Chapter V

Eric

Eric, along with Vasavadutta, was written in Pondicherry in 1912 or 1913. It was first published in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual in 1960 and also issued in book-form in the same year.¹ From chronological point of view, it is considered to be the fourth of Sri Aurobindo's complete plays.

Sri Aurobindo's preference for existing themes rather than the invented ones is apparent in Eric also. Dr. Prema Nandkumar who makes a scholarly attempt to trace the sources of Eric's narrative², is of the opinion that, keeping in view his fondness for re-charging existing themes and legends with new significances, one may reasonably suppose that Sri Aurobindo dived into the "abundant deep" of the sagas of Norway and Sweden to get the story of Eric's rise to power. The main characters in the play belong to actual legend or history, though it has not been possible so far to identify Eric with

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The play referred to in Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, in this chapter, is Eric, unless otherwise mentioned.

2. I owe most of the information on the possible sources of Eric to Dr. Prema Nandkumar's article, "Eric: An Approximation", in Sri Aurobindo Circle, No. 33(1977).
any legendary or historical character. "Olaf, Svegn and Eric are common names in the history of Norway, but no one seems to be the exact prototype of the play's hero\textsuperscript{1}, she says. Erik XIV of history, a king of Sweden in the 16th century, ambitious, quarrelsome and mentally deranged towards the close of his life, is the subject of two historical plays, both titled Erik XIV, written by August Strindberg (1849-1912) and Bergt Linder. In Linder's play, which is a tragedy in the pre-Romantic style of 1780's, the contestants are little better than criminals.

Henrik Ibsen wrote plays, on the historical and legendary characters of Norway, his country, like The Pretenders and The Vikings of Helegoland. The former is based upon the early Norse history and depicts the rivalry between Skule, the King by actual right and Hakon, the King 'by confidence'. In the latter, the heroine is Hiordis. She is heard saying in the play: "Erik is the King in Norway — do you rise against him! Many goodly warriors will join thee and swear thee fealty."

On the basis of the facts mentioned above, Dr. Prema Nandkumar reaches the following conclusion:

The interest shown by Strindberg and Ibsen in Norse history, and the vogue of these dramatists among the intellectuals at the turn of the century, may have drawn Sri Aurobindo also to the same fountain-source. In any case, he was deeply familiar with Norse history and legends before writing Eric, and he may have drawn upon them liberally.\textsuperscript{2}

2. Ibid., p. 96.
Then, on the basis of evidence from Carl Hallendrof and Adolf Schuck's *The History of Sweden* (1929), which mentions a thirteenth century historical character, the nearest to Sri Aurobindo's hero, she goes on to say that "the origins of the Eric-Swegn conflict (one elected, the other proclaiming his hereditary right) may be traced to Swedish and Norwegian history."¹

According to Dr. A.K. Sinha, however, Eric's story, "in its outline, has its origin in the Scandinavian mythologies about the sons and daughters of Odin, Thor and Freya, in the story of Eric, the legendary king of Sweden and in Aslaug's Knight—a romance by Dela Motte Foque."² It was translated by Carlyle in *German Romance*.

Eric, however, is a new creation for, whatever his sources, Sri Aurobindo transmutes and recreates the material to adapt it to his scheme of things and to project through it his vision of life. For him 'the truth of history' is not so important as 'the truth of a man's character'. He is interested mainly in delineating man's growth through the clash of circumstance and character, through the interplay of the one on the other. As such he does not feel obliged "to be historically accurate". Writing to Dilip Kumar Roy in this regard, he says:

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Poetry, drama, fiction also are not bound to be historically accurate; they cannot indeed develop themselves successfully unless they deal freely with any historical material they may choose to include or take for their subject. One can be faithful to history if one likes but even then one has to expand and deal creatively with characters and events, otherwise the work will come to nothing or little.  

Sri Aurobindo is not only a litterateur, but a literary critic also. He has his own dramatic theories, containing significant affirmations on the nature and function of drama. Referring to the object of drama he says that it cannot serve its great purpose by the mere presentation of life and action and passions, however truly, vigorously and abundantly they may be portrayed. It must have an interpretative vision; the vision must have an explicit or implicit idea of life and the human being; the interpretative vision and the idea must appear to arise out of the inner life of characters through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action. According to him, the true movement and result in all great drama is really psychological and the outward action is only either its symbol or else its condition of culmination.  

From the view point of interpretative vision, all the plays of Sri Aurobindo qualify to be considered as true dramas. They all interpret life and project a life-vision. The life-thought they contain may pertain to his philosophy of evolution, or to  

2. Ibid., pp. 67-68.
Love presented as "the great solvent of all varieties of evil", and the "supreme truth and goodness and power."\(^1\) It may be related also to Fate as the chief executive of Divine Will. But though Sri Aurobindo's plays may be considered as almost dramatic renderings of his philosophic ideas, they are considerably interesting even as pure dramatic achievements.

Sri Aurobindo, it seems, agreed with Arthur Miller who says that the drama "must communicate as it proceeds and it literally has no existence if it must wait until the audience goes home to think before it can be appreciated. It is the art of present tense par excellence."\(^2\) This is evident if we look at Eric whose "arguments have an immediacy of appeal."\(^3\)

Eric contains a theme with which Sri Aurobindo remained almost as preoccupied as he was with the theme of evolution. The play is purported to be an exposition of the truth of Love, the truth that finds expression in some way or the other in all his works, and the sublimest in Savitri. Eric anticipates Savitri.

It points to the truth of which the great epic is a masterly exposition when it says:

> Some day surely
> The world too shall be saved from death by Love.\(^4\)

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3. Idem.
The victory of Love over Death really takes place in Savitri, but it is not so in Eric. However, it does form part of Eric's optimism which is inspired by his victory over Aslaug. Motivated by the intensest feeling of hate, she fights against love with her whole might before finally yielding to the imperatives of love. So, Eric's victory over Aslaug is to be interpreted as Love's triumph over Hate and Eric is to be seen as dramatisation of the conflict between the two extreme emotions.

