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Poetry-Heart and Prose-Mind
The Style of Sri Chinmoy's University Lectures

B.A. Essay
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The Abstract

In the 20th century, Sri Chinmoy toured universities around the world and gave lectures, which were later published, about such lofty subjects as “Immortality”, “God and Myself” and “Is Death the End?”

Poetry-heart and prose-mind takes a close look at two of these lectures and discovers that, while there is a definite logical prose structure to them, there is a poetic structure at work as well, which enables a greater understanding of the loftiest, most ineffable and ethereal subjects. These are subjects that mystics and poets have wrestled with throughout centuries, and which have been put to words that have been classified as poetry, prayers, koans, sutras and other religious and spiritual literature. Sri Chinmoy’s lectures take their place among them and can be classified as a unique form of literature.

Looking deeper into the lectures, we see how Sri Chinmoy uses poetic tone, rhetorical structure, metaphors, imagery, lyricism and aphorisms to paint a vivid picture of his lofty topics, and how this seems to aim at inspiring the reader rather than persuading him with arguments. By referring to works on Sri Chinmoy’s poetry, we discover how the lectures’ poetic structure draws from Sri Chinmoy’s experience as a poet. At the same time, this essay looks at how the prose structure flows logically, and bases its statements on solid foundations, and how the two structures help, rather than interfere with each other.

This essay also speculates why Sri Chinmoy has created this unique style and finds evidence in the author’s other works that poetry is the language of the heart, while prose is the language of the mind, and, by speaking to both aspects, a fuller communication is established between speaker and reader. Finally, we discover evidence that Sri Chinmoy sees poetry being closely related to the presentation of truth.

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Introduction

On reading the published university lectures of Sri Chinmoy, one is struck by their uniqueness. This is not only so because of their deeply metaphysical issues, exemplified in topic headings such as “Know thyself”, “God and Myself” and “Immortality”, but, rather, even more so in the way the author addresses the topics. The lectures do not attempt to persuade the audience, or, in our case, the reader, of a point of view through arguments and counter-arguments. Rather, the author seems more concerned with presenting to and inspiring the reader by painting a vivid picture of his lofty topics, and, in doing so, his style becomes poetic. Nevertheless, we must also recognize that there is a definite structure in the lectures, which is logical and enables a greater understanding of the topic. The lectures are, therefore, elusive to traditional classification. My conclusion is that the university lectures of Sri Chinmoy transcend the distinction between poetry and prose while containing both poetry and prose.

The question of how Sri Chinmoy has created works that marry poetry and prose must be asked together with the question why. In Sri Chinmoy’s own philosophy, every person’s existence is made up of five parts: the soul, the spiritual heart, the mind, the vital and the body.¹ The soul is one with God, the spiritual heart identifies with the spiritual qualities of the soul, the mind searches for truth and amasses information, the vital is “the dynamic, emotional part of our nature”² and the body gives a physical frame to the other parts of existence. Thus, the spiritual heart (hereafter simply referred to as heart) can understand lofty spiritual concepts by identifying with them, without mentally comprehending them. As Sri Chinmoy puts it: “On the strength of our identification, we grow into divine reality.”³ On the other hand: “The mind is fond of accumulating information, but information is not going to give us an iota of inner wisdom.”⁴ However, Sri Chinmoy describes, the mind has deeper or higher faculties, called the higher mind:

¹ Sri Chinmoy, The Divine Hero (London: Watkins Publishing, 2002) 4-9.

² Sri Chinmoy, Divine Hero 8.

³ Sri Chinmoy, Divine Hero 6.

⁴ Sri Chinmoy, Divine Hero 7.

...when we go deep inside the mind, we find the higher mind, far beyond the domain of doubt. Right now we do not really know Infinity, Eternity and Immortality. These are vague terms that the physical mind cannot grasp. But if we enter into the higher mind, then we see these things as the real Reality.⁵

To enter into these higher faculties, the mind must be illumined by the heart. As Sri Chinmoy explains:

We are the possessors of two rooms. One room is known as the heart-room; the other is known as the mind-room. Right now the mind-room is obscure, unlit, impure and unwilling to open to the light. So we have to remain in the heart-room, the room of light, as much as we can. When we feel that our entire being is surcharged with the inner light that is there, then we can enter into the mind-room and illumine it.⁶

It could be argued that Sri Chinmoy would see poetry as better suited to express the messages of the heart, and prose more suited to express the messages of the mind. He writes: “Poetry teaches my heart infinitely more than it preaches to my mind.”⁷ And on the difference between poetry and prose he writes:

I have been writing prose and poetry for over half a century. I am very happily and proudly sailing in the boat of Coleridge:

I wish our clever poets would remember...Prose: words in their best order.
Poetry: the best words in the best order.⁸

It seems logical, then, that prose would be better suited to speak to the mind. Apart from giving lectures, Sri Chinmoy answered thousands of questions. His answer as to why he answers questions, could be taken to also explain why he wrote prose:

I answer questions because sometimes I see that your heart is not able to convince your mind of the truth which the heart already knows. But if you

⁵ Sri Chinmoy, Divine Hero 7.

⁶ Sri Chinmoy, Mind-confusion and heart-illumination, part 2 (1974; Augsburg, Offsetdruckerei Pohland, 1995) 36.

⁷ Sri Chinmoy, Blessingful Invitations from the University-World (New York: Agni Press, 1998) 11.

⁸ Sri Chinmoy, Blessingful Invitations 10.

hear this truth from me, your mind will try to see something in my wisdom-light... When I answer your questions, the power of your heart is strengthened because your mind begins to accept the truth and light in the answer, and to surrender to your heart. When the mind does not fight against it so much, the heart becomes stronger. That is why I answer questions — to convince the mind.⁹

My hypothesis is that Sri Chinmoy's lectures contain both poetry and prose, because they are intended to speak to both the heart and the mind of the reader. Thus, the lectures are similar to paintings with different layers of depths. A certain depth may stand out to a certain person at a certain time, while a different depth may stand out to the same person at a different time, or to another person altogether.

A close study of two lectures

To substantiate my hypothesis, we shall closely study two of Sri Chinmoy's university lectures to discover the patterns of poetry and prose. The first lecture is entitled "Know thyself". This was Sri Chinmoy's third university lecture, given at the University of Puerto Rico, August 26 1968. It appears here in the layout used in www.srichinmoylibrary.com, the online library of Sri Chinmoy's published works:

Know thyself

University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico

August 26, 1968

Atmanam viddhi — Know thyself. Each individual has to know himself. He has to know himself as the infinite, eternal and immortal Consciousness. The concept of Infinity, Eternity and Immortality is absolutely foreign to us. Why? The reason is quite simple. We live in the body, rather than in the soul. To us

⁹ Sri Chinmoy, Mind-confusion 45.

the body is everything. There is nothing and can be nothing beyond the body. The existence of the soul we consider sheer imagination. But I assure you that the soul is not imaginary. It is at once the life and the revelation of the Cosmic Reality. Most of us live in the body, in the earthbound physical consciousness. Our teacher is Darkness; our professor is Ignorance. But if ever we live in the soul, we shall see that our teacher is Vision and our professor is Illumination.

