman state of consciousness at the very top, breaking upon us in their own stuff and vibrancy through the medium of language. This is not the mind imagining the highest it can beyond itself. This is an Overmind actually holding all the magnitudes that are pictured;

its vision is from within, composed of its own substance and lit up with its own vast vitality. As a result, the pictures are at once extra-immediate and extra-remote: they make, as A. E. Housman would have said, an impact upon our solar plexus as no mental reflection of mystical realities can, but while convincing us of their living concreteness they dodge our mental apprehension by refusing to yield their meanings easily and to affine themselves to what our thought can size up. To adopt Sri Aurobindo's own turn, the ways of thought are overflown, worlds of splendour and calm above the human level are crossed and unborn things reached. Not that everything is difficult to conceive: Savitri's "magnanimity", "kindly care" and "inmost help" reach us through emblems that are not resistant to analysis, though we shall be deprived of a considerable amount of their stimulus unless we use the Eye behind the eye and the Ear behind the ear to sense that the elemental or cosmic analogies and metaphors with their supporting breadth of phrase and sonance are no eloquent exaggerations but are accurately intrinsic to the special nature of Savitri's "self-giving". The "sea of white sincerity" too is within our imaginative grasp and so, again, in this era of the psycho-analysed subconscious are the gulfs which are "secrecies of light". No less steeped in the Overmind run the language and rhythm of the lines where they are mentioned and it would be poor justice to them if we did not thrill to the rapturous wideness drowning all thought in the one case and in the other the ecstatic opening of depth beyond depth unsounded by the Freudian intellect; but we are able to adapt ourselves without much strain to the general vision. The two lines driving home Savitri's being at the same time the

stillness and the word—

> A continent of self-diffusing peace,
> An ocean of untrembling virgin fire,

have an expressive force more hard to absorb. Savitri's word-aspect could have been served well enough by being called an ocean of virgin fire and her stillness-aspect a continent of peace without the two epithets "untrembling" and "self-diffusing". As soon as the fire is "untrembling" and the peace "self-diffusing", the intense movement is seen as superbly steady, the extreme rest as gigantically spreading its influence. So in the very fact of movement there is rest, in the very fact of rest movement: the two are a single miracle most aptly figured to suggest, by their playing into each other's hands, the omnipotent essence of the Divine. Our mind has usually little experience of opposites meeting, much less coalescing; even Thompson's poetic idea—

> Passionless passion, wild tranquillities

falls slightly outside easy conception. Sri Aurobindo's direct mystical sight, packed with an inward sense of the superhuman, is still more enigmatic: it grips us by its intimacy with its object but we do not grip it enough by our ideative powers.

In the central picture of the passage—the nine lines, beginning with "As in a mystic and dynamic dance", which are perhaps Sri Aurobindo's grandest achievement in mantric poetry—there is no obstacle to our imaginatively realising how apt are the glorious figures—"a parable of dawn", "a niche for veiled divinity", "a golden temple-door"—for Savitri's body with its finite-looking beauty admitting us into a Presence that has no limit. Nor

is there any bar to our conjuring up "a priestess of immaculate ecstasies." But what is "Truth's revealing vault" inspiring and ruling her? Is the sky used here as a symbol of the light of Eternity? Evidently some infinitude of being that stretches above like a sky and is higher than our obscure and erring consciousness is meant. Yet immediately afterwards we have the "prophet cavern of the Gods": it is in a cavern that the priestess is moving and a cavern by definition cannot have a sky, it must be a closed place. The word "vault" is admirably dual and suits the cavern-suggestion no less than the sky-suggestion, but how are we to mingle the two? We must think of the cavern as having a "revealing" roof, which means really a roof that, instead of shutting out light, is one dense mass of light, Truth's own stuff. Such a cavern with such a roof is neither closed in nor dark: it is somewhat like our universe as viewed from the earth at midday, an immense "inverted bowl" of brightness under which we seem cooped. What special point is made by bringing in that cavernous view? The answer is that no other will present the profound secrecy of the world Sri Aurobindo is speaking of—a spiritual state which is to be entered by drawing the consciousness further and further away from outward phenomena as into a cavern but which, when entered, is discovered to be a boundless space of being, full of a knowledge capable of prophecy, a time-transcending knowledge which is a radiance poured from above where Truth is like some huge sun. This strange world appears to be a fusion of two levels. It is not quite removed from what Sri Aurobindo elsewhere hints as "an aureate opening in Time." The "aureate opening" refers to the psyche, the gate of communication between our