Some sort of struggle between love and hate is to be witnessed in Vasavadutta also. It goes on for a time in Vasavadutta's heart. But, ultimately, love gets the better of hate. The resistance she offers to love which she feels for Vuthsa melts away with love reigning her heart sovereign. But the "mild struggle" between love and contempt in Vasavadutta can hardly be compared to the "agonising mental drama" it becomes in Eric. Here the action is more psychological than physical, so that the play fulfils another requirement of great drama as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. With the shift of emphasis from external to the inner action in the play, the conflict has naturally been delineated with greater intensity and vividness and on a larger scale.

Eric, a great warrior, is elected the king of Norway with the help of the people of the northern Norway. But the south, claiming to be the real Norway, disputes Eric's right
to Norwegian throne. Swegn, the Earl of Trondhjem, being the son of the late King Olaf Thorleikson, has hereditary right to Norway's kingship. Therefore, he refuses to yield to Eric, and a battle follows in which Eric emerges victorious. Swegn still refuses to owe allegiance to Eric who, for the first time in the country's history, has been able to conquer and unite it within a short period of three years. He is called "a mere usurper", an "upstart", and "fortune-fed adventurer". Aslaug, Swegn's sister, considers him not "an earl of Odin's stock", but "a pauper house/Of one poor vessel and a narrow fiord/And some pine-trees possessor."

This leads to the conflict on the physical level in the play. Eric is determined to maintain the newly forged unity of Norway and to put down with iron-hand any attempt to disrupt it. About Swegn, who "lifts his outlawed head" against him, Eric says to Gunthur, one of the Earls:

He only now resits,
Champion of discord, ruthless, fell and fierce
This partisan and pattern of the past.
Such men are better with the Gods than here
To trouble earth. Let him not live, if taken.  

As for Swegn, he is equally adamant on challenging Eric's authority:

I have the snow for friend and, if it fails,
The arms of death are broad enough for Swegn,
But not subjection.  

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 481.
2. Ibid., p. 541.
Eric, therefore, confronts a problem. The unity he has attained through "the swiftness of his sword seems elusive, for it might not last when the sword is broken or when death proves swifter. So, he is in search of a power which proves more effective than "wisdom and force" which he has. What can that power be, he asks. Ready comes the reply to his question as it were, a reply which is also a very apt statement of the theme of Eric:

Love is the hoop of the gods
Hearts to combine.
Iron is broken, the sword
Sleeps in the grave of its lord;
Love is divine.1

Eric thinks this must be the answer of Freya, the mother of Heaven, whom he had forgotten. Unity or integrity can be achieved not through sword but by winning men's hearts. But how to do it is the question before Eric's "iron mind". The sweet words of the song being sung by Aslaug still float in the air:

When Love desires Love,
Then Love is born;
Nor golden gifts compel,
Nor even beauty's spell
Escapes his scorn.
When Love desires Love,
Then Love is born.2

Here is the answer to the problem Eric is faced with. From the "light lips and casual thoughts" of Aslaug, Sri Aurobindo

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 471.
2. Ibid., p. 478.
suggests, it is the gods who speak. This song, sung by Aslaug in all innocence, contains the whole truth Eric seeks to highlight. It epitomises the theme of the play.

The real conflict in the play, however, is the one that goes on in the mind of Aslaug, the conflict on the psychological plane. Aslaug and Hertha, Swegn's wife, come to Eric's court disguised as dancing-girls, to lure him into the trap of beauty and music and to do him to death at the earliest opportunity. They want to avenge their wounded family honour and pave the way for Swegn's emperorship. Eric seems to have fallen in love with Aslaug at the first sight, "the girl with antelope eyes/And the high head so proudly lifted up/Upon a neck as white as any swan's.‖¹ Aslaug's first reaction after seeing Eric is likewise one of strong attraction towards his personal charms:

A mighty man!
He has the face and figure of a god,—
A marble emperor with brilliant eyes.
How came the usurper by a face like that?²

In the very next breath she refers contemptuously to the "root" Eric sprang from. The reference, however, is alternated by such words as the following:

He has a strength, an iron strength, and Thor Strikes hammerlike in his uplifted sword.
His voice is like a chant of victory.³

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 482.
2. Ibid., pp 483-84.
3. Ibid., p. 484.
So far there is no real conflict in Aslaug's mind. Her natural attraction to Eric's beauty does not shake her in her resolve. When Hertha tells her if Eric is not of Odin's race, "Odin is for him", Aslaug retorts:

But fate alone decides, when all is said, Not Thor, not Odin, I will try my Fate.1

Aslaug's pride spurs her into stronger resolve of vengeance on the usurper of Norway's throne. It incapacitates her (as it does in the case of Vasavadutta) to love Eric, in spite of the strong natural attraction. When Hertha asks her if she noticed the way Eric looked on her, Aslaug proudly answers:

I am fair.

Men look upon me.2

It is pride again that manifests itself when Aslaug says to Hertha:

I am not of the earth, To bound my actions by the common rule. I claim my kin with those whom Heaven's gaze Moulded supreme,—Swegn's sister, Olaf's child, Aslaug of Norway.3

Rightly, therefore, does Hertha think of Aslaug as "pride violent" and "loftiness intolerable".

Eric on his part is already bewitched by Aslaug's beauty—her "sweet imperious eyes"; "noble stature" and "lofty look”,

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 484.
2. Ibid., p. 486.
3. Idem.
the beauty which is so "compelling" that "no man can gaze
on and possess his soul." 1

Suspicion, however, is bred in Eric's subtle mind about
her true identity by Aslaug herself. She is provoked into
saying or doing things which tend to divulge what she must
keep a secret. That is why Eric tells her:

Better play thy part,
If thou art really nobler than thou feign' st,
declare it. If thou art a dancing-girl,
I have bought thee for my hire, thy song, thy dance,
Thy body. I shrink not from whatever way I can
Possess thee more than hesitates the sea to engulf
What it embraces.2

This may be a subtle move to lift the mask off the face of
Aslaug. The mask really seems to have fallen when she cries
out in anger:

King, thou speakest words
I scorn to answer.3

Eric fires another salvo:

Thou art an enemy who in disguise
Enterest my court to know and break my plans.4

The way she replies to the question, leaves no one in doubt
about her noble birth. But picking up the fallen mask, she
tells the Norwegian king that she has come to Norway not to

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 488-89.
2. Ibid., p. 490.
3. Idem.
4. Idem.
spy, but "to sing, to dance and earn." Eric can be subtler than Aslaug is. So taking her at her words, the king says:

Then richly earn.