“Life is effort.” So says the body. “Life is blessing.” So says the soul. The human in man does not want to go beyond morality, society and humanity. The divine in man comes down from divinity into humanity, from unity into multiplicity.

Atmanam viddhi. Know thyself. The seers of the Upanishads not only discovered this Truth Transcendental but offered it to the suffering, crying and striving mankind. In order to know oneself, one has to discover oneself first. What is self discovery? Self-discovery is God-Realisation.

Without Yoga there is no self discovery. Yoga is not a religion. Yoga is the Universal Truth. It is the traditional truth of India. It is the most important experience of life. True Yoga and life go together. They cannot be separated. If you try to separate them, you will fail. Yoga and life are as inseparable as the Creator and the Creation.

Is Yoga another name for severe asceticism? Positively not. Is Yoga another name for self-discipline? Decisively yes. Does Yoga demand the rejection of the world and the starvation of the senses? No, never. Does Yoga demand the acceptance of the world and mastery over the senses? Yes, a mighty Yes. Is Yoga for everybody? Yes and no. Yes, because each human soul has come from God and inwardly aspires to return to Him. No, because some people, at their present stage of development, feel they can live without God.

Can learning and reasoning offer man self-realisation? No. Mere book knowledge ends in self deception. Why? Because a man of knowledge feels that he has achieved the infinite wisdom. Unfortunately, he does not know that the real Infinite Wisdom can come only from God, from God-Realisation. Mere mental reasoning ends in self-frustration.

Can dedication and aspiration offer man self-realisation? Yes. Man's dedication is his heart-flower offered at the Feet of God. Man's aspiration is his soul-fruit placed in the Lap of God.

For self-realisation, man needs freedom. God gives him freedom. What is freedom? Freedom is God's sacrifice-power and man's miracle-power. Sri Ramakrishna, the great spiritual Master of India, once remarked, "The wretch who constantly says, 'I am bound, I am bound,' only succeeds in being bound. He who says day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' verily becomes a sinner. One must have such burning faith in God that one can say, 'What? I have repeated God's name, so how can sin still cling to me? How can I be a sinner anymore?'"

We must cherish positive thoughts, positive ideas, positive ideals. Only then will our Goal no longer remain a far cry. Each man has to feel, "I am at the Feet of God, my own Master. I am in the Hands of God, my own Creator. I am in the Heart of God, my only Beloved."

"Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." I asked. My Lord bestowed His boundless Compassion on me. I sought. My Lord gave me His infinite Love. I knocked. To my utter surprise, the door was not bolted from inside. My sweet Lord was eagerly expecting my arrival. Lo, I am come!¹⁰

Discussion of the prose structure of "Know thyself".

Looking to discover the logical prose structure of the lecture, we can see that in the opening paragraph, the author introduces and defines a very particular type of self-knowledge and points in the direction where it can be attained. This self-knowledge is described as loftier than merely knowing oneself as a human being, and, the author explains, we are unfamiliar with this lofty self-knowledge because of our

¹⁰ Sri Chinmoy, "Know thyself". Eastern light for the Western mind (New York: Agni Press, 1973). Sri Chinmoy Library. 3 Sept. 2017. <<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/el-3>>.

identification with our body rather than our soul. The soul, however, is real, and our identification with the soul enables us to gain a higher insight and knowledge. Having compared the body with the soul, the author compares the human in man, which “does not want to go beyond morality, society and humanity,” with the divine in man, which “comes down from divinity into humanity”. It can be seen that man must go beyond the body to the soul and beyond humanity to divinity to attain this lofty self-knowledge.

Following up, the author reassures the reader of the veracity and universality of this particular type of self-knowledge. This he does by citing the origin of the phrase *Atmanam viddhi* (know thyself), which is the Upanishads. These ancient roots establish the timelessness of the message – the subtext of which is that it has withstood the test of time - and the universality of the message is encapsulated in the fact that the seers of the Upanishads “offered it to suffering, crying and striving mankind”.

At this point, the author further defines self-knowledge as “self-discovery” and “God-realisation”. This has two further implications. First of all, self-discovery implies that we still haven’t discovered who we really are, and so builds on the idea of going beyond the body to the soul, that the author had already introduced. Secondly, the fact that “Self-discovery is God-realisation”, means that the quest for the highest self-knowledge and the quest for God are one and the same thing.

Having elaborated on what self-knowledge means, the author now turns to the quest for self-knowledge. He introduces Yoga, without which “there is no self-discovery.” The author explains that Yoga is not a religion, but, rather, integral to life and truth, the subtext of which is that the experience and practice of Yoga goes far beyond only those practices and experiences that are named Yoga. Explaining the practice of Yoga, the author describes the importance of self-discipline rather than asceticism, and the acceptance of life and mastery over the senses rather than the rejection of the world and the starvation of the senses. The author ends the discussion of Yoga by explaining that, while Yoga is natural to all because it is a way to God-realisation and “each human soul has come from God and inwardly aspires to return to Him”, those who “at their present stage of development, feel they can live without God”, do not feel the need for Yoga. In essence, they do not feel the need for the

highest self-knowledge.

After establishing that Yoga is integral to all self-discovery, whether called Yoga or not, the author looks at different ways for self-discovery. Learning and reasoning would seem to suggest themselves, but the author explains that learning and reasoning are limited because they do not have access to the infinite Wisdom, which “can come only from God, from God-realisation.” Dedication and aspiration, however, are ways to attain self-discovery, because they are offered to God, and, therefore, reach God.

Freedom, we learn, is no less essential in the quest for self-discovery than the discipline that had been previously described. However, the way in which we use our freedom is of paramount importance. The author explains that we can take away our own freedom through a negative self-image, while, on the other hand, our integral freedom can be used to better ourselves and reach our Goal of self-knowledge through a positive image of ourselves and faith in God. The author had previously pointed out that going beyond the body, humanity and reasoning was necessary for self-discovery, and now, going beyond a limited self-image is added to the list. In the second-last paragraph of the lecture the author describes exactly how the lofty positive image of ourselves and God should look: God is “Master”, “Creator” and “Beloved” and man is at His Feet, in His Hands and in His Heart.

The final paragraph comes as a message of encouragement and inspiration. The author has already described what is the highest self-knowledge and how it can be attained; in essence it is the quest for God. In the final paragraph we get the encouraging and inspiring message that God is there at every step to respond to and help man in his quest.