ignorant time-process and the splendour of the eternal Spirit: it is the authentic soul or divine spark as distinguished from the *élan vital* and the mind-force, behind and between which it is hidden and upon which it sheds its mystical influence. In Yoga the psyche is found at the back of that juncture of the *élan vital* and the mind-force—the emotional being whose physical effects we feel in the heart-region. It is the true heart of us, of which our emotional being with its physical counterpart is an outward diminished representation. It has its own experience of the Divine, exquisite and passionate, yet it has not in itself the amplitude and puissance as experienced in the overhead planes, the amplitude and puissance which attain their extreme in the consciousness whence the *Mantra* comes. This consciousness is implied in Sri Aurobindo's mention of Truth's inspiring and ruling vault as well as of the Gods in whose cavern the priestess is dancing. The spiritual state he describes is, therefore, a domain where the psyche has opened up to the Overworld and got suffused with the highest light. Savitri has an embodied emotional being that is not merely merged in the psyche: it is merged also in a denizen of the Overworld's top-range descended into the psyche and making the inspiration of that Height one with it. The double character is suggested again when the "heart of silence" is said to be in the "hands of joy." Usually in Yoga a poise free from aching desire is taken hold of and enveloped by a vast bliss that is independent of finite objects and circumstances, but here more is meant than this mystical experience: the in-drawn dedicated stillness caught by a masterful bliss as though with hands commanding and directing corresponds to the *samadhi*-rapt priestess rhythmically swaying

to the luminous and beatific will invading her from Truth's empyrean.

All this, of course, is just an effort at an imaginative re-creation of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual symbols. It can serve merely as a prop, it cannot deliver the full sense of them. Intuitive vision is the means to compass both their subjective and objective values, for they are plucked from Super-Nature with an absolute loyalty to its extreme altitudes. We must go very far indeed from the imaginative intellect's grasp in order to feel their coherence and their living force. Without submitting ourselves in intuitive sympathy to an invasion from worlds of a Consciousness that is divine and deathless, ours will be a surface appreciation, at most admiring certain similes and felicitous turns of language, scarcely stirring to the hidden immensity of the revelation and its concrete mystical drive and scope. And if we do not read the passage aloud like a spell of superb potency and let the rhythm break through secret sound-spaces within us we shall never awake wholly to the fact that the entire description of Savitri and especially the part I have been commenting upon is word and vibration charged with actual deific states—the highest spiritual plane with its own native accent.

Failure to tackle the *Mantra*, and in general all overhead poetry, in the right receptive way will lay its contents, more than those of any other type of mystical verse, open to the accusation of being what Yeats called "Asiatic vague immensities." For in it Asia's difference from the European dealing with God is most prominent. Europe finds its natural element in definite philosophical ideas, it governs even the Infinite by the laws of logic and constructs a self-consistent picture by following a

single track of thought. Asia is at home in multiple tracks: though philosophers have tried to be logically bound down to systems clear-cut out of one dominant trend, the instinct is to give way to multitudinous incompatibilities harmonising and uniting in a supra-logical vision. Overhead poetry, particularly at its apex, is supra-logical vision embodied without the intellect playing the interpreter. Whatever is seizable by the intellect is an adaptation by the overhead planes of themselves to its mode and not its shaping of them according to its own desire and proclivity. Much must escape the intellect almost altogether and call for a very extended development of the faculties in us which respond to poetic values through intuition and rhythm-feeling. Large ambiguities, therefore, arise in the mind, especially the European. But, on the other hand, from the standpoint of intrinsic character we may say that overhead poetry is the least exposed to the Yeatsian accusation, since in it the supra-logical seeing is mated with an expression springing from the very planes on which that seeing is inherent in consciousness. The expression is organic to the sight and consequently carries an authentic and convincing power. If the word and the rhythm are from elsewhere, there is for the reader either a medley that floats unconvincingly on the mind's surface or a spaciousness that can be reflected only by blurring its infinite contents. The many-sided nature of the Divine becomes "confused", the essential unity "thin": in short, both turn "vague". No matter how much we yield to the poetry through intuition and rhythm-feeling, the supra-logical will never quite achieve in non-overhead language the needed degree of directness, of substantial and detailed presence. We may get complete intellectual

satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure—the meaning may stand out clear and the beauty may be vital and absolute; yet neither the meaning nor the beauty may do justice to what we cognise as pressing for poetic manifestation. The suggestive aura round the significant phrase and round the aesthetic form will not be enough dense and tense with the sheer Godhead.