Aslaug, even then thou knowest why I looked
Upon thee, why I kept thee in my house.
Thou, thou hast given the means of my desire!
Yet if thy form and speech more nobly express
The truth of thee than thy vocation can,
Avow it, beg my clemency. 2

This is really too much and Aslaug flares up. However, she controls herself immediately. But how long can she, after all! As for Eric, he feels that he is in full control of Aslaug and she can hardly escape his "passionate will":

Because thou hast the lioness in thy mood,
Thou thought'st to play with Eric. It is I
Who play with thee. Thou liest in my grasp. 3
How will thou now escape my passionate will?

He goes on, then, to make a plain confession of his love for her:

I am enamoured of thy golden hair,
Thy body like the snow, thy antelope eyes,
Thy neck that seems to know it carries heaven
Upon it easily. Thy song, thy speech,
Thy rhythmic motion of thy gracious limbs
Walking or dancing, and the careless pride
That undulates in every gesture and tone,
Have seized upon me smiling sweet control. 4

As Eric has "not learnt to yield to any power/But to surprise,
to force and to command" 5, Aslaug must be either prisoner and

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 492.
2. Idem.
3. Idem.
4. Idem.
5. Idem.
enemy or dancing-girl and purchased chattel. Hence a terrible and iron pressure on her mind. Eric gives her a necklace which she throws to the ground, obviously prompted by her mind. The mask falls once again revealing that she is not "the dancing-girl of Norway", but "some disguised, high-reaching, noble soul." A renewed effort to keep up the mask is made immediately after she recovers herself and is reminded of her humble role:

I am thy dancing-girl, King Eric. See I take thy necklace.

Eric has already seen through the mask. In plain words he says to Aslaug:

Take it; still be free. As thou deciest, thy price or else my gift.

These moves and counter moves of Eric and Aslaug bring the latter to a stage where she both loves and hates Eric. The game of see-saw between love and hate continues through tense moments and deep breath-taking suspense for pretty long. The reader keeps his fingers crossed and watches the progression of things with increasing interest till love emerges victorious in the end and the theme of love's supremacy and glory is underlined.

2. Ibid., p. 494.
3. Idem.
4. Idem.
In the psyche of Aslaug which has been turned into a virtual battle-field, the warring forces are her love for Eric, a god of wisdom and force and beauty, and her hatred for him for being the usurper of her brother's right. In the battle, Eric seems as much in control of himself as of the external situation, whereas Aslaug seems to lose control over herself as well as over the situation. A character whose personality is centred in the vital, she keeps swinging to extremes, from the passion of love to the passion of hate, and thus appears caught in the maelstrom of intense inner conflict. Eric on the contrary, fights a winning battle, his victory taking time only because he gives Aslaug a long rope. He says to her:

No light decision I would have thee make,  
But one that binds us both. I give thee time.  
Ponder and let thy saner mind prevail,  
Not courage most perverse, though ardent, rule.  
Confess thy treason, Aslaug, trust thy King.1

But Aslaug, it seems, would not be advised. She would rather let ardent and perverse courage rule her heart. She unwillingly admires Eric for his terrible subtleness, for being the mighty tyrant he is, but driven by the passion of hate, contemplates his murder at the same time. Her divided mind is shown in the following words she speaks to Hertha, who sees the former's love peeping through "new lustres" in her

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 494.
"face and eyes." When Hertha asks Aslaug what Eric told her, she replies:

What did Eric say?

Eric to Aslaug, sister of King Swegn.
A kingdom's price. Swegn's kingdom. And for him,
My marble emperor, my god who loves,
This mortal Odin? What for him? By force
Shall he return to his effulgent throne?

Aslaug, however, denies that she has a "divided mind" or is "heart-perplexed." But the fact that she is getting less and less sure of herself, itself shows that she is fighting a losing battle against Eric and her love. Hertha advises her to make a show of love to Eric; but Aslaug refuses. Then Hertha says:

Give freedom but no license to his love.
For when he thinks to embrace, we shall have struck.

Aslaug's reply vividly shows her mind at the moment:

And, Hertha, if a swift and violent heart
Betrayed my will and overturned your plans?
Is there no danger, Hertha, there?

Eric has no such fears. They believe that the anarchy of love disturbs even gods. But Eric would be/Monarch of a

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 495.
2. Ibid., p. 496.
3. Idem.
4. Ibid., p. 497.
5. Idem.
calm royalty within, / My blood my subject.1 He could "force a oneness" with Aslaug if he chose, but he uses restrain:

I see a tyranny I will delight in  
And force a oneness; I will violently  
Compel the goddess that thou art. But I know  
What soul is lodged within thee, thou as yet  
Ignorest mine. I still hold in my strength,  
Though it hungers like a lion for the leap,  
And give thee time once more; misuse it not.  
Beware, provoke not the fierce god too much;  
Have dread of his flame round thee.2

Aslaug breaks into a laughter to hear this, showing however, only the intensity of her inner conflict:

Odin and Freya, you have snares! But see,  
I have not thrown the dagger from my heart,  
But clutch it still. How strange that look and tone,  
That things of a corporeal potency  
Not only travel coursing through the nerves  
But seem to touch the seated soul within!  
It was a moment's wave; for it has passed  
And the high purpose in my soul lives on  
Unconquerably intending to fulfil.3

The conflict between Aslaug's heart's desire and her mind's purpose, instead of ceasing as a result of her efforts, gains in intensity. The mind spurs to move forward to kill Eric, the heart holds her back:

A marble statue gloriously designed  
Without that breath our cunning maker gives,  
One feels it pain to break. This statue breathe!  
Out of these eyes there looks an intellect

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 499.
2. Ibid., p. 502.
3. Idem.
That claims us all; this marble holds a heart,
The heart holds love. To break it all, to lay
This glory of God's making in the dust!
Why do these thoughts besiege me? Have I then —
No, it is nothing; it is pity works,
It is an admiration physical.
O he is far too great, too beautiful
For a dagger's penetration. It would turn,
The point would turn; it would deny itself
To such a murder.

