CHAPTER 3
WESTERN AESTHETICS IN SRI AUROBINDO’S CRITICISM

The Western aesthetics was developed in ancient Greece in relation to drama and transposed to other literary categories. This is the earliest or Hellenic (Greek) phase of criticism which was soon followed by Graeco-Roman phase. The poetic mind of Greece and Rome has pervaded and largely shaped the whole artistic production of Europe; Italian poetry of the great age has thrown on some part of it at least a stamp only less profound; French prose and poetry – but the latter in a much less degree – have helped more than any other literary influence to the modern turn of the European mind and its mode of expression. According to Sri Aurobindo, “The poetic literature in Greek started with poetry of Homer, Latin with the historical epic of Ennius, French with the feudal romances of the Charlemagne cycle and the Arthurian cycle. But in none of these was the artistic aim simply the observant accurate presentation of Greek or Roman or feudal life.”

With the Renaissance, which was ushered in by the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, and the consequent Western Movement of – literary masterpiece of antiquity, one witnesses an unprecedented spurt
of literary and critical activity. The modern English Poetry began to be written after the fusion of various races had taken place on English soil and an Anglo-Celtic national temperament had been evolved in addition to revealing lovingly that poetry and art have also their part to play and English poetry has followed successive steps of national ascending order of developing perceptions and consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo, “The English creative genius began by a quite external, a clear superficial substance and utterance. It proceeded to deeper vital poetry, a poetry of the power and beauty and wonder and spontaneous thought, the joy and passion and pain, the colour and music of life, in which the external presentation of life and things was taken, but heightened, exceeded and given its full dynamic imaginative content.”

The First definite starting point of this long movement is the poetry of Chaucer. Chaucer gives English poetry a first shape by the help of French Romance models and the work of Italian masters. Chaucer has captured the secret of ease, grace and lucidity from French Romance poetry and had learned from the great Italians more force and compactness of expression than French verse had yet attained, a force diluted and a compactness lightened for his purpose. But his poetic speech nor his rhythm has anything of plastic greatness and high beauty of the Italians. It was an
easy limpid and flowing movement, a well-spring of natural English utterance without depths in it, but limpid, clear and pure.

The first early motive and style of Chaucer’s poetry is a direct and concrete observation of ordinary human life and character. He has his eye fixed on the object, and that object is the visible action of life as it passes before him throwing its figures on his mind and stirring it to kindly satisfaction in the movement and its interest a blithe sense of humour or a light and easy pathos. According to Sri Aurobindo, “He neither concerned to look at all into the souls deeply into the minds of the men and whose appearance, action and easily apparent traits of character he describes with so apt and observant a fidelity nor moved to interpret life; a clear and happy presentation is his business.”

The new light and impulse that set free the silence of the poetic spirit in England for its first abundant and sovereign utterance come from the Renaissance in Italy, Spain and France. The middle ages had lived strongly and with a sort of deep and sober force, but as it were, always under the shadow of death, and under the burden of an obligation to aspire through suffering to a beyond; their life is bordered on one side by the cross and on the other side by the sword. According to Sri Aurobindo, “The Renaissance brings in the sense of a liberation from the burden and the obligation; it
looks at life and loves it in excess; it is carried away by the beauty of the body and the sense and the intellect, the beauty of sensation and action and speech and thought but of thought hardly at all for its own sake, but thought as a power of life.”

The Elizabethan age is the era of the most opulent output in the long history of English poetic genius and Elizabethan poetry is an expression of this energy, passion and wonder of life, and is much more powerful, disorderly and unrestrained than the corresponding poetry in other countries; for it has neither a past traditional culture nor an innate taste to restrain its extravagances. It springs up in a chaos of power and of beauty in which forms emerge and shape themselves by a stress within it for which there is no clear guiding knowledge except such as the instinctive genius of the age and the individual can give. According to Sri Aurobindo, “It bestowed on the nation a new English speech, rich in capacity, gifted with an extraordinary poetic intensity and wealth and copiousness, but full also of the excesses of new formation and its disorder.”

Shakespeare stands out alone both in his age and in all English Literature as the one great and genuine dramatic poet and stands out too as quite unique in his spirit, method and quality. He is a great vital creator and intensely, though within marked limits, a seer of life. He has
given a wonderful language to poetic thought, yet does not think for the sake of life. His development of human character has sovereign force with its bounds, but it is the soul of human being as seen through outward character, passion, action – the life-soul and not either the thought-soul or the deeper psychic being, still less the profounder truth of human spirit. According to Sri Aurobindo, “Homer makes beauty out of man’s outward life and action and stops there. Shakespeare rises one step further and reveals a life-soul and life-forces and life-values to which Homer has no access. In Valmiki and Vyas there is the constant presence of great idea-forces and ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare.”

Shakespeare in his vision and poetic motive never really either rises up above life or gets behind it; he neither sees what it reaches out to nor the great unseen powers that are active within it. In two or three of his tragedies he seems to have been striving to so this, but all that he does see than is the action of certain tremendous life-forces, which he either sets in a living symbol or indicates behind the human action, as in Macbeth, or embodies, as in King Lear, in a tragically uncontrollable possession of his human characters. According to Sri Aurobindo, “More than any other poet Shakespeare has accomplished mentally the legendary feat of the impetuous
Sage Vishwamitra; his power of vision has created a Shakespearean world of his own, and it is inspite of its realistic elements, a romantic world in a very true sense of the word, a world of the wonder and free power of life and not of its mere external realities but finds a greater enlarged and intense breath of living an ultra-natural play of beauty, curiosity and amplitude."