To sum up, the author sets out to introduce and define a particular type of self-knowledge, and how one can go about seeking that self-knowledge. Quite logically, the author starts with his definition and then expands on his definition. After this is put in order, he starts by defining the seeking and elaborates on the seeking. The structure moves logically with the discussion and the final paragraph comes as an encouraging message, or, even, as an example of how a quest for self-knowledge can come to its fulfillment.

This is the discussion of the logical prose structure of the lecture “Know thyself”. However, if we look at the lecture from another angle, we can discover a poetic structure there as well. To help with the discovery of the lecture’s poetic structure, let us present it in the layout used in the reprint version of *The Inner Promise*, which is different from the one we have just seen. The stanza numberings are my own:

Know Thyself

- 1 *Atmanam viddhi* - “know thyself.”
Each individual has to know himself.
He has to know himself
 as the infinite, eternal and immortal Consciousness.

- 2 The concept of Infinity, Eternity and Immortality
 is absolutely foreign to us
Why? The reason is quite simple.
We live in the body, rather than in the soul.
To us the body is everything;
 there is nothing and can be nothing
 beyond the body.
The existence of the soul
 we consider sheer imagination.

- 3 But I assure you that the soul is not imaginary.
It is at once the life and the revelation
 of the Cosmic Reality.

- 4 Most of us live in the body,
 in the earthbound physical consciousness.
Our teacher is darkness;
 our professor is ignorance.

- But if ever we live in the soul, we shall see
that our teacher is vision
and our professor is illumination.
- 5 “Life is effort” - so says the body.
“Life is blessing” - so says the soul.
- 6 The human in man does not want to go beyond
morality, society and humanity.
The divine in man comes down
from divinity into humanity,
from unity into multiplicity.
- 7 *Atmanam viddhi* – “know thyself.”
The seers of the Upanishads
not only discovered this Truth transcendental
but offered it to the suffering, crying
and striving mankind.
- 8 In order to know oneself,
one has to discover oneself first.
What is self discovery?
Self-discovery is God-Realisation.
- 9 Without yoga there is no self-discovery.
Yoga is not a religion.
Yoga is the Universal Truth.
It is the traditional truth of India.
It is the most important experience of life.
- 10 True yoga and life go together.
They cannot be separated.
If you try to separate them, you will fail.
Yoga and life are as inseparable
as the Creator and the creation.

- 11 Is yoga another name for severe asceticism?
Positively not.
Is yoga another name for self-discipline?
Decisively yes.
- 12 Does yoga demand the rejection of the world
and the starvation of the senses?
No, never.
Does yoga demand the acceptance of the world
and mastery over the senses?
Yes, a mighty yes.
- 13 Is yoga for everybody?
Yes and no.
Yes, because each human soul
has come from God
and inwardly aspires to return to Him.
No, because some people,
at their present stage of development,
feel they can live without God.
- 14 Can learning and reasoning
offer man self-realisation? No.
Mere book knowledge ends in self deception.
Why? Because a man of knowledge
feels that he has achieved the infinite wisdom.
Unfortunately, he does not know
that the real infinite wisdom
can come only from God, from God-Realisation.
Mere mental reasoning ends in self-frustration.
- 15 Can dedication and aspiration
offer man self-realisation? Yes.

- Man's dedication is his heart-flower
offered at the Feet of God.
- Man's aspiration is his soul-fruit
placed in the Lap of God.
- 16 For self-realisation, man needs freedom.
God gives him freedom.
What is freedom?
Freedom is God's sacrifice-power
and man's miracle-power.
- 17 Sri Ramakrishna, the great spiritual Master of
India, once remarked, "The wretch who constantly
says, 'I am bound, I am bound,' only succeeds in
being bound. He who says day and night, 'I am a
sinner, I am a sinner,' verily becomes a sinner. One
must have such burning faith in God that one can
say, 'I have repeated God's Name, so how can sin
still cling to me? How can I be a sinner anymore?'"
- 18 We must cherish positive thoughts,
positive ideas, positive ideals.
Only then will our Goal no longer remain a far cry.
- 19 Each man has to feel,
"I am at the Feet of God, my own Master.
I am in the Hands of God, my own Creator.
I am in the Heart of God, my only Beloved."
- 20 "Ask and it shall be given to you;
seek and you shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened unto you."

- 21 I asked.
My Lord bestowed
His boundless Compassion on me.
- 22 I sought.
My Lord gave me
His infinite Love.
- 23 I knocked.
To my utter surprise,
the door was not bolted from inside.
My sweet Lord was eagerly expecting my arrival.¹¹

Editorial differences between the two texts of “Know thyself”.

Before going on to the discussion of the poetic structure of the lecture, there are a few differences between the two texts, which, although essentially immaterial, are detailed below for the sake of completeness.

1. The phrase: Atmanam viddhi. Know thyself. (appearing twice in the text).

1a. *The Inner Promise* version: *Atmanam viddhi* - “know thyself.”

1b. *www.srichinmoylibrary.com* version: *Atmanam viddhi. Know thyself.*

2. Capital or not capital letters for the word “yoga”.

2a. In *The Inner Promise*, the word yoga is only capitalized due to punctuation.

2b. In *www.srichinmoylibrary.com*, the word Yoga is always capitalized.

3. Several other words: capitalized or not.

In *The Inner Promise*, words are more seldom capitalized than in *www.srichinmoylibrary.com*. Examples of words capitalized in

¹¹ Sri Chinmoy, “Know Thyself.” *The Inner Promise* (New York: Aum Publications, 2000) 9-13.

www.srichinmoylibrary.com, but not in *The Inner Promise*, listed with the spelling in *The Inner Promise* and under the stanza and line number in *The Inner Promise*:

Examples from stanza 4:

Line 3: “darkness”

Line 4: “ignorance”

Line 6: “vision”

Line 7: “illumination”

Stanza 7, line 3: “transcendental”

Stanza 10, line 5: “creation”

Stanza 12, line 6: “yes”

Stanza 14, line 7: “infinite”

Stanza 14, line 7: “wisdom”

There is one example of a word being capitalized in *The Inner Promise*, which is not capitalized in *www.srichinmoylibrary.com*:

Stanza 17, line 7: “Name”

4. Miscellaneous punctuation differences, listed with the spelling in *The Inner Promise* and under the stanza and line number in *The Inner Promise*:

Stanza 2, line 5:

The Inner Promise: “everything;”

www.srichinmoylibrary.com: “everything.”

Stanza 5, lines 1-2:

The Inner Promise:

“Life is effort” - so says the body.

“Life is blessing” - so says the soul.

www.srichinmoylibrary.com:

“Life is effort.” So says the body. “Life is blessing.” So says the soul.

5. Phrases left out in *The Inner Promise*, listed by the stanza and line number in *The Inner Promise*:

Stanza 17, line 7:

The Inner Promise: ‘I have repeated...

www.srichinmoylibrary.com: ‘What? I have repeated...

