

# SEER POETS

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# VEDIC STORY

(RIGVEDA - X. 51.)

The gods are in a great fix. Where is Agni? How is it that the comrade has disappeared all on a sudden? The Sacrifice—the great work has to be undertaken. And he is to be the leader, for he alone can take up the burden. There is no time to be lost, everything is ready for the ceremony to start and just at the moment the one needed most is nowhere. So the gods organise a search party to find out the Whereabouts of the runaway god.

The search party consists of Varuna, Mitra and Yama. We shall presently understand the sense of the selection. They look about here and there—in ten directions, it is mentioned—and at last spot the defaulting god hiding within a huge thick strong cloak or caul. They hail him and ask him to come out and take up his charge. Agni refuses: he says he is not competent to undertake the burden; indeed that is why he ran away and they must not force him. The gods explain, entreat, encourage Agni. They say and assure him that no harm will come to him, rather he will flourish and prosper and become immortal. He is mighty and he will become almighty as he takes up his work and proceeds with it. Agni accepts in the end and marches out with the gods.

What does this parable mean? First of all then we must know what Sacrifice—a Vedic sacrifice—is. Sacrifice symbolises the cosmic labour, the march of the universe towards its goal, the conquest of Light over Darkness, the ascent of manhood to godhead, the flaming rise and progress of consciousness to its supreme expression and embodiment. It is the release out of Inconscience and Unconsciousness to consciousness and finally into the superconsciousness.

Sacrifice consists essentially in lighting the fire and pouring fuel—offerings—into it so that it may bum always and brighter and brighter. It calls the gods, also, it is said, ascends to them, brings them down

here to live among men, in men. It lifts men from the ordinary life and consciousness, takes them to the abode of the gods. In other words its function is to bring down and infuse into the human vessel the godly consciousness and delight and power. Its purpose is to divinise human life. Through the sacrifice man offers his present possessions, his body and life and mind to the Deity and deities and by this surrender and submission constant and unflinching (namas) he awakens the Divine in him—the Agni that is to lead him to the divine consummation.

Fire then is the energy of consciousness secreted in the heart of things. It is that which moves the creation upward, produces the unfolding evolution that is history, both individual and collective. It is kindled, it increases in volume and strength and purity and effectiveness, as” and when a lower element is offered and submitted to a higher reality and this higher reality impinges upon the lower one (which is what the rubbing of the araṇi or the pressing of the soma symbolises); the limitation is broken, the small enters into and becomes the vast, the crooked is straightened and lengthened out, what was hidden becomes manifest. This is described as the progression of the sacrifice (adhvara - advance on the path). That is also the victorious battle waged against the dark forces of Ignorance. The goal, the purpose is the descent and manifestation of the gods here upon earth in human vehicles.

But this Fire is not normally available. It is lost, imbedded in the thick petrified folds of unconsciousness and inconscience. Man’s soul is not an apparent reality. It has to be found out, called forth, brought to the front. Even so, in the normal consciousness, the soul, the divine fire is a flickering, twinkling, hesitating spark; it is not sure of itself, not certain of its destiny. Yet when the time is ripe and the call comes, the gods, the luminous forces from above descend with all their insistence and meet the hidden godhead: Agni is reminded of his work and destiny which nothing can frustrate or cancel. He has to consent and undertake his sacrificial labour.

Agni feared and tried to escape from the burden of his responsibility. He wrapped himself in a thick and vast cloak and hid in the depths of far waters. That is the parable way of describing the difficulty, the apparent impossibility of the undertaking Agni has to shoulder. Curiously however he has taken shelter just in the spot which seemed safest to him, from where begins his work, whose nature and substance he has to transform, that is to say, the nether regions of inconscience which is to be raised and transfigured into the solar region of the supra-consciousness.

One interesting point in the story is the choice of the gods who formed

the search party. They were Mitra, Varuna and Yama. Varuna is the god of the vast consciousness (Brihat), the wide universal, the Infinite. His eye naturally penetrates everywhere and nothing can escape his notice. Mitra is harmony and rhythm of the infinity. Every individual element he embraces and he holds them all together in loving union—his is the friendly tie of comradeship with all. Finally Yama is the master of the lower regions, the underworld of physical and material consciousness, where precisely Agni has taken refuge. Agni is within the jurisdiction of this trinity and it devolves upon them to tackle the truant god.

There is another point which requires clarification. As a reason for his nervousness and flight he alleges that greater people who preceded him had attempted the work, but evidently failed in the attempt; so how can he, a younger novice, dare to go the same way? Putting the imagery back to its psychological bearing, one may explain that the predecessors refer to the deities of the physical, vital and mental consciousness who ruled the earth before the emergence of the psychic or soul consciousness. It is precisely because of the failure or insufficiency of these anterior—in the evolutionary movement—and inferior gods that Agni's service is being requisitioned. Mythologically also a parallelism is found in the Greek legends where it is said that the Olympian gods—Zeus and his company—were a younger generation that replaced, after of course a bloody warfare, their ancestors, the more ancient race of Kronos, the Titans. Titans were the Asuras and Rakshasas who reigned upon earth before the advent of the mental—sattwic—human being, Manu, as referred here. Now, here I give you the original text in translation:

### THE COLLOQUY OF AGNI AND THE GODS

(Rigveda-X. 51.)

The gods

1. Huge and firm was that covering with which you shrouded yourself and entered into the waters. O Agni! You are conscious from your very birth. The One God saw you in all your multiple universal body.

Agni

2. Who saw me? Which of the gods saw my multiple body all around?  
O Mitra! O Varuna! Tell me, where do they dwell—all the blazing  
fuel that move to the gods?

The gods

3. O Agni! god self-conscious, we seek you, you who have entered  
variably into the waters and into the growths of the earth. You  
shine richly. Yama has seen you as you flame out of your ten seats.

Agni

4. O Varana! I fled because I was afraid of the work of the priest. The  
gods must not yoke me to that work. That was why I embedded  
my body variably so that I as Agni may not know of that pathway.

The gods

5. Come, O Agni! Man, the mental being, desires to do the sacrifice,  
he has made everything ready, and you dwell in obscurity! Make  
easy-going the path that leads to the gods, with a happy mind  
carry the offering.

Agni

6. They were elders before Agni who covered the same path, even  
as charioteers do their way. That is why, O Varuna! out of fear I  
have come away so far, even as an animal shrinks and shivers at a  
shooting arrow.

The gods

7. We shall make your life undecaying, O Agni! so that no harm  
comes to you when engaged in the work. So, carry to the gods  
their share of the offering; a happy birth you have, a happy mind  
you must carry.

Agni

8. Then bring to me my share of the mighty offerings, those that are given before, those that are given after and those that are simply given. O gods! Long life to the being shining in the waters, to Agni himself lying in the growths of the earth.

The gods

9. The offerings that precede, the offerings that follow, offerings pure and simple—all forceful, may you enjoy. May this sacrifice be yours entirely. The four quarters bow down to you, O Agni!



# RISHI DIRGHATAMA

Many of the Upanishadic rishis are familiar to you. Vedic rishis are perhaps not so.

Today I will speak of one of the Vedic rishis. Some names of great Vedic rishis must have reached your ears —Vashishtha, Vishwamitra, Atri, Parasara, Kanwa (I do not know if it is the same Kanwa of whom Kalidasa speaks in his Shakuntala), Madhuchchanda. All of them are seers of mantra, hearers of mantra, creators of mantra; all of them occupy a large place in the Veda. Each one of them has his speciality, each one delivers a mantra that is in its tone, temper and style his own although the subject matter, the substance, the fundamental realisation is everywhere the same. For example, Vashishtha is characterised by a happy clarity, Vishwamitra has force and energy, Kutsa is sweetness, Dirghatama is well-known for his oblique utterances, his paradoxical apophthegms.<sup>1</sup>

Today precisely it is of Dirghatama that we will speak. Dirghatama does not mean as the word would indicate to the layman, one who is very tall—*śālaprāmsūrmahā-bhujah* in Kalidasa's phrase. Tama is not the superlative suffix (most), it is *tamas*, darkness. So, from the name itself one may naturally expect that the person was not of an ordinary category. Indeed the amount of stories and legends that have been woven around the name is fantastic—queer, odd, unbelievable, impossible in every way. I need not open that chapter.

I shall speak only of what seems to me probable and believable and likely and it must be this that he passed a long time in darkness, engulfed in obscurity. The legend says that he was in his mother's womb long past the due time and it seems it was of his own will. His mother's name

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo says: "In the deep and mystic style of the Dirghatamas Auchathya as in the melodious lucidity of Medhatithi Kanwa, in the puissant and energetic hymns of Vishwamitra as in Vashishtha's even harmonies we have the same firm foundation of knowledge and the same scrupulous adherence to the sacred conventions of the Initiates."

was Mamata and his father was Uchathya. When he came out of the darkness and saw the light, it was a light strangely glimmering with all the vibrations of the long obscurity to which he had been accustomed. It was indeed the Light beyond the confines of all darkness, nescience, and yet carrying a mystic imprint of the mysteries of darkness. So he started his quest with this questioning:

*I am an innocent babe, my ignorant mind knows nothing, who will tell me of the secret seats of the Godheads? <sup>2</sup>*

Indeed the darkness and the blindness seem to have been the Divine's grace upon him, for his eyes turned inward to other domains and saw strange truths and stranger facts. We remember in this connection another blind old poet who even though fallen on such evil days composed the world famous epic-poem (I am referring obviously to Milton and his *Paradise Lost*). We remember also here the deaf incomparable master of music Beethoven. Many of the sayings of Dirghatama have become so current that they are now familiar even to the common man. They are mottos and proverbs we all quote at all times. "Truth is one, the wise call it in different ways"—the mantra is from Dirghatama. "Heaven is my father, Earth my mother"—this is also from Dirghatama. The famous figure of two birds with beautiful wings dwelling on the same tree comes also from Dirghatama. There are a good many sayings of this kind that have become intimate companions to our lips of which the source we do not know. When we read the mantras of Dirghatama we are likely to exclaim even as the villager did when he first saw Hamlet played in London, "It is full of quotations."

You must have already noticed that the utterance of Dirghatama carries a peculiar turn, even perhaps a twist. In fact his mantras are an enigma, a riddle to which it is sometimes difficult to find the fitting key. For example when he says, "What is above is moving downward and what is down is moving upward; yes, they who are below are indeed up above and they who are up are here below," or again, "He who knows the father below by what is above, and he who knows the father who is above by what is below is called the poet (the seer creator)", we are, to say the least, not a little puzzled.

The old delightful rishi—to use the epithets he gives to his Agni—and blind into the bargain, continues, the substance and manner in the same

<sup>2</sup> *Rigveda- I. 164.*

way paradoxical and enigmatic, perhaps deliberately tantalising and confusing:

”Those who are called feminine are masculine, yes,  
only they who have eyes can see, the blind do not know.

”The son is the seer-poet, he knows and he  
alone knows these things who is the father of the father.”

(I. 164-16.)

Then again look at this picture almost surrealistic in its boldness:

”The cow gazing upward holds with her front legs the hind legs of  
her calf and the calf with its front legs holds the hind legs of its mother.”

(I.164-17.)

Needless to say these are signs and symbols and figures of a language seeking to express truths and realities of an invisible world, spiritual and occult. We are reminded of the ”twilight” language of the poet-saints (Siddhacharyas) of Bengal of much later days.

There is no end to the problems that face Dirghatama with his almost tormented mind. Listen once more to this riddle:

”Even he who has created this does not know it.

Even to him who has seen it, it remains veiled. One who  
is shrouded in his mother’s womb with his many  
progenies has entered into untruth (I. 164-32).

Here are some more of his aspirations, the questions that trouble him, the riddles whose solution he needs most. He calls upon the world and asks:

”Tell me where is the end of this earth? Tell me where  
is the nodus of this universe? Tell me what is the meaning of the  
energy-flow from the energetic steed?

Tell me again what is the word that is in the highest spaces?” (Rik 34.)

To these abstruse questions he himself gives, I am afraid, abstruse answers:

”This sacrificial altar is the extreme end of the earth,  
this sacrifice is the nodus of the universe, and this nectar of immortality  
(Soma)

is the energy-flow of the the steed and this Brahman is the Word  
in the supreme heaven.” (Rik 35.)

