Examples of Overhead Poetry

Examples from Various Poets
Evaluations of 1932–1935

Does Wordsworth’s ode on immortality contain any trace, however vague, of the Overmind inspiration?

I don’t remember, but I think not.

And what about the rhythm and substance of solitary thinkings; such as dodge Conception to the very bourne of heaven.

No. The substance may be overmind, but the rhythm is ordinary and the expression intellectual and imaginative.

And of

I come, O Sea,
To measure my enormous self with thee.

No; the poem “To the Sea” was produced by a collaboration of the dynamic poetic intelligence with the higher vital urge.

April 1932

I shall be obliged if you will indicate the origin of the few examples below—only the first of which is from my own work.

Plumbless inaudible waves of shining sleep.

Illumined mind.

The diamond dimness of the domèd air.

Illumined mind.
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Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer.

Intuition.

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

Illumined mind with an intuitive element and strong overmind
touch.

Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigueur!

Illumined mind.

Rapt above earth by power of one fair face.

Difficult to say. More of higher mind perhaps than anything else
— but something of illumination and intuition also.

Measuring vast pain with his immortal mind.

Don't know.

Piercing the limitless unknowable,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace.

Don’t know — the substance is overmental, but for the rest I
cannot judge. 2 March 1934

*  

From what plane do these lines by Vaughan come?

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

I thought they were from the illumined mind.

It is a mixture. Something of the illumined mind, something
of the poetic intelligence diluting it and preventing the full
sovereignty of the higher expression. 17 March 1935

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What about these lines of Vaughan’s — are they from the illumined mind?

1) But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness . . .

2) I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright . . .
This Ring the Bridegroom did for none provide
But for his Bride.

Yes, for the first two. In (1) there is something from the Intuition also and in (2) from the Overmind.

Is this table showing the degrees of style and rhythm of revelation in mystic poetry correct? —

1) solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven
(Higher Mind)\(^1\)

2) I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright.
(Illumined Mind)

3) Your spirit in my spirit, deep in the deep,
Walled by a wizardry of shining sleep
(Intuition)

4) Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.
(Overmind)

Though the expression and the rhythm differ, the substance of 1, 2, 4 is Overmind: what about 3? I suppose the table would be more consistent if the substance came in each case from the Overmind.

\(^1\) combined with Illumined [Sri Aurobindo’s addition]
Overmind is very various in its expression. All forms and rhythms are there in the Overmind.

From what planes are these lines?

Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer . . .
The lonely waters of eternal ease . . .
A hush dew-drenched with immortality . . .
A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown . . .
Eternal truth’s time-measuring sun-blaze . . .

The first two are intuitive. The last is higher mind mixed with illumination. The other two are mixed. 23 March 1935

Examples from Amal Kiran
Evaluations of 1934–1937

Madonna Mia
I echo her life’s rhythm of reverie
By spacious vigil-lonelinesses drawn
From star-birds winging through the vacancy
Of night’s incomprehensible spirit-dawn.

My whole heart fills but with the glowing gloom
Where God-love blossoms her ethereal grace:
The sole truth my lips bear is the perfume
From the ecstatic flower of her face.

Will you please tell me its effect as a whole and, if possible, where the inspiration comes from?

It is good. I could not very definitely say from where the inspiration comes. It seems to come from the Illumination through the higher Mind — but there is an intuitive touch here and there, even some indirect touch of “mental overmind”\(^2\) vision hanging

\(^2\) There are two ranges of overmind which might be called “mental” and “gnostic” overmind respectively — the latter in direct touch with supermind, the former more like a widened and massive intuition.
May I ask whether, when you speak of inspiration, you mean
the substance only or the rhythm as well? I had the impression
that lines 2 and 3 of the first stanza had some mantric quality,
but I felt it would be too presumptuous to ask you about it
before you had indicated their source.

Yes, that was what I meant by the touch of the overmind.

Is it only lines 2 and 3 that have a touch of the Overmind, or
line 4 also?

Line 4 also though 2 and 3 have most of it.

Have you felt that touch anywhere else in my poetry? And is
this rhythm in any way similar to that of Wordsworth’s

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone?

No — it is quite a different rhythm — a rhythm of flight through
sky-space not of ploughing lonely seas.

Of course by “similarity” I mean the source of inspiration
being more or less the same.

There may have been other lines, but I do not remember any.

What I should have said is: “Does that line of Wordsworth’s
have those special qualities which mark out the substance,
language and rhythm of a line from the mental Overmind —
the same qualities which are to be found in the three lines of
my poem, which you consider to have an Overmind touch?”
I am no competent judge, but I think that it contains all those
qualities in a more intense and undiluted form: is that true?
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Probably you are right.

Of my three lines, only

From star-birds winging through the vacancy
seems to be somewhere near it in pure inspiration from the mental Overmind.

I am not sure about the pure inspiration — I said a touch from the mental overmind. But perhaps I am overcautious in these matters.

To help me distinguish the planes of inspiration, would you just indicate where the following lines from various poems of mine have their sources?

What visionary urge
Has stolen from horizons watched alone
Into thy being with ethereal guile?

[Second line] Intuitive with overmind touch.
[Third line] Imaginative poetic intelligence.

A huge sky-passion sprouting from the earth
In branchèd vastnesses of leafy rapture.

Ditto with something of the higher Mind.

The mute unshadowed spaces of her mind.

Intuitive with overmind touch.

A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown.

Intuitive.

Irradiant wing-waft through eternal space,
Pride of lone rapture and invincible sun-gaze.

Higher Mind with mental overmind touch.