Aslau, who once boasted, "There is/A trouble in my blood.
I do not shake", now shrinks and trembles at the thought of
striking Eric. The reason is not far to seek. In spite of
all her pretences and feignings, she fails to conceal her love
for Eric. Eric knows the reality, so he says to her: "All is
not lion-like and masculine there/Within." At the very first
use of force by the king, Aslau seems to give in. When Eric
holds her suddenly in his embrace and begins to kiss her, she
exclaims:

O gods! I love! O loose me!

The moment is most opportune for Eric to exhort her:

Sweetly, O Aslau, to thy doom consent,
The doom to love, the death of hatred. Draw
No useless curtaining of shamed refusal
Between our yearnings, passionately take
Thy leap of love across the abyss of hate.

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 503.
2. Ibid., p. 501.
3. Ibid., p. 507.
4. Ibid., p. 506.
Force not thy soul to anger. Leave veils and falterings
For meaner hearts. Between us let there be
A noble daylight.1

The exhortation to take "the leap of love across the abyss
of hate" is meant for the whole mankind. It is indeed the
message and meaning of Eric, its most obvious theme.

The following dialogue shows that Aslaug, now in the arms
of Eric, has taken the leap already:

ASLAUG

Let me think awhile!
Thy arms, thy lips prevent me.

ERIC

Think not! Only feel,

Love only.!

ASLAUG

O Eric, king, usurper, conqueror!
O robber of men's hearts and kingdoms! O
Thou only monarch!

ERIC

Art thou won at last,
O woman who disturb'st the musing stars
With passion? Soul of Aslaug, art thou mine?

ASLAUG (sinking on a seat)

I cannot think. I have lost myself! My heart
Desires eternity in an embrace.2

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 506.

2. Ibid., pp. 506-7.
Here, the playwright subtly refers to another theme—the victory of heart over mind, suggested by Eric's "Think not! Only feel!" In Eric, love seems to beget love; the barriers between the souls of Aslaug and Eric seem to break, the heart seems to assert its supremacy. The victory of heart over mind, however, is not a smooth affair. What Aslaug says above proves to be the sweep of an impetuous passion, not the same voice of a deep and placid emotion. Eric has knowledge of the human heart and knows that "opposite passions wrestle there with gusts/And treacherous surprises"¹, as happens in the case of Aslaug's heart here. A fierce storm blows within her. She implores Eric not to trust her sudden heart:

I know no longer if I am my own,
The world swims round me and heaven's points are changed.
A purpose! I had one. I had besides
A brother! Had! What have I know? You gods,
How have you rushed upon me? Leave me, King.
It is not good to trust a sudden heart.
The blood being quiet, we will speak again
Like souls that meet in heaven, without disguise.²

The conflict now is at its worst. Torn between two opposite pulls, Aslaug does not know which way she should go:

Leave me, King, awhile
To wrestle with myself and calmly know
In this strange strife the gods have brought me to,
Which thing of these in me must live and which
Be dumb for ever.³

2. Ibid., p. 508.
3. Idem.
Eric has, no doubt, been able to bring to surface the painstakingly concealed love of Aslaug for him. His "restrained violences" have drawn out her loving soul. But a gulf between her will and heart yet remains to be bridged. There are indications also that "the older Aslaug rises against the new."¹

Aslaug, let not the darker gods prevail. Put off thy pride and take up truth and love.²

She asks herself repentantly:

What was it seized on me, O heavenly powers? I have given myself, my brother's throne and life, My pride, ambition, hope, and grasp, and keep Shame only.³

She resolves once again to stick to her old purpose of killing Eric. But Hertha decides to help Eric in the meantime:

I must act at once. Or this may have too suddenly a tragic close. Not blood, but peace, not death, you Gods, but life, But tranquil sweetness!⁴

Fate is with her, working towards the same end. Aslaug too knows that "Fate alone decides,.../Not Thor, not Odin."⁵

¹ Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 509.
² Ibid., p. 510.
³ Ibid., p. 512.
⁴ Ibid., p. 513.
⁵ Ibid., p. 484.
She believes that...

...she alone is prompter on our stage,
Things seen and unforeseen move by a doom,
Not freely. Eric's sword and Aslaug's song,
Music and thunder are but petty chords
Of one majestic harp. She builds, she breaks,
She thrones, she slays, as needed for her harmony.1

According to Aslaug, if love is inspired in her heart, it is
god's doing. If Eric commands her to dance before him, it's
again due to Fate. That is why, in her fight against her
heart, she seeks gods' help:

Help me, you gods, help me against my heart.
I will strike suddenly, I will not wait.2

Sri Aurobindo shows that fate & gods cannot play a
negative role. They are for love, which is invincible and
must prevail. Hertha in the play acts as Fate's instrument
as does Eric. So, the two collaborate and are eventually
victorious. This is suggestive of another major theme, i.e.,
Fate. To highlight it Sri Aurobindo writes one whole play,
Rodogune. It has been hinted at by passages scattered
over all his plays. To accept Fate's invincibility as the
Law of the world and as God's Will, to collaborate with her
rather than oppose her due to ignorance, is the way to peace.
Eric and Hertha win, for they, unlike Aslaug, are free from

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 479.
2. Ibid., p. 512.
egoistic pride and can see what Fate wills.