As are the questions so are the answers, equally enigmatic and obscure. About the Word, the mystery which Dirghatama unveils is an extraordinary revelation—so curious, so illuminating. In later times many lines of spiritual discipline have adopted his scheme and spread it far and wide. Dirghatama himself was an uncommon wizard of words. The

truths he saw and clothed in mantras have attained, as I have already said, general celebrity. He says: "The Word is of four categories. It has four stations or levels or gradations." The Rishi continues: "Three of them are unmanifested, unbodied; only the fourth one is manifest and bodied, on the tongue of man." This terminology embodying a fundamental principle has had many commentaries and explanations. Of these the most well-known is that given by the Tantras. They have named the fourfold words as (1) parā, supreme; (2) paśyantī, the seeing one; (3) madhyamā, the middle one or the one within and (4) vaikharī, the articulate word. In modern language we may say that the first one is the self-vibration of the Supreme Being or Consciousness; the second is the vibration of the higher-mind or the pure intelligence; the third is the vibration of the inner heart; and the fourth the vibration of physical sound, of voice. In philosophical terms of current English we may name these as (1) revelatory, (2) intuitive, (3) inspirational and (4) vocal.

Now in conclusion I will just speak of the fundamental vision of the rishi. His entire realisation, the whole Veda of his life, he has, it appears, pressed into one single ṛk. We have heard it said that the entire range of all scriptures is epitomised in the Gita and the Gita itself is epitomised in one sloka - sarvadharmān parityajya . . . Even so we may say that Rishi Dirghatama has summarised his experience, at least the fundamental basic one, and put it into a sutra. It is the famous ṛk with which he opens his long hymn to Surya:

"Lo, this delightful ancient Priest and Summoner; he has a second brother who is the devourer. There is a third brother with a dazzling luminous facet—there I saw the Master of the worlds along with his seven sons."

This is again a sphinx puzzle indeed. But what is the meaning? The universe, the creation has its fundamental truth in a Trinity: Agni (the Fire-god) upon earth, Vayu (the Wind-god) in the middle regions and in heaven the Sun. In other words, breaking up the symbolism We may say that the creation is a triple reality, three principles constitute its nature. Matter, Life and Consciousness or status, motion and Light. This triplicity however does not exhaust the whole of the mystery. For the ultimate mystery is imbedded within the heart of the third brother, for our rishis saw there the Universal Divine Being and his seven sons. In our familiar language we may say it is the Supreme Being, God himself (Purushottama) and his seven lines of self-manifestation. We have often heard of the seven worlds or levels of being and consciousness, the seven chords of the Divine Music. In more familiar terms we say that body

and life and mind form the lower half of the cosmic reality and its upper half consists of Sat-Chit-Ananda (or Satya-Tapas-Jana)

And the link, the nodus that joins the two spheres is the fourth principle (Turya), the Supermind, Vijnana. Such is the vision of Rishi Dirghatama, its fundamental truth in a nutshell. To know this mystery is the whole knowledge and knowing this, one need know nothing else.

A word is perhaps necessary to complete the sense of the commentary. Agni has been called old and ancient (palita), but why? Agni is the first among the gods. He has come down upon earth, entered into matter with the very creation of the material existence. He is the secret energy hidden in the atom which is attracting, invoking all the other gods to manifest themselves. It is he who drives the material consciousness in its evolutionary re-course upward towards the radiant fullness in the solar Supra Consciousness at the summit. He is however not only energy, he is also delight (vāma). For he is the Soma, the nectarous flow, occult in the Earth's body. For Earth is the storehouse of the sap of Life, the source of the delightful growths of Life here below.

# THE SHAKESPEAREAN WORD

The Vedic rishi, says the poet, by his poetic power, brings out forms, beautiful forms in the high heaven.

In this respect, Shakespeare is incomparable. He has through his words painted pictures, glowing living pictures of undying beauty.

Indeed all poets do this, each in his own way. To create beautiful concrete images that stand vivid before the mind's eye is the natural genius of a poet. Here is a familiar picture, simple and effective, of a material vision:

Cold blows the blast across the moor  
The sleet drives hissing in the wind,  
Yon toilsome mountain lies before,  
A dreary treeless waste behind.

Or we may take a pictorial presentation of a gorgeous kind from Milton:

High on a Throne of Royal State, which far  
Outshone the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind,  
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand Showers on  
her Kings Barbaric Pearl and Gold,  
Satan exalted sat by merit raised  
To that bad eminence...

Or take this image drawn by a more delicate and subtle hand—it is Wordsworth—

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Or that wonder-image magically wrought in those famous unforgettable lines:

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

We may turn to an Eastern poet to see how he too has gone the same way although in a different tone and temper. Here is a Kalidasian image:

To climb upon his Bull high and snow-white even like Mount  
Kailas  
The great Lord graciously presses his holy feet upon  
this back of mine;  
I am his slave, Kumbhodara by name, Nikumbha's comrade.<sup>3</sup>

One can go on ad infinitum, for in a sense poetry is nothing but images. Still I am tempted to give a last citation from Dante, the superb Dante, in his grand style simple:

Lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aer bruno  
Toglieva gli animai, che sono in terra  
Dalle fatiche loro. Now was the day departing, and the air,  
Imbrow'd with shadows, from their toils released All  
animals on earth.

Characteristically of the poet these lines give an image that is bareness itself, chiselled in stone or modelled in bronze.

All these images however, or most of them, belong to one category or genre. They are painted pictures, still life, on the whole, presented in two dimensions. Kalidasa himself has described the nature or character of this artistic effect. In describing a gesture of Uma he says, 'she moved not, she stopped not' (na yayau na tasthau); it was, as it were, a movement suddenly arrested and held up on a canvas. The imagery is as though of a petrification. The figures of statuary present themselves to our eyes in

<sup>3</sup> *Kailāsagauram vṛṣamāruruḥṣoḥ*

this connection—a violent or intense action held at one point and stilled, as for example, in the Laocoon or the Discabolo.

This is usually what the poets, the great poets have done. They have presented living and moving bodies as fixed, stable entities, as a procession of statues. But Shakespeare's are not fixed stable pictures but living and moving beings. They do not appear as pictures, even like moving pictures on a screen, a two-dimensional representation. Life in Shakespeare appears, as in life, exactly like a three-dimensional phenomenon. You seem to see forms and figures in the round, not simply in a frontal view. A Shakespearean scene is not only a feast for the eye but is apprehended as though through all the senses.

However, we must not forget Michael Angelo in this connection. He is living, he is energetic, to a supreme degree. If we seek anywhere intense authentic life-movement, it is there at its maximum perhaps. Even his statues are a paean of throbbing pulsating bodies. Still he has planted moving life in immobility and stilled rigidity. It is a passing moment stopped as though by magic; a mortis rigor holds in and controls, as it were, a wild vigour spurting out.

We know that almost no paraphernalia are really needed to present a Shakespearean drama on the stage. His magical, all-powerful words are sufficient to do the work of the decorative artist. The magic of the articulate word, the mere sound depicts, not only depicts but carries you and puts you face to face with the living reality. I will give you three examples to show how Shakespeare wields his Prosperian wand. First I take the lines from Macbeth, that present before you the castle of Duncan, almost physically—perhaps even a little more than physically—with its characteristic setting and atmosphere:

Dun. This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air Nimbly and  
sweetly recommends itself Unto our gentle senses.

Ban. This guest of summer, The temple-haunting mart-  
let, does approve, By his loved mansionry that the  
heaven's breath Smells wooingly here. No jutty,  
frieze, Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle.  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed  
The air is delicate.

The next scene is the famous episode in King Lear where Gloucester attempts—though vainly—comically, to kill himself. Here is the photo-



graph, rather the cinematograph that defies, surpasses all cinema-artifice.  
I present it in two parts:

## (I)

Glo. When shall I come to th' top of that same hill?

Edg. You do climb up it now. Look how we labour.

Glo. Methinks the ground is even.

Edg. Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

Glo. No, truly.

Edg. Why then your other senses grow imperfect

By your eyes' anguish.

Glo. So may it be indeed.

Methinks thy voice is alter'd, and thou speak'st

In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

Edg. You're much deceiv'd; in nothing am I chang'd

But in my garments.

Glo. Methinks you're better spoken.

Edg. Come on, sir, here's the place; stand still. How

fearful

And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!

The crows and choughs that wing the midway air

Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down

Hangs one that gathers samphire—dreadful trade!

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

The fishermen that walk upon the beach

Appear like mice; and yon tall anchoring bark

Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy

Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge,

That on th' unnumbered idle pebble chafes,

Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,

Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight

Topple down headlong.

Glo. Set me where you stand.

Edg. Give me your hand. You are now within a foot

Of th' extreme verge. For all beneath the moon

Would I not leap upright.

Glo. Let go my hand.

.....

Edg. Now fare ye well, good sir.

Glo. With all my heart.

.....

Glo. O you mighty gods!

This world I do renounce...

Now, fellow, fare thee well.

Edg. Gone, sir—; farewell.

(2)

Edg. ...Alive or dead?—

Ho, you sir! Friend! Hear you, sir! speak!

.....

What are you, sir?

Glo. Away, and let me die.

Edg. Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,  
So many fathom down precipitating,

Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg; but thou dost breathe,

Hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound.

Ten masts at each make not the altitude

Which thou hast perpendicularly fell:

Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.

Glo. But have I fall'n, or no?

Edg. From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.

Look up a-height; the shrill-gorged lark so far

Cannot be seen or heard: do but look up.

Glo. Alack, I have no eyes.

.....

Edg. Upon the crown o' th' cliff, what thing was that  
Which parted from you?

Edg. As I stood below, methought his eyes

Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,

Horns whelked and wav'd like the enridged sea.

It was some fiend...

Glo. 'The fiend, the fiend': he led me to that place.

The last one is the opening scene of Hamlet, an extraordinary scene familiar to the whole world.

(Francisco at his post. Enter to him Barnardo)

Bar. Who's there?

Fran. Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

Bar. Long live the king! Fran. Barnardo? Bar. He.

Fran. You come most carefully upon your hour.

Bar. 'Tis not struck twelve, get thee to bed, Francisco.

Fran. For this relief much thanks, 'tis bitter cold,  
And I am sick at heart.

Bar. Have you had quiet guard?

Fran. Not a mouse stirring.

Bar. Well, good night.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,  
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

Fran. I think I hear them. Stand, ho!

Who's there?

(Enter Horatio and Marcellus)

Hor. Friends to this ground.

Mar. And liegemen to the Dane.

Fran. Give you good night.

Mar. O! farewell, honest soldier:

Who hath reliev'd you?

Fran. Barnardo hath my place;

Give you good night.

Mar. Holla! Barnardo!

Bar. Say,

What, is Horatio there?

Hor. A piece of him.

Bar. Welcome, Horatio; welcome, good Marcellus.

Mar. What! has this thing appear'd again to-night?

Bar. I have seen nothing.

Mar. Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,

And will not let belief take hold of him

Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us;

Therefore I have entreated him along

With us to watch the minutes of this night,

That if again this apparition come,

He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

Hor. Tush, tush! 'twill not appear.

Bar. Sit down a while,

And let us once again assail your ears,

That are so fortified against our story,

What we two nights have seen.

Hor. Well, sit we down,

And let us hear Barnardo speak of this.

Bar. Last night of all,

When yond same star that's westward from the pole  
Had made his course to illumine that part of heaven  
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
The bell then beating one,—

(Enter Ghost)

Mar. Peace! break thee off, look, where it comes again!

Bar. In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

Mar. Thou art a scholar; speak to it Horatio.

Bar. Looks it not like the king? Mark it Horatio.

Hor. Most like; it harrows me with fear and wonder.

Bar. It would be spoke to.

Mar. Question it, Horatio.

Hor. What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee speak.

Mar. It is offended.

Bar. See! it stalks away.

Hor. Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak!

(Exit Ghost)

Mar. 'Tis gone and will not answer.

Bar. How now, Horatio? you tremble and look pale?

Is not this something more than fantasy?

What think you on't?

Hor. Before my God I might not this believe,

Without the sensible and true avouch

Of mine own eyes.

Mar. Is it not like the king?

Hor. As thou art to thyself.

Such was the very armour he had on,

When he the ambitious Norway combated;

So frown'd he once, when in an angry parle

He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.

'Tis strange.

Mar. Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour,

With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.

This is not at all a theatrical representation on a stage where personages are acting; there is no make-up, no decor. It is a real incident happening before our eyes as it were, that we are invited to attend and

contemplate. It is not a story narrated but an event occurring upon earth disclosed to our view.

Such is the magical creative power in the Shakespearean word. It is the evocative force of the articulate sound. In India, we call it mantra. Mantra means a certain sum of syllables charged with dynamic force, creative consciousness. It is that which induces life into the body of a clay image, it is that which awakens the Divinity, establishes Him in a dead material form. Shakespeare has, as it were, instilled his life's breath into his words and made them move and live as living creatures, physical beings upon earth.