Born nomad of the infinite heart!
Time-tamer! star-struck debauchee of light!
Warrior who hurls his spirit like a dart
   Across the terrible night
   Of death to conquer immortality!

Illumined Mind with mental overmind touch.

   . . . And to the earth-self suddenly
   Came through remote entrancèd marvelling
   Of adoration ever-widening
   A spacious sense of immortality.

Mixture of higher and illumined mind — in the last line the mental overmind touch.

   Here life's lost heart of splendour beats immense.

Illumined mind with mental overmind touch.

   The haunting rapture of the vast dream-wind
   That blows, star-fragrant, from eternity.

Ditto.

   An ocean-hearted ecstasy am I
   Where time flows inward to eternal shores.

Intuitive, illumined, overmind touch all mixed together.

I have analysed but very imperfectly — because these influences are so mixed together that the descriptions are not exhaustive.

   Also remember that I speak of a touch, of the mental overmind touch and that when there is the touch it is not always complete — it may be more apparent from something either in the language or substance or rhythm than in all three together.

   Even so perhaps some of my descriptions are overhasty and denote the impression of the moment. Also the poetical value of the poetry exists independent of its source.  13 February 1934

It was extremely kind of you to analyse, as you did, a few weeks back, the influences of different planes in my poetry. I seem to have some feeling now for the qualities in them.
I should like to know whether you intend any distinction when you speak of “Overmind touch” and “mental Overmind touch.”

Yes — the overmind proper has some gnostic light in it which is absent in the mental overmind. 2 March 1934

a

Overself

All things are lost in Him, all things are found:
He rules an infinite hush that hears each sound.

But fragmentary quivers blossom there
To voice on mingling voice of shadowless air,

Bodies of fire and ecstasies of line
Where passion’s mortal music grows divine —

For in that vasty region glimmers through
Each form one single trance of breakless blue!

Well, the first and third couplets are quite admirable. The rest not quite as inevitable as it should be though lines 4 and 8 could be so if coupled with perfect lines that made them also perfect. Your emendations do not mend matters; the first [“rules” changed to “makes”] only spoils the second line of the couplet without bringing the first up to level. . . . “Vasty region” does not appeal to me — it sounds pseudo-Miltonic and ineffective.

P.S. Higher mind throughout, illumined. 10 October 1936

a

I understand your objection to “vasty region” . . . though I don’t know if Milton ever used “vasty”. It is a Shakespearean word, a famous instance being in that line about calling “spir- its from the vasty deep”. . . .

I am describing, of course, the Overmind, but does the fact that the poem is only from the Higher Mind, however illumined, come in the way?

I know very well the Shakespearean line and I don’t think Milton
uses “vasty”; but I did not at all mean that the choice of the word “vasty” was Miltonic. I meant that the phrase here gave a pseudo-Miltonic effect and so do “lofty region” and “myriad region” [proposed by the poet as emendations]; in some other context they might give some other impression, but that is the effect here. . . .

I don’t think the lines express distinctively the Overmind — they would apply equally to any plane where the unity of the Self governed the diversity of its creation, — so the illumined Higher Mind is quite appropriate for the purpose.

P.S. By pseudo-Miltonic I mean a certain kind of traditional poetic eloquence which finds its roots in Milton but even when well done lacks in originality and can easily be vapid and sonantly hollow. In the last line there is inspiration but it has to be brought out by this preceding line; that must be inspired also. An expression like “lofty region”, “vasty region”, “myriad region” even expresses nothing but a bare intellectual fact with no more vision in it than would convey mere wideness without any significance in it.

13 October 1936

[after revision of line 7 to “For in that spacious revel glimmers through”]

There is nothing to be altered in what I said about the poem. It is a fine poem — in the first and third couplets exceedingly fine, perfect poetic expressions of what they want to say, — the other couplets are less inevitable, although the second lines in both are admirable. Line 2, lines 5, 6 are among the best you have written; they have a certain revelatory power.

17 October 1936

Consummation

Immortal overhead the gold expanse —
An ultimate crown of inexhaustible joy!
But a king-power must grip all passion numb
And with gigantic loneliness draw down
This large gold throbbing on its silver hush.
For only an ice-pure peak of trance can bear
The benediction of that aureole.

I would suggest “a gigantic loneliness”. “With” makes the line rather weak; the loneliness must be brought out in its full effect and “with” subordinates it and prevents it from standing out.

There is something wrong in the fifth line. Perhaps it is the excess of sibilants — not that one cannot have a sibilant line, but the sounds must be otherwise dispersed. Besides your style of consonant and vowel harmonisation is of the liquid kind and here such combinations as “its silver hush” are best avoided. How would “the large gold throbbing in a silver hush” do?

The second line is strong and dignified, but it impresses me as too mental and Miltonic. Milton has very usually (in *Paradise Lost*) some of the largeness and rhythm of the higher mind, but his substance except at certain heights is mental, mentally grand and noble. The interference of this mental Miltonic is one of the great stumbling-blocks when one tries to write from “above”.

17 November 1936

*[after revision]*

It is very fine now — it is the higher mind vision and movement throughout, except that in the fifth line a flash of illumination comes through. Intense light-play and colour in this kind of utterance is usually the illumined mind’s contribution.

18 November 1936

*Mere of Dream*

The Unknown above is a mute vacancy —
But in the mere of dream wide wings are spread,
An ageless bird poising a rumour of gold
Upon prophetic waters hung asleep.
A ring of hills around a silver hush,
The far mind haloed with mysterious dawn
Treasures in the deep eye of thought-suspense
An eagle-destiny beaconing through all time.