Stanza 23, line 4:

The Inner Promise: My sweet Lord was eagerly expecting my arrival.

www.srichinmoylibrary.com: My sweet Lord was eagerly expecting my arrival. Lo, I am come!

6. Word changes, listed by the stanza number in *The Inner Promise*:

Stanza 20:

The Inner Promise:

“Ask and it shall be given to you;

 seek and **you** shall find;

 knock and **the door** shall be opened unto you.”

www.srichinmoylibrary.com:

“Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and **ye** shall find; knock and **it** shall be opened unto you.”¹²

Discussion of the poetic structure of “Know thyself”.

Putting these textual differences aside, the task at hand is to look at the poetic structure of the lecture. Many poetic devices can be identified. For example: rhetoric, imagery, metaphors and aphorisms. What is more important, however, is that there is a distinct poetic tone throughout the lecture, which draws these poetic devices together in a unifying whole, so that they should be considered the careful craft of a poet.

The title of the lecture, “Know Thyself”, has a powerful tone of authority. The

¹²The Gideons International, The New Testament (The Gideons International, 1979) Matthew 7:7.

imperative of the verb and the directness of the pronoun combine to create a stirring call to action. The first stanza of the lecture sees the author maintain this powerful tone through rhetoric repetition and diction. The lecture opens with “Atmanam viddhi”, which, as an allusion to the Upanishads, invokes the authority of ancient and timeless truths. Continuing with the translation of this phrase, “know thyself”, the author sets up a rhetorical repetition of the title which is continued with subtle changes in diction and tone. The archaic “thyself” is changed for “himself”, creating a slightly more personal tone, and the imperative is changed for the infinitive, creating a slightly less direct tone. The effect of these subtle changes is to make the reader more receptive to the resolution: the insertion of the clause which has been missing throughout all the repetitions and now comes in a rhetoric list of three alliterated aspects of “Consciousness”, with all the authority returned to the tone and now more acceptable to the reader.

This subtle and artful management of tone and diction continues in the second, third and fourth stanzas, mainly through changes in how the speaker addresses the reader. After rhetorically repeating the resolution of the first stanza, the tone in the second stanza, shifts as the speaker changes from the impersonal to the personal. He is now one of us, which gives credibility to his analysis of why the lofty self-knowledge is “foreign to us”. The shift from first person plural to singular in stanza 3 is used to make a point and also to build up the rapport between the speaker and the reader, crystallized in the phrase “I assure you”. The fourth stanza is the penultimate time in the lecture that the speaker uses the first person plural and acts as an introduction into what is to come.

The fourth stanza is an aphorism; it could easily stand on its own and contains a statement of a truth. Moreover, this stanza presents the reader with a point of view by the use of poetic devices, rather than persuading reason, which is the hallmark of aphorisms, or as Vidagdha Meredith Bennett, in her book *Simplicity and Power: The Poetry of Sri Chinmoy 1971-1981* remarks:

Succinct enough to avail itself of literary elements, such as metaphoric density, rhyme, assonance and parallelism, the aphorism disqualifies itself

from reason's lengthy processes.¹³

The poetic devices used in this aphorism are the personification of darkness and ignorance, on the one hand, and vision and illumination, on the other hand. These personified qualities are contrasted through the repetition of the phrases “our teacher is” and “our professor is”. The effect is not only that of persuasion, but of inspiration. Faced with the vivid imagery of living in the body and living in the soul, the reader is inspired to incline to the latter.

“A further characteristic of aphorism...” writes Vidagdha Bennett, “is its authority of pronouncement, its sense of finality.”¹⁴ The fourth stanza thus resumes the tone of authority and acts as a gateway to the many aphorisms which are to follow, starting with the two-line fifth stanza, in which the body and the soul are personified so that their different messages can be presented vividly.

In the sixth and the seventh stanzas, the author departs from the form of the aphorism, but uses poetic devices to make his point, while maintaining the tone of authority. Thus, in the sixth stanza, “the human in man” and “the divine in man” are personified, which makes the contrast between these two aspects of man and what they want vivid, while in the seventh stanza the author refers to the Upanishads, which recalls the invocation of the authority of the timeless truths even more explicitly than before, which is cemented with the repetition of the phrase *Atmanam viddhi* – “know thyself”.

The eighth stanza is an aphorism, which uses a rhetorical question to make its point, and, furthermore, uses a hyphenated compound noun, which become common later in the lecture, for the first time. In the same way that the abbreviated nature of the aphorism carries a “propositional thrust”¹⁵, the compact nature of the hyphenated compound noun has an “energetic tautness”¹⁶, both of which the author uses to add a sense of immediacy, simplicity and clarity to the underlying tone of authority. Lines 2 and 3 of this stanza (lines 38 and 39 in the lecture) illustrate the difference between

¹³ Bennett, Vidagdha Meredith, Simplicity and Power: The Poetry of Sri Chinmoy 1971-1981 (New York: Aum Publications, 1991) 105-106.

¹⁴ Bennett, 108.

¹⁵ Bennett, 108.

¹⁶ Bennett, 29.

the hyphenated and the non-hyphenated form of the concept of self-discovery, whereby the hyphenated form connotes immediacy, simplicity and clarity. In other words, the hyphenated form presents itself as something more attainable, and, therefore, more inspiring.

Stanzas nine and ten depart from the form of the aphorism, while skillfully managing the tone of authority. Stanza nine starts with a series of statements that have a sense of finality to them, even more so than the aphorism. Repetition is the poetic device used to maintain the tone. “Self-discovery” is repeated from the previous stanza, and then “yoga” is repeated three times. A very artful change occurs in the final two lines of stanza nine, in which “yoga” is replaced with “it”. By ceasing the repetition of “yoga”, the speaker makes the tone slightly more reflective. This skilful management of tone is continued in stanza ten, where the repetition of the verb to be in its present singular form in the previous stanza is discontinued, thereby toning down the finality of the statements. This toning down reaches its fulfillment in line three of stanza ten, where the speaker addresses the reader directly. This solidifies the rapport between speaker and reader, which had been built up with the use of the words “I assure you” in stanza three. The purpose here is the same as before: the speaker is asking the reader to trust in what he has to say.