Borrowing an analogy from modern knowledge, I may say that the Shakespearean word is a particle or wave of life-power. Modern science posits as the basis of the material creation, as its ultimate constituents, these energy-particles. Even so it seems to me that at the basis of all poetic creation there lie what may be called word-particles, and each poet has a characteristic quality or energy of the word-unit. The Shakespearean word, I have said, is a life-energy packet; and therefore in his elaboration of the Word, living figures, moving creatures leap up to our sight.

Shakespeare himself has said of his hero Romeo, characterising the supreme beauty the hero embodies:

When he shall die  
Take him and cut him out in little stars,  
And he will make the face of heaven so fine  
That all the world will be in love with Night.

Even so the whole body of Shakespearean utterances may be described as consisting, in the last analysis, of starry vocables, quanta of articulate life-energy.

Yes, Shakespearean syllables are indeed the glorious members cut out of the body as it were of a beautiful vital being transmuted into heavenly luminaries.

In the world of poetry Dante is a veritable *avatar*. His language is a supreme magic. The word-unit in him is a quantum of highly concentrated perceptive energy, Tapas. In Kalidasa the quantum is that of the energy of the-light in sensuous beauty. And Homer's voice is a quantum of the luminous music of the spheres.

The word-unit, the language quantum in Sri Aurobindo's poetry is a packet of consciousness-force, a concentrated power of Light (instinct with a secret Delight)—listen:

Lone in the silence and to the vastness bared,  
Against midnight's dumb abysses piled in front  
A columned shaft of fire and light she rose.

O Word, cry out the immortal litany:  
Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born.

# TWO SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE

On the occasion of the 400th birth anniversary of Shakespeare, I present to you today two of the great Shakespearean sonnets. The sonnets, as you know, are all about love. They are however characterised by an incredible intensity and perhaps an equally incredible complexity, for the Shakespearean feeling is of that category.

Shakespeare has treated love in a novel way; he has given a new figure to that common familiar sentiment. And incidentally he has given a new sense and bearing to Death. From a human carnal base there is a struggle, an effort here to rise into something extracorporeal; that is, something outside and independent of the body and impersonal. The sense of the first sonnet is this: the body decays and dies, even as bleak winter seizes upon the beauties of Nature or black Night swallows up the light of the day. But love lingers still—as the song of sweet birds—and the dying cadence of love curiously invokes and evokes a resurgent love in the beloved. The second sonnet hymns the soul's conquest over Death. The soul is that which is sinless in the sinful, it is the pure, the unsullied—the immortal love—in this filth and dirt of a mortal body with its crude passions. Death eats away the body, but in this way the soul grows and eats away Death. This is the final epiphany, the death of Death and the resurgence of the soul divine in its love divine.

## Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day

As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.  
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

### Sonnet 146

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,  
Fool'd by these rebel powers that thee array,  
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,  
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?  
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,  
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?  
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,  
Eat up thy charge? is this thy body's end?  
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,  
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;  
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;  
Within be fed, without be rich no more:  
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men  
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.

The Shakespearean conclusion 'And Death once dead, there's no more dying then' resounds in our ears like an echo of the famous lines of Sri Aurobindo in Savitri—

Even there shall come as a high crown of all  
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance.

The words are perilously parallel. I say perilously because one might just think that Shakespeare was trying to be a disciple of Sri Aurobindo!



# ROBERT GRAVES

Robert Graves is not a major poet, and certainly not a great poet. He is a minor poet. But in spite of his minor rank he is a good poet: here he presents us a jewel, a beautiful poem both in form and substance. He has indeed succeeded, as we shall see, in removing the veil, the mystic golden lid, partially at least and revealed to our mortal vision a glimpse of light and beauty and truth, made them delightfully sink into and seep through our aesthetic sense.

Like the poet his idol also is of a lower rank or of a plebeian status. He keeps away from such high gods as Indra and Agni and Varuna and Mitra: great poets will sing their praises. He will take care of the lesser ones, those who are moving in the shadow of the great ones and are hardly noticed. Even in these modern days, goddess Shitala, the healing goddess of epidemics, lives side by side with Durga.

But really it does not matter if the deity is small. For, if the worship is sincere and the offering pure, they ultimately reach the Divine. Did not Sri Krishna say in the Gita that whomsoever you may worship and in whatever way, that in the end reaches him? The importance and significance of worship do not depend upon their size and scale: a little water, a leaf, a flower may more than do.

The small gods are small, but do not slight them— they are powerful. They are powerful because they are deities of the earth. In fact, like gods and goddesses in heaven, there are gods and goddesses on earth also. The gods in heaven are high and far away, but these unobtrusive deities are near to our hearth and home. The Greeks referred to the Olympian gods, of high caste and rank as it were,—like Jupiter and Apollo—and to those others who dwelt on the lowly earth and embraced its water and land, its rivers and trees and fields—the nymph, the satyr, and Pan and dryad and naiad. What are the powers and functions of these unearthly beings? They on their part are guarding the gate to heaven, questioning

the pilgrim of their divine destination. Well, the sentinels have to be appeased first, satisfied and convinced. Surely the sands bum hotter than the sun!

We may ask in this connection which deity does our poet invoke here, to whom does he raise his offerings, to whom—kasmai devāya? One need not be startled at the answer: it is the toadstool. But the mushroom growth assumes a respectable figure in the guise of its Sanskrit name, chatraka. Kalidasa did one better. His magic touch gave the insignificant flora a luminous robe- śilindhra, a charming name. The great poet tells us that the earth is not barren or sterile - kartum yat ca mahīmucchilīndhrāmabandhyām. The next pertinent question is: why does the poet worship a toadstool? What is his purpose? Does a toadstool possess any special power? This leads us to a hidden world, to the 'mysteries' spoken of by the poet himself.

In ancient days and in some spiritual practice and discipline this fungus had a special use for a definite purpose.

Its use produces on one a drowsy effect, perhaps a strong and poisonous intoxicating effect. What is the final result of this drugging? We know that in our country among the sadhus and some sects practising occult science, taking of certain herbal drugs is recommended, even obligatory. Today Aldous Huxley has taken up the cue, in the most modern fashion indeed, and prescribed mescaline in the process of Yoga and spiritual practice. Did the Vedic Rishis see in the same way a usefulness of Soma, the proverbial creeper secreting the immortal drink of delight? However, the Tantrik sadhaks hold that particular soporifics possess the virtue of quieting the external senses and dulling and deadening the sense organs, and thereby freeing the inner and subtler consciousness in its play and manifestation.

Our poet too is saying something in the same line. He is appealing to the toadstool god to give him the right vision, to take him to the other shore, to lead him to the presence of the gods in heaven. Because he is the divine food, its self, the ambrosia. Not only that: by taking this ambrosia one enjoys, even while in the physical body, existence in heaven, ihaiva tairjitam, as the Upanishad said.

That he may pass me through when my star falls  
Who have ambrosia eaten, and yet live.

Life extinguishes when the star falls, yet the truer and another life awaits to be lived.

How does Graves invoke his god? Let us have a complete view of his mantra.

He begins by speaking of the birth of the gods. Well, a small truth needs to be revealed at this point. We have spoken of the lesser and smaller gods. These small gods are shielded and supported, in fact, by the big gods. This Shilindhra or toadstool has behind him Dionysus, the delight and loveliness and enjoyment and youth—a veritable symbol of ecstasy, of earthly ecstasy. That which is nectar in heaven is presented on earth in drugs and herbal juices. Shilindhra and ambrosia pertain to the same class.

The birth of Shilindhra resembles the birth of Dionysus. When King Zeus took the form of thunder and lightning and entered the womb of Semele, Dionysus was bom. Similar is the story of the appearance of the toadstool, in the midst of rain and thunder and lightning and on the lap of mother earth. We have already said that there are two categories of gods or two types of them—one belongs to heaven and the other to earth. The Vedic Rishis announced that heaven was our father and earth the mother—*daurme pitā mātā pṛthvimahiyam*. The Vedantins usually and mainly worship the father, and Tantriks, the mother. Svarga, Dyaus, is the world of light, and earth or *bhu* is that of delight and enjoyment. We have already said that high above, up there, dwell Apollo and Zeus and Juno, and below here on earth, Dionysus and Bacchus and Semele and Aphrodite.

However the poet says that as the toadstool is born in the midst of thunder and lightning, his strength and capacity are of the nature of thunder—enduring and hard and powerful. Bom thus it spreads everywhere and lasts through all time. From the beginning of creation this god has sprouted up everywhere, as giver of pleasure and ecstasy and intoxication. To worship him is to worship earth, to worship Dionysus himself. But one needs to worship this god in the right way, to give oneself away wholly to him. Once upon a time the demons for some selfish interest wanted to capture and imprison him. The result was disastrous—he thought of depriving them of their power of movement and drowning them into the ocean. On the contrary, to the devoted which world does he reveal, which delight bring? Let us listen to the poet:

Lead us with your song, Queen of the Earth!  
 Twinned to the god, I follow comradely  
 Through his first rainbow-limbo, webbed in white,

Through chill Tyrrhenian grottoes, under water,  
Where dolphins weave among marble rocks.  
Through sword-bright jungles, tangles of conjecture,  
Through halls of fear ceilinged with incubi,  
Through blazing treasure-chambers walled with gems,  
Their domes pillared with naked Caryatides;  
Then mount at last on wings into pure air,  
Peering down with regal eye upon  
Five-fruited orchards of Elysium.

Let us not be too curious to know the name of the five fruits whose taste brings an immortal delight, but do we not relish already a foretaste of its sweetness in these lines:

And still she drowsily sings:  
Tender her voice, the notes come linked together  
In intricate golden chains paid out  
Slowly across brocaded cramoisy,  
Or unfold like leaves from the jade-green shoot  
Of a rising tree whose blossoms are her tears...  
O, whenever she pauses, my heart quails  
Until the sound renews.

Here in this connection one is naturally reminded of Sri Aurobindo's *The Other Earths*. The poem reveals other earths like this earth of ours as reflections or projections or prototypes: like the concretely visible earth here, they too are equally beautiful, with million colours and shades. We are blind and cannot see them. But when we learn to see with the eye of our eye there appear clear before us

Calm faces of the Gods on background vast  
Bringing the marvel of the infinitudes,  
Through glimmering veils of wonder and delight  
World after world bursts on the awakened sight.

Of course, in Sri Aurobindo we reach the inner and higher world through a luminous path, through worlds of light, ranging one upon another. It is a journey through pure air and clear light. Conversely the poet of the toadstool leads one by the passage of an acid drunkenness and a half conscious drowse. If the goal here is a delight and a freedom

they are arrived at after traversing a purgatory or undergoing a troubled purification. But this too leads verily to a world of the gods.

This "little slender lad, whose flesh is bitter, lightning engendered, bom from dungs of mares" is perhaps a symbol of our human receptacle. We have to carry this mortal frame with its clay feet and make the effort towards self-transcendence: the alchemy's other name is self-purification and self-perfection. This tender shoot is a mysterious chemical storehouse, its fermentation and purification and use awaken in us the sleeping divine will, give a clear vision, guide us through the secret worlds and ultimately to the home of Immortality. The Vedic Rishis sang to the Soma creeper or god Soma, *Tatra mām amṛtam kṛdhi*, O Somadeva, carry us where thou flowest down and there make us immortal. For there abound all delight, all ecstasy, all enjoyment, all lure and the supreme Desire of desire – *ānanda, moda, mud, pramud, kāma* <sup>4</sup> – are these not the five fruits of heaven the poet of the West mentions?

<sup>4</sup> *Yatrānandāśca modāśca mudaḥ pramuda āsate kāmasya yatrāptāḥ kāmāḥ (Rigveda: IX. 113)*

# *BORIS PASTERNAK*

The portrait of the late poet (for he is more of a poet than a novelist, as has been pointed out) on the cover of the British edition of his novel *Dr. Zhivago* seems to be the very image of the tragic hero. Indeed he reminds one of Hamlet as he stood on the ramparts of the castle of Elsinor. Curiously, the very first poem in the collection at the end of that book is entitled "Hamlet" and the significant cry rings out of it:

Abba, Father, if it be possible  
Let this cup pass from me.

Here is a sensitive soul thrown into a world where one has to draw one's breath in pain. Even like the Son of Man, the exemplar and prototype, he has to share in the sufferings and errors of an ignorant humanity. He cannot escape and perhaps should not. It will not do like Hamlet again, to say

The time is out of joint. O cursed sprite  
That ever I was born to set it right.