A poet like Shakespeare without spiritual experience ma in an inspired moment become the medium of an expression, as it is not of his own mind, may be very powerful and living, not merely aesthetically agreeable. According to Sri Aurobindo, “Shakespeare has overhead touch in his substance, the rhythm and the feeling but he does not give us the sense of one and the Infinite.”

Spenser and Marlow of the Elizabethan age are poets of high order inspite of eventual failure. Spenser’s Faerie Queene is indeed a poem of unfailing imaginative charm and its two opening cantos are exquisite in execution; there is a stream of liquid harmony, of curiously opulent, yet finally tempered description, of fluid poetical phrase and minutely seen image for these are Spenser’s constant gifts, the native form of his genius which displays more of a descriptive vision than of any lager creative power or narrative force. An inspired idea is worked out; a little too much lost in detail and in the diffusion of a wealthy prolixity, it still holds
well together its rather difficult and entangling burden of symbols and forms achieves totality of fine poetic effect. But one looks at the poem as a whole, the effect intended fails as it could not have come to a successful completion. According to Sri Aurobindo, “Kalidasa’s Birth of the War-God was left unfinished, or finished by a very inferior hand, yet even in the fragment there is already a masterly totality of effect; there is an admirable design. Virgil’s Aeneid, though in a way finished did not receive those last touches which sometimes make all the difference between perfection and the approach to it; and we feel too, not a failure or art, - but a relative thinning of the supporting power and inspiration.”

Marlow alone of the lesser Elizabethan dramatist stands apart from his fellows, not solely by his strong and magnificent vein of poetry, but because he alone had some clearly grasped dramatic idea. And not only is he conscious of his artistic aim, but it is a sound aim on the higher levels of dramatic art. He knows that the human soul in action is his subject and karma the power, the theme, and he attempts to create a drama of the human will, throwing itself on life the will egoistic and asuric conquering only to succumb to death. Marlow had this conception but not any real power of dramatic execution. According to Sri Aurobindo, “He is unable to give the last awakening breath of life to his figures; in the fiction he rather constructs
than evolves, portrays than throws out into life, paints up or sculptures from outside than creates from within, - and yet it is this other inward way that is the sole true method of poetic or at least of dramatic creation."\(^{10}\)

The result of Elizabethan era is great but there are other powers of all human consciousness which have not yet been mastered and to get at these is the next immediate step of English poetry. According to Sri Aurobindo, “In Elizabethan poetry the physical and external tendency still persists but it is no longer sufficient to satisfy either the perceiving spirit or its creative force. Life is still the muse of this poetry; but it is a life which demands to feel itself more and is already knocking or trying to knock at the gates of the deeper subjective being."\(^{11}\)

English poetry turned to an attempt at mastering the secret of the Latins, the secret of a clear, measured and intellectual dealing with life, things and ideas. At first there is an intermediate manner that of Milton’s early work and of the Carolean poets, in which something of Elizabethan impulse, something of its intense imaginative sight or its charm of emotion, prolongs itself for a while but fast in fading away under the stress of an increasing intellectuality, a strong dryness of the light of the reason and a growing hardness of form and concentrated narrowness of the observing eye.
The age set out with a promise of better things; for a time it seemed almost on the right path. Milton occupies his high rank among the poets by his epic poem *Paradise Lost* in the world’s literature. Milton’s early poetry in the fruit of a strong classical intellectuality touched with a glow and beauty, spontaneous warmth of emotion and passion and vital intuition, gifts of a greater depth and force of life. According to Sri Aurobindo, “Milton has given English poetic speech a language of intellectual thought which is of itself highly poetic without depending on any formal aids of poetic expression, a speech which succeeds by its own intuitive force and in its very grain inspired intellectual thought-utterance.”

*Paradise Lost* compels admiration throughout by its greatness of style and rhythm, but as a whole inspite of its mighty opening ‘Of Man’s first obedience, and fruit’, its whole substance fails to enter victoriously either into the mind or into the heart of the world; much of it has not lodged itself deeply in its imagination or enriched sovereignty the required stock of more intimate poetical thought and utterance. According to Sri Aurobindo, “There is nothing of the Higher Mind knowledge or vision either in the style or substance. But there is often a largeness of rhythm and sweep of language in Milton which has a certain kinship to the manner natural to a higher supra-intellectual vision, and something from the
substance of the planes of spiritual seeing can come into this poetry whose medium is the poetic intelligence and uplift it."13

The movement rises on one side into the ripened classical perfection of Milton and facts away on the other into the reaction in Dryden and Pope. Moreover some work was done especially by Pope and Dryden which even on the higher levels of poetry can challenge comparison with the work of Elizabethans and the greater poets of later times. They got rid of Milton's Latinisms and poetic inversions, substituting smaller rhetorical artifices of their own device - dismissed his great and packed turns of speech, still the work they had to do, they did effectively with talent energy, even an undeniable genius. Even the satire of Pope and Dryden rises sometimes into a high poetic value beyond the level they normally reached and they have some great outbursts which have the power not only to please or delight by their force and incisiveness or their weight of thought or their powerful presentation of life, but to move to emotion. But their work is not faultless; it has much of the baser lead of rhetoric, too frequent a pomposity and artifice too little of Roman nobility and too little of English sincerity. According to Sri Aurobindo, "The psychological development of English poetry, its place, its value is mostly in the direction of sheer intellectuality concerned with the more superficial aspects of thought and life deliberately
barren of emotion except the more superficial; lyricism has run dry, beauty has become artificial where at all it survives, passion is replaced by rhetoric, the heart is silent, life has civilized, urbanized, socialized and stylized itself too much to have any mare a very living contact with nature."\(^{14}\)