Up to this point the author has controlled subtle shifts of tone and style, which occur at no greater intervals than two stanzas. In the next five stanzas, 11-15, the author maintains the same tone and style throughout. Each of these stanzas is an aphorism that uses a parallel structure of rhetorical questions and answers to arrive at an increasingly finer definition of the subject. In this way, this whole passage of stanzas 11-15 is reminiscent of a jigsaw puzzle, where each piece of the puzzle, inserted correctly, contributes to the whole picture. It is no accident, then, that stanzas 11-15 revolve around the same subject: the quest for self-knowledge, as described in the analysis of the lecture’s prose structure. The author has carefully chosen and maintained a particular style to fit a particular subject matter. What is more, we see how the author echoes the journey aspect of the quest for self-knowledge through the length of the aphorisms. Thus stanza 11 is four lines, stanza 12 is six lines and stanza 13 eight lines, each of them a self-contained aphorism, which blends easily in the preceding and following stanza. Stanzas 14 and 15 should be taken as one aphorism,

as this would be in line with the parallel structure of the preceding stanzas. As such, stanzas 14-15 are a 15-line aphorism; an expansive and powerful passage that ends with the lofty and haunting image of man offering his dedication, or “heart-flower”, “at the Feet of God”, and placing his aspiration, or “soul-fruit”, “in the Lap of God”.

This final image of stanza 15 has a finality to it for two reasons. On the one hand because it is the climax of an aphorism, and a whole passage, or cascade, of aphorisms, and on the other hand because of its stirring imagery, in which hyphenated compound nouns are used to paint a vivid picture of the quality of man’s dedication and aspiration and how they reach God.

Stanza 16 comes as a slight toning down after the climactic, powerful tone of stanza 15. It is less poetic than the immediately preceding stanzas, although the form of question and answer together with the repetition of the word “freedom”, and a culmination in two hyphenated compound nouns carries a distinct poetic power. At the same time, stanza 16 acts as an appropriate transition into stanza 17, where the author abandons the poetic form altogether. The reason is to quote specific words of prose. These words, however, and, even more so, the fact that their source is referred as the great Indian spiritual Master Sri Ramakrishna, carries authority (and recalls the aspect of the timeless truths invoked through the Upanishad quote) so that stanza 17, although dissimilar in style from the rest of the lecture, merges with the general tone and acts as a meaningful side trip on an otherwise one-pointed journey.

The change in style in stanza 17, and the fact that it ends with a question, provides the author with an opportunity to readily re-introduce previously discontinued elements of style, which he does in stanza 18 by using the first person plural and the imperative, last used in stanzas 4 and 1, respectively. By doing so, Sri Chinmoy recalls the powerful authority of the lecture’s beginning, but with the difference that the speaker is now closer to the reader than before, due to the contact that has been forged in the intermediate stanzas.

The use of the to-infinitive, coupled with the verb have and a 3rd person only appears three times in the lecture: in stanzas 1, 8 and 19. Each time, it is used to set up a poetic device, a resolution of some sort, which has a specific effect. In stanza 1, the resolution is a repetition of the to-infinitive and the verb to have followed by a short

list of three alliterated qualities, which creates the effect of power, while in stanza 8 the resolution is a rhetorical question and a hyphenated compound noun, which creates the effect of immediacy, simplicity and clarity. In stanza 19, on the other hand, the resolution comes in the form of three parallel sentences, all starting with the phrase “I am”, followed by an image of man’s place by (or in) God, and finishing with a description of man’s relationship with God. In doing so, the author recalls the poetic imagery of stanza 15 and prepares the reader for the lyrical beauty of the lecture’s last three stanzas.

Before the last three stanzas, however, the author inserts a well chosen quote from the New Testament: Matthew 7:7 from the Sermon on the Mount. Not only is the chosen quote an aphorism, but it alludes to the Christ’s best known sermon, which is, to some extent, a collection of aphorisms. In this way the allusion hints at a similarity between the present lecture and the Sermon on the Mount. Moreover, the Sermon on the Mount ends with:

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teachings.

For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.¹⁷

Those familiar with this passage (and since the lecture was originally delivered in Catholic Puerto Rico in 1968, it seems safe to assume that there would have been a few at the inaugural address) would be tempted to draw analogies between the divine authority of these two speakers, separated by almost 2000 years in time, but joined in their efforts to enlighten.

The quote from the New Testament sets up the finale of the lecture, which is a truly poetic climax. The speaker rhetorically repeats the verbs of asking, seeking and knocking with the difference that, whereas in the New Testament quote the reader was encouraged to do so, the speaker now describes that he has done so. Furthermore, while Matthew 7:7 leaves it, to some extent, open what the asking, seeking and knocking shall achieve, the speaker describes exactly what resulted from his actions. By speaking in the first person, the author moves into the region of lyrical poetry,

¹⁷ The Gideons International, Matthew 7:28-29.

where we are presented with three images of God fulfilling the speaker's wishes, inherent in the acts of asking, seeking and knocking. The intention of this passage, as described in the discussion of the lecture's prose structure, is to show how God helps man in his quest for self-knowledge. Since lyrics are "poems in which the speaker, a single distinctive voice, captures a particular emotion or moment"¹⁸, this passage not only makes the author's point, but also allows the reader to identify with the joy of the fulfillment of the quest, captured by the speaker.

Appropriately, it is the emotion of man's relationship with God that crescendos at the end of the lecture, and shows that the author is primarily interested in inspiring the reader in his own personal quest. The tone of authority, was only a means to an end, the confident nudge of a veteran traveler to him who is about to set up on his journey. The last three stanzas see the most personal address to God in all the lecture and "My Lord" is repeated three times to find its resolution in the insertion of the loving adjective "sweet". The very last words are a fitting climax. Through the use of the lyrical style, the author has invited the reader to identify with his emotion. The final image shows God "eagerly expecting" the speaker's arrival, and, at the same time, inspires the reader on his own quest to his own eagerly expecting sweet Lord.

To sum up, the author maintains a poetic style throughout the lecture, which is only broken in stanza 17 that, nevertheless, through its allusion, adds to the overall poetic tone of the lecture. The poetry crescendos and diminuendos, and shifts between different styles of poetry and poetic devices, but throughout we detect skilful management that should be considered the craft of a poet.

Furthermore, the lecture's poetry has a definite effect. Whereas the lecture's prose structure presents the author's view, the lecture's poetry makes the feeling of this view accessible to the reader, and enables the speaker to inspire the reader. "Know thyself" is a call to action, and the lecture's powerful poetic tone sees this call maintained throughout.

The second lecture under scrutiny is entitled "The meaning of life". It appears

¹⁸ Bennett, 47.

here in the layout used in www.srichinmoylibrary.com.

The meaning of life

Inter-American University, San Juan, Puerto Rico

October 17, 1968

Life is God's Transcendental Blessing to His Creation. What is more important than God's Blessing? God's Concern. What is more important than God's Concern? The absolute Fulfilment of God's Will.

Life is man's experience of wisdom and faith. Wisdom without faith is the bondage of futility. Faith without wisdom is the smile of stupidity. Faith and wisdom can go together. Faith awakens us to see the Truth. Wisdom helps us to live the Truth.

The outer world is a play of conflict between the fleeting and destructive thoughts of man's mind and the constructive and lasting will of man's soul. The inner world is a play of harmony between the mind's surrender and the soul's acceptance.