You say this poem is “not as a whole quite as absolute as
some that went before.” . . . I am glad you have mentioned
that the highest flight is not present here on the whole, for
I am thereby stung to make an intenser effort. I should like,
however, to have a formulation from you of the ideal you
would like me to follow.

What you are writing now is “overhead” poetry — I mean po-
etry inspired from those planes; before you used to write poems
very often from the intuitive mind — these had a beauty and
perfection of their own. What I mean by absoluteness here is a
full intensely inevitable expression of what comes down from
above. These lines are original, convincing, have vision, they
are not to be rejected, but they are not the highest flight except
in single lines. Such variations are to be expected and will be
more prominent if you were writing longer poems, for then to
keep always or even usually to that highest level would be an
extraordinary feat — no poet has managed as yet to write always
at his highest flight and here in that kind of poetry it would be
still more difficult. The important point is not to fall below a
certain level.

12 May 1937

* * *

A Poet’s Stammer

My dream is spoken
As if by sound
Were tremulously broken
Some oath profound.

A timeless hush
Draws ever back
The winging music-rush
Upon thought’s track.
Though syllables sweep
Like golden birds,
Far loneliness of sleep
Dwindle my words.

Beyond life’s clamour,
A mystery mars
Speech-light to a myriad stammer
Of flickering stars.

It is a very true and beautiful poem — the subject of the outward stammer seems to be only a starting point or excuse for expressing an inner phenomenon of inspiration. Throughout the inspiration of the poem is intuitive.

You have said before I used to write poems very often from the intuitive mind, but the term you have employed connotes for us the plane between the Illumined Mind and the Overmind. But that would be an overhead source of inspiration. Do you mean the intuitivised poetic intelligence? If so, what is its character as compared to the mystic or inner mind?

The intuitive mind, strictly speaking, stretches from the Intuition proper down to the intuitivised inner mind — it is therefore at once an overhead power and a mental intelligence power. All depends on the amount, intensity, quality of the intuition and how far it is mixed with mind or pure. The inner mind is not necessarily intuitive, though it can easily become so. The mystic mind is mind turned towards the occult and spiritual, but the inner mind can act without direct reference to the occult and spiritual, it can act in the same field and in the same material as the ordinary mind, only with a larger and deeper power, range and light and in greater unison with the Universal Mind; it can open also more easily to what is within and what is above. Intuitive intelligence, mystic mind, inner mind intelligence are all part of the inner mind operations. In today’s poem, for instance, it is certainly the inner mind that has transformed the idea of stammering into a symbol of inner phenomena and into that operation a certain strain of mystic mind enters, but what is
prominent is the intuitive inspiration throughout. It starts with the intuitive poetic intelligence in the first stanza, gets touched by the overhead intuition in the second, gets full of it in the third and again rises rapidly to that in the two last lines of the fourth stanza. This is what I call poetry of the intuitive Mind.

13 May 1937

**Bengali Overhead Poetry**

We are sorry to hear that you can’t decide about Bengali overhead poetry. I consider it a defect, Sir, in your poetic supra-mental make-up, which you should try to mend or remove!

Why a defect? In any case all qualities have their defects, which are also a quality. For the rest, by your logic, I ought to be able to pronounce on the merits of Czechoslovakian or Arabic poetry. To pronounce whether a rhythm is O.P. or not, one must have an infallible ear for overtones and undertones of the sound music of the language — that expertness I have not got with regard to Bengali.

23 September 1938

**Overhead Poetry: Re-evaluations of 1946**

It is a bit of a surprise to me that Virgil’s

\[\text{sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt}\]

is now considered by you “an almost direct descent from the overmind consciousness” [see page 33]. I was under the impression that, like that other line of his —

\[\text{O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem}\]

it was a perfect mixture of the Higher Mind with the Psychic; and the impression was based on something you had yourself written to me in the past [see page 295]. Similarly I remember you definitely declaring Wordsworth’s

\[\text{The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep}\]

to be lacking precisely in the Overmind note and having only the note of Intuition in an intense form [see pages 25–26].
Examples of Overhead Poetry

What you write now means a big change of opinion in both the instances — but how and why the change?

Yes, certainly, my ideas and reactions to some of the lines and passages about which you had asked me long ago, have developed and changed and could not but change. For at that time I was new to the overhead regions or at least to the highest of them — for the higher thought and the illumination were already old friends — and could not be sure or complete in my perception of many things concerning them. I hesitated therefore to assign anything like overmind touch or inspiration to passages in English or other poetry and did not presume to claim any of my own writing as belonging to this order. Besides, the intellect took still too large a part in my reactions to poetry; for instance, I judged Virgil’s line too much from what seemed to be its surface intellectual import and too little from its deeper meaning and vision and its reverberations of the Overhead. So also with Wordsworth’s line about the “fields of sleep”: I have since then moved in those fields of sleep and felt the breath which is carried from them by the winds that came to the poet, so I can better appreciate the depth of vision in Wordsworth’s line. I could also see more clearly the impact of the Overhead on the work of poets who wrote usually from a mental, a psychic, an emotional or other vital inspiration, even when it gave only a tinge.

