

1) The Apogee of Formal Innovation: Free Verse

2) From Modernism to Postmodernism

3) Poetry Today

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1) The Apogee of Formal Innovation: Free Verse

[apogee:

1 the point at which the moon, the sun, a space vehicle etc., is farthest from the earth

2 the highest point of power or success]

Types of Free Verse:

(cf. Steele 1999, 260-264)

- 1) free verse hovering intermittently around, in, and out of meter, alluding to and playing off of conventional measure.
- 2) long-lined, syntactically repetitive free verse modelled on the translations of the Psalms in the King James Bible: a sense of rhythm is established by parallelism/anaphora, a sense of closure is signalled by departing from this scheme of repetition.
- 3) short lines corresponding to syntactical units: line divisions reflect the syntactical current, grammar is compressed and urgent.
- 4) short lines with lots of enjambment: to facilitate run-ons, lines end in mid-phrase – with prepositions, conjunctions, articles, attributive words, or with adjectives whose nouns appear at the beginning of the line below. Effects: makes the verse paragraph rather than the line the basic unit, facilitates visual structures.

1) T.S. Eliot

The Waste Land (1922)

Part I The Burial of the Dead

[...]

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
you cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

[...]

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

[...]

Four Quartets, "Burnt Norton" (1936)

[...]

So we moved [...]
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed and the pool was empty.
Go said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.

[...]

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

2) Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (1956)

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterically naked,	1
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,	2
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,	3
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz	4
who [...]	
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls [...]	11

3) Mark Strand, “Keeping Things Whole” (1964)

In a field
I am the absence
of field.
This is
always the case.
Wherever I am
I am what is missing.

When I walk
I part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been.

We all have reasons
for moving.
I move
to keep things whole.

4) William Carlos Williams, "This Is Just to Say" (1934)

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

2) From Modernism to Postmodernism

The Modernist Paradox:

a tradition of breaking with tradition



How can you break with this tradition?



Postmodernism: pluralism, eclecticism, pastiche
anything goes + irony, reflexivity

postmodernism (playful attitude)

vs.

late modernism (emphatic or elegiac attitude)

epistemological concerns:

representation experience



language

3) Poetry Today

Philip Larkin, "This Be the Verse" (1974)

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were soppo-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.

Benjamin Zephania, "Speak" (1992)

Yu teach me
Air Pilots language
De language of
American Presidents
A Royal Family
Of a green unpleasant land.
It is
Authorized
Approved
Recycled
At your service.
I speak widda bloody tongue,
Wid Nubian tones
Fe me riddims
Wid built in vibes.
Yu dance.

Carol Ann Duffy, "Poet for Our Times" (1990)

I write the headlines for a Daily Paper.
It's just a knack one's born with all-right-Squire.
You do not have to be an educator,
just bang the words down like they're screaming *Fire!*
CECIL-KEYAS ROW SHOCK TELLS EYETIE WAITER.
ENGLAND FAN CALLS WHINGEING FROG A LIAR.

Cheers. Thing is, you've got to grab attention
with just one phrase as punters rush on by.
I've made mistakes too numerous to mention,
so now we print the buggers inches high.
TOP MP PANTIE ROMP INCREASES TENSION.
RENT BOY: ROCK STAR PAID ME WELL TO LIE.

I like to think that I'm a sort of poet
for our times. My shout. Know what I mean?
I've got a special talent and I show it
in punchy haikus featuring the Queen.
DIPLOMAT IN BED WITH SERBO CROAT.
EASTENDERS' BONKING SHOCK IS WELL-OBSCENE.

Of course, these days, there's not the sense of panic
you got a few years back. What with the box
et cet. I wish I'd been around when the Titanic
sank. To headline that, mate, would've been the tops.
SEE PAGE 3 TODAY GENTS THEY'RE GIGANTIC.
KINNOCK-BASHER MAGGIE PULLS OUT STOPS.

And, yes, I have a dream – make that a scotch, ta –
that kids will know my headlines off by heart.
IMMIGRANTS FLOOD IN CLAIMS HEATHROW-WATCHER.
GREEN PARTY WOMAN IS A NIGHTCLUB TART.
The poems of the decade ... *Stuff 'em! Gotcha!*
The instant tits and bottom line of art.

Nick Drake, "Static" (1999)

When you pulled the t-shirt
over your stooped head
I heard the crackle of static
and imagined the soft,
invisible fur
of charged atmosphere
over the TV's
translucent imagery.

Lights out, my blind
and all-believing hands
discover the ghost
of a smile
on your invisible face;
here you are
in your skin,
shocking against mine.