Then came an attempt, a brilliant and beautiful attempts to get through nature and thought and the veiled mind in life and nature and its profounder aesthetic suggestions to some large and deep spiritual truth behind these things. There is the beginning of a direct gaze of the poetic intelligence and imagination upon life and nature and of another and a new power in English speech, the poetry of sentiment as distinguished from the inspired voice of sheer feeling or passion. Nature and life and things are seen accurately as objects and forms but not with any vision, emotion or presentation into the spirit behind them. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, "Classicism prides itself on knowledge, romanticism longs for wisdom. Naturally, in the former, the emphasis is on intellect, and, in the latter, the emphasis is on feeling. Classicism deifies reason, in romanticism there is the apotheosis of imagination. It is no wonder that romanticism is so often anti-intellectual."\(^{15}\)

The poetry of the time is called romantic poetry which has great voices who fall naturally inspite of their pronounced differences into
pairs – Wordsworth and Byron, Blake and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. The romantic poetry lives really by its greater and more characteristic element, by its half spiritual turn by Wordsworth’s force of ethical thought and communion with nature, by Shelley’s imaginative transcendentalism, Keats’ worship of beauty, Byron’s titanism and force of personality, Coleridge’s supernaturalism or as it should more properly be called his eye for other nature, Blake’s command of the inner psychic realms.

The early poetry of nature gave merely the delight of the forms of objects and the beauty of the setting of the natural world around man’s life, but not any inner communion between him and the Universal Mother. A later tone brought in more subtleties of the vital soul of the natural world and a response of the moved sensation and emotion of the life-spirit in us and out of this arose an intellectual and aesthetic sense of hidden finer and subtler things, more profound in the romantic poetry an attempt at communion with a universal presence in nature and a living principle of peace or light and love or universal power or conscious delight and beauty. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, “It is this anti-intellectual attitude which leads the romantic poet to emphasize the element of spontaneity.”

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Byron started the language and movement which were an intellectual and sentimental rhetoric, the speech of 18th century broken down, melted and beaten into new shape for stronger uses, Byron expressed the fervent mind of humanity to shake off the convention of the past struggle towards a direct feeling of itself and surrounding world in their immediate reality. Byron went on to a more chastened and rapid style of great force but he had no idea of art, structure, accomplished mould, the weight of a deep and considered, the sureness of inspired inspiration. According to Sri Aurobindo, “Byron did a considered work of secondary kind but he had something greater to say which he never said, but only gave rare hints of it and an obscured sense of its meaning. He sets out with a strangely transformed echo of the past intellectualism, is carried beyond it by the elemental force of his personality, has even one foot across the borders of the spiritual but never quite enters into that kingdom.”

Wordsworth is the most outstanding visionary with a much higher poetic mind than Byron’s who did not entirely miss his greatest way though he wandered much in adjacent paths and finally lost himself in the dry desert sound of the uninspired intellectual mentality. Wordsworth saw nature and he saw man near to nature and when he speaks of these things he finds his noblest or purest and the most penetrating tones and his views
of them is native to his temperament and personality at the opposite pole to Byron's. According to Sri Aurobindo, "The moralist in Wordsworth finds a rule of simple faith, truth, piety, self-control, affection, grave gladness in which the sentimental naturalism of the eighteenth century disappears into an ethical naturalism, a different idealism of humanity in the simplicity of its direct contest with nature unspoiled by the artifice and corruption of a too developed society."\textsuperscript{18}

Wordsworth's chosen form of diction, often too bare and trivial in the beginning, too heavy afterwards, helps him at his best to a language and movement of unsurpassed poetic weight and gravity charged with imaginative insight in which his thought and his ethical sense and spiritual sight meet in a fine harmony. He has transparencies in which the spirit gets free of the life-wave, the intelligence, the coloured veils of the imagination, and poetic speech and rhythm become hints of the eternal movements and eternal stabilities, voice of the depths, rare moments of speech direct from our hidden immortality. According to Sri Aurobindo, "All depends on the power of expression of poet. A poet like Wordsworth though without spiritual experience may in an inspired moment become the medium of an expression, as it is not that of his own mind, may be very powerful and living merely aesthetically agreeable."\textsuperscript{19}
Wordsworth intellectualizes his poetic statement over much and infact states too much and sings too little, has a dangerous turn for a too obvious sermonizing, pushes too far his reliance on the worth of this substance and is not careful to give it a form of beauty. But still he is one of the seer poets, a seer of the calm spirit in nature, the poet of man’s large identity with nature and serene liberating communion; it is on this side that he is admirable and unique. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, “He is himself a major and full-fledged Romantic poet; and he is a mystic par excellence, perhaps the greatest mystical poet in English Literature.”