The context of Virgil’s line has nothing to do with and cannot detract from its greatness and its overhead character. If we limit its meaning so as to unify it with what goes before, if we want Virgil to say in it only, “Oh yes, even in Carthage, so distant a place, these foreigners too can sympathise and weep over what has happened in Troy and get touched by human misfortune,” then the line will lose all its value and we would only have to admire the strong turn and recherché suggestiveness of its expression. Virgil certainly did not mean it like that; he starts indeed by stressing the generality of the fame of Troy and the interest in her misfortune but then he passes from the particularity of this idea and suddenly rises from it to a feeling of the universality of mortal sorrow and suffering and of the chord
of human sympathy and participation which responds to it from all who share that mortality. He rises indeed much higher than that and goes much deeper: he has felt a brooding cosmic sense of these things, gone into the depth of the soul which answers to them and drawn from it the inspired and inevitable language and rhythm which came down to it from above to give to this pathetic perception an immortal body. Lines like these seldom depend upon their contexts, they rise from it as if a single Himalayan peak from a range of low hills or even from a flat plain. They have to be looked at by themselves, valued for their own sake, felt in their own independent greatness. Shakespeare’s lines upon sleep depend not at all upon the context which is indeed almost irrelevant, for he branches off into a violent and resonant description of a storm at sea which has its poetic quality, but that quality has something comparatively quite inferior, so that these few lines stand quite apart in their unsurpassable magic and beauty. What has happened is that the sudden wings of a supreme inspiration from above have swooped down upon him and abruptly lifted him for a moment to highest heights, then as abruptly dropped him and left him to his own normal resources. One can see him in the lines that follow straining these resources to try and get something equal to the greatness of this flight but failing except perhaps partly for one line only. Or take those two lines in _Hamlet_. They arise out of a rapid series of violent melodramatic events but they have a quite different ring from all that surrounds them, however powerful that may be. They come from another plane, shine with another light: the close of the sentence — “to tell my story” — which connects it with the thread of the drama, slips down in a quick incline to a lower inspiration. It is not a dramatic interest we feel when we read these lines; their appeal does not arise from the story but would be the same anywhere and in any context. We have passed from

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3 _Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast_  
_Seam the ship-boy’s eyes, and rock his brains_  
_In cradle of the rude imperious surge._

4 _Absent thee from felicity awhile,_  
_And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain._
the particular to the universal, to a voice from the cosmic self, to a poignant reaction of the soul of man and not of Hamlet alone to the pain and sorrow of this world and its longing for some unknown felicity beyond. Virgil’s

O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem. . . .
. . . forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit

is only incidentally connected with the storm and wreck of the ships of Aeneas; its appeal is separate and universal and for all time; it is again the human soul that is speaking moved by a greater and deeper inspiration of cosmic feeling with the thought only as a mould into which the feeling is poured and the thinking mind only as a passive instrument. This applies to many or most of the distinctly overhead lines we meet or at least to those which may be called overhead transmissions. Even the lines that are perfect and absolute, though not from the Overhead, tend to stand out if not away from their surroundings. Long passages of high inspiration there are or short poems in which the wing-beats of some surpassing Power and Beauty gleam out amidst fлокings of an equal or almost equal radiance of light. But still the absolutely absolute is rare; it is not often that the highest peaks crowd together.

As to the translations of Virgil’s great line I may observe that the English translation you quote repeats the “here too” of the previous line and so rivets his high close to its context, thus emphasising unduly the idea of a local interest and maiming the universality. Virgil has put in no such close riveting, he keeps a bare connection from which he immediately slips away; his single incomparable line rises sheer and abrupt into the heights both in its thought and in its form out of the sustained Virgilian elegance of what precedes it. The psychological movement by which this happens is not at all mysterious; he speaks first of the local and particular, then in the penultimate line passes to the general—“here too as wherever there are human beings are

5 Here, too, virtue has its due rewards; here, too, there are tears for misfortune and mortal sorrows touch the heart. —H. R. Fairclough
rewards for excellence”, and then passes to the universal, to the reaction of all humanity, to all that is human and mortal in a world of suffering. In your prose translation also there are superfluities which limit and lower the significance. Virgil does not say “tears for earthly things”, “earthly” is your addition; he says nothing about “mortal fortune” which makes the whole thing quite narrow. His single word rerum and his single word mortalia admit in them all the sorrow and suffering of the world and all the affliction and misery that beset mortal creatures in this transient and unhappy world, anityam asukham lokam imam. The superfluous words bring in a particularising intellectual insistence which impoverishes a great thought and a great utterance. Your first hexametric version is rather poor; the second is much better and the first half is very fine; the second half is good but it is not an absolute hit. I would like to alter it to Haunted by tears is the world and our hearts by the touch of things mortal.

But this version has a density of colour which is absent from the bare economy and direct force Virgil manages to combine with his subtle and unusual turn of phrase. As for my own translation — “the touch of tears in mortal things” — it is intended not as an accurate and scholastic prose rendering but as a poetic equivalent. I take it from a passage in Savitri where the mother of Savitri is lamenting her child’s fate and contrasting the unmoved and unfeeling calm of the gods with human suffering and sympathy. I quote from memory, We sorrow for a greatness that has passed And feel the touch of tears in mortal things. Even a stranger’s anguish rends my heart, And this, O Narad, is my well-loved child.

6 Here too there is reward for honour, there are tears for earthly things and mortal fortunes touch the heart.
7 Tears are in all things and touched is our heart by the fate of the mortals.
8 Haunted by tears is the world; on our heart is the touch of things mortal.
In Virgil’s line the two halves are not really two separate ideas and statements; they are one idea with two symmetrical limbs; the meaning and force of *mortalia tangunt* derives wholly from the *lacrimae rerum* and this, I think, ought to be brought out if we are to have an adequate poetic rendering. The three capital words, *lacrimae, mortalia, tangunt*, carry in them in an intimate connection the whole burden of the inner sense; the touch which falls upon the mind from mortal things is the touch of tears *lacrimae rerum*. I consider therefore that the touch of tears is there quite directly enough, spiritually, if not syntactically, and that my translation is perfectly justifiable.