Life is will. There is only one will that mediates between God and man. That will is at once the descending cry of concern and compassion and the ascending cry of love and helplessness.

Life is man's conscious attempt to see God face to face.

First try. Then cry. If necessary.

First give. Then take. If necessary.

First run. Then stop. If necessary.

First be the doer. Then be the talker. If necessary.

Thought, human thought, rules the world. But mere thinking is of no avail.

When I think, God is my frustration.

When I cry, God is my consolation.

When I try, God is my salvation.

When I will, God is my illumination.

We must love God first if we really love life, for God is not only the Source but the very Breath of life. Love of God costs nothing, absolutely nothing, but is worth much. Our mind knows this truth. Our heart practises this truth. Our soul embodies this truth.

The ultimate aim of the human life is liberation. Liberation is the choice of man and the Grace of God. Liberation is man's total freedom and God's constant responsibility.

You cry because you have no plans to make your life meaningful and successful. He cries because all his plans have come to a lame conclusion. I cry because I do not want to have any plans. What I want is to be seated all the time at the Feet of the Supreme, who is at once the Vision and the Reality.

My life has three doctors: Dr. Love, Dr. Devotion and Dr. Surrender. Dr. Love

cures my mind's narrowness. Dr. Devotion cures my heart's impurity. Dr. Surrender cures my life's ignorance.

My life has three Gods: God the Existence, God the Consciousness and God the Bliss. God the Existence eternally lives in me. God the Consciousness constantly grows in me. God the Bliss immortally lives with me.¹⁹

Discussion of the prose structure of “The meaning of life”.

Similarly to “Know thyself”, and logically, the opening paragraph introduces the subject of the lecture. The author starts by illustrating a very lofty, positive view on life: “Life is God’s Transcendental Blessing to His Creation.” Life, therefore, is God’s gift. Furthermore, we learn of the importance of God’s Concern and the fulfilment of God’s Will, meaning that God has not only given life to His creation, but also cares about it. The creation, in turn, should strive to fulfil God’s Will. This opening paragraph serves as the ideological basis of the lecture, affirming that life has meaning, which is experienced in the fullest through the fulfilment of God’s Will.

Moving from idealism to practicality, the author turns his attention to man’s situation and introduces the steps he can take to fulfil God’s Will and find meaning in life. First of all, man must synthesize faith and wisdom to discover truth and live in truth. Secondly, man is reminded that the harmony of his mind and his soul takes place in his inner world, not his outer world, which means that man must spend time in his inner world. Thirdly, the qualities that bring together man and God are God’s Concern and Compassion and man’s love and helplessness.

The author now focusses on man’s search for God. He starts by affirming that man is searching for God and goes on to describe how thinking, crying, trying and willing all find a different aspect of God. We learn that it is essential to love God to be able to love life, “for God is not only the Source but the very Breath of life.” The

¹⁹ Sri Chinmoy, “The meaning of life.” Eastern light for the Western mind (New York: Agni Press, 1973). Sri Chinmoy Library. 3 Sept. 2017. <<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/el-4>>.

limitation of the mind, compared to the soul, is underlined, for while “Our mind knows this truth” our soul goes further and “embodies this truth.” At this point, the heart is introduced, whose level of involvement is midway between the mind’s and the soul’s and “practises this truth.”

Having established that life has meaning and how it can be fulfilled, the author goes one step further and defines liberation as “the ultimate aim of the human life”. As with the meaning of life, the synthesis of man and God is at the heart of the ultimate aim of life. Thus, liberation is “the choice of man and the Grace of God.” And at the same time that liberation is “man’s total freedom” it is “God’s constant responsibility.” Moreover, a vivid picture is painted of the despondency of those who have no plans to make their life meaningful and those whose plans have failed, compared with the aspiration of those who seek to be “at the Feet of the Supreme”. Here, the author hints back at his previous statement about “the ascending cry of love and helplessness” which can be seen as man’s way of seeking God.

The last two paragraphs sum up the two key concepts of the lecture: God gives meaning to life, and man’s inner qualities allow him to find the meaning of life. Thus, the author lists love, devotion and surrender as the cures for man’s failings. The final paragraph also recalls the lofty and positive view on life put forward in the first paragraph, whereby God, in different forms, “eternally lives”, “constantly grows”, and “immortally lives” in man.

To sum up, similar to “Know thyself”, we can see a logical structure at work in “The meaning of life”, that runs by similar lines. “The meaning of life” also starts with a definition of the subject, in this case the meaning of life, and goes on to describe how the individual can go about seeking the meaning of life, and, ultimately, fulfil that quest, again similar in structure to “Know thyself”.

Moving on to the discussion of the lecture’s poetic structure, we will present it in the layout used in the reprint version of *The Inner Promise*, as we did with “Know thyself”. The stanza numberings are my own:

The Meaning of Life

- 1 Life is God's transcendental Blessing
to His creation.
What is more important than God's Blessing?
God's Concern.
What is more important than God's Concern?
The absolute fulfilment of God's Will.
- 2 Life is man's experience of wisdom and faith.
Wisdom without faith is the bondage of futility.
Faith without wisdom is the smile of stupidity.
- 3 Faith and wisdom can go together.
Faith awakens us to see the Truth.
Wisdom helps us to live the Truth.
- 4 The outer world is a play of conflict
between the fleeting and destructive thoughts
of man's mind
and the constructive and lasting will
of man's soul.
- 5 The inner world is a play of harmony
between the mind's surrender
and the soul's acceptance.
- 6 Life is will.
There is only one will that mediates
between God and man.
That will is at once
the descending Smile of Concern and Compassion
and the ascending cry of love and helplessness.

- 7 Life is man's conscious attempt
to see God face to face.
- 8 First try. Then cry, if necessary.
First give. Then take, if necessary.
First run. Then stop, if necessary.
First be the doer. Then be the talker, if necessary.
- 9 Thought, human thought, rules the world.
But mere thinking is of no avail.
- 10 When I think, God is my frustration.
When I cry, God is my consolation.
When I try, God is my salvation.
When I will, God is my illumination.
- 11 We must love God first if we really love life,
for God is not only the Source
but the very Breath of life.
- 12 Love of God costs nothing, absolutely nothing,
but is worth much.
Our mind knows this truth.
Our heart practises this truth.
Our soul embodies this truth.
- 13 The ultimate aim of human life is liberation.
Liberation is the choice of man
and the Grace of God.
Liberation is man's total freedom
and God's constant responsibility.

14 You cry because you have no plans
to make your life meaningful and successful.
He cries because all his plans
have come to a lame conclusion.
I cry because I do not want to have any plans.
What I want is to be seated all the time
at the Feet of the Supreme,
who is at once the Vision and the Reality.