Even the inspiration from the occult and the psychic is, in comparison to the overhead speech, attenuated in its suggestive aura. It has not the God-grip and the God-sweep of *Savitri*'s accent. To get that accent, however, is no facile task. A poet who has not himself reached the overhead planes can be occasionally a vehicle for their messages, but only if he lets nothing of his ordinary mind interfere. And in his case the ordinary mind must be understood to comprise not merely what has to be kept in abeyance in the writing of all genuine poetry; to get overhead inspiration we must regard as the ordinary mind the whole poetic urge too of the planes that are usually tapped. One who aspires after the speech of *Savitri* must be on guard against the very best he can achieve from another psychological level, unless of course that level has to be brought in for a special purpose like giving the reader an easy hold on an idea before lifting him into the spiritual reality to which the idea is a pointer. Where no such aim is present the natural tendency to create poetry from a more accessible plane must be closely watched. Look at the line:

> Concealed because too brilliant for our eyes.

It occurs in an earlier draft of *Savitri* and is quite effective for expressing the excess of light which

shuts out scrutiny. Stand it against the line Sri Aurobindo put in its place:

> Veiled by the Ray no mortal eye can bear.

Instead of the striking and clever point the first vision makes, we have a straight presentation of some high reality, the actual fact is before us without any explaining of its peculiar attribute, the attribute is concretely offered and an atmosphere of the spiritual brought up. The rhythm comes with a more inward thrill, a more intrinsically wide movement as if without the effort mental speech has to put forth for suggesting the ample and the majestic. Indeed it is the changed rhythm which, even more than the changed form of vision, produces the necessary directness—as can be proved by choosing a line in which the imagery can be kept intact and even the language unaltered in every word but only a small modification introduced in the rhythm and by that modification the living thrill transferred from spiritual to mental. This verse, for example, from *Savitri*—

> The old adamantine vetoes stood no more

loses the overhead wideness of sound and with it the overhead experience that is caught by the words, if we write:

> No more the old adamantine vetoes stood.

Apart from the undue emphasis "stood" gets by closing the line and occupying that final position divorced from "no more", the inner suggestion stops dead short with a staccato rhythm: the huge escape from ancient barriers lacks the profound spiritual

thrill. Losing that thrill, the line drops in the directness which is born of the vision being coupled with the word-rhythm natural to the plane where the vision originates.

The coupling of the overhead vision with the overhead word-rhythm is the achievement *par excellence* of Sri Aurobindo. The former is rare enough, but at times it does occur in other mystical poets. There are a few snatches in Yeats, many in A.E., for Yeats, for all his attraction towards the unseen world, had no strong eye for the supremely spiritual. A.E. had a far closer acquantance with it, yet he too did not go beyond the heart's lyrical God-drunkenness, the glamour of the Celtic mid-worlds and the mind's first few entranced steps above philosophy into direct touch on the Spirit. Though the Upanishads cast their light on him, the overhead accent visited him at scattered moments only and then also, as a rule, in a weakened form. The line—

> And by their silence they adore the lovely silence
> where He dwells

has something of it, tuned with extreme liquid beauty to a more delicate, more loosened note than is proper to the overhead. A greater intensity is in

> White for Thy whiteness all desires burn,

yet the rhythm and the vision do not hail from much above the eye and ear of spiritualised thought. Some tone of the overhead at its intuitive pitch is:

> Like winds and waters were her ways.
> They heed not immemorial cries;
> They move to their high destinies
> Beyond the little voice that prays.

What A.E. lacks on the whole in dealing with the ultra-mental afflatus is fullness of rhythm—his genuine seizures of it are often thin in sound-stuff and hence unable to drive home its varied cosmicity, so to speak. This is not to deny his poetic merit on planes where he can seize word and vision at once, nor his value as a mystical messenger. That he is not a frequent assured dweller on the Aurobindonian levels detracts nothing from his status as the most spiritual of English singers, the first among them to be a Yogi in the oriental sense.