Hertha, after negotiating terms with Eric for peace of Norway with admirable ingenuity and shrewdness, divulges to him the secret about her and Aslaug — their identity, their treason and plots:

Thy enemies are here,
No dancing-girls, but Hertha, wife of Swegn,
And Aslaug, child of Olaf Thorleikson,
His sister.¹

This is a decisive step against Aslaug as she is now left alone with her plot which is bound to misfire. Eric grants Hertha all her three demands in return of her gesture of cooperation — life and liberty for Swegn, life and pardon for Aslaug and forgiveness for her ownself. He, then, rightly rejoices in his victory which, indeed, is the victory of Freya, the goddess of Love:

O Freya Queen,
Thou help'st me even as Thor and Odin did.
I make my Norway one.²

Eric feels that his victory has issued from a new knowledge which is the knowledge of his own self. He has realised his "wide flaw" — the lack of love in him: "There was the wide flaw, —/The coldness of the radiance that I was."³ Because of the flaw he was incomplete as a creation:

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol.6, 518.
2. Ibid., p. 521.
3. Ibid., p. 522.
It left my soul the torso of a god,
A great design unfinished and my works
Mighty and crude like things admired that pass,
Bare of the immortality that keeps
The ages.1

Without love "the trinity of glorious manhood"2 remains incomplete. In the beginning of the play, Eric says:

Wisdom and force I have; one strength's behind
I have not; I would search it out.3

He has found it out now:

Strength in the nature, wisdom in the mind,
Love in the heart complete the trinity
Of glorious manhood.4

He realises the truth contained in the words of Aslaug though uttered in a cavalier manner:

O, the word they spoke was true!
'Tis Love, 'tis Love fills up the gulfs of Time.
By Love we find our kinship with the stars,
The spacious uses of the sky. God's image
Lives nobly perfect in the soul he made,
Reflected in the nature of a man.5

Such hymns to love are quite in keeping with the main theme of the whole play which seems to have been written to celebrate love's power, grace and supremacy. Eric's triumph over Aslaug is made possible largely through love. If

2. Idem.
3. Ibid., p. 577.
4. Ibid., p. 522.
5. Ibid., p. 523.
Aslaug's heart is delivered from revolt and fierce hate, it is through the power of love. Love tames an unruly heart, rids it of its waywardness, and liberates it from the violent impulses that trouble it and dissipate its energies. About heart and love's impact on it, Eric says:

Unruled, it follows violent impulses, This way, that way; working calamity, Dreams that it helps the world. What shall I do, Aslaug, with an unruly noble heart? Shall we not load it with the chains of love, And rob it of its treasured pain and wrath And bind it to its own supreme desire? Richly 'twould beat beneath an absolute rule And sweetly liberated from itself By a golden bondage.1

Liberated from its treasured pain, wrath and hatred, Aslaug's heart is bound to its supreme desire. The sweet liberation is effected through the bondage of love, a golden bondage.

Aurobindo shows that love's powers are great and mysterious are its ways. This is well illustrated by the miracle it works in the play in the form of Aslaug's surrender. Unaware that Hertha has betrayed all their secret to Eric, Aslaug tenaciously pursues her goal to attack Eric suddenly when she performs the scheduled 'dance with the dagger'. But she is overpowered by love:

O gods, I did not know myself till now, Thrown in this furnace, Odin's irony Shaped me from Olaf's seed! I am in love With chains and servitude and my heart desires, Fluttering, like a wild bird within its cage, A tyrant's harshness.2

2. Ibid., p. 527.
The mind proves powerless; her heart, her senses and indeed her entire being is held in sway by love. Eric knows this:

The power to strike has gone out of her arm
And only in her stubborn thought survives.1

So he feigns to sleep, when Aslaug returns to his chamber, to see if she attacks. Finding the opportunity most favourable to her design she says to herself:

If I must strike, it could be only now;
For time is like a sapper, mining still
The little resolution that I keep.
Swegn's death or life upon that little stands.
Swegn's death or life and such an easy stroke!
Yet so impossible to lift my hand! 2

Twice she lifts the dagger and twice she lowers it, then throws it away in desperation and falls at Eric's feet.

The victory of love over hate, however, is not yet complete. She still has feeling of bitter self-abasement:

Eric of Norway, live and do thy will
With Aslaug, sister of Swegn and Olaf's child,
Aslaug of Trondheim. For her thought is grown
A harlot and her heart a concubine,
Her hand her brother's murderess.3

Her frustration and indignation are due to the defeat of her "high intention" by her "passionate body". Eric would like her to submit herself to him "without ashamed reserve"; not

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol.6, 528.
2. Ibid., p. 529.
3. Ibid., p. 530.
4. Ibid., p. 531.
to recoil from her heart, but "let its choice be absolute" over her soul. But Aslaug's self-abasement continues unabated. Eric now asks her to kill him if she so chooses, and promises not to defend him if he is attacked. He wants her to kill him or to gift to him both his life and kingdom:

My life and kingdom twice are in thy hands
And I will keep them only as thy gift.2

Eric knows that Fate is on his side and Aslaug is full of love for him and hence she cannot but surrender. He is right, for Aslaug surrenders to him, saying:

O Eric, is not my heart already thine,
My body, thine, my soul into thy grasp
Delivered? I rejoice that God has played
The grand comedian with my tragedy
And trapped me in the snare of thy delight.3

Sri Aurobindo through Eric lyrically expresses here his belief in the all conquering power of love:

Aslaug, the world's sole woman! thou cam'st here
To save for us our hidden hopes of joy
Parted by old confusion. Some day surely
The world too shall be saved from death by Love.4

The play, thus, has a predominant theme of Love. It sets forth a celebration of the heart's triumph over the mind — "of the heart of love over the mind of hate", — of

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1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 531.
2. Ibid., p. 532.
3. Ibid., p. 534.
4. Idem.
a calm royalty within over a passionate wayward heart.

Love not only gets better of Aslaug's hate, but also of the rebellious heart of Swegn. When Eric starts on his final campaign against him, there is a unique self-assurance in his heart because he goes "with mercy and from love." ¹ In his peace proposals, he offers Swegn the Earldom of Trondhjem, "honours, wealth and state" ², and urges him to accept the offer considering his "country's wounds." ³ But Swegn is too proud, too stubborn, and too conscious of his noble birth. He has too little regard, it seems, for national interest and honour to yield to Eric. The peace offer is turned down arrogantly and obdurately, and Gunthur, Eric's emissary of peace, receives an acrimonious message for his lord:

Think'st thou that to the upstart I shall yield,
The fortune-fed adventurer, the boy
Favoured by the ironic gods? ...