15 My life has three doctors:
Dr. Love,
Dr. Devotion
and Dr. Surrender.

16 Dr. Love cures my mind's narrowness.
Dr. Devotion cures my heart's impurity.
Dr. Surrender cures my life's ignorance.

17 My life has three Gods:
God the Existence,
God the Consciousness
and God the Bliss.

18 God the Existence eternally lives in me.
God the Consciousness constantly grows in me.
God the Bliss immortally lives with me.²⁰

Editorial differences between the two texts of "The meaning of life".

As with "Know thyself", there are a few differences between the two versions of "The meaning of life" which, although essentially immaterial, are detailed below for the sake of completeness.

²⁰ Sri Chinmoy, "The Meaning of Life." Inner Promise 15-17.

1. Words capitalized in *www.srichinmoylibrary.com* but not in *The Inner Promise*, listed with the spelling in *The Inner Promise* and under the stanza and line number in *The Inner Promise*:

Stanza 1:

Line 1: “transcendental”

Line 2: “creation”

Line 6: “fulfillment”

2. Words capitalized in *The Inner Promise* but not in *www.srichinmoylibrary.com*, listed with the spelling in *The Inner Promise* and under the stanza and line number in *The Inner Promise*:

Stanza 6, line 4: “Concern” and “Compassion”.

3. Different word.

Stanza 6, line 5:

The Inner Promise: “Smile”

www.srichinmoylibrary.com: “cry”.

4. Different punctuation.

Stanza 8 lines 1-4, occurring in each line:

The Inner Promise: “Then cry, if...”

www.srichinmoylibrary.com: “Then cry. If...”.

Discussion of the poetic structure of “The meaning of life”.

In “The meaning of life”, like “Know thyself”, the author artfully manages poetic tone, which binds together poetic devices and illustrates the subject in a way that the prose structure cannot, but whereas a poetic structure effected a powerful tone of authority in “Know thyself”, the tone of “The meaning of life” is more subtle. The difference is clear from stanza 1. Whereas “Know thyself” started with a call to action from the very first sentence, “The meaning of life” starts by simply describing; “Life is God’s transcendental Blessing/to His creation.” There is a finality to this

description, such as there was an abundance of in “Know thyself”, but, on the other hand, the reader is not being asked to do anything. The truth is simply being presented and it is up to the reader what to do with it.

This tone of simply presenting the truth runs throughout the lecture, and is skillfully maintained through the use of poetic devices, the main two being the form of the aphorism and rhetorical lists. The aphorism we have already seen at work in “Know thyself”, while rhetorical lists are another recurring feature in Sri Chinmoy’s poetry. As Vidagdha Bennett describes:

In the context of oral or improvised poetry, Sri Chinmoy’s work features a number of clearly defined formulaic patterns. Foremost among these are lists or progressions. They may fall into categories of time, of action, of place, of qualities or of men. Frequently the poet arranges them in order of ascending importance (the rhetorical figure *auxesis*) or, conversely, of descending importance.²¹

As described in the discussion of the lecture’s prose structure, the purpose of stanza 1 is to present the ideological basis of the lecture. Life is God’s gift, but, more importantly, God cares about His creation, and, even more importantly, creation should strive to fulfill God’s Will. By arranging the presentation of this lofty view of life in a rhetorical progressive list, the author not only manages to speak to the reader’s reason, but also to his intuition. Describing such progressive list poems of Sri Chinmoy, Vidagdha Bennett says: “...the reader intuitively identifies “wise thinking” with the purity and clarity of the style.”²² Thus, in stanza 1 the author creates the tone of simply describing the truth, whereby the style must appropriate to the subject and speak to the reader’s intuition as well as his reason.

The truth-presentation tone is maintained in the compact aphoristic stanzas 2 and 3. Stanza 2 deals with the interplay between faith and wisdom and uses a parallel structure to comment on the inadequate results of having one without the other. The first result is “the bondage of futility”, where the emotive word “bondage” opens a way for the reader’s associations beyond the logical meaning of the sentence, and

²¹ Bennett, 12.

²² Bennett, 15.

evokes an image of the man of wisdom and no faith being unable to do or create anything ultimately worthwhile and fulfilling, as he is, inextricably, bound. The second result, “the smile of stupidity”, uses a similar poetic device. This time, the logically unnecessary word, “smile”, would evoke positive feelings were it not tainted by “stupidity”. Again, our associations allow us to paint a mental picture as a result of the author’s diction. In this case, a man of faith and no wisdom would seem to conjure an image of a silly fellow.

After having evoked unappealing images resulting from the separation of faith and wisdom, the author’s discussion of the synthesis of faith and wisdom focuses on the reader’s benefit, through the use of the first person plural pronoun. We, the readers, are warned of the dangers of having only either faith or wisdom, but we are invited to synthesize them, in stanza 3, so that we can “see the Truth” and “live the Truth”. Moreover, faith and wisdom are personified – they “awaken” and “help” us – which allows the reader to instinctively appreciate them more, in the same way that one would instinctively appreciate a loved one over a concept. As the first four stanzas were crucial for the setting of the tone in “Know thyself” – whereby the reader is stirred to accept the authority of the speaker – so the first three stanzas of “The meaning of life” form a solid foundation on which the rest of the lecture builds. The speaker is simply describing the truth, but by speaking also to the reader’s intuition and heart, he gives the reader the chance to intuitively feel that the speaker’s words are “wise thinking”.

The fourth and fifth stanzas, which together form one aphorism, maintain the rhetorical structure, and add to it skillful management of sounds. In this aphorism, the rhetorical structure allows us to see and feel that a comparison is being made between the outer world and the inner world. Rather than reasoning with us, the speaker presents a description of either world and allows us to draw our conclusion. The description of the inner world is much more appealing, not only because of the meaning of the words, but also because of their sounds. Thus, the clipped sounds of the outer world, “conflict”, “destructive” and “constructive” create the impression of tension, whereas the open sounds of the inner world, “harmony”, “surrender” and “acceptance” create the impression of peace and vastness. In this way, the author maintains the intuitive relationship between speaker and reader. Such usage of subtle

nuances, in this case sounds, within a parallel structure is a recurring device in Sri Chinmoy's poetry. Vidagdha Bennett comments:

...it [parallelism] affords the poet a means of approaching a feeling or concept from various angles. With each advance, he is able to extend and clarify his meaning so that the growth of the poem is through a series of approximations of meaning or subtle nuances. In this way the poet is able to reduce the margin of error involved in translating from his world of inner vision to the outer world.²³

Stanzas 6 and 7 introduce a new poetic movement in the lecture, which will last until stanza 10. In this section of the lecture, the speaker's descriptions are left open for the reader to finish. It can be seen that the speaker is not only presenting the truth, but also inviting the reader to expand on it. First, by starting both stanza 6 and 7 with statements that begin "Life is", the author establishes a bridge to the lecture's opening by recalling the beginnings of stanzas 1 and 2. Stanza 6 then goes on to present an image of a "descending Smile" and an "ascending cry", and leaves it up to the reader to decide who smiles and who cries. By looking at the preceding sentence, it may seem clear that it is God who smiles and man who cries, but, at any rate, the reader has been offered the opportunity to interpret for himself.