Even in an oriental poet like Tagore the overhead language-stir is mostly absent. Tagore is the ideal psalmist of the emotions—emotions not feverishly uncontrolled and rendered a confusing flame as in so many devotee-poets of the West but harmoniously psychicised and tinged by the superb serenity which enters into all Indian mysticism—the calm shadow of the overhead. The overhead, however, is an undifferentiated influence in him, far and faint, never intimately known. It may be argued that after all his *Gitanjali* is prose-poetry and is thus prevented from the absolute overhead ring. But, though not so clearly as in poetry proper, that ring can still make prose its medium. Two of the most clearly overhead strains from the Upanishads retain something of their characteristic rhythm in Sri Aurobindo's translations in prose. Listen to this suggestion of the transcendental supracosmic Divine: "There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind. There these lightnings flash not nor any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness and by His shining all this shineth." Now hear what Yeats offers in his collaboration with Purohit Swami: "Neither sun, moon, star

neither fire nor lightning lights Him. When He shines, everything begins to shine. Everything in the world reflects His light." Evidently the attempt is to imitate the pithiness of the Upanishadic utterance, but where is the sonority accompanying the pithiness in Sanskrit, the sound subtly conveying the colossal Presence underlying the apparent concentrated points like the huge hidden bulk of an iceberg below the crystalline taperings that show above the sea's surface? Besides, Sanskrit is more naturally polysyllabic than English and the pithy statement in it does not appear bare and clipped. To make the English version equally polysyllabic would be to risk bombast; the same holds in translations from Greek and Latin. To compensate for the missing majesty a certain sweep of word and volume of sound have to be achieved by a special skill in phrase-formation and sentence-construction. Yeats is devoid of the true Upanishadic resonance as well as intonation in also his rendering of the stanza about the cosmic Divine: "Spirit is everywhere, upon the right, upon the left, above, below, behind, in front. What is the world but Spirit?" How poor in comparison to the Aurobindonian vividness and vibrancy: "The Eternal is before us and the Eternal is behind us and to the south and to the north of us and above and below and extended everywhere. All this magnificent universe is nothing but the Eternal." As prose-poetry it rises head and shoulders over the Yeats-Purohit team-work; but its most choice quality is the overhead breath—a quality which we might expect from an Indian like Tagore in the mystical prose-poetry of *Gitanjali*. Tagore, however, gets the overhead afflatus to a recognisable degree no more than once—in a semi-reminiscence of the Upanishad's verse about the

Transcendental. As he originally wrote them, the words run: "There, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word." Yeats, in the *Oxford Book of English Poetry* edited by him, touched up the Tagorean sentences: "Where thine infinite sky spreadeth for the soul to take her flight, a stainless white radiance reigneth; wherein is neither day nor night, nor form nor colour, nor ever any word." Perhaps the Yeatsian tightening and connectivity add to the overhead intonation; the Irish poet's greater intimacy with the poetic potentialities of English seems to help out better the accent which the Indian has acquired.

The poetry written by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya before he turned Marxist and started versifying proletarian slogans is haunted by the Unknown as puissantly as anything composed by Tagore. His lyrics are a colourful subtlety that lays keen fingers on truths of the inner life, yet instead of plucking the word native to those truths the fingers bring back a creative impress for handling spiritually the speech of ideas and feelings in our normal mind and heart. Except in rare pieces there is very little of the Upanishadic inspiration. The Shelleyan "white radiance" of which Tagore gave an Indian avatar in the passage quoted from *Gitanjali* becomes in Chattopadhyaya:

> . . . the naked everlastingness
> That nor by pleasure nor by pain is stirred,
> Being a hush that bears no human word
> Nor deed nor dream nor passion as a burden.

Deeply inspired are these lines, a true echo by the poetic mind to the overhead harmonies. As poetry

they are faultless; as word-rhythm capturing mystical vision, they come close to the overhead stuff Chattopadhyaya is handling but do not arise from it—as does, for instance, Sri Aurobindo's description of the Yogic self-release of Savitri's father, Asvapati, into the spiritual ether by breaking "the intellect's hard and lustrous lid":

> The toiling thinker widened and grew still,
> Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart:
> His soul could sail beyond thought's luminous bar;
> Mind screened no more the shoreless infinite.
> Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed
> Through a last shimmer and drift of vanishing stars
> The superconscient realms of motionless peace
> Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
> And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.

Speech and sound are sovereignly adequate to the concrete vision of the mystical altitudes. Not echoes but actual voices are reproduced. The emotional seeker and the philosophical seer are both transfigured, raised towards a mighty moving God-realisation and the profound actuality of the experience conveyed in an accent leaping from its core. In the last three lines the *Mantra* is heard—and a remarkable technique of labials, sibilants, liquids, nasals and long vowels create at once hauntingly and lullingly, wideningly and envelopingly the impression of a single-mooded unthinkable infinitude of silence. But this technique succeeds because of a special inner rhythm, and it succeeds in a manner which is different from that of any similar outer technique normally possible to Chattopadhyaya. He too can surely bring about fitting effects of vowel and consonant and fill them with inspiration. What is typical here is that the inspiration carrying such

effects is received by Sri Aurobindo by breaking completely the "lustrous lid" which divides the overhead from the ranges whence poetry usually springs.