As to the doubt you have expressed, I think there is some confusion still about the use of the word “great” as distinct from the beautiful. In poetry greatness must, no doubt, be beautiful in the wider and deeper sense of beauty to be poetry, but the beautiful is not always great. First, let me deal with the examples you give, which do not seem to me to be always of an equal quality. For instance, the lines you quote from Squire\(^9\) do not strike me as deserving supreme praise. There is one line “on rocks forlorn and frore” which is of a very high beauty, but the rest is lofty and eloquent poetry and suggestive of something deep but not more than that; above all, there is a general lack of the rhythm that goes home to the soul and keeps sounding there except indeed in that one line and without such a rhythm there cannot be the absolute perfection; a certain kind of perfection there may be with a lesser rhythmic appeal but I do not find it here, the pitch of sound is only that of what may be described as the highly moved intellect. In the lines from Dryden\(^10\) the second has

\(^9\) And that aged Brahmapostra  
Who beyond the white Himalayas  
Passes many a lamasery  
On rocks forlorn and frore,  
A block of gaunt grey stone walls  
With rows of little barred windows,  
Where shrunken monks in yellow silk  
Are hidden for evermore. . . . — J. C. Squire

\(^10\) In liquid burnings or on dry to dwell  
Is all the sad variety of bell. — Dryden
indeed the true note but the first is only clever and forcible with
that apposite, striking and energetic cleverness which abounds
in the chief poets of that period and imposes their poetry on
the thinking mind but usually fails to reach deeper. Of course,
there can be a divine or at least a deified cleverness, but that is
when the intellect after finding something brilliant transmits it to
some higher power for uplifting and transfiguration. It is because
that is not always done by Pope and Dryden that I once agreed
with Arnold in regarding their work as a sort of half poetry;
but since then my view and feeling have become more catholic
and I would no longer apply that phrase,—Dryden especially
has lines and passages which rise to a very high poetic peak,—
but still there is something in this limitation, this predominance
of the ingenious intellect which makes us understand Arnold’s
striction. The second quotation from Tennyson\textsuperscript{11} is eloquent
and powerful, but absolute perfection seems to me an excessive
praise for these lines,—at least I meant much more by it than
anything we find here. There is absolute perfection of a kind, of
sound and language at least, and a supreme technical excellence
in his moan of doves and murmur of bees.\textsuperscript{12} As to your next
comparison, you must not expect me to enter into a comparative
valuation of my own poetry\textsuperscript{13} with that of Keats;\textsuperscript{14} I will only
say that the “substance” of these lines of Keats is of the highest
kind and the expression is not easily surpassable, and even as
regards the plane of their origin it is above and not below the
boundary of the overhead line. The other lines you quote have
their own perfection; some have the touch from above while

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,  
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws. — Tennyson  
\textsuperscript{12} The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
And murmuring of innumerable bees. — Tennyson  
\textsuperscript{13} Above the reason’s brilliant slender curve,  
Released like radiant air dimming a moon,  
White spaces of a vision without line  
Or limit . . . —Sri Aurobindo  
\textsuperscript{14} . . . solitary thinkings; such as dodge  
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,  
Then leave the naked brain. — Keats
\end{flushright}
But what is the point? I do not think I have ever said that all overhead poetry is superior to all that comes from other sources. I am speaking of greatness and said that greatness of substance does count and gives a general superiority; I was referring to work in the mass and not to separate lines and passages. I said, practically, that art in the sense of perfect mastery of technique, perfect expression in word and sound was not everything and greatness and beauty of the substance of the poetry entered into the reckoning. It might be said of Shakespeare that he was not predominantly an artist but rather a great creator, even though he has an art of his own, especially an art of dramatic architecture and copious ornament; but his work is far from being always perfect. In Racine, on the other hand, there is an unfailing perfection; Racine is the complete poetic artist. But if comparisons are to be made, Shakespeare's must surely be pronounced to be the greater poetry, greater in the vastness of its range, in its abundant creativeness, in its dramatic height and power, in the richness of his inspiration, in his world-view, in the peaks to which he rises and the depths which he plumbs — even though he sinks to flatnesses which Racine would have abhorred — and generally a glory of God's making which is marvellous and unique. Racine has his heights and depths and widenesses, but nothing like this; he has not in him the poetic superman, he does not touch the superhuman level of creation. But all this is mainly a matter of substance and also of height and greatness in language, not of impeccable beauty and perfection of diction and rhythm which ought to rank higher on the principle of art for art's sake.

That is one thing and for the sake of clarity it must be seen by itself in separation from the other points I put forward. The comparison of passages each perfectly beautiful in itself but different in their kind and source of inspiration is a different matter. Here it is a question of the perfection of the poetry, not of its greatness. In the valuation of whole poems Shelley's Skylark may be described as a greater poem than his brief and exquisite lyric — “I can give not what men call love” — because of its
greater range and power and constant flow of unsurpassable music, but it is not more perfect; if we take separate lines and passages, the stanza “We look before and after” is not superior in perfection or absoluteness to that in the other poem “The desire of the moth for the star”, even though it strikes a deeper note and may be said to have a richer substance. The absolute is the absolute and the perfect perfect, whatever difference there may be in the origin of the inspiration; but from the point of view of greatness one perfection may be said to be greater, though not more perfect than another. I would myself say that Wordsworth’s line about Newton is greater, though not more perfect than many of those which you have put side by side with it. And this I say on the same principle as the comparison between Shakespeare and Racine: according to the principle of art for art’s sake Racine ought to be pronounced a poet superior to Shakespeare because of his consistent and impeccable flawlessness of word and rhythm, but on the contrary Shakespeare is universally considered greater, standing among the few who are supreme. Theocritus is always perfect in what he writes, but he cannot be ranked with Aeschylus and Sophocles. Why not, if art is the only thing? Obviously, because what the others write has an ampler range, a much more considerable height, breadth, depth, largeness. There are some who say that great and long poems have no true value and are mainly composed of padding and baggage and all that matters are the few perfect lines and passages which shine like jewels among a mass of inferior half-worked ore. In that case, the “great” poets ought to be debunked and the world’s poetic production valued only for a few lyrics, rare superb passages and scattered lines that we can rescue from the laborious mass production of the artificers of word, sound and language.

