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Evaluation poetic forms in Contemporary English Literature: A Comparative Study: "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot, The Sun and her Flowers" by Rupi Kaur and "Citizen: An American Lyric" by Claudia Rankine

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"تقييم الأشكال الشعرية في الأدب الإنجليزي المعاصر: دراسة مقارنة (الأرض الخراب) لت. س. إليوت، و(الشمس وزهورها) لروبي كور، و(مواطن: نشيد أمريكي) لكلوديا رانكين"

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الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة البحثية تطوّر الأشكال الشعرية في الأدب الإنجليزي المعاصر من خلال المقارنة والتحليل بين ثلاث قصائد/أعمال شعرية بارزة هي :*الأرض الخراب* لت. س. إليوت، *والشمس وزهورها* لروبي كور، و*مواطن: نشيد أمريكي* لكلوديا رانكين. يمثّل كل عمل من هذه الأعمال توجّهًا أسلوبيًا وموضوعيًا متميزًا، يعكس تعقيدات السياقات الثقافية والتاريخية التي أُنتج فيها. تتناول تحفة إليوت الحداثية مفاهيم التفكك وخيبة الأمل، مسلّطةً الضوء على الفوضى التي أعقبت الحرب في المجتمع الغربي. وعلى النقيض من ذلك، تركّز مجموعة روبي كور على الشفاء الفردي والجماعي من خلال شعر بسيط ومباشر، مع توظيف عناصر بصرية تسهم في تعزيز الأثر العاطفي للنص. أما كلوديا رانكين، فتقدّم معالجة شعرية مبتكرة تمزج بين الشعر والنثر، حيث تواجه من خلالها قضايا العنصرية البنيوية والهوية، متجاوزةً الحدود التقليدية للأنواع الأدبية. وتهدف هذه الدراسة المقارنة إلى إبراز الكيفية التي تعبّر بها هذه الأشكال الشعرية المتنوعة عن القضايا المعاصرة، كاشفةً عن التفاعل الديناميكي بين التقاليد الشعرية والابتكار الفني في الأدب الحديث. ومن خلال هذا التحليل، تسهم الدراسة في تعميق الفهم للتحولات المستمرة في مشهد التعبير الشعري، وللحوار المتواصل بين الشكل والمضمون في الشعر المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الأشكال الشعرية، الأرض الخراب، الشمس وزهورها، مواطن: نشيد أمريكي.

ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the evolution of poetic forms within contemporary English literature by comparing and analyzing three seminal poems: T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," Rupi Kaur's "The Sun and Her Flowers," and Claudia Rankine's "Citizen: An American Lyric." Each poem represents distinct stylistic and thematic approaches, reflecting the complexities of their respective cultural and historical contexts. Eliot's modernist masterpiece delves into fragmentation and disillusionment, highlighting the chaos of post-war society. In contrast, Kaur's collection emphasizes personal and collective healing through accessible verse, employing visual elements to enhance emotional resonance. Rankine's innovative use of lyricism confronts systemic racism and identity, blending poetry with prose to challenge conventional boundaries. This comparative analysis seeks to illuminate how these diverse poetic forms articulate contemporary concerns, revealing the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in literature today. Through this exploration, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the shifting landscapes of poetic expression and the ongoing dialogue between form and content in modern verse.**Key Words:** Poetic Forms, The Waste Land, The Sun and her Flowers, Citizen: An American Lyric