Wordsworth and Byron in the deepest centre or on the highest peak of their inspiration are moved by powers but they failed by an excess of the alloy of untransmuted intellect in their work. Byron and Wordsworth are the two poets who are the most hampered by the difficulty of finding and keeping to the native speech of their greater self, most often depressed in their elevation, because they are both drawn by a strong side of their nature, the one to a forceful, the other to a weighty intellectualized expression; neither of them are born singers or artists of word and sound, neither of them poets in the whole grain of their mind and temperament; they are readily prone to fall away to what is, however interesting it may otherwise be, a lower, a not genuinely poetic range of substance and speech.
The other two poets of the time Blake and Coleridge open magical gates, pass by flowering side lanes with hedges laden with supernatural blooms into a middle world whence their voices come ringing with an unearthly melody. They are the poet’s of supernatural and of spiritual truth as may be shadowed by it or penetrate through it but not of the greatest truths of the spirit.

Blake is not only a seer, but almost an inhabitant of other planes whose power of expression is akin in its strangeness to his eye vision, who seeks to put away as much as possible the intellectual mind to see and only sing. Blake is unique voice among the poets of the time who occupies indeed a place unique in the poetry of the English language, for there is no other singer of the beyond who is equal to him in the strangeness, supernatural lucidity, power and directness of vision of the beyond and the rhythmic clarity and beauty of singing. Blake wanted to explore and exploit his sensuous experience so that it would be his gateway to higher things: his ideals of truth, love and beauty (somewhat corresponding to the Indian concepts of Satyam, Sivam and Sundaram). According to Visvanath Chatterjee, “Blake did not want to deprive himself of sensuous experience. Not for him is the life of austerity, the ancient tradition of via negative. He
could say with Tagore: Yogic postures, through closing the door of the senses, are not for me."\textsuperscript{21}

Although a visionary, Blake often found the earth beautiful; but this earth is the one unspoiled by human tampering. The beauty of nature simply fascinated him. His enthusiasm for the beauty of nature leads him to a rapturous contemplation of the great spirit which is behind it. In the words of W.E. Williams, "This spirit is not the mild benevolent deity whom Wordsworth found behind natural creation; but an ineffable wonder whose features and characteristics were always behind the veil. The mystic's ecstasy lay in penetrating the veils and finding more alluring mysteries beyond. He found his delight in following the mirage of the unattainable."\textsuperscript{22}

Blake's power of expression is akin in its strangeness to his eye of vision. His speech like his seeing has singular other-world clarity and sheerness of expression in it, the light of supernature. According to Sri Aurobindo, "When he prophetises as in some of his more ambitious efforts, he mentalises too much the mystic and misses the marvel and the magic."\textsuperscript{23}

S.T. Coleridge was more a philosopher than a mystic. He attempted to synthesize poetry and philosophy. Intellectuality he had in abundance, a wide, rich and subtle intellect, but he squandered rather than used it in discursive Metaphysics and criticism. The poet in him never took
into himself the thinker and the greater part of his poetry, though his whole production is small enough in bulk, is unconvincing in the extreme. According to Sri Aurobindo, “It has some intellectual finish but not either force or magic, or a fluidity of movement which fails to hold the ear.”

Coleridge more than any of his great contemporaries missed his poetic crown; he has only found and left three or four scattered jewels of a strange and singular beauty. The rest of his work is a failure. Coleridge’s major poetry – The Rime of The Ancient Mariner (1798), Christabel (1816) and Kubla Khan (1816) – is mystical, but in a special sense. They are full of mystic suggestion; there is hardly a breath of religious mysticism here. Instead one enters the mysterious world of the supernatural which is a kind of dream world. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, “This kind of poetry is best appreciated in that state of dream in which we neither believe nor disbelieve – or rather, that mood of ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ which, he himself tells us constitutes poetic faith.”

Coleridge in his scanty best work, Blake almost always, along in sight are unable to command the weight and power in utterance which arises from the thinking mind when it is illumined and able to lay hold on and express the reality behind the idea. They have the faculty of revelatory sense in a high degree, but little of the revelatory thought which
should go with it; at least though they can suggest this sometimes with the intense force which comes from spiritual feeling, they cannot command it and constantly give it greatness and distinctness of body.

Their poetry has strange and unique quality and charm, but it stops short of something which would have made it Supreme. They are great poets of the supernatural and of such spiritual truth as may be shadowed by it or penetrate through it, but not of the greatest truths of the spirit. According to Sri Aurobindo, “This supernature remains in them a thing seen indeed and objectively real, but abnormal; but it is only when supernature becomes normal to the inner experience that it can be turned into material of the very greatest.”26

Shelley and Keats are perhaps the two most purely poetic minds than almost any of these that have used the English tongue with certain antimony. Shelley sings from the skies earthwards and Keats looks from earth towards Olympus.

Keats is the first entire artist in word and rhythm in English poetry – not grandiose, classical and derived, like Milton, but direct and original. All the high things that interested his great equals, had for him no interest; one godhead only he worshipped, the image of divine beauty and through this alone he wished to see truth and by her to achieve spiritual
delight and not so much freedom as completeness. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, "Keats is a worshipper of beauty and it is no wonder that is intense love of beauty sometimes reaches mystical heights. After all, he loved the principle of beauty in all things."\(^{27}\)

Keats saw the image of divine beauty in three of her four forms, sensuous beauty, and imaginative beauty, intellectual beauty and ideal beauty. But it is the first only which he had entirely expressed; the second he had carried for, but it was not yet full-orbed; towards the third and the highest he was only striving to philosophize he dared not yet but it was from the first the real sense and goal of his genius.