No, the son of man and every man has to bear his cross heroically and triumphantly. Life is a calvary and the Kingdom of Heaven can be reached only by traversing Gethsemane. There is no short cut. However, let us begin from the beginning. For Pasternak has a well-pronounced view of things and it is characteristic of his consciousness. The first article of his faith then—it is not merely a faith but a deep and concrete perception—is that the world is one. Creation forms a global unity and there is one pulsation, one throb running through all life. In this regard he is a unanimist of the school of Jules Romains. Life's single pulsation, however, he feels most in the plant world; the global unity there moves in a wonderfully perfect rhythm and harmony. Mankind in its natural, unsophisticated state shares in that rhythm and harmony and forms

part of it. That is perhaps the stage of happy innocence of which many of the first great Romantics dreamed, e.g., Rousseau and Wordsworth. Viewed as such, placed as a natural phenomenon in the midst of Nature, in its totality, mankind still appears as a harmonious entity fitting into a harmonious whole. But that is a global bird's-eye view. There is a near view that isolates the human phenomenon; and then a different picture emerges. That is the second article of Pasternak's faith. Life is a rhythmic whole, but it is not static, it is a dynamic movement, it is a movement forward-toward growth and progress. It is not merely the movement of recurrence; life does not consist in pulsation only, a perpetual repetition. As I say, it means growing, advancing, progressing, as well. That is, in other words, the inevitable urge of evolution. Ay, and there's the rub. For it is that which brings in conflict and strife: together with creation comes destruction. Nature in her sovereign scheme of harmony accepts destruction, it is true, and has woven that element too in her rhythmic pattern and it seems quite well and good. She is creating, destroying and re-creating eternally. She denudes herself in winter, puts on a garb of bare, dismal aridity and is again all lush, verdant beauty in spring. Pain and suffering, cruelty and battle are all there. And all indeed is one harmonious whole, a symphony of celestial music. And yet pain is pain and evil evil. There are tears in mortal things that touch us to the core. In mankind the drive for evolution brings in revolution. Not only strife and suffering but uglier elements take birth; cruelty, inhumanity, yes, and also perversity, falsehood, all moral turpitudes, a general inner deterioration and bankruptcy of values. In the human scheme of things nothing can remain on a lofty status, there comes inevitably a general decline and degradation. As Zhivago says "A thing which has been conceived in a lofty ideal manner becomes coarse and material." An element of the human tragedy—the very central core perhaps—is the calvary of the individual. Pasternak's third article of faith is human freedom, the freedom of the individual. Indeed if evolution is to mean progress and growth it must base itself upon that one needful thing. And here is the gist of the problem that faces Pasternak (as Zhivago) in his own inner consciousness and in his outer social life. The problem—Man versus Society, the individual and the collective—the private and the public sector in modem jargon—is not of today. It is as old as Sophocles, as old as Valmiki. Antigone upheld the honour of the individual against the law of the State and sacrificed herself for that ideal. Sri Rama on the contrary sacrificed his personal individual claims to the demand of his people, the collective godhead. Pasternak's tragedy runs on the same line.

Progress and welfare of the group, of humanity at large is an imperative necessity and the collective personality does move in that direction. But it moves over the sufferings, over the corpses of individuals composing the collectivity. The individuals, in one sense, are indeed the foci, the conscious centres that direct and impel the onward march, but they have something in them which is over and above the dynamism of physical revolution. There is an inner aspiration and preoccupation whose object is other than outer or general progress and welfare. There is a more intimate quest. The conflict is there. The human individual, in one part of his being, is independent and separate from the society in which he lives and in another he is in solidarity with the rest. The freedom of the individual is a double-edged sword—it is a help to progress, it is also a bar. Individuals, great individuals, are the spearhead of progressive movements. They initiate new and advanced beginnings. But if freedom means whims and caprices, too great a stress on personal likes and dislikes, then that brings about a deviation in the straight path, or rather, obstacles in the forward march. And the advancing time-spirit or world-spirit has to push them and cast away. There is also the other side of the shield. Collectivity, like the individual, may also be a help as well as a bar. It means the enlargement and diffusion of the individual's gain, a sharing in wide commonalty, an element or asset of human progress; it may also hamstring, for it is normally conservative and averse to movement and progress. Zhivago at almost every step shows how the individual is thwarted in his inner and personal fulfilment—even in those matters that concern his higher and nobler inclinations and pursuits, not merely his affairs of selfish interest. The demands of the collective urge, the progress that society needs and exacts is often a millstone that slowly grinds the individual down to personal frustration and failure. That is, I suppose, the central lesson of Pasternak's autobiography. That is why even when Pasternak speaks of social progress, a better humanity, we are not sure. For what matters is the present. A brave new world in the offing, yes. But how to take life in the meanwhile? Evidently, it is the life of the cross, you have to choose that or it is imposed upon you. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you and in spite of what the world and life are, you can create within you, possess in your inner consciousness something of the divine element, the peace that passeth understanding, the purity and freedom and harmony with oneself and with the entire creation, including even one's neighbours. Inner divinity does not save you from an outer calvary. But you know how to accept it and go through it, not only patiently but gladly, for thereby you take



upon yourself the burden of sorrow that is humanity's share in the life here below. I referred at the beginning to the tragedy of a sensitive soul; I may turn the phrase and speak of the sensitivity of a tragic soul. There are souls that are tragic in the very grain—it is that which gives an unearthly beauty, nobility—indeed the martyr's aureole. It is not only that our sweetest songs arise out of our saddest thought, but that, as our poet says,

The whole existence awaits its warmth  
From just a little suffering.<sup>5</sup>

Pasternak's poetry is characterized by this tragic sensitivity, a nostalgia woven into the fabric of the utterance, its rhythm and imagery, its thought and phrasing. "The eternal note of sadness" which Arnold heard and felt in the lines of Sophocles, we hear in the verses of Pasternak as well. Almost echoing the psalmist's cry of Vanity of vanities, Pasternak sings:

But who are we, where do we come from  
When of all those years  
Nothing but idle is life  
And we are nowhere in the world!

Here in this world, upon this earth we move as in a dream—I, you, everything, living or non-living, all together forming together one indivisible flow passing eternally to eternity!

But their hearts are beating,  
Now he, now she Struggles to awake, Falls back to sleep.

Eyes closed.  
Hills. Clouds.  
Rivers. Fords.  
Years. Centuries.

<sup>5</sup> *Rendered from the French version*

*C'est que toute existence attend  
Sa chaleur d'un peu de souffrance.*

A beautiful picture in the Chinese style — a few significant strokes, simple and clear, evoking a whole landscape, brimful of yearning and resignation and tearful quietness in which the whole creation is embalmed. Pasternak's snowscapes are beautiful, they are particularly expressive of this nostalgia that pervades his whole consciousness like a perfume as it were. Here, for example, is a haunting scene:

The driven snow drew circles and arrows  
On the window pane.  
The candle on the table burned.  
The candle burned.

Or again

The frosty night was like a fairy tale,  
Invisible beings kept stepping down  
From the snowdrifts into the crowd.

But the cardinal point is in the final settling of accounts.

In all the world  
Are there so many souls?  
So many lives?  
So many villages and woods?

These three days will pass  
But they will push me down into such emptiness  
That in the frightening interval  
I shall grow up to the Resurrection...

This is one world, one and indivisible, and it moves, whole and entire, through a kind of wintry blizzard, bearing its heavy cross, moves yet to a new life, a miracle that shall happen—for such is the lesson of the life that the lord of life, the Son of Man lived and showed. Even like his master and guide, Pasternak says, to himself, above all

Surely it is my calling  
To see that the distances should not lose heart  
And that beyond the limits of the town  
The earth should not feel lonely.

For the miracle does happen and man is waiting for that in spite of all the tragic interlude:

If the leaves, branches, roots, trunk  
Had been granted a manual of freedom,  
The laws of nature would have intervened. But a miracle is  
a miracle, a miracle is God.  
When we are all confusion,  
That instant it finds us out.

Yes, the captive tree rooted to the soil for eternity is as much of a miracle as the free wide-winged bird in the infinitude, even as Death too is a miracle, the passage to Immortality, only its mask perhaps.

# GEORGE SEFERIS

*Poet and essayist in modern Greek. Translated poems of the English poet, George Eliot, into modern Greek; was in diplomatic service, now retired and settled in Athens. Awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1963. An Elder, maître, now in the literary world of modern Greece.*

*References: "Poetry" (Chicago); Greek Number, June 1951; "Poetry", Greek Number, October 1964; "Poems" translated by Rex Warner (the Bodley Head. London)*

Seferis is a poet of sighs. I do not know the cadence, the breath of the original Greek rhythm. But if something of that tone and temper has been carried over into English, what can be more like a heave of sigh than—

"Bend if you can to the dark sea forgetting  
The flute's sound on naked feet  
That trod upon sleep in the other, the sunk life."

It is the Virgilian "tears of things"—*Lacrymaererum*—the same that moved the muse of the ancient Roman poet, moves the modern Greek poet.

Seferis' poetry sobs—explicit or muffled—muttering or murmuring like a refrain—a mantra:

'Oh the pity of it all!'

What else is it, I repeat, but sobbing:

I look for my old house,  
The house with the torn windows  
Darkened by the ivy,  
And for that ancient column

The landmark of the sailor.  
How can I get into this hutch?

We are reminded of Jeanne d'Arc, the little maid who melted with great pity (*grande pitié*) at the sight of the misery stalking all around, ravaging her sweet France like a pest and which drove her in the end to a more than classical tragic end: Seferis too in the same manner wails

"Great pain had fallen on Greece."

Great pain, ruin everywhere...Greece is but a sign, a symbol of the whole earth, the whole humanity. All around ancient—sempiternal—ruins...

"Walls, streets and houses stood out  
Fossilised muscles of Cyclopien giants,  
Spent power in its anatomy..."

As if these were not sufficient, we must add new ones, fresh and bleeding—and not only material but moral ruins also—the dreadful results of our inhuman cruelties of war:

"When you look around and you find  
All about you swathes of feet  
All about you dead hands  
All about you darkened eyes;  
When there is no longer any choice  
Of the death you wanted as your own,  
Listening to a great cry,  
Even to a wolf that yells..."

Indeed a great cry shoots out of your heart; an indescribable pity, the upsurge of a divine *Pieta*, seizes upon your being and you are another person, you become a poet, a prophet, a God's warrior. Seferis too became in this way a poet and something of a prophet.

His poetry fulfils perfectly the function of the tragic drama, in the Aristotelian way—purification by evoking terror and pity—evoking terror, for example in these lines:

On our left the south-wind blows and drives us mad,  
The wind that bares bones, stripipng off the flesh,...

Or the whole story of diabolical cruelty, the three Mules, with these tremendous lines:

...those jolting breasts Ripe as pomegranates with murder...  
6 (P.108)

This is terror, in excelsis. As for pity—his lines on Greece:

Great pain had fallen on Greece  
So many bodies thrown  
To jaws of the sea, to jaws of the earth,  
So many souls  
Given up to millstones to be crushed like corn.  
And the muddy beds of the rivers sweated with blood.  
(Pp.115-116)

or

O Nightingale, Nightingale,  
What is God? What is not God? What is in between?

Or this truly pitiful invocation:

But they have eyes all white without eyelashes  
And their arms are thin as reeds.