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of contemporary English literature is marked by a rich tapestry of poetic forms, each reflecting the diverse experiences and challenges of its time. This paper explores the intricate ways in which poetry has evolved, focusing on three pivotal works: T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Rupi Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*, and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric.* Each of these texts serves as a lens through which we can examine the shifting nature of poetic expression, revealing not only the personal struggles of their authors but also the broader societal issues at play.Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, remains a cornerstone of modernist poetry, characterized by its fragmented structure and allusions to a wide array of cultural texts. It mirrors the disorientation of a post-World War I world, grappling with themes of despair and renewal. In stark contrast, Kaur's work, emerging from the digital age, employs a minimalist aesthetic to address themes of love, identity, and healing, resonating with a younger audience through its visual elements and emotional accessibility. Rankine's *Citizen*, meanwhile, blurs the boundaries between poetry and prose, tackling urgent social issues such as race and identity in contemporary America, thus redefining the role of the poet as a social commentator.This comparative study aims to illuminate the distinctive poetic forms employed by these authors while also considering how their works interact with and respond to one another. By examining their stylistic choices and thematic concerns, we can gain insights into the dynamism of contemporary poetry and its capacity to engage with the pressing issues of our time. Through this analysis, we seek to understand not only the individual contributions of Eliot, Kaur, and Rankine but also the evolving nature of poetic discourse in the modern era.*The Waste Land* represents modernist fragmentation, experimentation and allusion meanwhile the other two works exemplify contemporary forms, blending poetry and prose. *The Waste Land* features disjointed narratives, allusions, and multiple voices. Kaur's work uses short, free-verse poems, often without punctuation meanwhile in Rankine's poems, poetry and prose are blended creating a hybrid form. Eliot uses rich, allusive language and this is contrasted with Rankine whose language is lyrical and evocative while exploring racism and identity whereas Kaur functions concise and accessible style. *The Waste Land* examines post-WWI disillusionment and spiritual decay meanwhile *Citizen* explores collective experiences of identity, racism, and disconnection. Yet, Kaur's work concentrates more on experiences of love, loss, and healing. Thus, all three works touch on identity but Kaur's and Rankine's concentrate more on personal experiences and racial identity. Each work showcases developing poetic forms, ranging from modernist experimentation to contemporary hybrid forms. The three poets experiment with form, language and structure so that they can convey complex themes. They provide powerful social commentary, reflecting their respective historical context. However, Kaur's and Rankine's works focus on intersectional experiences examining identity, gender, and race.

METHODOLOGY

This study takes an interpretive qualitative approach, aiming to explore and compare the poetic forms utilized in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Rupi Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*, and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*. The focus will be on how these forms shape the poets' thematic expressions and emotional impacts. A detailed textual analysis will be conducted for each of the selected works. The ultimate goal of this study is to enhance understanding of how contemporary poets navigate and innovate within poetic forms, offering insights into their artistic choices and the cultural contexts that shape their work.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to revisit T.S. Eliot's early writings and correspondence to provide a framework for understanding his poetry. It highlights that many critics have largely ignored this significant content, yet it uncovers Eliot's challenge in defining a poetic approach centered on what could be described as liminality—the space where different elements coexist without blending into one another. This poetic approach emerges from Eliot's perspective of the individual as a liminal figure, shaped by social influences and primal impulses that are always changing. The analysis also illustrates Eliot's view of art as a partnership between the audience and the artist, as well as between tradition and personal creativity. The artwork exists at a boundary that merges reality with idealism, leading to a distinct aesthetic experience. Within this framework, the study examines *The Waste Land*, arguing that the self-aware themes of liminality and collaboration—both in substance and form—are expressed in the poem. By employing this poetic lens, the poem captures the intricate mix of "odds and ends, in constant flux, shaped by desire and fear," reflecting Eliot's understanding of the modern mind and, more broadly, any state of consciousness.This poetic perspective comes from Eliot's view of individuals as liminal beings, influenced by social factors and instinctual drives that are always in motion. The discussion also highlights Eliot's belief that art is a collaborative effort between the audience and the creator, as well as a blend of tradition and individual expression. Art exists at a crossroads where reality and ideals converge, creating a