I come now to the question of the Overmind and whether there is anything in it superior or more perfectly perfect, more absolutely absolute than in the lower planes. If it is true that one can get the same absolute fully on any plane and from any kind of inspiration, whether in poetry or other expressions of the One, then it would seem to be quite useless and superfluous
for any human being to labour to rise above mind to Overmind or Supermind and try to bring them down upon earth; the idea of transformation would become absurd since it would be possible to have the “form” perfect and absolute anywhere and by a purely earthly means, a purely earthly force. I am reminded of Ramana Maharshi’s logical objection to my idea of the descent of the Divine into us or into the world on the ground, as he put it, that “the Divine is here, from where is He to descend?” My answer is that obviously the Divine is here, although very much concealed; but He is here in essence and He has not chosen to manifest all His powers or His full power in Matter, in Life, in Mind; He has not even made them fit by themselves for some future manifestation of all that, whereas on higher planes there is already that manifestation and by a descent from them the full manifestation can be brought here. All the planes have their own power, beauty, some kind of perfection realised even among their imperfections; God is everywhere in some power of Himself though not everywhere in His full power, and if His face does not appear, the rays and glories from it do fall upon things and beings through the veil and bring something of what we call perfect and absolute. And yet perhaps there may be a more perfect perfection, not in the same kind but in a greater kind, a more utter revelation of the absolute. Ancient thought speaks of something that is highest beyond the highest, parātparam; there is a supreme beyond what is for us or seems to us supreme. As Life brings in something that is greater than Matter, as Mind brings in something that is greater than Life, so Overmind brings in something that is greater than Mind, and Supermind something that is greater than Overmind, — greater, superior not only in the essential character of the planes, but in all respects, in all parts and details, and consequently in all its creation.

But you may say each plane and its creations are beautiful in themselves and have their own perfection and there is no superiority of one to the other. What can be more perfect, greater or more beautiful than the glories and beauties of Matter, the golden splendours of the sun, the perpetual charm of the moon,
the beauty and fragrance of the rose or the beauty of the lotus, the yellow mane of the Ganges or the blue waters of the Jamuna, forests and mountains, and the leap of the waterfall, the shimmering silence of the lake, the sapphire hue and mighty roll of the ocean and all the wonder and marvel that there is on the earth and in the vastness of the material universe? These things are perfect and absolute and there can be nothing more perfect or more greatly absolute. Life and mind cannot surpass them; they are enough in themselves and to themselves: Brindavan would have been perfect even if Krishna had never trod there. It is the same with Life: the lion in its majesty and strength, the tiger in its splendid and formidable energy, the antelope in its grace and swiftness, the bird of paradise, the peacock with its plumes, the birds with their calls and their voices of song, have all the perfection that Life can create and thinking man cannot better that; he is inferior to the animals in their own qualities, superior only in his mind, his thought, his power of reflection and creation: but his thought does not make him stronger than the lion and the tiger or swifter than the antelope, more splendid to the sight than the bird of paradise or the human beauty of the most beautiful man and woman superior to the beauty of the animal in its own kind and perfect form. Here too there is a perfection and absoluteness which cannot be surpassed by any superior greatness of nature. Mind also has its own types of perfection and its own absolutes. What intrusion of Overmind or Supermind could produce philosophies more perfect in themselves than the systems of Shankara or Plato or Plotinus or Spinoza or Hegel, poetry superior to Homer’s, Shakespeare’s, Dante’s or Valmiki’s, music more superb than the music of Beethoven or Bach, sculpture greater than the statues of Phidias and Michael Angelo, architecture more utterly beautiful than the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon or Borobudur or St. Peter’s or of the great Gothic cathedrals? The same may be said of the crafts of ancient Greece and Japan in the Middle Ages or structural feats like the Pyramids or engineering feats like the Dnieper Dam or inventions and manufactures like the great modern steamships and the motor car. The mind of man may not
be equally satisfied with life in general or with its own dealings with life, it may find all that very imperfect, and here perhaps it may be conceded that the intrusion of a higher principle from above might have a chance of doing something better: but here too there are sectional perfections, each complete and sufficient for its purpose, each perfectly and absolutely organised in its own type, the termite society for instance, the satisfying structure of ant societies or the organised life of the beehive. The higher animals have been less remarkably successful than these insects, though perhaps a crows’ parliament might pass a resolution that the life of the rookery was one of the most admirable things in the universe. Greek societies like the Spartan evidently considered themselves perfect and absolute in their own type and the Japanese structure of society and the rounding off of its culture and institutions were remarkable in their pattern of perfect organisation. There can be always variations in kind, new types, a progress in variation, but progress in itself towards a greater perfection or towards some absolute is an idea which has been long indulged in but has recently been strongly denied and at least beyond a certain point seems to have been denied by fact and event. Evolution there may be, but it only creates new forms, brings in new principles of consciousness, new ingenuities of creation but not a more perfect perfection. In the old Hebrew scriptures it is declared that God created everything from the first, each thing in its own type, and looked on his own creation and saw that it was good. If we conclude that Overmind or Supermind do not exist or, existing, cannot descend into mind, life and body or act upon them or, descending and acting, cannot bring in a greater or more absolute perfection into anything man has done, we should, with the modification that God has taken many ages and not six days to do his work, be reduced to something like this notion, at any rate in principle.