Keats, the youngest and in many directions the most gifted, enters the secret temple of ideal beauty, but he has not time to find his way into the mystic sanctuary. According to Sri Aurobindo, "In him the spiritual seeking stops abruptly short and prepares to fall away down a rich sensuous incline to a subsequent poetry which turns from it to seek poetic truth a pleasure through the senses and an artistic or curiously observing or finely psychologising intellectualism."\(^{28}\)

A greater poet by nature than almost any of these is Shelley who is a sovereign voice of the new spiritual realities much more rationally near to them than Wordsworth, has, what Coleridge had not, a poetic grasp
of metaphysical truths, can see the forms and hear the voice of higher
elemental spirits and godheads than those seen and heard by Blake, is the
singer of a greater and deeper liberty and a purer and nobler revolt than
Byron, not sensuous in the manner of Keats, but with a hold on the subtler
beauty of sensible which gives their light and life. According to Visvanath
Chatterjee, “He is indeed as Browning so felicitously describes him, the ‘sun
trader’. He is the rhapsodist of limitless desire and infinite passion, of
endless suffering and ceaseless aspiration.”

His *Prometheus Unbound*, one of the masterpieces of poetry
arises from the combination of this larger endeavour and profounder
substance with the constant use of lyrical mould in which he most excelled.
Shelley says in his *Defence of Poetry*, “Poetry is not like reasoning, a power
to be exerted according to the determination of the will.”

In Shelley it is not so much what is said but what is not said that
is important. All his reference to love in his poetry prepare one’s
consciousness to grow develop and reach a state of readiness for the
epiphany of self-transcendence. Light, live, liberty; are the three spiritual
qualities in whose presence his pure and radiant spirit lived which he would
bring down to earth without losing their intrinsic celestial nature and shape.
According to Sri Aurobindo, "To bring about the union of the mortal and immortal, the terrestrial and the celestial is always his passion."31

The spiritual truth which had possession of Shelley's mind was higher than any thing opened to the vision of any contemporaries, and its power and reality which was the essence of his inspiration can only be grasped, when it is known and lived, by a changed and future humanity. Shelley looked always towards the light, toward a beauty, a truth behind the appearance of things. But he never got through the idealising mind to the spiritual experience. Shelley is not a spiritual poet, what he did get was something of the purest emotional or aesthetic feeling a purest subtle mind—touch of an essence behind the appearance, an essence of ideal light, truth or beauty. According to Nolini Kanta Gupta, “Both Shelley and Aurobindo were alike in their depth of knowledge and drew their inspiration from similar sources. Though Shelley follows Coleridge in emphasizing the function of imagination, he interprets it in the light of Sri Aurobindonian idealism.”32

Sri Aurobindo does not deal with poetry in the most universal sense as Shelley does. He did not like Shelley include all arts with in the ambit of poetry. But he recognizes that poetry, like the kindred arts of painting and architecture, appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference that in this case the image is
meant to be mental and verbal and not material. According to Sri Aurobindo, "The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of or rather be included in sight, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech."\(^\text{33}\)

Shelley is himself too much war with his age to ignore its contradictions and pass onward to the reconciliation. He has not the symbols or the thought forms through which he can make the spirit of light, love and freedom intimate and near to men. Shelley has not Wordsworth's distinctness and intimate spiritual communion with nature as she is on earth; the genii of the worlds of dream and sleep cluster too thickly round all that his waking eye seizes. The earth nature is seen in the light of another nature more than in its own, and that too is only half visible in the mixed luminosity, burning through the vest that hides it. According to Sri Aurobindo, "He is the bright archangel of this dawn and he becomes greater to us as the light he foresaw and lived a in returns and grows, but he sings half concealed in the too dense halo of his ethereal's beauty."\(^\text{34}\)

The attempt of romantic poets did not come to perfect fruition; it stopped shortly because there had not been the right intellectual preparation or a sufficient of spiritual knowledge and experience. There is a deviation into a second age of intellectualism, an aesthetic or reflective
poetry with much wider range, but much less profound in its roots, much less high in its growth, the creation of a more informed, but less inspired intelligence.

The next era is the Victorian period which has been unimaginative artistic intellectualism touched with the greater and fresh breath of modern thought and its wide interest and fullness of matter opened up to some mountain – top prospects, struck across by some moments of prophecy. The rich beauty of Keats is replaced by the careful opulent cultivated picturesqueness of Tennyson, the concentrated force of Byron by the many-sided intellectual robustness and energy of Browning, the intense nature poetry and the strong and grave ethical turn of Wordsworth by the too intellectually conscious eye on nature and the cultured moralizing of Arnold, the pure ethereal lyricism of Shelley by Swinburne’s turgid lyrical surge and all too self- sufficient and self-conscient fury of foam – tossing sound and in place of the supernatural visions of Blake and Coleridge.

Tennyson is the most representative and successful poet of the Victorian epoch. He mirrors its ordinary cultivated mind as it shaped in the English temperament and intelligence, with an extraordinary fidelity and in a richly furnished and heavily decorated mirror set round with all the art and device that could be appreciated by the contemporary. According to
Visvanath Chatterjee, “Eliot has no doubt of Tennyson’s greatness as a poet and appreciates him for his abundance, variety and complete competence.”