unique aesthetic experience. Within this context, the analysis focuses on *The Waste Land*, arguing that the poem articulates self-aware themes of liminality and collaboration in both content and structure. Through this poetic framework, the piece encapsulates the complex interplay of "odds and ends, in constant flux, shaped by desire and fear," mirroring Eliot's insights into the modern mind and, more generally, any state of awareness.T.S. Eliot's groundbreaking modernist poem *The Waste Land* was published in 1922. It is divided into five sections and examines life in London after World War I, while also featuring diverse settings like deserts and oceans alongside the city's hustle and bustle. The poem is notable for its unique style, blending various poetic forms and traditions. Eliot references a wide range of literary works, including the Bible, Shakespeare, St. Augustine, Hindu and Buddhist texts, French poetry, Wagnerian opera, and Arthurian legends related to the Holy Grail. At the same time, it reflects modernity through mentions of jazz music, gramophones, motorcars, typists, and canned food.Shortly after its publication, *The Waste Land* sparked much discussion among readers. Some critics praised it as a masterpiece representing a generation of lost souls, while others criticized its complexity, like U.S. poet William Carlos Williams, who felt it brought readers back to the classroom. The poem remains polarizing, but its status as one of the most influential works of the twentieth century is well established.*The Waste Land* does not adhere to a conventional structure; its lines and stanzas vary widely in length. This unpredictability aligns with the poem's themes of the chaos of modern life and the shortcomings of past traditions. One literary style it draws from is the dramatic monologue, which involves a direct conversation between the speaker and the reader. However, what distinguishes *The Waste Land* from typical dramatic monologues is the frequent change of speaker throughout the poem. The identities, cultures, and settings shift abruptly, often without clear signals that a new voice has emerged. This is confirmed by Jessica Malordy who said "apart from most other dramatic monologues is that its speaker *changes* constantly throughout the poem, shifting identities, cultures, and locations abruptly and with little indication that a new voice is taking over"(n.p). This leads to a fragmented and disorienting experience, but it also offers a rich variety of perspectives on the wasteland at the poem's core.One consistent feature of the poem is its use of refrains and repetitions, which help create a sense of unity despite the chaotic lines. The refrain "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" provides structure at the end of Section II, while the recurring "Jug jug" from Philomel acts as a thread throughout the poem's disordered form. Similarly, the phrases Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyata at the end of Section IV add structure, giving the conclusion more clarity and a sense of progression. Although the poem lacks a rigid format, it is organized into five sections, each with its own title, focusing on different aspects of its thematic ideas.The first section, "The Burial of the Dead," addresses the monotony of contemporary life. It specifically references the traumas of war and the dull ache that defines post-war existence. The spring rain only serves to highlight feelings of despair and isolation. Urban residents appear zombie-like, unable to connect as they move across "London Bridge" in a shroud of "brown fog." A fortune-teller delivers foreboding warnings about the fear of dying by water, a theme that recurs later in the poem. In short, modern society feels like a living hell.

The second section, "A Game of Chess," explores themes of seduction, failed love, and the plight of women. It touches on topics like abortion, the myth of Philomela's rape, and Ophelia's tragic end in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The poem critiques the superficiality of pop culture and expresses regret over people's inability to recognize the beauty and lessons from the past.The third section, titled "The Fire Sermon," ironically references a sermon by the Buddha that warns against the destructive nature of lust and earthly desires. This section, the longest in the poem, offers explicit and grotesque portrayals of modern relationships, which the speaker views as immoral and unfulfilling. It concludes with the speaker feeling "burned" by the shame associated with all this lust and depravity.The fourth and shortest section is "Death by Water," which serves as a cooling reflection and a kind of parable. It reminds readers that death inevitably comes for everyone, suggesting that they should consider the horrors presented in the poem and strive to improve their lives.The fifth and final section, "What the Thunder Said," portrays the wasteland as a stark, physical reality—a harsh, barren, nightmarish environment where the speaker yearns desperately for water. Eventually, the skies open up, bringing much-needed rain and prompting the speaker to contemplate spiritual teachings that might offer solutions to the challenges of modern life.Rupi Kaur is an Indo-Canadian poet and illustrator born into a Sikh family in Punjab, India. Her family moved to Canada when she was just four years old, and her father worked as a truck driver. Kaur found artistic inspiration in her mother. She has published two poetry collections: *Milk and Honey* (2014) and *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017). While the latter explores themes of love, relationships, and sexual trauma, it also clearly captures the immigrant experience, which is often overlooked. Kaur gained international acclaim with her collection of poetry which has sold over two million copies. She stands out as a contemporary poet in South Asia, writing to