Kevin Halligan, "Days"

The days go by us like the cars,
Either fast or slow,
One followed by another
Rushing through an amber light,
Or grinding up a hill,
Or casually taking a corner
With a dog gulping the breeze.

Then all of them run together
At once, almost identical.
Someone with a tinted window
Swerves to the right
Attempting a new direction,
And the rest follow as at a funeral,
Keeping a respectful distance.

(*Times Literary Supplement*, Oct 28, 2005: 4)

Susan Wicks, “Z”

What my father needed was a Z-shaped coffin
slash – slash – slash

But undertakers must have special scissors
snip snip
to cut the tightened tendons behind a client’s dead knees

...
Now he is with God
in heaven in the arms of my mother
Crunch

I loved him
as much as anyone *can* love a letter

And none of us is truly coffin-shaped
Slash – snip – crunch – howl – clatter

(*Times Literary Supplement*, May 16, 2003: 7)

5 6 7
2 4 6
6 5 7
4 9 6
8 8

Walter Vogt, “Die drei Lebensalter des Menschen” (1978)

da da
bla bla
ga ga

You turn the page
to find another title,
though the last one
didn't even end,
so you shut the book
& open it again
sometime next week
but the thing that
scratched your soul
in a personal way
isn't even *there*,
only a bunch of
unfamiliar words,

saying something
entirely different
& you begin to wonder
just whose thoughts
you've been thinking.

(from *Glass Lunch*. New York: Penguin, 1997: 28f.)

Michael S. Glaser, "The Problem with Haiku"

Of all the things I
Wish would be, the one that most
Occurs to me is

(*Antioch Review* , Summer 2007)

Makarand Paranjape (*1960): From *Used Book* (2001)

Roach Trap

They saw it at K Mart,
with Mohammed Ali, fist clenched,
imprinted on the glossy package,
promising to eliminate their cockroaches
without harmful sprays or messy squashings.
They peeled the polythene wrapper
and examined the contents gingerly:
a small black cardboard box,
openings funnelling inward on both sides,
met their curious eyes. Inside,
strips of adhesive ran parallel
breadth-wise; in between
a dark, odious substance
emitted what they presumed
was the insect-attracting odour.
Bold lettering in red
added the advice
"Keep out of reach of children."

There were two traps to a carton.
They placed one atop the kitchen cupboards,
the other in a corner
next to the air freshener
on the bathroom shelf.
A few days later they spied
two roaches blockaded in the box,
silently writhing hour after hour in toil.
Then, all legs broken,
bellies flattened,
they lay still.
Only their antennas flickered
indicating that they lived.

At last, all motion ceased, and,
completely sealed in glue, they perished.

Soon the trap began to fill.
Again and again
they witnessed the insects' passion
played to its inexorable conclusion.
Sometimes a roach would dodge a layer
only to be stuck in another.
One, preferring freedom to feet,
even nibbled into a fastened limb
until nearly free. Just then,
he lost his nerve, and in panic
lurched mandible down to his doom.

In winter, out of frosted windows they would watch
multicolored bugs of steel whining their plight
as their helpless wheels spun in the slippery ice.
Even through tightly throttled windows,
they could hear the screams in the wee hours of the morning.

Every year
pilgrims like them
came from the old country —
hopeful,
faces scrubbed clean,
and such innocence in their eyes —
attracted by the sweet scent
of opportunity, success, and money.
Initially they all intended to return
but were eventually tied down
by the relentless logic of the situation.
Finally, most settled down, reconciled
to the reality of their divided existence.
(Yet, why was there always
a lingering sense of regret or guilt?)

At midnight they woke up sweating;
everywhere the same neurosis:
in suburban houses, air-tight and clammy,
racked, flailing bodies,
locked in layers of adhesive prosperity,
shrieking, squirming, silently —
slowly expiring like cockroaches.

Loudon Wainwright, “A Song”

Here's a song for someone else to sing
With a universal and generic ring
It's all about the same old stuff
That you like and can't get enough of
How about a minor chord right here
Wasn't that rather pleasant in your ear?

And here's a song with not a lot to say
But when you see it it'll sound okay
You bet there'll be a video
We'll flesh it out for radio
Now it's high time that I play that change again
It's haunting you like an annoying friend

It's true that you like what you get
You get what you're given
God knows what the hell you'll like
That's why he's up in heaven

Here's a song I didn't even write
It came to me one rainy April night
I had been drinking I was bored
Next to me our fat gray cat snored
I'm afraid it's time for you know what
The cat's awake, I fear I woke him up
So that's enough of that now I'll shut up

(from *Little Ship*, 1997)

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