Tennyson accepts evolution as part of divine plan and he believes like Sri Aurobindo, that mankind is gradually evolving towards the higher man. Tennyson’s *In Memorium* was widely acclaimed as a great poem of faith in which he grapples with the burning questions of life, death and after-life. T.S. Eliot emphasized the element of doubt in the poem:

“In Memorium can, I think, justly be called a religious poem, but for another reason than that which made it seem religious to his contemporaries. It is not religious because of the quality of its faith, but because of the quality of its doubt. Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is very intense experience. *In Memorium* is a poem of despair, but not of a religious kind.”

Tennyson gives a good deal of thinking of a kind in often admirably telling phrase and with much art of setting, but he is not a revealing poetic thinker. According to Sri Aurobindo, “The poet has no meditative, no emotional or impassioned, no close or revealing grasp on life, and on the other hand no deep interpretative idea and without one or other of these things narrative poetry of the modern kind cannot succeed; it becomes a body without soul or life-breath.”
Tennyson does not figure largely as a lyrical poet inspite of one or two inspired and happy moments for he has neither the lyrical passion and intoxication nor the profounder depth of lyrical feeling. In his description of nature there is no greater seeing, but a painting of vivid details detached for simile and ornament and though he worked up a great accuracy of observation and colour, the deeper sincerity of the born nature poets is absent. According to Sri Aurobindo, “His art suffers from the excess of value of form over value of content; it incurs a liability to a besetting note of artificiality a frequent falsetto tone of prettiness, an excessive stress, a colouring which is too bright for the stuff it hues and is unevenly laid but it is always taking and effective. A great poetical craftsman turning many forms to account for the displaying of an unusual power of descriptive and decorative language and a verse of most skilled device, but no very great purpose and substance, this he is from beginning to end of his creation.”

By his very limitation of mind he becomes the representative poet of a certain side of the English mentality, not in its originality and adventurous power but in its temperate convention and fixity, renders its liberalism and its conservatism, its love of freedom and dislike of idealism, its formal ethicism and its absence of passion. But to all these things he brings an artistic decorative quality which is new in English poetry. He has left his
Swinburne brings in into poetry of the time elements to which the rest are strangers. He is unique as a voice of all round revolt, political, moral and of every kind and in this lies his significance. He has especially in his earlier poetry done work of a perfect and highly wrought beauty, a marvellous music. According to Sri Aurobindo, "There is often a captivatingly rich and sensuous appeal in his language and not unoften it rises to a splendid magnificence." 39

He is at best one of the great lyrical singers; he writes in a flood and sweep and passion of melody. He is a great lyricist, but like many of his contemporaries revels too much in devices and virtuosities of form and his lyrical thought and sentiment turn easily to the dithyrambic note, are marred by excess, diffuseness, an inequality in the inspiration and the height and tone. He exhausts himself too soon; the reproach of emptiness can be brought against much of his work and his later voice becomes empty of significance but not of resonance.

Among the Victorians Browning stands next to Tennyson in the importance of his poetic work and station as representative figure of the
age and creator. In his mass of creation he can be regarded as the most remarkable in invention and wideness, if not the most significant builder and narrator of the drama of human life in his time.

He is a student critic, psychologist, and thinker who seeks to interpret, like certain French poets, the civilizations and the ages. His inventiveness of form and range and variety of subject are prodigious; he turns to every quarter of the world, seizes on every human situation, seems to be trying to exhaust a study of all possible human personalities and minds and characters and turn his eye on every age and period of history and many countries and all possible scenes and extract from them their meaning and their interest for the satisfaction of his universal curiosity and his living and inexhaustible interest in the vividness and abundance of the life of earth and man. According to Browning, “The poet's role is that of the interpreter, his main function being to interpret the beauty of God's world for us.”

Human life seems to be dominated not only by sacred but also profane love. It is these two loves — human and divine love — that weave the mingled yarn of Browning’s poetry. The love of God is, for Browning, the very foundation of religion and his belief in the immortality of love is a natural corollary of his belief in the immortality of soul. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, “Browning does not attach much importance to the
part of intellect plays in our religious experience. Intellect must be combined with the greater force of intuition and imagination."

His genius is essentially dramatic; or though he has written in many lyrical forms. The lyric is used to represent a moment in the drama of life or character and though he uses the narrative, his treatment of it is dramatic and not narrative. He does not succeed except perhaps once as a dramatist in the received forms because he is too analytic, too much interested in the mechanism of temperament, character, emotion and changing idea to concentrate sufficiently on their results of their action; but he has an unrivalled force in seizing on a moment of the soul or mind and in following its convolutions as they start into dramatic thought feeling and impulse.

Browning of all these writers has hold of the substance of the work marked out for a poet of the age. And with all these gifts one might have had in him the great interpretative poet, the Shakespeare of his time. Power was there and the hold of his material; what was absent was the essential faculty of artistic form and poetic beauty. According to Sri Aurobindo, "This great creator was no artist; this strength was too robust and direct to give forth sweetness. Much strong forceful work he did of a great
and robust substance won many victories, but the supreme greatness cannot come in poetry without the supreme beauty."42

Arnold is the third considerable Victorian poet cum critic of the epoch and the critical spirit predominates in his poetry. There is a return to the true classic style of poetry in the simplicity and straightforward directness of his diction and turn of thought that brings back to the way of the earlier poets and gives a certain seriousness and power. According to Sri Aurobindo, "He was also able to bring into Victorian poetry the expression of the most characteristic trains of thought expressing the contemporary mind and temperament of its highest and the best. This imparts a note of depth and sincerity to his passion and his pathos, a character of high seriousness to his reflection and meditative thought, a greatness and strength to his moments of him an create an impression of the truest poetry, the most genuine in poetic value, if not in effect, the greatest of this Victorian age."43

The movement away from the Victorian type is recent and contemporary English poetry. It is a period of transition not yet a new age, but the preparation for a new age of humanity. Everywhere there is a seeking after some new thing, a discontent with the moulds, ideas and powers of the past spirit of innovation, a desire to get at deeper powers of language, rhythm and form.
The poets of yesterday and today, Whitman, Carpenter; the Irish poets, and the Indian poet Tagore are the forerunners of the new spirit and way of seeing. This is the age of the intuitive mind breaking into dawn in the poetry of Meredith and Yeats, A.E and Tagore, Whitman and Carpenter.