The breaking of the "lustrous lid" is a very real spiritual experience. The Upanishads speak of the face of Truth having a golden cover which has to be removed. This cover is composed of the concepts and percepts through which we ordinarily turn our sight towards the Divine. Our concepts and percepts are indeed means of knowledge, rays of Truth, but indirect ones: they acquaint us with the appearance of the Divine, not with the reality of Him; they constitute a brilliant formation like a shield or a lid which falls over the Divine's reality. The formation is not easy to break through: it is "hard" as well as "lustrous" and obstructs a new poise as if there were a mental skull corresponding to the physical. Influences of the Truth-Sun can percolate into the mind and produce now and then a perfect result if the poet trains himself to be sensitive to them. But a sustained stream of light can arrive only if the poet practises that self-training in a deliberate integral way. Yoga is the desideratum —and an important part of Yoga for the poet of the Spirit is a tuning-up to the overhead speech by constantly revolving within his consciousness the *Mantra* and its approximations. Even for the non-poet the *Mantra* and its approximations are a potent means for evolving man into superman: they are the Infinite and the Eternal in one of the most veilless forms of manifestation possible. Therefore, a gift to the world precious in the last degree is *Savitri*. It is also a gift appropriate in the extreme to the position of the giver himself. Philosophical statement lending logical plausibility to facts of

the Spirit is necessary in a time like ours when the intellect is acutely in the forefront and Sri Aurobindo has answered the need by writing that expository masterpiece, *The Life Divine*. There too it is not the bare intellect chopping logic: a greater faculty executes deft and many-aspected designs of argumentation and through them appeals to some intuitive intelligence behind the seat of analytic and synthetic judgment. But since the method of logic is accepted, the language of abstract speculation is used as a framework; this, though serving to hold the attention of the intellectuality of our day, lessens the impact of the living Reality that is far removed from abstract speculation, be it ever so magnificent and cogent. To create a poetic mould equally massive and multiform as *The Life Divine* for transmitting the living Reality to the furthest bounds of speech—such a task is incumbent on one who stands as the maker of a new spiritual epoch. Without it he would not establish on earth in a fully effective shape the influence brought by him. All evolutionary influences, in order to become dynamic *in toto*, must assume poetic shape as a correlate to the actual living out of them in personal consciousness and conduct. In that shape they can reach man's inner being persistently and ubiquitously over and above doing so with a luminous and vibrant suggestiveness unrivalled by any other mode of literature or art. But scattered and short pieces of poetry cannot build the sustained and organised *weltanschauung* required for putting a permanent stamp upon the times. Nothing except an epic or a drama can, moving as they do across a wide field and coming charged with inventive vitality, with interplay of characters and events. Nor can an epic which teems with ultra-mental

realisations be wholly adequate to its aim if it does not embody these realisations in ultra-mental word and rhythm. Hence, *Savitri* is from every angle the right correlate to the practical drive towards earth-transformation by India's mightiest Master of spirituality in his Ashram at Pondicherry. Next to his own personal working as *Guru* on disciples offering themselves for a global remoulding of their lives, this poem that is at once legend and symbol will be the chief *formateur* of the Aurobindonian Age. Out of its projected fifty thousand lines, about twelve thousand only are said to be ready yet in final version, but even that number is enough to give it a central place, for the whole length of *Paradise Lost* is exceeded and in no other art-creation so continually and cumulatively has inspiration, the lightning-footed goddess, "a sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops", disclosed the Divine's truth and beauty:

> Even was seen as through a cunning veil
> The smile of love that sanctions the long game,
> The calm indulgence and maternal breasts
> Of Wisdom suckling the child laughter of Chance,
> Silence, the nurse of the Almighty's power,
> The omniscient hush, womb of the immortal Word,
> And of the Timeless the still brooding face,
> And the creative eye of Eternity.
> From darkness' heart she dug out wells of light,
> On the undiscovered depths imposed a form,
> Lent a vibrant cry to the unuttered vasts,
> And through great shoreless, voiceless, starless breadths
> Bore earthward fragments of revealing thought
> Hewn from the silence of the Ineffable.