reach a broad audience rather than seeking academic accolades or journal publications. Her straightforward language allows her to connect emotionally with readers, making her work accessible and relatable. Known as an Instapoet, Kaur rose to fame through Instagram, where she first shared her poetry and quickly gained a large following. Her poems touch on themes such as love, sexuality, feminism, and immigration. Drawing from her own background as an immigrant, she dedicates a chapter in her second book to address the cultural challenges faced by immigrants in the U.S. Her second book, *The Sun and her Flowers,* consists of five chapters titled "Wilting", "Falling", "Rooting", "Rising", "Blooming" and these chapters focus on multi-dimensional aspects a woman goes through in her life, comparing her with a sunflower. In this book, the scars and the process of recovering from the colonial wound are even harsher than her previous one. In this second collection, Kaur explores themes of love and loss, trauma and abuse, healing, femininity, and the body. "Wilting" takes on the themes of sadness and loss. "Falling" focuses on the sad sentiments accompanying the loss of a significant relationship—"Rooting" delves into issues of female infanticide, immigration, and boundaries.A closer look, however, reveals that *the sun and her flowers* powerfully addresses serious topics like female infanticide and racial diaspora, elevating Kaur beyond a mere "Tumblr-girl" aesthetic to a voice for social justice. Her poetry gained traction through self-publishing on Instagram, where she has over 1.8 million followers. Critics often dismiss her work as simplistic, pointing to lines like "on the last day of love/my heart cracked inside my body" as catering to mass sharing among uninspired users. While some of her pieces may veer into cliché, dismissing Kaur entirely for her Instagram presence reflects a certain intellectual elitism. She uses the platform to mirror her audience's real experiences, encouraging self-reflection amid a sea of idealized lives.Unlike *Milk and Honey,* the poems of *The Sun and her Flowers* elaborate on accepting roots, self-acceptation, female infanticide, colonization, immigration and borders and other non-spatial themes. Kaur presented several poems describing the cultural diversity, migration and familial stories and wrapped up nostalgia with them. She muses, "I want to know what she laughed about with/ friends. in the village within houses of mud and brick. surrounded by acres of mustard plant and sugarcane" (143). She pens, "my mother sacrificed her dreams/ so I could dream" (148) and she pictures the thousands of Asian women's sacrifices, tears and silences in order to providing the facilities to their daughters they were unable to get. She also describes the pains and sufferings of an immigrant family to spend days after days in another foreign urban city, "was it worth to pull all of our money/ into the dream of a country/ that is swallowing us whole" (149). They have landed in this land with broken vowels and this unknown territory "looks at her/with the word visitor wrapped around its tongue" (149). Kaur (2017) deconstructs the idea of perfect accentuation in a posh manner which can make one person into perfect westernized and celebrates the accent of her mother, which is "thick like honey" (151). Claiming the human as "cyborgs", William J. Mitchell notes that urban designers of the digital era should retheorize "the body in space" (28) and Kaur is vividly doing so. She is re-accepting and reconstructing the body parts as they should be and is combining them in virtual space. She embraces her brown skin by stating, "it is a blessing/ to be the color of earth" (227) and the illustration paints a human body on the soil, which is growing flowers and leaves all over it. In *the sun and her flowers*, Kaur blends short poems with longer narratives, tackling themes such as the beauty of her parents' imperfect English and her journey of self-reclamation after trauma. The poems often lack titles and rigid boundaries, allowing them to be read individually or as a cohesive sequence. This fluidity fosters an organic quality in her poetry, breaking free from traditional constraints. Her choice to use only lowercase letters reflects an effort to incorporate Gurmukhi script, where such distinctions don't exist. By avoiding conventional punctuation, she emphasizes the idea that some concepts are too vast for a full stop.The first section, "Wilting," grapples with the pain of lost love and waking up alone. Kaur doesn't just dwell on heartbreak; she emphasizes the significance of self-love. In "what love looks like," she avoids self-pity and instead asserts, "i think love starts here/everything else is just desire and projection," challenging the narrow definition of love. She highlights the need to recognize the love from hard-working parents, distant friends, and acts of kindness. Importantly, the path to self-acceptance is not oversimplified; the struggles with depression are depicted with raw honesty. Lines like "what draws you to her/tell me what you like/so I can practice" reveal her inner turmoil, yet the collection boldly rejects the idea of seeking validation from a partner.Originally, *the sun and her flowers* was meant to explore toxic love, but Kaur was inspired by recent events in America to address immigration and diaspora. This shift moves the work beyond the romantic themes of *milk and honey* to a poignant commentary on racial issues in the "Rooting" section. Instead of presenting a generalized narrative of South Asian refugee experiences, Kaur focuses on personal moments, like her mother's longing for Punjab, capturing nostalgia in the search "in foreign films/and the international food aisles." While some poems critique