... ... ... ... ... ...
... ... ... Go, tell thy King.
Swegn of the ancient house rejects his boons.
Not terms between us stand, but wrath, but blood.
I would have flayed him on a golden cross
And kept his women for my household thralls,
Had I prevailed. Can he not do as much
That he must chaffer and market Norway's crown?
These are the ways of Kings, strong, terrible
And arrogant; full of sovereignty and right.
Force in a King's his warrant from the gods.
By force and not by bribes and managements

¹ Sri Aurobindo, Collect. Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 537.
² Ibid., p. 540.
³ Idem,
Empires are founded! But your chief was born
Of huckstering earls who lived by prudent gains.
How should he imitate a royal flight
Or learn the leap of Kings upon their prey?\(^1\)

Swegn's aversion for Eric, his towering pride, his obtrusive
sense of nobility, his rashness and obstinacy and narrow
sense of loyalty do not allow him to a magnanimous surrender
to the greater cause of Norway's unity and greatness. Eric,
however, holds it dearest to his heart and must achieve it
irrespective of "pebbles" like Swegn obstructing his march.
Full of sound and fury, Swegn is like the cloud that roars
before it rains. But Eric "is the thunderbold that strikes/
And threatens only afterwards."\(^2\) Swegn is defeated and
brought captive to Eric's court at Yara to submit to him,
the "earth's mightiest man"\(^3\) He is already unnerved to know
that Hertha and Aslaug are Eric's captives, that his "Fate
has wandered into Eric's camp"\(^4\) and that his "soul is made
his prisoner."\(^5\) Yet he does not surrender. Eric now
understands that Swegn's submission can be effected "not by
love only, but by love and force!"\(^6\):

This man must lower his fierceness to the fierce,
He must be beggared of the thing left, his pride
And know himself for clay.\(^7\)

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1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 541-42.
2. Ibid., p. 544.
3. Ibid., p. 543.
4. Ibid., p. 544.
5. Idem.
6. Ibid., p. 546.
He knows that he is his "country's brain of unity\textsuperscript{1}, and says there is an "immortality that thinks in me, /That plans reasons.\textsuperscript{2} He is an instrument of God's Will, which must necessarily prevail. So he decides to rob Swegn of his too lofty sense of honour and pride. Swegn cannot be allowed to oppose his egoism, his pride and his desire against a country's fate, against the God's Will. Eric's wisdom devises a plan to humble Swegn. Hertha and Aslaug are asked to appear in their robes of dancing-girls. This is a sight Swegn cannot bear, for it implies an onslaught on his honour which a typical Scandinavian hero like Swegn must defend at all cost. He condemns Hertha's crooked scheming brain responsible for the present ignominy and shame to Olaf's race. He reprimands Aslaug also who goes over to Eric, his enemy, taking his fate and courage. But he cannot see them shamed before his own eyes. Hence he surrenders unconditionally to Eric to safeguard his family honour:

King, I have yielded, I accept thy boons.  
Heir of a starveling Earl, I bow my head  
Even to thy mercies. I am Olaf's son, 3  
I shall be faithful to my own disgrace.

The surrender may be unconditional, although not free from grief and shame. But the self-abasement in Swegn's heart

\textsuperscript{1} Sri Aurobindo, \textit{Collected Plays}, B.C.L. Vol.\textbf{6}, 547.  
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p. 546.  
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p. 554.
dissolves and yields place to happy surprise when he hears
Eric grant him unexpected boons:

Four prisons I assign to Olaf's son.
Thy palace first in Trondhjem, Olaf's roof,
Thy house in Nara, Eric's court — thy country,
To whom thou yieldest, Norway — and at last
My army's head when I invade the world.1

Naturally overwhelmed by the King's magnanimity, Swegn says:

Eric, enough! Have I not yielded? Here
Let thy boons rest.2

The victory of Eric over Swegn is thus complete. It
serves the purpose in the play of reinforcing the theme of
love, for Eric's victory is the victory of love over pride,
of force and wisdom tempered with love over haughty pride
of race, egoism and arrogance.

Like his creator, Aurobindo, who was a great champion
of the nationalist cause, her will, her unity, integrity
and peace. His mind is always full of "Norway's needs".
He pities Swegn who forgets "to value Norway's will", and
wishes that the rebel, instead of being loyal to his race
and blood only, were devoted to the cause of his country:

O narrow obstinate heart!
Had this been but thy country or a cause
Men worship, then it would indeed have been
A noble blindness, but thou serv' st thy pride.3

2. Ibid., p. 556.
3. Ibid., p. 549.
Like Sri Aurobindo again, Eric feels that a unity attained through revolution, through "the swiftness of a sword", may not last long. The warrior's sword can join, but it may fail to solder. Hence the search for a viable alternative to physical force. The alternative is found in Love. At the time of writing Perseus the Deliverer or poems like 'Baji Prabhu', in the first decade of this century, Sri Aurobindo preached fiery nationalism, and favoured the use even of the sword when necessary. His nationalist politics was not very different from revolutionary terrorism. But by the time Sri Aurobindo was writing Eric, his political thinking had undergone changes. The fact is amply borne by the play. Here Sri Aurobindo's hero has discovered love as the most effective instrument for national unification, as the surest way to durable peace and unity.

Apart from the theme of love enshrined in the play, there is also in it the theme of Fate. If Aslaug is won through love and force, Swegn is won through love and grace.

1. Sri Aurobindo said:

"My idea was an armed revolution in the whole of India. What they (P. Mitra and Miss Ghosal, etc.) did at that time was very childish, killing a Magistrate and so on. Later it turned into terrorism and dacoities which were not at all my idea or intention.... — We wanted to give battle by creating a spirit in the race through guerilla warfare. But at the present stage of the science such things are impossible and bound to fail."