Lord, not with these. I have known  
The voice of children at dawn

<sup>6</sup> I quote here the whole passage in a little different translation:

*The glorious animal of Queen Eleanor.  
Against her belly those eperons of gold,  
On her saddle those insatiable loins,  
In her amble tottering those breasts.  
Bursting like pomegranates with murder.  
And when Neapolitans, Genoese and Lombards  
Brought to the royal table on a silver tray  
The shirt all bloody of the murdered king  
And made away with his . pitiable brother  
I can imagine how she neighed that night,  
Something beyond the impassivity of her race  
Like the howling of a dog.*

Running on green hill-sides  
Happily coloured, like the bees  
And like the butterflies.  
Lord, not with these, their voice  
Cannot even leave their mouths,  
It stays there glued on yellow teeth. (P.78)

But as I have said terror and pity are invoked not for themselves but for the sake of purification. They serve to wash and cleanse the troubled sentiments and bring in a purer clearer atmosphere. When we have passed through those heavy and cruel feelings, we arrive at a kindlier note. Thus,

Then I heard footsteps upon the pebbles;  
I saw no faces. They had gone when I turned my head.  
Still that voice heavy upon me like the treading of cattle  
Stayed in the pulses of the sky and the seas rolled  
Over upon the shingle again and again. (P.110)

Or this superb picture of the Holy Ascension:

Suddenly I was walking and not walking.  
I looked at the flying birds; they had turned to stone.  
I looked at the shining sky; there was amazement in the air.  
I looked at the struggling bodies; they stood still.  
And in their midst was a face ascending into the Light.  
Over the neck the black hair flowed, the eyebrows  
Had the beat of a swallow's wing, the nostrils  
Curved back over the lips, and now the body  
Was rising out of the labour, naked, with the unripe breasts  
Of a virgin, Leader of Ways;  
A dancing but no movement. (Pp.120-121)

Indeed, this is beauty cleansed and translucent, a beauty of the eternal Ionian sky. How limpid and serene, yet pulsating with a coursing life is this pastoral:

In the sky the clouds were ringlets; here and there  
A trumpet of gold and rose: the approaching dusk.  
In the scanty grass and among the thorns there roamed  
Thin breaths that follow the rain; it must have been raining

Over there at the edge of the hills that now took on colour.  
(P. 120)

Yet was he a Christian in mood or feeling or faith in the wake of his friend and comrade, kindred in spirit and in manner, the English poet T. S. Eliot? There was a difference between the two and Seferis himself gave expression to it. The English poet after all was an escapist: he escaped, that is to say, in his consciousness, into the monastery, the religious or spiritual sedative—opium? Seferis speaks approvingly of a poet of his country, alike in spirit, who declared that he was no reformer in this sad world<sup>7</sup>, he let things happen, he was satisfied with being a witness, seeing nature unroll her inexhaustible beauty. Eliot's was more or less a moral revulsion whereas the Greek poet was moved rather by an aesthetic repulsion from the uglinesses of life. It was almost a physical reaction.

This reaction led him not to escape the reality but to detach himself and rise to heights from where he could see a clearer beauty in earthly things. He says:

Just a little more  
And we shall see the almond trees in blossom  
The marbles shining in the sun  
The sea, the curling waves.  
Just a little more  
Let us rise just a little higher.

Nor was he, we may now observe, a pagan, a secular aesthete. He has himself risen enough to glimpse and name his soul. It was not perhaps as clear a sight as that of Eliot that had a touch of the Upanishadic assurance. Still the sense of an immortal thing unrepressed by mortalities came to him, in an authentic manner. For such is his final vision:

And those bodies  
Created from a land unknown to them

7

This is what exactly Seferis says about this "old man" of Greece. "He has no inclination to reform. On the contrary, he has an obvious loathing for any reformer. He writes as though he were telling us: if men are such as they are, let them go where they deserve to be. It is not my business to correct them." *(Poetry (Chicago), Oct., 1964)*



Have their own souls.  
Now they assemble tools to change these souls.  
It will not be possible. They will only undo them.  
If souls can be undone. (P.III)

Neither wholly an earthbound poet nor clearly an otherworldly prophet his question still remains:

What is God? What is not God ? What is in between ?

Seferis is a being of this in-between world, his consciousness a golden seam joining two hemispheres.

# JULES SUPERVIELLE

Jules Supervielle is a French poet and a modern French poet. He belongs to this century and died only a few years ago. Although he wrote in French, he came of a Spanish colonist family settled in South America (Montevideo). He came to France early in life and was educated there. He lived in France but maintained his relation with his mother-country. His poetry is very characteristic and adds almost a new vein to the spirit and manner of French poetry. He has bypassed the rational and emotional tradition of his adopted country, brought in a mystic way of vision characteristic of the East. This mysticism is not however the normal spiritual way but a kind of oblique sight into what is hidden behind the appearance. By the oblique way I mean the sideway to enter into the secret of things, a passage opening through the side. The mystic vision has different ways of approach—one may look at the thing straight, face to face, being level with it with a penetrating gaze, piercing a direct entry into the secrets behind. This frontal gaze is also the normal human way of knowing and understanding, the scientific way. It becomes mystic when it penetrates sufficiently behind and strikes a secret source of another light and sight, that is, the inner sight of the soul. The normal vision which I said is the scientist's vision, stops short at a certain distance and so does not possess the key to the secret knowledge. But an aspiring vision can stretch itself, drill into the surface obstacle confronting it, and make its contact with the hidden ray behind. There is also another mystic way, not a gaze inward but a gaze upward. The human intelligence and the higher brain consciousness seeks a greater and intenser light, a vaster knowledge and leaps upward as it were. There develops a penetrating gaze towards heights up and above, to such a vision the mystery of the spirit slowly reveals itself. That is Vedantic mysticism. There is a look downward also below the life-formation and one enters into contact with forces and beings and creatures of

another type, a portion of which is named Hell or Hades in Europe, and in India *pātāl* and *rasātal*. But here we are speaking of another way, not a frontal or straight movement, but as I said, splitting the side and entering into it, something like opening the shell of mother of pearl and finding the pearl inside. There is a descriptive mystic: the suprasensuous experience is presented in images and feeling forms. That is the romantic way. There is an explanatory mysticism: the suprasensuous is set in intellectual or mental terms, making it somewhat clear to the normal understanding. That is I suppose classical mysticism. All these are more or less direct ways, straight approaches to the mystic reality. But the oblique is different- it is a seeking of the mind and an apprehension of the senses that are allusive, indirect, that move through contraries and negations, that point to a different direction in order just to suggest the objective aimed at. The Vedantic (and the Scientific too) is the straight, direct, rectilinear gaze-the Vedantin says, ' May I look at the Sun with a transfixed gaze' -whether he looks upward or inward or downward. But the modern mystic is of a different mould. He has not that clear absolute vision, he has the apprehension of an aspiring consciousness. His is not religious poetry for that matter, but it is an aspiration and a yearning to perceive and seize truth and reality that eludes the senses, but seems to be still there. We shall understand better by taking a poem of his as example. Thus:

## Alter Ego

Une souris s'échappe  
 (Ce n'en était pas une)  
 Une femme s'éveille  
 (Comment le savez-vous?) Et la porte qui grince  
 (On l'huila ce matin)  
 Près du mur de clôture  
 (Le mur n'existe plus)  
 Ah! je ne puis rien dire  
 (Eh bien, vous vous taisez!)  
 Je ne puis pas bouger  
 (Vous marchez sur la route)  
 Où allons nous ainsi?  
 (C'est moi qui le demande) Je suis seul sur la Terre  
 (Je suis là près de vous)  
 Peut-on être si seul

(Je le suis plus que vous,  
Je vois votre visage,  
Nul ne m'a jamais vu).

It is a colloquy between "I" and the other-I. The apparent self sees things that appear so concrete and real but in the other, they vanish and become airy nothings. Still, if things have any reality it is there in that other self. Or again, take this:

## Lui seul

Si vous touchez sa main c'est bien sans le savoir,  
Vous vous le rappelez mais sous un autre nom,  
Au milieu de la nuit au plus fort du sommeil,  
Vous dites son vrai nom et le faites asseoir.  
Un jour on frappe et je devine que c'est lui  
Qui s'en vient près de nous à n'importe quelle heure  
Et vous le regardez avec un tel oubli  
Qu'il s'en retourne au loin mais en laissant derrière  
Une porte vivante et pale comme lui.

The Reality is so real that it is always there, and it is not always altogether intangible, invisible. You touch it often enough but you do not know that it was the reality. You give it another name: perhaps imagination, illusion, hallucination. Yes, at the dead of night when you have forgotten yourself, forgotten the world, nothing exists, you call out his true name and set him in front—O my soul, O my God! In the next poem that I quote, the mystery is explained, that is to say, described a little more at length.

## Saisir

Saisir, saisir le soir, la pomme et la statue,  
Saisir, l'ombre et le mur et le bout de la rue,

Saisir le pied, le cou de la femme couchée  
Et puis ouvrir les mains. Combien d'oiseaux lâches,  
Combien d'oiseaux perdus qui deviennent la rue,  
L'ombre, le mur, le soir, la pomme et la statue.

Mains, vous vous usurez  
A ce grave jeu-là,  
Il faudra vous couper  
Un jour, vous couper ras.

\* \*

Grands yeux dans ce visage,  
Qui vous a placés là?  
De quel vaisseau sans mats  
Etes-vous l'équipage?

Depuis quel abordage  
Attendez-vous ainsi  
Ouverts toute la nuit?

Feux noirs d'un bastingage  
Etonnés mais soumis  
A la loi des orages.

Prisonniers des mirages  
Quand sonnera minuit  
Baissez un peu les cils  
Pour reprendre courage.

\* \*

Saisir quand tout me quitte,  
Et avec quelles mains  
Saisir cette pensée,  
Et avec quelles mains  
Saisir enfin le jour  
Par la peau de son cou,  
Le tenir remuant  
Comme un lièvre vivant?  
Viens, sommeil, aide-moi,  
Tu saisiras pour moi  
Ce que je n'ai pu prendre,  
Sommeil aux mains plus grands.

These hands do not grasp that thing, these eyes do not see that. Try to capture through the senses that tenuous substance, you find it nowhere. You cannot throttle that reality with your solid fist. Chop off your hands, pluck out your eyes, then perhaps something will stir in that darkness, something that exists not but wields a sovereign power. The eyes that see are not these winkless wide eyes, blank, vacant and dry, before which blackness is the only reality. One must have something of the bedewed gentle hesitating human eyes; it is there that the other light condescends to cast its reflection. The poet says, man with his outward regalia seems to have lost all trace of the Divine in him, what is still left of God in him is just the "humidity" of his soul<sup>8</sup> —the 'tears of things' as a great poet says.

The sense that seizes and captures and makes an object its own is not any robust material sense, but something winged and vast and impalpable like your sleep—the other consciousness.

The poet speaks obliquely but the language he speaks by itself is straight, clear, simple, limpid. No rhetoric is there, no exaggeration, no effort at effect; the voice is not raised above the normal speech level. That is indeed the new modern poetic style. For according to the new consciousness prose and poetry are not two different orders, the old order created poetry in heaven, the new poetry wants it upon earth; level with earth, the common human speech, the spoken tongues give the supreme intrinsic beauty of poetic cadence. The best poetry embodies the quintessence of prose-rhythm, its pure spontaneous and easy and felicitous movement. In English the hiatus between the poetic speech and prose is considerable, in French it is not so great, still the two were kept separate. In England Eliot came to demolish the barrier, in France a whole company has come up and very significant among them is this foreigner from Spain who is so obliquely simple and whose Muse has a natural yet haunting magic of divine things:

Elle lève les yeux et la brise s'arrête  
Elle baisse les yeux, la campagne s'étend.

<sup>8</sup> *God says to man: "L'humidité de votre âme, c'est ce qui vous reste de moi."*

# *TWO MYSTIC POEMS IN MODERN FRENCH*

Here is the first poem, I give only the text, followed by an explanatory paraphrase.

(I)

Chanson Des Étages  
Il fait jour chez la reine.  
C'est la nuit près du roi.  
Déjà chante la reine.  
A peine dort le roi.

Les ombres qui l'enchaînent,  
Une à une, il les voit.  
Le regard de la reine  
Ne s'y attache pas.

Le destin qui les mène,  
Dont frissonne le roi,  
Ne trouble point la reine.  
Brillent la mer au bas,  
Et, rythme de ses veines,  
Celle qui la brûla,  
Sœur de la vague même.

Ô minutes sereines,  
Vous n'êtes plus au roi!

Le souvenir d'un chêne

Sur son front de souci  
Pose une tache claire.  
C'est dans une autre vie,  
Quand s'éveillait la reine  
Contre le cœur du roi.

Ah! ferme ton palais  
Ou monte en ses étages,  
Timide souverain.  
Tu comprendras pourquoi  
Sur un rocher sauvage  
Le reine appuie son sein.

Tu comprendras pourquoi,  
Et t'en consoleras.

(RENÉ CHAR (from POETRY Volume 104 No. 5 August 1964))

#### EXPLANATORY PARAPHRASE

The queen upstairs is the higher consciousness. The king downstairs is the egoistic being in the lower consciousness. While it is dawn and daylight with the queen, it is night with the king—he is just entering into sleep. The king sees dark shadows closing him in, binding him down—bonds of ignorance imprisoning him in the ordinary life and consciousness. The queen, the higher power, is free of all that.

Both are being led towards a high divine destiny. But the ego-being is frightened, while the higher consciousness has no worry. And yet the lower consciousness is aflame; for its veins are flowing with a secret fire which its own sister has kindled in it. Ignorance harbours within its bosom a secret knowledge that is a reflection of the higher consciousness.