borders didactically, Kaur's nuanced exploration of race shines through her feelings of guilt about her parents' sacrifices and her quest to unearth their cultural history, striving to "pry their silence apart like a closed envelope". She expresses pride in her identity, celebrating "it is a blessing/to be the colour of the earth." Kaur demands greater representation in literature, and her unapologetic style insists on occupying space: "to be mouthy/get as loud as we need/to be heard."A standout feature of Kaur's poetry is her minimalistic approach to both language and form. Many of her poems are very short, often consisting of multiple brief lines with little to no punctuation. She consistently uses lowercase letters, which has drawn significant attention from literary critics and readers alike. Kaur attributes these stylistic choices to her Punjabi heritage, especially her mother tongue, which lacks capital letters and punctuation. Esha Sharma assures: "These design decisions draw on the author's Punjabi identity, stating that those choices were inspired by her understanding of the *Gurmukhi* script, her mother tongue- a script that does not use capital letters and punctuation"(540). This minimalist style visually enhances her work, creating a flow that mirrors the rhythm of spoken-word poetry. The minimalist format of Rupi Kaur's poetry primarily enhances its readability and accessibility, making it appealing even to those who typically do not read poetry. This simplicity also amplifies the emotional impact of her work, allowing the words to convey their intended meanings without distractions. Additionally, her straightforward style aligns perfectly with the visual nature of Instagram, where concise, easy-to-read content thrives. Esha states: The fact that Kaur could impart a great deal of meaning in very few lines dovetails exceedingly well with
how content is digested in a digital context"(540). In her second poetry collection, *The Sun and Her Flowers*, Kaur devotes a full chapter titled "Rooting" to the theme of immigration. She paints a vivid picture of the struggles, confusion, and cultural identity crises that immigrants experience. Kaur explores the trauma of being uprooted from one's homeland and the gas lighting effect that often follows immigration, along with its psychological repercussions. She writes:

they have no idea what it is like
to lose home at the risk of
never finding home again
to have your entire life
split between two lands and
become the bridge between two countries
Immigrant (119).

She shares the deep, often inexplicable grief she felt as an immigrant, particularly regarding her parents' struggles, who faced significant hardships. These experiences affected her own mental well-being, eroding her confidence and making her feel inferior. Despite the challenges and financial burdens, her parents managed to raise four children while adapting to an unfamiliar land. Kaur reflects: "My parents never sat us down in the evenings to share stories of their younger days. One was always working, and the other too tired. Perhaps being an immigrant does that to you" (138). She recounts how her mother struggled with English and felt self-conscious about it, yet she never allowed this to hold her back. It did not stop her from successfully raising her children. In her collection *The Sun and Her Flowers*, Kaur includes a poignant poem titled "Broken English," where she reflects on how her father raised them without a strong command of the language, often unable to form complete sentences. They had no friends or family to support them, relying solely on hard work and determination, even earning two university degrees that felt pointless in their situation. They were often seen as mere "visitors" in a foreign land. Kaur emphasizes the difficulty her mother faced in leaving her homeland and adapting to a new culture. She writes:

leaving her country
was not easy for my mother
i still catch her searching for it
in foreign films
and the international food aside (123).

Kaur embraces a deep sense of cosmopolitanism. She argues that the cultural borders separating people are not natural, like bioregions, but rather artificial divisions created by humans. These borders do not define our true identities; they only separate us physically. Kaur urges us to refrain from engaging in conflict or viewing one another as enemies because of these man-made boundaries.

People are all fundamentally human and should not let these borders turn them against each other. Kaur underscores the importance of respecting and honoring their roots. No matter where life takes them or where they settle, she believes they must always remember their origins. She states:

borders
are man-made
they only divide us physically
don't let them make us
turn on each other
- we are not enemies (128).