It is evident that there is something wrong and unsatisfying in such a conclusion. Evolution has not been merely something material, only a creation of new forms of Matter, new species of inanimate objects or animate creatures as physical science has at first seen it: it has been an evolution of consciousness,
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a manifestation of it out of its involution and in that a constant progress towards something greater, higher, fuller, more complete, ever increasing in its range and capacity, therefore to a greater and greater perfection and perhaps finally to an absolute of consciousness which has yet to come, an absolute of its truth, an absolute of its dynamic power. The mental consciousness of man is greater in its perfection, more progressive towards the absolute than the consciousness of the animal, and the consciousness of the overman, if I may so call him, must very evidently be still more perfect, while the consciousness of the superman may be absolute. No doubt, the instinct of the animal is superior to that of man and we may say that it is perfect and absolute within its limited range and in its own type. Man’s consciousness has an infinitely greater range and is more capable in the large, though less automatically perfect in the details of its work, more laborious in its creation of perfection: the Overmind when it comes will decrease whatever deficiencies there are in human intelligence and the Supermind will remove them altogether; they will replace the perfection of instinct by the more perfect perfection of intuition and what is higher than intuition and thus replace the automatism of the animal by the conscious and self-possessed automatic action of a more luminous gnosis and finally, of an integral truth-consciousness. It is after all the greater consciousness that comes in with mind that enables us to develop the idea of values and this idea of the quality of certain values which seem to us perfect and absolute is a viewpoint which has its validity but must be completed by others if our perception of things is to be entire. No single and separate idea of the mind can be entirely true by itself, it has to complete itself by others which seem to differ from it, even others which seem logically to contradict it, but in reality only enlarge its viewpoints and put its idea in its proper place. It is quite true that the beauty of material things is perfect in itself and you may say that the descent of Overmind cannot add to the glory of the sun or the beauty of the rose. But in the first place I must point out that the rose as it is is something evolved from the dog-rose or the wild rose and is largely a creation of man
whose mind is still creating further developments of this type of beauty. Moreover, it is to the mind of man that these things are beautiful, to his consciousness as evolution has developed it, in the values that mind has given to them, to his perceptive and sometimes his creative aesthesis: Overmind, I have pointed out, has a greater aesthesis and, when it sees objects, sees in them what the mind cannot see, so that the value it gives to them can be greater than any value that the mind can give. That is true of its perception, it may be true also of its creation, its creation of beauty, its creation of perfection, its expression of the power of the absolute.

This is in principle the answer to the objection you made, but pragmatically the objection may still be valid; for what has been done by any overhead intervention may not amount for the present to anything more than the occasional irruption of a line or a passage or at most of a new still imperfectly developed kind or manner of poetry which may have larger contents and a higher or richer suggestion but is not intrinsically superior in the essential elements of poetry, word and rhythm and cannot be confidently said to bring in a more perfect perfection or a more utter absolute. Perhaps it does sometimes, but not so amply or with such a complete and forcible power as to make it recognisable by all. But that may be because it is only an intervention in mind that it has made, a touch, a partial influence, at most a slight infiltration: there has been no general or massive descent or, if there has been any such descent in one or two minds, it has been general and not yet completely organised or applied in every direction; there has been no absolute transformation of the whole being, whole consciousness and whole nature. You say that if the Overmind has a superior consciousness and a greater aesthesis it must also bring in a greater form. That would be true on the overmind level itself; if there were an overmind language created by the Overmind itself and used by overmind beings not subject to the limitations of the mental principle or the turbidities of the life principle or the opposition of the inertia of Matter, the half light of ignorance and the dark environing wall of the Inconscient, then indeed all things might be transmuted.
and among the rest there might be a more perfect and absolute poetry, perfect and absolute not only in snatches and within boundaries but always and in numberless kinds and in the whole: for that is the nature of Overmind, it is a cosmic consciousness with a global perception and action tending to carry everything to its extreme possibility; the only thing lacking in its creation might be a complete harmonisation of all possibles, for which the intervention of the highest Truth-Consciousness, the Supermind, would be indispensable. But at present the intervention of Overmind has to take mind, life and matter as its medium and field, work under their dominant conditions, accept their fundamental law and method; its own can enter in only initially or partially and under the obstacle of a prevailing mental and vital mixture. Intuition entering into the human mind undergoes a change; it becomes what we may call the mental intuition or the vital intuition or the intuition working inconsciently in physical things: sometimes it may work with a certain perfection and absoluteness, but ordinarily it is at once coated in mind or life with the mental or vital substance into which it is received and gets limited, deflected or misinterpreted by the mind or the life; it becomes a half intuition or a false intuition and its light and power gives indeed a greater force to human knowledge and will but also to human error. Life and mind intervening in Matter have been able only to vitalise or mentalise small sections of it, to produce and develop living bodies or thinking lives and bodies but they have not been able to make a complete or general transformation of the ignorance of life, of the inertia and inconscience of Matter and large parts of the minds, lives and forms they occupy remain subconscious or inconscient or are still ignorant, like the human mind itself or driven by subconscious forces. Overmind will certainly, if it descends, go further in that direction, effect a greater transformation of life and bodily function as well as mind but the integral transformation is not likely to be in its power; for it is not in itself the supreme consciousness and does not carry in it the supreme force: although different from mind in the principle and methods of its action, it is only a highest kind of mind with the pure intuition, illumination
and higher thought as its subordinates and intermediaries; it is an instrument of cosmic possibilities and not the master. It is not the supreme Truth-Consciousness; it is only an intermediary light and power.