More such opportunities await the reader in the following stanzas. In stanza 7, the author arranges the words in such a way as to achieve a koan-like brevity. At first, it may seem illogical to call life "man's conscious attempt", while more logical would be to say: In life man consciously attempts. However, as with the hyphenated compound nouns in "Know thyself", there is an energetic tautness to the stanza as it is, which the reader is invited to intuitively, rather than logically, appreciate. Intuition over logic is also the theme in stanza 8, wherein several actions are presented, many of which seem, at first sight, to lack a further definition. What is the speaker asking the reader to try, give, take and stop? The answer presents itself from the intuitive understanding that these are all attempts, which stanza 7 had introduced, "to see God face to face". Logically, it may not make perfect sense, but intuitively it does, because the reader can finish the descriptions.

²³ Bennett, 26.

Stanzas 9 and 10 mimic the structure of stanzas 7 and 8, wherein a koan-like aphorism is followed by an aphorism in parallel structure. This time, the speaker leaves it open what thinking cannot avail of, but, while stanza 8 was a list of equally important attempts, stanza 10 is a progressive list in order of ascending importance as with Sri Chinmoy's poetry. Stanza 10 shows that it is God's consolation, salvation and illumination that thinking cannot avail itself of and describes what crying, trying and willing achieve. It is left open to the reader's intuitive understanding that these are four ways of searching for God. This section of the lecture does much to engage the reader's intuitive understanding, whereby a fuller picture of the truth, being presented simply, can be seen.

In stanza 11 the author puts aside the tone of simply presenting the truth for a call to action, effected by the speaker's use of the first person plural pronoun together with the imperative. This stanza would seem to fit with the tone scheme of "Know thyself", but in this lecture it has an effect like stanza 17 of "Know thyself": a meaningful detour on an otherwise straightforward journey. The journey's straightforwardness resumes in stanza 12 and the author uses the subject, love of God, as a gateway from the side trip of stanza 11 to the tone of simply presenting the truth. This stanza's two parallel lists present the ascending importance of mind, heart and soul, on the one hand, and knowing, practicing and embodying, on the other, in relation to truth. Thus recalling the structure of stanza 10 speaks to the reader's intuition that the lecture will now continue in the general tone.

Stanza 13 describes the different roles that man and God play in liberation, and, by using a parallel structure to facilitate the description, the author encourages the reader's intuitive understanding, beyond the denotation of the words, of the nature of the relationship between man and God. The fact that liberation is man's choice and total freedom, and God's Grace (or gift) and constant responsibility suggests a parent-child relationship. This intuitive understanding of the relationship between man and God effects a further appreciation of stanza 14, whereby the rhetorically repeated word "cry" evokes emotive images of a child. The first two cries refer to the despondency of those who have no plans to make their life meaningful and to those whose plans have failed, as described in the discussion of the lecture's prose structure. Surprisingly, the last cry is not of despondency, but a call to God, such as the "cry of

love and helplessness” from stanza 6. This unexpected departure from the logical progression of the rhetorical structure gives the power of resolution to the lyrical image of the speaker “at the Feet of the Supreme”.

As in “Know thyself”, the lecture concludes with lyricism in stanzas 15-18. Whereas in “Know thyself” elated emotions were the fitting finale to a call to action, parallel structure and metaphorical language is the appropriate ending to the simple presentation of truth in “The meaning of life”. The qualities of love, devotion and surrender are personified so that the reader can not only appreciate what they do for the speaker, but love them, as one would love a person rather than a concept. In the same way, and same rhetorical structure, three aspects of God are personified, so that the reader can better value their “living in”, “growing in” and “living with” the speaker, just like one would value having friends in one’s life. As this is all presented in the lyrical style, the reader is invited to identify with the speaker and feel that he, too, can cultivate love, devotion and surrender and live with God the Existence, Consciousness and Bliss.

Conclusion

From the close study of the two lectures it is clear that there are both poetry and prose structures at work. As Sri Chinmoy’s published lectures number in the hundreds, this study of two lectures makes no pretensions to presenting a final conclusion. On the other hand, the evidence presented here speaks for itself and further study, including more lectures would seem logical. It is noteworthy that in both cases the author maintains a poetic tone throughout the lectures (with the two exceptions mentioned) that bind together many different poetic devices and enable a greater understanding of the subject than the prose structures alone, logical though they may be. As we have seen, this greater understanding comes from intuition, emotion or imagination. These can be said to belong to the region of the heart, while the logical structure of the lecture belongs to the region of the mind. Thus, the lectures speak to both the mind and the heart.

Furthermore, it may be that the author feels that the lectures’ lofty, sometimes almost ineffable and ethereal subjects require a poet’s eye to fully envision their

truths. Sri Chinmoy himself writes:

Poetry and truth are inextricably linked. The Sanskrit word for poet is *kavi*. *Kavi* means “he who envisions”. What does he envision? He envisions the truth in its seed-form.²⁴

And on the different envisioning capacities of prose and poetry, respectively, he writes:

Being both a prose-mind-writer and a poetry-heart-writer, I have made a supreme discovery in my own life: every time there is a competitive race between my prose-mind and my poetry-heart to arrive at God’s Golden Palace, my poetry-heart invariably wins. How and why? Because, unlike my prose-mind, my poetry-heart sees invisibility’s reality-existence-life.²⁵

It would, therefore, seem that at certain points in the lectures, prose will simply not be able to convey everything, because the lofty, ineffable subjects require poetry. This claim can be supported by Vidagdha Bennett’s comment that “Aphorism holds within its finite limits the ineffable dimensions of life’s deepest mysteries and questions.”²⁶

It would seem that no compromise can be made when it comes to the presentation of truth, or as Sri Chinmoy himself explains:

Teach or preach the ultimate Truth on its own level. If you reduce it to the footing of a particular listener to make it accessible to his understanding, the power and strength of that Truth will be lost.²⁷

In conclusion, it is a testament of Sri Chinmoy’s creative genius that he is able to create lectures that contain poetry needed to convey ineffable truths, while at the same time contain a prose structure that will appeal to the reader’s sense of logic.

²⁴ Sri Chinmoy, Blessingful Invitations 41.

²⁵ Sri Chinmoy, Blessingful Invitations 43.

²⁶ Bennett, 109.

²⁷ Sri Chinmoy, Eternity’s Breath (1972; New York: Agni Press, 2014) 71.

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