

The Wright Word – by Ray

Art and Artifice

Those of you who kindly take the time to read this column know that I know very little. I have opinions, but that's all they are.

You also know that I am an occasional poet. As such, I constantly puzzle over the issue of 'form.'

I look on writing as *Art*. That's a really heavy label for my scribbles to carry. So what kind of onus do I feel this appellation imposes?

My definition of 'Art' has always been, "Inspiration constrained by discipline." Certainly, without inspiration, a work must be without the 'universality' that must be part of 'Art.' And without discipline, inspiration becomes little more than a formless "howl."

But how to mingle the two?

I was raised on 'formal' poetry: Meter, Rhyme, Structure. Yet, I am aware that over-attention to these elements can cripple a work.

On the other hand, I read a lot of poetry that is so formless and ill-thought-out that the result is like a one-minute egg. The nourishment may be there, but the dish is gooey and un-appetizing — a mess that, with a little more time and care, could have been a meal.

The human mind automatically imposes structure on

what it perceives. Skillful organization of thoughts and ideas can delight it: an unexpected repetition or rhyme. A seductive cadence, an eccentric juxtaposition of images, or just an unbroken golden thread for the imagination to follow.

But when these things become the entire *raison d'être*, when they call attention to themselves, the entire work becomes trivial, a clever, shallow trick.

Extra words or superfluous syllables — inserted solely to make the meter of a line scan well — detract from the actual content. Short rhyming lines that, inappropriately, pound the ear scream out, "Look how clever! I'm rhyming!" and reduce a poem to the level of a cheap greeting card. In particular, the perversion of sentence structure just to achieve a rhyme (for some reason, so common in Christian hymnology) trashes a poem. ("What a blessing it will be, when the face of God I see." Who would spontaneously SAY that?!)

Yet, done skillfully, these things can seem like the most blessed of accidents — the hand of the Muse imposed on conversation.

I suppose, in the end, it is the perception of the reader that matters. One person's kitsch is another one's treasure. But I do exhort you to do your best. Remember that a 'finished' work represents "the best I can offer." Ask yourself, "Is it?" -rm-