There are tranquil moments in the lower eternity that come from on high, from the queen. They do not belong to the king. At such moments a memory comes of a divine tree, the tree of immortal life, and imprints a white seal upon the king's tormented brow. The king feels it is another life, feels the queen awake by his side.

To have the queen always by his side the king must close the doors and windows of the lower storey of his palace and climb the stairs upward.



The king must shed all fear. There will be no palace to live in but a bare rock upon which he will find the queen lying down.

The king will understand that the higher consciousness must come down and touch and kiss the bleak earth-consciousness. The spirit must embrace the cold bare earth. Then only the human soul, the king free of his ego, will attain peace and felicity.

Here is the second poem. I follow the same principle— I do not give a translation but, as I said, an explanatory paraphrase, and I conclude by a short comment.

(2) POÈMES  
(Extraits)

Tes soleils sont de houx, de gui.  
Jamais perdu, jamais saisi  
Qui est en moi, qui n'y est plus!  
L'eau va et vient sous les talus.

Je ne vois pas ce que je vois  
—Ta nuit de tilleul et de noix.  
Je vois ce que je ne vois pas  
—Tes mains sont dans les résédas!

Oreille ouverte, oreille close  
J'entends les lacs aux lauriers-roses:  
Ton nom de silence et de sel.  
Mais je n'entends pas les pétrels!

(3)

Mes lièvres, dans l'herbe obscure, quelqu'un les traque.  
Un chien frais, un épervier pur sur ma proie.

C'est cache sans abri que ces fourrés, ces cistes.  
Des menhirs de verre emmurent mes îles.

Ô lumière aiguë! Je m'enracile— m'exile.  
Le seul feu que je fuis m'a déjà consumé.

Mon sang est pris. Mon sang ne se soumet

Aux signes sur la proie, mais n'est vivant que mort.

Ne plus tenter de voir, d'entendre, d'ouvrir l'or:  
La ténèbre d'enfance est mangée de merveilles!

(4)

Ce sang perdu comme un pas  
N'a densité que d'en bas.

— Des basses eaux, de la cendre  
Où l'arme aussi doit descendre.

Les statues marchent, s'attardent  
Dans une mort tiède et fade.

J'ai mon amour ennemi.  
Ses sables m'ont endormi.

Qui charmera d'un chevreuil  
Les longues salles de deuil?

Ma bouche bourbeuse, vide  
Crie par morsure d'acide

Sur le silence aggravé.  
Un feu survient du névé.

— Jean-Claude Renard  
(From POETRY Volume 104 No. 5 August 1964)

#### EXPLANATORY PARAPHRASE

All the suns of the higher consciousness are hidden here in the heart of leaves and flowers—the tiniest beauties, the floating fragrances of nature. That I never lose, yet never catch, it remains within my heart and yet it is not there. The stream flows and passes through, under the embankment.

It is the hidden Reality that plays hide and seek with us.

I do not see with the outer eye what I see with the inner eye. For the outer eye moves in a darkness made by the wooded growths of the

earth. I see with the inner eye what I do not see with the outer eye. The luminous hand of the higher consciousness moves about in the midst of the thorns of life.

With the inner ear open, with the outer ear closed I hear the tranquil waters, bordered with laurels and roses, move somewhere within. That is a sea of silence and of salt, but the cry of the wild storm-bird is not there.

In the dark woodlands of our nature animals rush about. Someone is chasing them. A hound of heaven, a falcon of the sky is after its prey. There are hidden bushes, grottoes, secret holes and comers that shelter my favourite animals. But to the secret luminous eye the solid walls of the shelter are transparent, are seen through.

I follow the Light that pierces me. I uproot myself from my home. I seek to fly from that Fire but I am already burnt up.

My blood is now captured. It is the willing prey, the victim of its hunter. It is living only because it is dead. There is now no endeavour to seek and to hear, to run after the golden treasure, for now it is a child's consciousness made of a darkness, a forgetfulness crowded with marvels.

The earthly blood that loses its way is heavy because it treads here below. Here there are stagnant waters, dead ashes. The arm from on high must extend here too. Here all forms are walking statues. They delay and delay in a death that is yet warm—only lukewarm—but lifeless. The earthly love I bear is my enemy. Its fire ends in dust and I go to sleep into the unconsciousness. My home here is a mourning hall; how can it be changed into a hall of beauty and living and moving shapes? Yes, my mouth is empty and full of dust, yes, it cries bitten by a corrosive acid thrown upon an increasing silence. It is a fire that comes from the chill snowy heights.

#### A NOTE

The relation between the Higher and the Lower, between the other world and this, the interaction between the two is all that mysticism means. The relation is spoken of sometimes as that of enmity and sometimes as that of friendliness. Ordinarily the two are incompatibles, enemies, as is quite natural. At times however, when the individual is ripe for the turnover, the two collaborate. The lower consciousness aspires for the higher and the higher comes down and enters into the lower to purify and change it.

Various figures and images depict the nature and relation of the two. The lower is darkness and the night, the higher is light and the day. Sometimes it is the opposite: the lower is the day (ordinary common light), the higher is dark night (because unknown and unfamiliar or because of the very dazzle of its light). The lower is imaged at times as a woodland, a shelter for wild growths and roving animals. The higher is the hunter, with his hounds chasing the creatures of the lower domain. Also the higher is the serene infinite sky, the lower the raging sea below. Otherwise, again, the higher is the vast sea, tranquil or quietly rippling above and the lower is the solid material universe. The higher is the delightful sun, the lower is the muddy slimy earth of the bed of stones and rocks. The consummation, the dénouement is the interlocking between the two and a final coalescence in which the higher penetrates into the lower and the lower is sublimated into the higher and the two form one integral undivided reality.

# TWO MYSTIC POEMS IN MODERN BENGALI

Here is the first one as I translate it:

Baritone<sup>9</sup>

Let us all move together, one and all,  
Together into the cavern of the ribs,  
Raise there a song of discordant sounds—

পাঁজরের গুফার ভেতর।  
শব্দের বিকারে গান গাই  
লাল নীল সাদা আত্মপর  
বেজে যাচ্ছে আর্তনাদ, শোনো।  
ভূতে পাওয়া স্বপ্নগুলি ঝোলে  
গাছে গাছে বাদড়ের মত।  
এখনি কি সুর হবে নাচ?  
এসো সব দল মিলে যাই।  
সব স্রোত মিলক শরীরে  
অস্থি পাক উজ্জ, জলতা আরো  
চলো যাই অগ্নিকুণ্ড ঘিরে  
শিল্পের যকৃৎ কুরে খাই—  
চলো যাই, যাই চলো যাই।

“ব্যারিটোন”—দীপক মজুমদার (‘দেশ’ পুজোসংখ্যা, ১৩৭০)

Red and blue and white, kin or alien.

Listen, the groan plays on:  
Dreams as if possessed  
Swing, like bats on branches;  
Is now the time for the dance?  
Come, let us all move together, one and all.

Let the streams meet in the body, one and all,  
Yes, let the bones brighten up still more;  
Let us all go around the fire  
And scrape and eat of the very Liver, the Muse's self-  
Let us go, let us go, one and all.

— DIPAK MAJUMDAR

Can you make any sense out of it ? This seems to be surrealistic with a vengeance. Anyhow there is no doubt that it is a puzzle, a veritable Chinese puzzle. The puzzle however appeared to me interesting. I felt that the poet, through this cryptic—*mantric*—collocation of words and images, attempted to give expression to an uncommon experience. It was as though I entered into a Tantric experience—but of the left-handed path (*vāmācāra*).

There is a Tantric discipline which speaks of the bodyfulfilment (*kāyāsiddhi*), a spiritual consummation in and through the body; the body-consciousness, according to this view, is the greatest reality. And whatever is achieved must have its final and definitive expression and manifestation there, in that concrete reality.

The body, the body-consciousness, our poet says here, is to be a confluence, where all the streams of consciousness, all the movements of the being, flow in: movements of life-force, movements of the mind, secret urges of the subliminal physical consciousness—pure and impure, things foreign to its nature, things that are its own, elements friendly and unfriendly, all assemble in a marketplace, as it were, the result being a huge horrid discordant music, a groaning, a bellowing of a queer orchestra—the bass, the lowest note of the system that the human vehicle is.

There is a call for all the parts of the being to precipitate to the very foundation of the being, coalesce and evoke a wild and weird, doleful and discordant symphony — a painful cry. Unrealised dreams, that had

faded into oblivion, are now like possessed beings and hang like bats on darkling branches: they are about to begin their phantom dance. Even so, the body, the material precipitate into which they gather, gives them a basic unity. These elements with their ardour and zeal kindle a common Fire. There is a divine Flame, Agni, burning within the flesh, burning brighter and brighter, making the bones whiter and whiter, as it were — the purificatory Flame, *pāvaka*, of which the Vedic Rishi spoke, Master of the House, *grhapati*, dwelling in the inner heart of the human being, impelling it to rise to purer and larger Truth. But here our modern poet replaces the Heart by the Liver and makes of this organ the central altar of human aspiration and inspiration. We may remember in this connection that the French poet Baudelaire gave a similar high position and —function— to the other collateral organ, the spleen. The modern Bengali poet considers that man's consciousness, even his poetic inspiration, is soaked in the secretion of that bilious organ. For man's destiny here upon earth is not delight but grief, not sweetness but gall and bitterness; there is no consolation, no satisfaction here; there is only thirst, no generosity but narrowness, no consideration for others, but a huge sinister egoism.

The cry of our poet is a cry literally *de profundis*, a deep cavernous voice surging, spectral and yet sirenlike, out of the unfathomed underground abysses.

The cry has nothing in it, very evidently, like the thrill of a skylark's throat.

Something of the purer atmosphere of the heights and heavens we breathe in our second poem. We move no more here in the darker left-handed labyrinthine path, but swim in a lighter clearer air through which passes the right-handed path. Here it is in its serene simplicity:

I Embark <sup>10</sup>

Trampling my own shadow  
on a long, long path I came  
And saw a river of gladness.  
I pushed the bank with my left foot  
And with my right landed in the boat.

Here a straw canopy over the head,  
A wooden floor to sit upon,  
A sure helm and an oar within reach  
And a sail to unfurl in the sky:  
All were there—  
A whole lungful of breath  
Grew into a flight of white pigeons  
That found the sky.

— PURNENDU PRASAD

*Kasmai devāya kaviṣā vidhema?* To which god then shall we dedicate  
our offering?

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নিজের ছায়াকে আমি দর পথ মাড়িয়ে মাড়িয়ে  
একটু খসীর নদী দেখতে পেলাম।  
ডাঙাটা বাঁ পায়ে ঠেলে ডান পায়ে  
নায়ে উঠলাম।  
এখানে মাথায় দুই, বসার মত পাটাতন  
নির্ভর করার হাল, হাতের নাগালে বৈঠা,  
আকাশে মেলার মত পলি  
সব আছে।  
এক বুক নিঃশ্বাস পায়রার মত বাঁক হয়ে  
আকাশ পেয়েছে।

“নায়ে উঠলাম”—পর্ণেন্দুপ্রসাদ ভট্টাচার্য (প্রবাসী, কার্তিক, ১৩৭০)



# HYMN TO DARKNESS

Here is a modern poem in Bengali. It is characteristically modern, though perhaps not quite modernist. It is an invocation to Darkness:

That darkness is not more,  
The darkness in which my heart plunged when you came,  
It is no more there.  
Many are the lights now around the heart  
Arrayed as in a festive illumination. Ceaseless now  
There is the earth's merry-go-round all the time.  
But beyond still,  
Outside Time, the mind, even this mind stands  
And sends its call to Thee alone.  
Yes, the Darkness is there no longer;  
And yet stretching out both the arms  
My mind yearns to reach the Darkness  
And itself becomes the Darkness.

Invocation to Darkness has, it appears, become quite fashionable among a certain group of modern poets. It is a favourite theme on which many a poet, many a good poet has played each in his way, a characteristic variation. Curiously enough, I came across about the same time the work of another poet, a French poet, also modern and almost modernist and, curiously still, in the same manner, a worshipper of Darkness. He is Yves Bonnefoy, originally belonging to the school of Jouve, an earlier modern. He speaks of two kinds of Night, one darker than the other—the less dark one is our common day with its grey light. The other is on the other shore:

*Vers l'autre rive encore plus nocturne*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> "Towards the other bank in a still darker night."