The most considerable representatives of the new and free form of poetic rhythm are English and American, Carpenter and Whitman. The straining for a new power of rhythm is the first indication of the coming change. Rhythm is the subtle soul of poetry and a change in the spirit of the poetry is to fully discover itself and altogether realize its own characteristic greatness and perfection.

Whitman is a great poet, one of the greatest in the power of his substance, the energy of his vision, the force of his style. He is the spiritual crowned athlete and vital prophet of democracy, liberty and the soul of man and nature and all humanity whose aim is consciently, clearly, professedly to make a great revolution in the whole method poetry with his energy and diction.

He is the most Homeric voice since Homer and has the elemental Homeric power of sufficient straight forward speech. He has the nearness to something elemental which makes everything he says, even the most common and prosaic sound out with a ring of greatness gives a force
even to his barest or heaviest phrases, throws even upon the coarsest, dullest, most physical things something of divinity. According to Sri Aurobindo, "What he has not, is the unfailing poetic beauty and nobility which saves greatness from its defects – supreme gift of Homer and Valmiki – and the self-restraint and obedience to a divine law which makes even the Gods more divine."⁴⁴

Whitman for all his energy loses because of lack of intensity of rhythm which is poetry's primal need, is lowered and diluted and by lowering the two other intensities of thought and soul substance intensity of expression, suffer the poet himself tends to loosen them to the level of his movement. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Whitman will remain great after all the objections that can be made against his method of his use of it, but the question is whether what served his unique personality, can be made a rule for lesser or different spirits and whether the defects which we see but do not and cannot weigh too closely in him, will not be fatal when not saved by his all uplifting largeness."⁴⁵

Carpenter like Whitman with a poetic faculty of a high order is a prophet of democracy and of the self but of a higher more spiritual truth of the self. In both the prophet and the thinker predominates over poet and
artist as they found it impossible to restrain the largeness of their vision and personality in the bonds of metrical poetry.

Carpenter's poetry has a more harmonious, limpid and meditative fullness but the lesser abundance of force and drive makes one feel the limitations of his form. The thought is not only great but poetically great and satisfying, the expression as form of thought is noble and admirable, there is no subtler rhythmic uplift of the poetic enthusiasm which is given to minds of much less power by the inspiring cadence and the ordered measures of the poetic spirit (chandas). He is most widely known through his writings on sociological subjects and through certain frank and illuminating books on human relationship. His Adam's Peak to Elephanta is treasure trove to those who love philosophy of India and would fain see something of her life through sympathetic eyes. Close readers of his personal revelation in Towards Democracy have noticed its points of mental affinity with the BhagavadGitha. According to James Cousins, "His democracy can be no little economic formula, no method of 'one man one vote' or 'pool and divide', for his vision is towards, and that means Infinity: the foot of the imagination is set lightly on the present, but is springing always towards the future."45
Carpenter has a power of substance, thought-vision, image, expression which is very rare in all these respects he would have been recognized as not only equal but superior to many who have enjoyed in their own day the reputation of poets of the first rank. According to Sri Aurobindo, “He is not so recognized is due to the inferior form, a form, legitimate enough for lesser uses, but not easily capable of the greatest poetic effects.”

W.B. Yeats was an ardent Irish nationalist and the choicest poet and the greatest poetical influence of the period. His poetry falls roughly into three broad categories: the romantic, the realistic and the mystical. The poetry of the first period has a dreamy quality which can be labelled in his own phrase, as ‘celtic twilight’. His poetic creed of this period is expressed in his own words: “I believe that all men will more reject the opinion that poetry is criticism of life and be more and more convinced that it is a revelation of hidden life.”

His early love poem, essentially romantic has an Indian background and is entitled Anasuya and Vijaya which has a few mystical touches. The second period is primarily concerned with the bitter reality of the Irish struggle for Independence. It is also described as the period of the
mask. As Yeats himself has said: "I think all happiness in life depends on having the energy to assume the mask of some other self."\(^{48}\)

His final period is the most modern. He is no longer mainly concerned with love, beauty, nature, and the Irish tradition but he has developed a mystic outlook on life. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, "This has been evolved from various philosophical systems, both oriental and occidental."\(^{49}\)

AE was the Pseudonym of Yeats's friend George William Russel who was another major figure of Irish Renaissance. The poetry of AE is still more remarkable. What others suggest or give in more or less luminous glimpses, he casts into concentrated expression from a near spiritual knowledge.