Love is there in both the cases, for it is the only true cementing force for hearts, it is "the hoop of the gods hearts to combine." But, Eric looks at his ultimate victory from one more angle. According to him, Aslaug, who had a violent and mighty purpose, yielded at last to the noble heart because it was Odin's purpose. Her recognition of the heart's desire was the inevitable surrender of the individual will to the Will Supreme, to Fate. Similarly, Eric views his victory over Swegn as the triumph of gods. Aslaug too thinks that all that Eric does must necessarily be well because he executes only gods' will:

What canst thou do but well?
For in thy every act and word I see
The gods compel thee.

She feels that God has averted the tragic course of her life and trapped her in the snare of Eric's delight. All this reflects faith in a Power that is loving, merciful and benignant. The conclusion she reaches on the basis of her personal experiences speaks of her faith in the Supreme Power she calls Fate:

Fate orders all and Fate I now
Have recognised all the world's mystic will
That loves and labours.

2. Ibić., p. 558.
3. Ibić., p. 536.
There is frequent reference to gods, to Fate in *Eric* and characters in it believe in her supremacy. Aslaug "sees Fate even in a sparrow's flight."¹ Hertha is always conscious of gods' existence and asserts her faith in them variously. *Eric's* faith in Fate is evident. Skeyn attributes *Eric's* rise or his fall to Fate. From such frequent reference to Fate and from the characters' speeches and actions the impression is created that *Eric* seeks to project the truth of Fate, the truth that Fate does all even though human beings may be her instruments.

Fate is the most favourite word of Aslaug. According to her, Fate "alone is the prompter on our stage."² But *Eric* thinks differently. "I think the soul is the master,"³ he says. Thus is introduced in the play the problem of Fate versus Soul. Aslaug in the beginning speaks of Fate as the grim Necessity, the god that rules all men. She believes in Fate which is inexorable, in "Fate in the sense of iron determinism, an impersonal, subconscious force of Necessity"⁴ in "iron gods". But after she has awakened to love, the aspiration of man's innermost soul or his psychic being, and

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3. *Idem*.
has begun to feel that "God has played/The grand comedian
with her tragedy"\(^1\) by trapping her in Eric's delight, her
views of Fate change. She says:

Fate orders all and Fate I now
Have recognised all the world's mystic will
That loves and labours.\(^2\)

To this Eric adds:

Because it labours and loves
Our hearts, our will are counted, are indulged.\(^3\)
Aslaug, for these few days in hope and trust
Anchor thy mind. I shall bring back thy joy.
Because I go with mercy and from love.\(^3\)

Thus Sri Aurobindo believes that the world is not governed
by a blind Power, a dire Necessity, or iron gods who do not
take into account aspirations of man's inmost soul. Aslaug
says: "A heart, not iron gods, overrules."\(^4\) Eric refers to
gods and voices the same opinion:

They shut our eyes and drive us, but at last
Our souls remember when the act is done.\(^5\)

Thus, between Fate and man's Soul, there is no contra-
diction whatsoever. To plead for Soul's supremacy over Fate
is to say by implication only that God's Will (Fate) is
subservient to God Himself which is what man's soul is. Soul

\(^1\) Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol.6, 534.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 536.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 537.
\(^4\) Idem.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 569.
is God's own image:

Lives nobly perfect in the soul he made,
Reflected in the nature of a man.

There is "a divinity that sits in man", says Sri Aurobindo in Rodogune. The seat of divinity is the soul. To harken to the soul's voice, therefore, is to heed God's voice. Fate is the mystic will, the heaven's secret, or the Law Divine operating through the whole universe. As such, faith in Fate means faith in God and vice versa. As far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned, he expresses through his plays faith in the Creator, faith in the Creation and faith in the Law of the Creation. Eric exudes this faith in ample measure.

The theme of evolution is also implied in Eric. As in the other plays of Sri Aurobindo, in Eric also characters are shown as growing — and developing and getting transformed through conflict into better human beings. The theme is presented here also through a dialectic as is done in Perseus the Deliverer or in Rodogune etc. The action in the play originates from the criss-crossing of love and hate, the two extreme emotions, and all the characters involved emerge transmutated from the fierce conflict. Eric's "iron mind" is transmuted with the touch of love; he is no more "the coldness of the radiance" that he was, his soul

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol.6, 523.
2. Ibid., p. 522.
no more "the torso of a god"\(^1\) as, with the advent of love in his heart, the trinity of glorious manhood is completed and Eric is a whole man, capable of rendering Norway unified and peaceful. He has learnt from his "soul and life/The great wise pitiless calmness of the gods\(^2\) enjoys "a calm royalty within\(^3\), and lords over his blood.

Aslaug, the heroine of the play, is basically a character of the emotional type. She is thrown into the fire of conflict due to her own violent nature which knows only extreme emotions. Absolute and extreme in all things she must be, whether it is slaying or surrendering, hating or loving. Left free she moves like a lioness midst her passions. The sweet violent spirit badly needs love as the tamer of her heart, for "unruled, it follows violent impulses,/This way, that way : working calamity,/Dreams that it helps the world."\(^4\) The impulsive unruly heart of Aslaug is loaded with "the chains of love."\(^5\) The result is its complete purgation of "its treasured pain and wrath", its riddance from the bitter feeling of hate and revenge. A proud heart like that of Aslaug does not sink prostrate in

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5. *Idem.*
surrender to force easily; and when it yields after all, it is filled with grief and shame. But love washes it completely of all negative feelings so that a pure serene flame of love burns in the heart. Liberated from the agonising conflict between the warring passions in her heart, Aslæug now is happy that God has trapped her in the snare of Eric's delight.