This darker night on the other shore is not illuminated by any light, but there is fire there, fire and its flame and the transparency of that flame: here is his description of how they stand to each other, that Night and our familiar day:

*Une torche est portée dans le jour gris,  
Le feu déchire le jour.  
Il y a que la transparence de la flame  
Amèrement nie le jour.<sup>12</sup>*

But why bitterly? Perhaps the day (the common day) tasted bitter in the mouth of the poet.

The poet has not perhaps the spiritual sense as we in India understand it. He speaks in effect of a dark goddess, he calls her

*Douve profonde et noire* <sup>13</sup>

He names her Douve, perhaps in memory of his first master Jouve, and addresses her as Sombre Lumière (Dark Light). He evidently means his poetic inspiration; his vision of the other shore is that of the world of his poetic experiences and realisations. But the nature of the contents of that world is very characteristic. They are apparendy qualities and objects fundamentally spiritual— transparent fire and even motionless silence. Yes, that world is of wind and fire (compare our world of Tapas) and yet calm and tranquil. So the poet sings:

*Douve sera ton nom au loin parmi les pierres,  
Douve profonde et noire,  
Eau basse irréductible où l'effort se perdra.<sup>14</sup>*

Inspiration, according to the poet, is not the high swell of garrulousness and anxious effort. It is the solid bedrock underground when all the surface effusions have ebbed away—a shadowy dark strong tranquil repose.

<sup>12</sup> "A torch is held up in the day's grey.

The fire tears rifts in the day.

There's this: the flame's transparency

Bitterly denies the day."

<sup>13</sup> "Douve dark and black."

<sup>14</sup> "Douve shall be your name far off among the stones,

Douve dark and black,

Irreducible low water where effort shall spend itself."

A modern English poet—Robert Graves—worships a White Goddess. But from the description he gives of the lady, she would appear to be more black than white; for she seems to be intimately connected with the affairs— that is to say—the mysteries—of Hades and Hecate, underground worlds and midnight rites. She incarnates as the sow, although a white sow, she flows as the sap within plants and rises as passion and lust in man.

We in India have a dark god and a dark goddess— Krishna and Kali. Krishna is dark, his is the deep blue of the sky. Kali is dark, hers is the blackness of the earthly night. The Vaishnava poet and saint sang:

Oh, I love black,  
For black is the tamal tree, black is Krishna,  
Oh, how I love black.

Ramprasad the Bhakta thus speaks of Kali, his dark Mother: the poem itself is very dark, that is to say, the meaning is dark, and the style, the phrasing is darker still. A literal translation is out of question. A very free rendering is only possible:

I have brooded over it and I am utterly confused;  
She in whose name one defies dark time,  
She at whose feet lies low the Supreme in his pure whiteness  
Why should she herself be black?  
Many are the forms of blackness,  
But here is a very marvel of blackness.  
If you hold it in your heart,  
the lotus there shall bloom and burn bright—  
Oh, she is dark and her name is Mother Darkness:  
She is blacker than blackness.  
But one who has seen that beauty is lost for good,  
He will have no eye for any other beauty.

Are the moderns on the same track as these older mystics?

But why this panegyric in worship of darkness ? Whence this fascination for blackness?

Our ancient Rishis speak of the supreme Light of lights, the Source of all the lights that bum here, the Light that is beyond darkness, on the other shore. Darkness is this world, the world of ignorance, our earthly consciousness; this is a perception easily understandable. But

in the mystic consciousness of a kind, darkness and light seem to be interchangeable. Darkness seems to be a form of light, nay even of a greater light.

It is said, the occultists say, that between the light of the day, that is to say, the light, of the ordinary consciousness and the higher spiritual light, there is an interim world, an intermediate zone of consciousness. When one leaves the earthly day, the normal consciousness and goes within and to the heights, towards the other Light, one enters at first into a dark region (cf. the *selva oscura* of Dante). Physically also, the scientists say today that when you leave the earth's atmosphere, from a certain height you no longer see the earthly light but you dive into a darkness where the sun does not shine in its glory as on earth. You see and feel the sunlight again when you approach the sun and are about to be consumed in its fires. In the same way, we are told that on the spiritual path too, the path of the inner consciousness, when you leave the ordinary consciousness, when you lose that normal light and yet have not arrived at the other higher light you grope in an intermediary region of darkness. You have lost the lower knowledge and have not yet gained the higher knowledge, then you are in that uncertain world of greyness or darkness. Or it happens also that while in the comparatively faint light of the ordinary consciousness, you are suddenly confronted with the Superior Light—through some grace perhaps—you cannot stand the light and get blinded and see sheer darkness. Again, the infinite sky in its fathomless depth appears to the naked eye blue, deep blue, blue-black. Light concentrated, solidified, materialised becomes a speck of darkness to the human eye. Do we not say today that a particle of matter (consolidated darkness) is only a quantum of concentrated light-energy?

Something of these supraphysical experiences must have entered into the consciousness of the modern poets who have also fallen in love with darkness and blackness—have become adorers, although they do not know, of *Shyāmā* and *Shyāmā*.

Here, for example, is a hymn from the Rig Veda, a whole hymn addressed by Rishi Kushika to Night. Listen how the Rishi invokes his black goddess: Night and Light are unified—almost one—in his consciousness. The Vedic Rishis considered Night as only another form or function of Day—*naktoṣasa samanāsā virūpe*—Night and Dawn have the same mind although the forms are different.

## ODE TO DARKNESS

(Rigveda: X. 127)

1. Night spreads wide, she comes everywhere, a Goddess with shining eyes—she looms over these glories as their overlord.
2. The Immortal Goddess fills up the Vast, above and below. She compels the darkness with her light.
3. The Goddess comes and veils her sister, the Dawn and glows through the blackness.
4. She is now that to us wherein we shall rest even as birds do on a tree.
5. In her repose all habitations, all the footed and winged creatures, even the fast racing eagle.
6. O Ocean-born Goddess! Smite the wolf, he or she, smite the robber! Garry us safely through.
7. Black darkness clings to me all around; it stands here firm. O Dawn! clear it even as you do my debts.
8. Daughter of Heaven! A Herd of light is this hymn of victory that moves towards you. I have made it for your sake. Do thou accept it, O Night.

# *MYSTICISM IN BENGALI POETRY*

Bengali poetry was born some time towards the end of an era of decline in the Indian consciousness, almost towards the close of what is called the Buddhist period, but it was born with a veritable crown on its head. For it was sheer mystic poetry, mystic in substance, mystic in manner and expression. The poets were themselves mystics, that is to say spiritual seekers, sadhaks—they were called siddhas or siddhacharyas. They told of their spiritual, rather occult experiences in an occult or oblique manner, the very manner of the ancient Vedic Rishis, in figures and symbols and similes. It was a form of beauty, not merely of truth—of abstract metaphysical truth—that rose all on a sudden, as it were, out of an enveloping darkness. It shone for a time and then faded slowly, perhaps spread itself out in the common consciousness of the people and continued to exist as a backwash in popular songs and fables and proverbs. But it was there and came up again a few centuries later and the crest is seen once more in a more elevated, polished and dignified form with a content of mental illumination. I am referring to Chandidasa, who was also a sadhak poet and is usually known as the father of Bengali poetry, being the creator of modern Bengali poetry. He flourished somewhere in the fourteenth century. That wave too subsided and retired into the background, leaving an interregnum again of a century or more till it showed itself once more in another volume of mystic poetry in the hands of a new type of spiritual practitioners. They were the Yogis and Fakirs, and although of a popular type, yet possessing nuggets of gold in their utterances, and they formed a large family. This almost synchronised with the establishment and consolidation of the Western Power, with its intellectual and rational enlightenment, in India. The cultivation and superimposition of this Western or secular light

forced the native vein of mysticism underground; it was necessary and useful, for it added an element which was missing before; a new synthesis came up in a crest with Tagore. It was a neo-mysticism, intellectual, philosophical, broad-based, self-conscious. Recently however we have been going on the downward slope, and many, if not the majority among us, have been pointing at mysticism and shouting: "Out, damned spot!" But perhaps we have struck the rock-bottom and are wheeling round.

For in the present epoch we are rising on a new crest and everywhere, in all literatures, signs are not lacking of a supremely significant spiritual poetry being born among us.

In order to give you a taste of what this poetry is and how it evolved I shall cite samples of the various waves at their crest as they rose from epoch to epoch till today. The earliest Siddhacharya says:

That comes not down, nor does that go up;  
That has no second to its self, that has attained absolute  
fixity.

Kanhu says where the mind never cracks,  
where the winds are stilled, there dwells the mistress of the  
house."

or again

This is the seed of Time out of which the Lotus has bloomed,  
O heroic enjoyer, even like a bee, take in with every  
breath of yours the honeyed fragrance.

This is mysticism in excelsis and beautiful mysticism.

We dive down the centuries and when we come up we find Chandidas thus greeting us:

There is a shore poised on a shore,  
Upon that a wave,  
Waves dwell upon waves—  
But a few only know.

or again

It is the lover that knows the sweetness of love;  
And who is it that pours out this sweetness?

Who is it that has abandoned all and become the Two and  
dwells in the Home of Delight?

From sheer symbolism we rise into some kind of mental apprehension of the symbolistic experience. That mental element further gains ground and seeks even an intellectual illumination in the songs of the Bauls and Fakirs that form, the next stage of the evolution. Lalan the Fakir says:

It is within this man that the other man dwells;  
It is Him that saints and sages through the ages  
    had sought and pursued.  
As the moon is seen in the water  
But flees the touch of your fingers,  
Even so ever he dwells  
    Apart and aloof.

In the lotus beyond is his abode,  
In the lotus with twin petals he is out and astir;  
One sees all this easily, only when one has ascertained  
    the petals of his lotus.

Now, coming at last to the modern age, in Tagore we have the full-fledged intellectual mysticism. Here is the modern seer and prophet:

Within the finite, O Infinite, thou playest thy notes,  
That is why so sweet is thy manifestation in me.

or again

The incense yearns to melt into the perfume,  
And the perfume yearns to embrace the incense;  
The sound seeks to be caught in the rhythm  
And the rhythm hastening runs into the sound.

or these lines

I dived into the ocean of forms  
    seeking the pearl of the formless—  
Oh, I shall no more wander from port to port  
    plying my worn out bark—



There where rises eternally the song  
that ears do not hear

Shall I go with the harp of my heart  
into the royal court in fathomless depths.

That is not the end or the *ne plus ultra*-nothing beyond— for there is  
a beyond and Sri Aurobindo has shown and taught what it can be like.  
Here is one daring poet:

Thy firm galaxies  
Are tracing their script on our forehead.  
This day, O Mother, all the terrestrial illuminations  
Weave a garland of lights that come from beyond.

or this one, more mystically mystic:

The Bard wheels onward in his sweeping march:  
He gathers in perfect the soul's obeisances,  
Urges secreted in the heart of the sun-flower,  
Hymns limned in her petalled gold!

or these almost surrealistic lines:

The Dark One has put on a golden garland,  
And on her delicate forehead burns the flame of  
red sandal—  
She, the Eternal Memory, from the forgetfulness of  
earth's depths  
Kindles the first spark of the word born of the  
churning—

One great characteristic of these mystics, particularly the older ones, is  
the conception of the spiritual or divine being as a human being—the soul,  
"the man there within this man here," is a human person and the human  
form has a significant charm which none other possesses. The Spirit, the  
Divine individualised and concretised in an earth-made man is a blazing  
experience with the Siddhacharyas and the experience continues down  
to our days. The Siddhacharyas themselves have added a peculiar, rather  
strange form to the conception. The soul, the inmost divine being is a  
woman whom one loves and seeks: she is an outcaste maid who dwells  
beyond the walls of the city; one, that is to say, the conscient being in

us, loves her all the more passionately because she is so. The city means this normally flourishing confine of outer consciousness where we dwell usually; the Divine is kept outside the pale of this inferior nature. To our consciousness that which is beyond it is an obscure, valueless, worthless, miserable non-entity; but to the consciousness of the sage-poet, that is the only thing valuable and adorable. These mystics further say that the true person, the divinity that lies neglected and even despised in our secular life is truly the idol of all worship and when she is accepted, when she puts off her beggarly robes, the obscurities of our mind and heart and senses, then she becomes the mistress of the house, the queen whom none thenceforth can disobey—all the limbs become her willing servitors and adorers. The divine Law rules even the external personality.

The significance of the human personality, the role of the finite in the play of the infinite and universal, the sanctity of the material form as an expression and objectification of the transcendent, the body as a function of Consciousness-Force-Delight are some of the very cardinal and supreme experiences in Bengal mysticism from its origin down to the present day.