She also addresses colonialism, critiquing the colonizers for exploiting resources that never belonged to them. She questions the notion that certain lands or resources are designated for one group over another, asking, "Who decided this is for us, and this is for you?" Kaur argues that is not everything part of our shared inheritance on this Earth? Who granted them the rights to colonize and exploit a specific country or a state. Thereby, slave-trade, and influence their culture, education, occupation, and even control their mind set--where they free to think at all?. She says:

you split the world
into pieces and
called them countries
declared ownership on
what never belonged to you
and left the rest with nothing
- colonise (137).

Kaur tackles the theme of broken English, encouraging people not to feel ashamed of it.
She says:

…was it worth it to pull all of our money
into the dream of a country
that is swallowing us whole. . . (149).

She also critiques the obsession with Anglophilia, asserting that it does not matter if she embodies two different cultures and accents—her father's words and her mother's way of speaking. She questions what there is to be embarrassed about, emphasizing that carrying influences from two worlds is perfectly fine. This ties back to the idea of cultural cosmopolitanism. She writes:

my voice
is the offspring
of two countries colliding
what is there to be ashamed of
if English
and my mother tongue
made love
my voice
is her father's words
and mother's accent
what does it matter if
my mouth carries two world
- accent (139).

Kaur asserts that, in some way, we as people are all immigrants. She beautifully describes how, from the moment of birth, we emerge from their mother's womb—a place that is theirs—into a world that is not. As we move through life, we often relocate to different cities for better education or job opportunities, making us all immigrants in a sense. No place truly belongs to just one person; we are all part of a larger community. Cosmopolitanism is essential in our lives, reminding us that there shouldn't be any cultural divides between us. She assures:

perhaps we are all immigrants
trading one home for another
first we leave the womb for air

then the shrubs for the filthy city
in search of a better life
some of us just happen to leave entire (131).

It is crucial to recognize the authenticity of Kaur's style and her commitment to breaking away from established patriarchal poetic conventions. The true evolution of the modern female narrative begins with experimentation and thrives on open-mindedness. Nonetheless, *The Sun and Her Flowers* is bold and unapologetic in which Kaur successfully creates content that resonates emotionally. Overall, her simplistic style appears to be enduring and promises even more from her in the future. Though *the sun and her flowers* is not without its flaws, with moments of brilliance mixed among filler, Kaur's courageous honesty positions her as a literary revolutionary, challenging oppression through her fragmented, taboo-breaking voice.*Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine, published in 2014 and recognized with several prestigious awards, explores the collective aspects of political life—citizenship and social interactions. Susan Ayres states: "As a work of art, Citizen can be considered documentary poetry or protest written in an epideictic rhetorical mode that invites us to renew public perspectives on institutional legitimacy, disciplinary practice, and citizenship"(217). The term "American" in the title highlights specific cultural contexts and the voices and silences within contemporary society that Rankine sees as still burdened by historical inequalities. Metres and Nowak assure: "Documentary poetry critiques historical events, often employing collage, sampling, and fragmentation, which is presented in a collective first-person plural voice"(9). In this genre, the documentary poet "infuses the lyric line with 'data clusters' so 'that poetry should again assume responsibility for the description of history'"(Welch 77). In fact, *Citizen* can be regarded as a protest poetry in a documentary mode in which "a poem can influence an audience or a larger public with its argument"(Smith 15). For many migrant communities, shaped by factors like race and gender, citizenship becomes a goal to attain, often a mere label rather than a true sense of belonging. The notion of an American "lyrical" or choral song evokes the rich tradition of American poetry, reminiscent of Walt Whitman. However, unlike Whitman's optimistic and celebratory style from the nineteenth century, Rankine's work conveys a fragmented elegy, reflecting a society plagued by hatred rather than the exuberance typically found in patriotic anthems.The poetic forms employed by Claudia Rankine in "Citizen: An American Lyric" are integral to the work's overall impact and themes. The hybrid form, use of second-person narration, visual art, and fragmented structure all contribute to a work that is both innovative and powerful. According to Sánchez, the use of the second person "pushes the level of engagement needed from the reader"(85). By evaluating these poetic forms, a deeper understanding of the ways in which Rankine's work challenges readers is gained to confront the realities of racism and its impact on individuals and communities. Sánchez states: "It is not a memoir of racism narrated in the first person but rather a public exposure: a call for the readership to get involved in race dynamics"(85). "Citizen" is a masterpiece of contemporary literature, and its poetic forms are a key part of its enduring power and significance.Rankine's "Citizen" is a groundbreaking work that blends poetry, prose, and visual art to explore the complexities of racial identity, and systemic racism in contemporary America. One of the most striking aspects of "Citizen" is its hybrid form, which defies traditional genre boundaries. Rankine seamlessly blends poetry, essay, and visual art, creating a unique narrative structure that mirrors the fragmentation and complexity of Black experience in America. This genre-bending approach allows Rankine to explore themes of identity, racism, and belonging in a way that is both innovative and impactful.Rankine's use of second-person narration is a powerful tool that implicates the reader in the narrative. By addressing the reader directly, Rankine creates a sense of immediacy and intimacy, forcing the reader to confront their own complicity in perpetuating systems of oppression. This narrative strategy also highlights the ways in which racism is often perpetuated through subtle, everyday interactions. Sánchez assures that "the apostrophic use of the second person is a means of addressing the position of everyone - white, black, and brown bodies - in society"(85).The inclusion of visual art in "Citizen" adds another layer of depth and complexity to the work. Rankine incorporates images of artwork, historical artifacts, and everyday objects, which serve as powerful reminders of the pervasiveness of racism. These images are not merely illustrative; they are integral to the emotional landscape of the work, forcing the reader to confront the visceral realities of racial injustice. In a video script made in collaboration with John Lucas, Rankine gives a good description on how a black subject is stopped and arrested as he was driving. Again using the apostrophic device and a rhythm and repetition that recalls slam poetry, the apostrophic "you" describing racial profiling:This is what it looks like. You know this is wrong. This is not what it looks like. You need to be quiet. This is wrong. You need to close your mouth now. This is what it looks like. Why are you talking if you haven't done anything wrong? And you are not the guy

