



Free verse Technique in Modern English Poetry: Subject Review

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received Oct1, 2025

Revised Oct6, 2025

Accepted Oct 28.2025

Online Jan.1, 2026

ABSTRACT

The current paper is a subject review. It relies on the review style by which it offers some of the studies that handle the free verse technique. It also looks at the application of free verse in contemporary English poems. The rise of free verse in modern English poetry marked a radical departure from traditional metrical and rhyming structures, allowing poets greater suppleness in expression and form. It became an important vehicle through which writers could capture the rhythms of natural speech, explore fragmented identities, and reflect the complexities of contemporary life. This paper also sheds light on key prominent English figures including Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams who developed innovative approaches that emphasized imagery, cadence, and psychological depth over formal constraint. The free verse technique not only democratized poetic language but also opened a space for experimentation that continues to influence contemporary poetry. The study of this technique highlights how modern English poetry negotiates the tension between tradition and innovation, reshaping the boundaries of poetic form to mirror the fluidity of modern experience. Thus, free verse plays an essential role in redefining poetic form and expression. It is characterized by its liberation from traditional metrical and rhyming constraints. Accordingly, it concludes that free verse, far from being unstructured, it demands precision and deliberate craftsmanship that reflects the complexities of contemporary life

Keywords: free verse technique, modern English poetry, Walt Whitman, and Ezra Pound.

أسلوب الشعر الحر في الشعر الإنكليزي الحديث: مقال مراجعة موضوع

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المخلص

تمثل الدراسة الحالية مقال مراجعة موضوع . ويعتمد المقال طريقة عرض المراجع التي يشير بها الى أسلوب الشعر الحر . كما تتناول تطبيق هذه التقنية في القصائد الإنكليزية المعاصرة. فلقد شكّل ظهور الشعر الحر في الشعر الإنكليزي الحديث تحولاً جذرياً عن البنى التقليدية القائمة على الوزن والقافية، مما أتاح للشعراء مرونة أكبر في التعبير والصياغة. وقد أصبح الشعر الحر وسيلة مهمة مكنت الكتاب من النقاط إيقاعات الكلام الطبيعي، واستكشاف الهويات المتشظية، والتعبير عن تعقيدات الحياة المعاصرة. كذلك يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على أبرز الأسماء الأدبية المؤثرة مثل والت وبتمان، وإزرا باوند، وتي. اس. إليوت، وويليام كارلوس ويليامز، الذين ابتكروا أساليب جديدة تقوم على إبراز الصورة الشعرية، والإيقاع الداخلي، والعمق النفسي، بدلاً من التقيد بالقيود الشكلية الصارمة. لقد أسهمت تقنية الشعر الحر في ديمقراطية اللغة الشعرية، وفتحت مجالاً واسعاً للتجريب ما زال يترك أثره في الشعر المعاصر. ويبرز من دراسة هذه التقنية كيف يتناول الشعر الإنكليزي الحديث العلاقة بين التقاليد والابتكار، ليعيد تشكيل حدود البناء الشعري بما يعكس سيولة التجربة الحديثة. وعليه، فإن الشعر الحر يؤدي دوراً أساسياً في إعادة تعريف الشكل الشعري وطرائق التعبير. وهو يتميز بتحرره من القيود التقليدية للوزن والقافية، ووفقاً لذلك يمكن الاستنتاج بأن الشعر الحر، بعيداً عن كونه شعراً غير منظم، يتطلب دقة عالية ومهارة متقنة تعكس تعقيدات الحياة المعاصرة.

أسلوب الشعر الحر، الشعر الإنكليزي الحديث، والت وبتمان، وإزرا باوند

الكلمات المفتاحية:



Introduction: -

The emergence of free verse by the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries marks an important shift in poetic form, offering poets creative freedom in structure and rhythm and became a dominant technique in modern English poetry. Ezra Pound (1913) declared that "poetry should be as well written as prose" (P. 9), reflecting the modernist move toward innovation in form and diction. Critics such as T.E. Hulme (1912) claimed that "free verse does not lack form; rather, it discovers form through content" (P. 127). Modern scholars, like Gross (1996), emphasize that "while free verse lacks meter, it maintains rhythm through syntax, diction, and the visual layout of the poem" (P. 58). Free poetry necessitates an acute awareness of poetic technique and mastery, as T. S. Eliot noted, "no poem is free for the man who wants to make a decent job." (Eliot, 1933, P. 27). The rise of free verse from the French "verse libre" is often traced to French Symbolist poets, such as Arthur Rimbaud and Jules Laforgue, who sought to escape the constraints of traditional forms. In the English literature, Walt Whitman is widely ascribed with pioneering the technique in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), using long, flowing lines and natural cadences to celebrate individualism and democracy (Whitman, 1855). As a testament to this, Bloom (2005) argues that "the poetry of Whitman brought about what may be called the modern paradigm of poetic freedom: subsequently, writers were allowed to break free of rigid metrical modes, and to write more naturally instinctual forms of expression." The trope of Whitman can be seen in the works of the later success represented in T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams, whose aesthetic motifs of formal experiment were further developed in the modernist poetics. (Perloff, 1985).

Previous studies have individually contributed to define the nature of free verse including Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971), Charles O. Hartman's *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980), Michael Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism* (1984), Michael Coyle's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*(2012), and Marjorie Perloff's *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric* (1990). Together, these studies have considerably advanced understanding of the free verse form but no particular study has traced the evolution of free verse technique across prominent poets like Walt Whitman, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Sylvia Plath, and others. This Review seeks to fill that gap by tracing the evolution of free verse as a technique used by those poets to mirror shifting cultural, aesthetic, and psychological concerns across time.

The Objective of the Study: -

The research seeks to elucidate the significance of the free verse approach in contemporary English poetry with reference to pioneer writers who employed this method in their works.

Methodology of the Study: -

This review adopts a qualitative and analytical approach. It gathers, surveys and interprets selected works thematically. It presents certain excerpts from poets and writers who address the topic of free poetry in their works.

Thematic analysis of the use of Free Verse Technique: -

Free verse revolutionized modern English poetry by refusing strict meter and rhyme in favor of expressive freedom. From Whitman to contemporary poets, it has allowed for innovation and diversity of voice. The technique remains vital for poets responding to personal, political, and aesthetic challenges. This study is likely to be started with the discussion of Walt Whitman (1819-1892) who is widely acknowledged as the pioneer of free verse in American poetry. In his revolutionary collection, *Leaves of Grass* (1855), he rejected conventional poetic structures in favor of a sweeping, expansive form reflective of democratic ideals and individualism. His poem "Song of Myself" represents this approach:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (Poetry foundation.org. Song of Myself L 1-3)

Whitman's lines are long and loosely structured, mimicking the rhythms of natural speech and the cadences of biblical verse (Kummings, 1998). Bloom (2005) asserted, Whitman's poetry provided "the prototype for modern poetic freedom, liberating poets from rigid metrical constraints and inspiring later English poets to adopt more organic forms of expression" (P. 312). The use of repetition, cataloguing, and parallelism allows for an organic flow rather than syntactical rigidity. By relating poetic form to American identity, Whitman laid the foundation for future generations of poets seeking formal freedom.

In the 20th century, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound expanded the use of free verse. Pound's imagism highlighted clarity and economy of language over metrical constraint (Pound, 1913, P. 4). Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) demonstrates modernist fragmentation and intertextuality while using flexible, irregular verse forms (Eliot, 1922). T.S. Eliot's embrace of free verse is equally important in the development of modernism. In poems like "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922), he depends the use of line breaks, shifts in voice, and fragmented imagery:

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table. (Poetry foundation .org. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, L 1-3)

In the lines above, Eliot blends poetic lyricism with clinical detachment, disrupting traditional rhythms to reflect the disorientation of modern life (Moody, 1979). Although he occasionally incorporates rhyme or meter, Eliot's structural choices privilege meaning and atmosphere over formality.

Ezra Pound's attitude to free verse is best understood through his role as the architect of Imagism, a movement that advocated for clarity, economy, and precision in language. His poem "In a Station of the Metro" (1913) is a quintessential

free verse work "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough." (L, 1-2)

With only two lines, he abandons meter and rhyme entirely, instead creating resonance through juxtaposition and visual imagery (Kenner, 1971). Pound's contributions to free verse include not only technical innovation but also the integration of classical and Eastern influences, particularly haiku and ancient Greek metrics.