A mysticism that evokes the soul's delights and experiences in a language that has so transformed itself as to become the soul's native utterance is the new endeavour of the poet's Muse.

# *RABINDRANATH AND SRI AUROBINDO*

"Tagore has been a wayfarer towards the same goal as ours in his own way." Sri Aurobindo wrote these words in the thirties and their full significance can be grasped only when it is understood that the two master-souls were at one in the central purpose of their lives. Also there is a further bond of natural affinity between them centring round the fact that both were poets, in a deeper sense, seer poets—Rabindranath the Poet of the Dawn, Sri Aurobindo the Poet and Prophet of the Eternal Day, a new Dawn and Day for the human race.

And both had the vision of a greater Tomorrow for their Motherland and that was why both regarded her freedom as the basic necessity for the recovery of her greatness. How the inspired songs and speeches of Rabindranath and the flaming utterances of Sri Aurobindo created a psychological revolution almost overnight in the mind and heart of the people during the Swadeshi days forms a glorious chapter in the history of India's freedom movement. Profoundly touched by Sri Aurobindo's soul-stirring lead to the country, Rabindranath wrote a memorable poem, addressing Sri Aurobindo, which is still enshrined in the hearts of his countrymen. Rabindranath himself called on Sri Aurobindo and read out to him his heart's homage. We remember with thrill the majestic opening lines:

Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!  
O friend, my country's friend, O voice incarnate, free, Of  
India's soul!

Sri Aurobindo retired from the outer political world to devote himself more intensively to the discovery and conquest of a new consciousness and force, glimpses of which he was having at the time and which alone

could save mankind and recreate it. From 1910 to 1914 he was, he said, silently developing this new power in seclusion and in 1914 he began to give to the world the result of his realisations through his monthly review *Arya*. In five major sequences published month after month through several years, he envisaged, in the main, the progressive march of man towards a divine life on earth, towards the unity of mankind and a perfect social order. One of these serials was called the Future Poetry in which he traced the growth and development that world poetry is undergoing towards its future form that would voice the dawn of a New Age of the Spirit. Sri Aurobindo hailed those who feel and foresee this distant dawn behind the horizon as the Forerunners of the new Spirit, among whom he included Rabindranath, because he saw in Tagore's the first beginnings, "a glint of the greater era of man's living", something that "seems to be in promise". "The poetry of Tagore," Sri Aurobindo says, "owes its sudden and universal success to this advantage that he gives us more of this discovery and fusion for which the mind of our age is in quest than any other creative writer of the time. His work is a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subde sounds and lights of the truth of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subteties of life."

Characterising Tagore's poetry, in reference to a particular poem, Sri Aurobindo once wrote: "But the poignant sweetness, passion and spiritual depth and mystery of a poem like this, the haunting cadences subde with a sub-dety which is not of technique but of the soul, and the honey-laden felicity of the expression, these are the essential Rabindranath and cannot be imitated because they are things of the spirit and one must have the same sweetness and depth of soul before one can hope to catch any of these desirable qualities." Furthermore: "One of the most remarkable peculiarities of Rabindra Babu's genius is the happiness and originality with which he has absorbed the whole spirit of Vaishnava poetry and turned it into something essentially the same and yet new and modem. He has given the old sweet spirit of emotional and passionate religion an expression of more delicate and complex richness voiceful of subder and more penetratingly spiritual shades of feeling than the deep-hearted but simple early age of Bengal could know."

Certain coincidences and correspondences in their lives may be noticed here. The year 1905 and those that immediately followed found them together on the crest wave of India's first nationalist resurgence. Again both saw in the year 1914 a momentous period marked by events of epochal importance, one of which was the First World War. For Tagore

it was "yuga-sandhi, the dying of the old age of Night to the dawning of a new with its blood-red sunrise emerging through the travail of death, sorrow and pain". For Sri Aurobindo it was a cataclysm intended by Nature to effect a first break in the old order to usher in the new. The significant year 1914 was also the period when Rabindranath expressed in the magnificent series of poems of the *Balaka* his visions and experiences of the forces at work on earth, and Sri Aurobindo began revealing through the pages of the *Arya* the truths of the supramental infinities that were then pouring down into him and through him into the earth's atmosphere.

So it was natural and almost inevitable—written among the stars—that both should meet once more on this physical earth. Sri Aurobindo had been in complete retirement seeing none except, of course, his attendants. He was coming out only four times in the year to give silent darshan to his devotees and a few others who sought for it. It was in the year 1928. Tagore was then on a tour to the South. He expressed to Sri Aurobindo by letter his desire for a personal meeting. Sri Aurobindo naturally agreed to receive him. Tagore reached Pondicherry by steamer, and I had the privilege to see him on board the ship and escort him to the Ashram. The Mother welcomed him at the door of Sri Aurobindo's apartments and led him to Sri Aurobindo. Tagore already knew the Mother, for both were together in Japan and stayed in the same house and she attended some of his lectures in that country. It may be interesting to mention here that Tagore requested the Mother to take charge of the Visva Bharati, for evidently he felt that the future of his dear institution would be in sure hands. But the Mother could not but decline since it was her destiny to be at another place and another work.

What transpired between them is not for me to say, the meeting being a private one. But I may quote here what Tagore himself wrote about it subsequently (*The Modern Review*, July 1928):

*"For a long time I had a strong desire to meet Aurobindo. It has just been fulfilled... At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realisation had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light... I felt that the utterance of the ancient Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him, 'You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through*

*your voice to the world, 'Hearken to me'.... Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him:*

*Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath. Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of a reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence:*

*Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath."*

Vibhutis, emanations and embodiments of the higher destiny of mankind appear upon earth from time to time to lead and guide the race on the upward way. And we are fortunate that we are born in an age that has been blessed by two such Shining Ones.

\*

# *APPENDIX*

# WORDSWORTH

I did not come to appreciate the poetry of Wordsworth in my school days, it happened in college, and to a large extent thanks to Professor Manmohan Ghose. In our school days, the mind and heart of Bengali students were saturated with the poetry of Tagore:

In the bower of my youth the love-bird sings,  
Wake up, O darling, wake;  
Opening thy lids lazy with love,  
Wake up, O darling, wake...

This poetry belongs to the type once characterised as follows by our humorous novelist Prabhat Mukherji through one of his characters, a *sādhu*, describing the charms of the Divine Name:

It has the sweetness and the sugar  
of *sandesh* and *rasogulla*.

It is needless to say that to young hearts enraptured by such language and feeling, Wordsworth's

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray!  
And when I crossed the wild,  
I chanced to see at break of day  
The solitary child...

would appear rather dull and dreary, tasteless almost.

Let me in this connection tell you a story. We were then in college. The Swadeshi movement was in full flood, carrying everything before it. We the young generation of students had been swept off our feet. One day, an elder among us whom I used to consider personally as my friend, philosopher and guide, happened to pass a remark which rather



made me lose my bearings a little. He was listing the misdeeds of the British in India. "This nation of shopkeepers!" he was saying, "There is no end to their trickeries to cheat us. Take, for instance, this question of education. The system they have set up with the high-sounding title of "University" and "the advancement of learning" is nothing more than a machine for creating a band of inexpensive clerks and slaves to serve them. They have been throwing dust into our eyes by easily passing off useless Brummagem ware with the label of the real thing. One such eminently useless stuff is their poet Wordsworth, whom they have tried to foist on our young boys to their immense detriment." This remark was no doubt a testimony to his inordinate love of country. But it remains to be seen how far it would bear scrutiny, as being based on truth.

For us in India, especially to Bengalis, the first and foremost obstacle to accepting Wordsworth as a poet would be his simple, artless and homely manner:

Behold her single in the field  
Yon solitary Highland lass.

And, as a classic instance of that famous homely diction, the line that follows:

Can anyone tell me what she sings?

Who would be moved by lines such as these?

On the gates of entry to the poetic world of Wordsworth is engraved this motto:

The Gods approve  
The depth and not the tumult of the soul.

It is as if the hermitage of old, an abode of peace and quiet, *śānta-rasāspadam-āśramam-idam*. All here is calm and unhurried, simple and natural and transparent, there is no muddy current of tempestuous upheavals. That is why the poet feels in his heart as if he were

quiet as a nun  
Breathless in adoration,

or else

The winds come to me from the fields of sleep.

Here is an easy, natural, limpid flow, undisturbed in its movement and yet with a pleasant charm and filled with an underlying sweetness. But perhaps one has to listen intently to get at the sweetness and beauty of such lines. They do not strike the outer ear for they set up no eddies there; the inner hearing is their base.

She was a Phantom of Delight  
When first she gleamed upon my sight:

Is this not a silent opening of the divine gates of vision?

Ethereal minstrel, pilgrim of the sky.

Do not these words bear us far away on some unknown wings?

Tranquillity and a pleasant sweetness are then the first doors of entry. Through the second doors we come to a wide intimacy, an all-pervading unity, where man and nature have fused into one. This unity and universality breathe through and inspire such simple yet startling words:

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

Or,

And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face;

Or else, this easy and natural yet deep-serious utterance carrying the burden of a *mantra*:

Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea.

Once we cross beyond these second gates we reach an inner region, a secluded apartment of the soul where poetry assumes the garb of magic, a transcendent skill leads to words the supernatural beauty and grace of a magician's art. How often we have read these lines and heard them repeated and yet they have not grown stale:

A voice so thrilling never was heard...  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides

Or,

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

This magic has no parallel, except perhaps in Shakespeare's

Daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim <sup>15</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has referred to another point of greatness in Wordsworth, where the poetic mind has soared still higher, opening itself not merely to an intimacy but to the voice of a highest infinity:

The marble index of a mind for ever  
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone <sup>16</sup>

Thus, with this poet we gain admittance to the very heart, the innermost sanctuary of poetry where we fully realise what our old Indian critics had laid down as their final verdict, namely, that the poetic delight is akin to the Delight of Brahman.

But even the moon has its spots, and in Wordsworth the spots are of a fairly considerable magnitude. Manmohan Ghose too had mentioned to us these defects. Much of Wordsworth is didactic and rhetoric, that is, of the nature of preaching, hence prosaic and non-poetical although couched in verse. Ghose used to say that even the Ode on the Intimations of Immortality which is so universally admired is mainly didactic and is by and large rhetoric, with very little real poetry in it. I must confess however that to me personally, some of its passages have a particular charm, like

Our birth is but a sleep and forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar...  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come...

<sup>15</sup> (*The Winter's Tale Act IV Scene 4*)

<sup>16</sup> *Prelude, III. II, 62-63*

Atul Gupta had seen perhaps only the adverse side of Wordsworth. He had marked the heavy hand of the logician, *sthūla-hastāvalepa*, but omitted to see the delicate workmanship of the artist. But a man's true quality has to be judged by his best performance, and the best work of Wordsworth is indeed of a very high order.

Matthew Arnold brings out very well the nature of Wordsworth's best work. Wordsworth at his peak, he says, seems to have surpassed even Shakespeare. He is then no longer in his own self. Mother Nature herself has taken her seat there and she goes on writing herself through the hands of the poet.

Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides,

or else,

Or hear old Triton blow his wrèathed horn

are indeed the highest peaks of English poetry.

Sri Aurobindo has said that Vyasa is the most masculine of poets. Echoing his words we may say that Wordsworth is the most masculine of English poets. This classification of poets into "masculine" and "feminine" was made by the poet Coleridge. "Masculine" means in the first place, shorn of ornament, whereas the "feminine" loves ornament. Secondly, the masculine has intellectuality and the feminine emotionalism. Then again, femininity is sweetness and charm, masculinity implies hard restraint; the feminine has movement, like the flow of a stream, the play of melody, while the masculine has immobility, like the stillness of sculpture, the stability of a rock. This is the difference between the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, between the styles of Vyasa and Valmiki. This too is the difference between Wordsworth and Shelley. The Ramayana has always been for its poetic beauty; Valmiki is our first great poet, *ādi-kavi*. In the Mahabharata we appreciate not so much the beauty of poetic form as a treasury of knowledge, on polity and ethics, culture and spirituality. We consider the Gita primarily as a work of philosophy, not of poetry. In the same way, Wordsworth has not been able to capture the mind and heart of India or Bengal as Shelley has done. In order truly to appreciate Wordsworth's poetry, one must be something of a meditative ascetic, *dhyānī, tapasvī*, indeed,

Quiet as a nun

Breathless in adoration...

*(Translated by Sanat K. Banerji from the original Bengali)*