As regards poetry, the Overmind has to use a language which has been made by mind, not by itself, and therefore fully capable of receiving and expressing its greater light and greater truth, its extraordinary powers, its forms of greatness, perfection and beauty. It can only strain and intensify this medium as much as possible for its own uses, but not change its fundamental or characteristically mental law and method; it has to observe them and do what it can to heighten, deepen and enlarge. Perhaps what Mallarmé and other poets were or are trying to do was some fundamental transformation of that kind, but that incurs the danger of being profoundly and even unfathomably obscure or beautifully and splendidly unintelligible. There is here another point of view which it may be useful to elaborate. Poets are men of genius whose consciousness has in some way or another attained to a higher dynamis of conception and expression than ordinary men can hope to have,—though ordinary men often have a good try for it, with the result that they sometimes show a talent for verse and an effective language which imposes itself for a time but is not durable. I have said that genius is the result of an intervention or influence from a higher consciousness than the ordinary human mental, a greater light, a greater force; even an ordinary man can have strokes of genius resulting from such an intervention but it is only in a few that the rare phenomenon occurs of a part of the consciousness being moulded into a habitual medium of expression of its greater light and force. But the intervention of this higher consciousness may take different forms. It may bring in, not the higher consciousness itself but a substitute for it, an uplifted movement of mind which gives a reflection of the character and qualities of the overhead movement. There is a substitute for the expression of the Higher Thought, the Illumination, the pure Intuition giving great or brilliant results, but these cannot be classed as the very body of the higher consciousness. So also there can be a mixed move-
ment, a movement of mind in its full force with flashes from the overhead or even a light sustained for some time. Finally, there can be the thing itself in rare descents, but usually these are not sustained for a long time though they may influence all around and produce long stretches of a high utterance. All this we can see in poetry but it is not easy for the ordinary mind to make these distinctions or even to feel the thing and more difficult still to understand it with an exact intelligence. One must have oneself lived in the light or have had flashes of it in oneself in order to recognise it when it manifests outside us. It is easy to make mistakes of appreciation: it is quite common to miss altogether the tinge of the superior light even while one sees it or to think and say only, “Ah, yes, this is very great poetry.”

There are other questions that can arise, objections that can be raised against our admission of a complete equality between the best of all kinds in poetry. First of all, is it a fact that all kinds of poetry actually stand on an equal level or are potentially capable by intensity in their own kind, of such a divine equality? Satirical poetry, for instance, has often been considered as inferior in essential quality to the epic or other higher kinds of creation. Can the best lines of Juvenal, for instance, the line about the graeculus esuriens be the equal of Virgil’s O passi graviora, or his sunt lacrimae rerum? Can Pope’s attack on Addison, impeccable in expression and unsurpassable in its poignancy of satiric point and force and its still more poignant conclusion

Who would not laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep if Atticus were he?

be put on a same poetical level with the great lines of Shakespeare which I have admitted as having the overmind inspiration? The question is complicated by the fact that some lines or passages of what is classed as satirical verse are not strictly satirical but have the tone of a more elevated kind of poetry and rise to a very high level of poetic beauty, — for instance Dryden’s descriptions of Absalom and Achitophel as opposed to his brilliant assault on the second duke of Buckingham. Or can we say that apart
from this question of satire we can equal together the best from poetry of a lighter kind with that which has a high seriousness or intention, for instance the mock epic with the epic? There are critics now who are in ecstasies over Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* and put it on the very highest level, but we could hardly reconcile ourselves to classing any lines from it with a supreme line from Homer or Milton. Or can the perfect force of Lucan’s line

Victrix causa deis placuit sed victa Catoni

which has made it immortal induce us to rank it on a level of equality with the greater lines of Virgil? We may escape from this difficulty of our own logic by pointing out that when we speak of perfection we mean perfection of something essential for poetic beauty and not only perfection of speech and verse however excellent and consummate in its own inferior kind. Or we may say that we are speaking not only of perfection but of a kind of perfection that has something of the absolute. But then we may be taxed with throwing overboard our own first principle and ranking poetry according to the greatness or beauty of its substance, its intention and its elevation and not solely on its artistic completeness of language and rhythm in its own kind.

We have then to abandon any thorough-going acceptance of the art for art’s sake standpoint and admit that our proposition of the equality of absolute perfection of different kinds, different inspirations of poetry applies only to all that has some quintessence of highest poetry in it. An absolutely accomplished speech and metrical movement, a sovereign technique, are not enough; we are thinking of a certain pitch of flight and not only of its faultless agility and grace. Overmind or overhead poetry must always have in its very nature that essential quality, although owing to the conditions and circumstances of its intervention, the limitations of its action, it can only sometimes have it in any supreme fullness or absoluteness. It can open poetry to the expression of new ranges of vision, experience and feeling, especially the spiritual and the higher mystic, with all their inexhaustible possibilities, which a more mental inspiration could not so fully and powerfully see and express except
in moments when something of the overhead power came to its succour; it can bring in new rhythms and a new intensity of language: but so long as it is merely an intervention in mind, we cannot confidently claim more for it. At the same time if we look carefully and subtly at things we may see that the greatest lines or passages in the world’s literature have the overmind touch or power and that they bring with them an atmosphere, a profound or an extraordinary light, an amplitude of wing which, if the Overmind would not only intervene but descend, seize wholly and transform, would be the first glimpses of a poetry, higher, larger, deeper and more consistently absolute than any which the human past has been able to give us. An evolutionary ascent of all the activities of mind and life is not impossible.

20 November 1946