A fellow Imagist and collaborator of Pound is, H. D. She employed free verse to craft crystalline, emotionally charged poems. Her works often draw on myth and the natural world, as seen in "O read" (1914):

"Whirl up, sea—

whirl your pointed pines,

splash your great pines

on our rocks"... (Poetry foundation. org, O read, L 1-4)

H.D.'s poetry uses free verse to induce layered meanings and compressed imagery. The absence of formal constraints enables her to express a uniquely feminine and modernist voice (Friedman, 1990).

Her use of repetition and fragmentation mirrors both psychological interiority and cultural upheaval.

William Carlos Williams is another outstanding author who adopted free verse. The coherence of his corpus is attested to by a lifetime preoccupation with developing a clearly American poetic voice, one that was beginning to be denied by the formal practice largely imported to the United States by Europeans, in favor of a Celtic-model of speech that was the ground that his poetry made its habitation. His use of free-verse styles especially in works of poetry that describe common subjects and objects is highlighted through "The Red Wheelbarrow"(1923) which starts with a striking line thus, "so much depends upon a red wheel barrow..." (Poetry foundation. org, The Red Wheel barrow , L 1-2). Such minimalist structure of the poem, where other rhyme and conventional meter could not find a place, intensifies the spheres of tension between the formal composition and the sensory observation. With the techniques, like the variable foot and the fragmented syntax the writer, Williams, provokes readers to perceive the rhythm of the text through pauses, moments of silence and even space. This formal experimentation, MacGowan (2008) sees, expresses a more comprehensive

philosophic stand "in Williams, the freedom of verse is not only a style choice, but a position of poetic independence, the independence of the poet, and the independence of the art" (P. 85).

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) also revitalized free verse in the mid-20th century with his sprawling, breath-length lines and countercultural themes. His poem "Howl" (1956) starts: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness..." (Poetry foundation. org, Howl, L 1-2). His structure mirrors Whitman's expansive form but infuses it with surrealism, political critique, and personal confession. His rhythm follows the natural rhythm of speech and chant, enabling an emotional immediacy rare in traditional forms (Charters, 1992). Free verse, for Ginsberg, is both a form of liberation and resistance. On the other hand, contemporary poets like Ocean Vuong and Tracy K. Smith continue to use free verse as a tool for intimate, personal, and politically engaged expression (Longenbach, 2007). Later poets like Sylvia Plath used free verse to convey emotional volatility, especially in *Ariel*, where erratic rhythm mirrors mental unrest (Axelrod, 1990). Poets including Langston Hughes, Allen Ginsberg, and Denise Levertov adapted free verse to explore themes of identity, politics, and spirituality (Vendler, 2004). While free verse has become a dominant mode in modern English poetry, it has not been without critics. Some claim that its popularity has led to a decline in technical accuracy. Others, however, see this flexibility as enabling more diverse voices and narratives to emerge, particularly those outside Eurocentric traditions (Vendler, 2004)

Thus through all periods of English literature, the free verse allowed poets the freedom to express their thoughts freely and also to reflect the discontinuities of modern life, mirroring its complexities through irregular rhythms, abrupt shifts in tone, and disjunctive imagery.

Conclusion: -

In Modern English Poetry, free verse represents more than a stylistic innovation; it reflects a broader ideological shift towards freedom, fragmentation, and personal expression. Thus, it offers modern poets the freedom to shape form around meaning, rather than fitting meaning into inherited structures. Free verse is a form that continues to evolve with the needs of contemporary voices. It remains one of the most significant innovations in modern poetry, enabling a radical reimagining of poetic form and voice. Effective free verse demands a precise and deliberate approach to rhythm, image, and lineation, allowing poets to capture the dynamic and multifaceted nature of modern life. Through the works of Whitman, Eliot, Pound, H.D., Williams, and Ginsberg, free verse evolved into a powerful mode of expression that reflects individual voice, cultural change, and artistic innovation. Their collective legacy asserts that poetic freedom is not the absence of form, but the creation of a form uniquely suited to the poet's vision. Nonetheless, the field still lacks frameworks that unite early theories of prosody with modern linguistic and cultural contexts.

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