Yeats is a supreme artist in rhythm and his spiritual intonation is the very secret of all his subtlest melodies and harmonies while AE is not a great rhythmist but he is preoccupied with his vision, more of a truth-seer than a truth-hearer of the spirit. According to Sri Aurobindo, "What Yeats expressed, he expressed with great poetical beauty, perfection and power and he has, besides a creative imagination while AE had an unequal profundity of vision and power and range in the spiritual and psychic field."\(^{50}\)
George Meredith is one of the very few great writers who have attained the distinction of obscuring themselves. He was essentially a supreme poet, yet his poetry is bulk and substance, has been held from wide recognition by the brilliant and mass of his contribution to fiction. His poetry belongs to an earlier technique, observes faithfully the metrical law where the metrical sound floats and seems always on the point of drowning in some deep sea of inner intonation. According to Sri Aurobindo, “He has got the intimate revealing image of higher and fuller intuitive word of thought in its more crowded manner of suggestion for an intuitive and vivid spiritual interpretation of nature.”

Meredith with his greater force of thinking gives a clear significance of powerful indication, a seeing identity of the soul of man with the hidden soul in earth – nature. According to Sri Aurobindo, “It is a movement to unite the life of the earth, not lessened, not denied, not cast away, but accepted, with its own hidden spiritual reality.”

The poetry of Whitman and his successors has been that of life, but of life broadened, raised and illumined by a strong intellectual intuition of the self of man and the large soul of humanity. At the subtler elevation of all that has yet been reached stands or rather wings and floats in a high intermediate region the poetry of the Indian Poet, Tagore not in complete
spiritual light, but amid an air shot with its seekings and glimpses, a sight and cadence found in a psycho-spiritual heaven of subtle and delicate soul experience transmuting the earth tones by the touch of its radiance.

The English mind is apt to look on poetry by an Indian as a curiosity, something exotic and to stress the distance at which the English temperament stands from the Indian temperament. But Tagore's *Gitanjali* is most un-English, yet it overcame this obstacle for the poetry of spiritual experience even if it has true poetic value, the difficulty might lie in the remoteness of the subject. According to Srinivas, K. Iyengar, "The *Gitanjali* songs are mainly poems of Bhakti in the great Indian tradition."53

The higher heights of the glimpses of poetry has already begun and found many of its tones in Whitman, Carpenter, AE and Tagore which will grow into a more full and near and intimate poetic knowledge and vision and feeling. A poetry of this kind will be in a supreme way what all art should be a thing of harmony and joy and illumination, a solution and release of the soul from its vital unrest and questioning and struggle, not by any ignoring of the things but by an uplifting into the strength of the self within and the light and air of its greater view where there is found not only the point of escape but the supporting calmness and power of a seated knowledge, mastery and deliverance.
The modernist has perhaps restored to the poet the freedom to think as well as to adopt a certain straight-forwardness and directness of style and his way is a new way of looking at things in poetry. In trying to arrive at something very direct, recording either the thing exactly as it is or some intimate essential truth of the thing without wrapping it up in ideas and sentiments superfluous images and epithets, the modernist tends often to end in mere flat objectivity; emotion seems often to be replaced by an intensified vital-physical sensation of the object.

The most characteristic trend of recent poetry has been an attempt, sometimes lucid, sometimes half understanding or obscure, to break open the doors of the luminous cavern and to get the seeing and phrase which would be that of the intuitive self of intelligence, imagination and sensation and life and feeling. According to Sri Aurobindo, “Much of the present day English poetry drives in the same direction but with less subtlety and more forceful outwardness of sight and tone.”

Western aesthetics has done great things but has neither exhausted its great natural vigour nor fixed itself in any dominant tradition but rather has constantly shown a free spirit of poetical advance. It has an unsurpassed power of imaginative and intuitive language and has shown it to
a very high degree in the intuitive expression of the life soul and to some degree in that of inspired intelligence.

Western aesthetics is powerful but it is imperfect, strong in spirit, but uncertain and tentative in form; it is extraordinarily stimulating, not often quite satisfying. It aims high, but its success is not as great as its effort. It's imaginative force exceeds its thought-power; it has indeed been hardly at all a really great instrument of poetic thought-vision; it has not dealt fruitfully with life. Its history has been more a succession of individual poetic achievements than a constant national tradition; in the mass it has been a series of poetical revolutions without any strong inner continuity. According to Sri Aurobindo, "It has had no great self-recognising idea or view of life expressive of the spiritual attitude of the nation or powerful to determine from an early time its own sufficient artistic forms. But it is precisely the possession of such self-recognising spiritual attitude and the attainment of a satisfying artistic form for it which make the poetry of a nation a power in the world's greatest culture."\(^{55}\)

The modernists have not successfully achieved the possibility of a real advance - an attempt to get away from ornate mental constructions about things to the expressions of the intimate truth of things themselves as directly seen by a deeper sight within us. This aim can be achieved by only
one kind of technique i.e. by overhead poetry. The poet of the intuitive mind is more free to invent his own technique and style, and to give thought to its legitimate place in poetry but without losing that soul excitement or ecstasy which is the heart of the matter. According to Sri Aurobindo, "This poetry will be the voice of eternal things raising to a new significance and to a great satisfied joy in experience the events and emotions and transiences of life. This poetry will speak of new things and of old things in a new way and with a new voice not by any exclusion or diminution of its province, but by a great heightening above, a great intimacy with, a great enlargement and wideness around, a vision of inmost things and therefore a changed vision of the world and life and the untold potentialities of the soul's experience."
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid., P.64.

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4. Ibid., P.69.

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10. Ibid., P. 77.

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16. Ibid., P. 65.


18. Ibid., P. 135.


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24. Ibid., P. 139.


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