Equally conspicuous is the transformation of the character of Swęgn. A true representative of the Scandinavian traditions of heroism, culture and way of life, Swęgn is ready to sacrifice all at the altar of his honour and pride, for apotheosis of the heroic ideal of honour is among the very best values of his country and the pattern of life in which he has been bred and brought up. Regrettably for Eric, however, his sense of honour is too narrow to encompass the honour of the whole country. It is he who "has been the invisible wall separating the love-locked hearts of Aslæug and Eric."¹ He is among those whose hearts are "rugged and hard/As Norway's mountains, as her glaciers cold/To all but interest and power and pride."² Eric calls him "champion of discord, ruthless, fell and fierce."³ According to him,

2. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 482.
3. Ibid., p. 481.
Swegn is "a man treacherous and rude and ruthless." Like his sister, Swegn also is a violent spirit, impetuous and headstrong. Stubbornness, arrogance, pride and egoism are the hallmarks of his personality. He takes greater pride in his race and blood than in his country. Eric says:

O narrow obstinate heart! 
Had this been but thy country or a cause 
Men worship, then it would indeed have been 
A noble blindness, but thou serv' st thy pride.

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
If from the ages he can buy this word, 
"Swegn still was stubborn." That to him is all. 2

But Swegn, the stoical hero, also changes. His obduracy and pride dissolve under the force of Eric's mighty personality, his terrible subtle mind and love. From the fire of his confrontation with Eric, Swegn emerges pure gold of a man. A brave honourable warrior, Swegn's is a fearless nature that cannot be cowed down to submission or purchased through offers of wealth, honour and state. His surrender to Eric adds to Swégén's stature, for it means rising above the narrowness of sticking only to one's racial honour to embrace the greater cause of the nation's unity and honour.

Like the other characters in Eric, Swegn grows from a "life based on egoistic ignorance" to a life of "light and love" due to "the masterful, compelling and unselfish

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol.6, 549.
2. Idem.
character" of Eric. Eric can almost see through a man's character. He knows that Swegn too has a heart capable of loving. He loves his sister and wife deeply. That is why Eric decides to torture him into enlightenment by threatening an outrage on Swegn's family honour by making Hertha and Aslaug dance before him in the court. The trick works and Swegn's pride is broken. Eric wins his heart by gestures of love and grace. Now that his ego, which was the main barrier in the way of love's manifestation, is broken and love pervades the whole atmosphere, Swegn's loving heart manifests itself naturally and freely. The birth of love in his heart results into transformation of his being.

Significantly, these transmutations in the various "fundamental types of human personality"—"the subliminal Eric, the emotional Aslaug and the stoic-ethical Swegn"—are attributed in the play to love. Sri Aurobindo in the play wants to project love as the "best educator" in life. Eric says:

If man could seize the heart as palpably,
The forms, the limbs, the substance of this soul!

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...

... Walled from ours are other hearts:
For if life's barriers twixt our souls were broken
Men would be free and our earth paradise
And the gods live neglected.

2. Ibid., p. 98.
3. Sri Aurobindo, op. cit.,
Then, as has been mentioned above, Eric, like Sri Aurobindo's other plays, presents the conflict of opposites, the resultant change pointing to the possibility of a better and higher life for man. Sri Aurobindo's experience of his own life had been that a crisis, a conflict, a dialectic means a change, a lurch forward, and a call to transformation. He had inferred the evolutionary dialectic also in the cosmic play which was a drama of confrontation, conflict, a push forward, a decisive change. This is insinuated and even underlined in several of his poems, including 'Illion' and Savitri; and it is more or less explicit in his dramas.¹

Eric in the play is shown as attaining the perfection of the three-fold nature: strength in the nature, wisdom in the mind and love in the heart. Besides, he has surrendered his individual will to the will of Odin and lives to accomplish the work Odin has entrusted to him:

But Odin gave the work to me. I came
Into this mortal frame for Odin's work.²

¹ Sri Aurobindo, in a letter to his wife, on Feb. 17, 1908 wrote:

"...From now on I no longer am the master of my own will. Like a puppet I must go wherever God takes me; like a puppet I must do whatever He makes me do..."


² Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 524.
Unlike his rival, Swen, whose character presents a sharp contrast to that of Eric's and serves to throw into bold relief the qualities of the latter, Eric does not oppose his egoism, his pride and desire against a country's fate or against the Supreme Will. Hence, no conflict in his life. He is a man of destiny, Fate's "favourite and brother." Or, perhaps, he is master of his Fate, no more obliged to obey its command, for he has surrendered his heart and soul to the Will of God. He had "a highly developed consciousness that can draw back and observe the workings of nature without being bound by them." Persons, like Swen, who are not even masters of themselves can hardly be a match to Eric. In his famous soliloquy with which the Act III opens, Eric says:

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I have resumed
The empire with the knowledge of myself.
For this strong angel Love, this violent
And glorious guest, let it possess my heart
Without a rival, not invade the brain,
Not with imperious discord cleave my soul
Jangling its various harmonies, nor turn
The manifold music of humanity
Into a single and a maddening note.
Strength in the nature, wisdom in the mind,
Love in the heart complete the trinity
Of glorious manhood. There was the wide flaw,—
The coldness of the radiance that I was.
This was the vacant gap I could not fill.
It left my soul the torso of a god,
A great design unfinished and my works
Mighty and crude like things admired that pass,
Bare of the immortality that keeps
The ages. O, the word they spoke was true!
'Tis Love, 'tis Love fills up the gulfs of Time.
By Love we find our kinship with the stars,
The spacious uses of the sky. God's image
Lives nobly perfect in the soul he made,
Reflected in the nature of a man."
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This is the central idea of the play, the main thrust of its action. As for Eric, he foreshadows Sri Aurobindo's Superman towering far above "pinchbeck potentates" like Swegn. In the period between his political leadership and his siddhi of 1926, points out Dr. Prema Nandkumar, Sri Aurobindo made consistent effort in various ways to limn the identification-marks of the leader of mankind.¹ Eric is a result of such efforts of Sri Aurobindo, explicitly made in his dramas. Eric as such remains, besides being Sri Aurobindo's apotheosis of love, an enunciation of his principle of evolutionary progress. By insinuating faith in "the world's mystic will that loves and labours", in "the immortality that thinks" in us, "that plans and reasons" and dwells in our secret souls, Sri Aurobindo emerges in the play as a singer of faith and love.

Love must not cease to live upon earth,  
For love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven.  
Love is the far Transcendent's angel here,  
Love is man's lien on the Absolute. ²