and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description (Rankine105; 107).The fragmented structure of "Citizen" mirrors the disjointed nature of Black experience in America. Rankine's use of short, lyrical passages creates a sense of urgency and intimacy, while also highlighting the ways in which racism can be both personal and collective. The lyricism of the work is both beautiful and haunting, capturing the complexities of racial identity in a way that is both poignant and powerful. In *Citizen*, Rankine explores violence in many forms: from unexpected aggressions in personal spaces and public slurs to violent silences and outright physical attacks and murders. The mixed lyrical style illustrates how being black often means facing stops, checks, arrests, and the threat of gun violence. In several poems, the speaker conveys that encounters with others can lead to violence because black bodies are perceived as threats and potential criminals, making them targets for policing.The poem prompts readers to assign a "race label" to each character. While not explicitly stated, it suggests that the therapist is assumed to be white, and the narrator, who addresses the therapist, is black. In her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* , Christina Sharpe discusses the racial dynamics stemming from the legacy of slavery and the Middle Passage. She uses the metaphor of the wake to convey multiple meanings: watching over the dead, the trail left by a ship in water, the consequences of past actions, and themes of awakening and awareness. She states: “keeping watch with the dead, the path of a ship in the water, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening and consciousness” (17-18). These multiple meanings are relevant to black lives in contemporary America, where existence often occurs under a system of necropolitics, a term introduced by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe. Building on Foucault's idea of biopolitics, which aims “to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order, taking into consideration the administration of life and a locality‘s populations as its subject (Foucault 34). Mbembe contends that this system also involves managing populations and their lives in specific locales. He states: Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective? What place is given to life, death, and the human body?”(12). According to Sharpe and Rankine, racially motivated killings are not rare occurrences but rather a continuous source of violence against black bodies, which are seen as exceptional. The concept of justice often hinges on the exclusion and death of black individuals. Rankine employs the impactful second-person singular "you" to depict a scenario in which children are being cared for by a black babysitter, prompting a fearful neighbor to call the police. Rankine says:Your partner calls your friend and asks him if there‘s a guy walking back and forth in front of your home. Your friend says that if anyone were outside he would see him because he is standing outside. You hear the sirens through the speakerphone. Your friend is speaking to your neighbor when you arrive home. The four police cars are gone. Your neighbor has apologized to your friend and is now apologizing to you. Feeling somewhat responsible for the actions of your neighbor, you clumsily tell your friend that the next time he wants to talk on the phone he should just go in the backyard. He looks at you a long minute before saying he can speak on the phone wherever he wants. Yes, of course, you say. Yes, of course (16).Talking on a phone outside might seem like a harmless, everyday activity. However, simply standing outside a house can lead to different perceptions of safety. In the same situation, some bodies are viewed with suspicion while others are not. This ongoing scrutiny serves as a constant reminder to certain individuals that they are living "in the afterlives of slavery, in a lived and undeclared state of emergency" (Sharpe 100). Rankine poetically illustrates a political reality: to exist in the wake, as Sharpe describes, is to be conscious of being in the line of fire. The aftermath of slavery translates to a continuous state of disaster for black bodies, entwined with this legacy. Sharpe states, "In the wake, we must connect the birth industry to the prison industry, the system that undermines and denies reproductive justice to the system that incarcerates" (87)The legal system is not the same as true justice. While Western governments often boast about their justice and democracy, claiming that modern states are on a path to achieving perfect justice, the exclusions inherent in these systems reveal the flaws in these claims. This narrative about democracy's past, present, and future is misleading and fails to address the realities faced by those whose lives are still under threat.Audre Lorde states that raising black children in the U.S. is like raising them "in the mouth of a racist, sexist suicidal dragon" (30). This dragon symbolizes America, a nation where anti-blackness is foundational to its justice system, reflecting the ongoing impact of slavery, where certain lives are seen as disposable, resulting in incarceration or death. What does it mean to mourn a disaster that never truly ends? How can American society and black individuals heal from a trauma that keeps resurfacing? Following the 2015 murders of nine black people in a Charleston church, Rankine wrote an article entitled "The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning." Echoing Lorde's point, Rankine shared that a black friend with

children noted that being black in this country means always being prepared for the possibility that your children could be stopped by police or killed. This involves teaching them how to avoid appearing suspicious, especially at night, and learning to demonstrate innocence and safety.

This process is ongoing and cannot be fully resolved; it represents a constant state of being. It is a life lived in a precarious balance between existence and the threat of death, leading to an endless cycle of grief caused by the system. As Sharpe suggests, this experience resembles a wake—an act of accompanying the dead rather than traditional mourning. In *Citizen*, there is a tribute to those who have lost their lives due to racial violence.

In Memory of Jordan Russell Davis
In Memory of Eric Garner
In Memory of John Crawford
in Memory of Michael Brown
In Memory of Akai Gurley
In Memory of Tamir Rice
In Memory of Walter Schott
[….]
In Memory
In Memory

By the end of the page, the black ink fades, symbolizing both an endlessness and a sense of depletion: the effort to remember an ongoing disaster feels futile. Being "in the wake" is a more fitting term than merely grieving, as the racial issues we face are not relics of the past but a "presentification of a still-present slavery past".

CONCLUSION

In examining the poetic forms within T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Rupi Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*, and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*, this study highlights the diverse ways contemporary poets engage with language and structure to convey complex themes. Eliot's intricate layering of voices and fragmented imagery reflects the disillusionment of the modern era, while Kaur's accessible yet profound verses capture personal and collective experiences of identity and healing. Rankine's innovative blend of prose and poetry confronts the harsh realities of race and systemic injustice, creating an urgent dialogue about the lived experience of black Americans.

Together, these works illustrate how poetic forms evolve to address the nuances of contemporary life, allowing for both individual expression and broader societal commentary. This comparative analysis underscores the importance of poetry as a dynamic medium that not only reflects but also challenges the cultural and emotional landscapes of our time. Ultimately, the exploration of these texts reveals the enduring power of poetry to articulate the complexities of human experience, fostering empathy and understanding in an increasingly fragmented world.

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