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COMMENTS ON ELIOT'S "REFLECTIONS ON VERS LIBRE"

Eliot's article appeared in "The New Statesman",
Volume 8, March 3, 1917, pp 518-19

Eliot's essay concerning *vers libre* is extremely important. One may even say that it is groundbreaking because it puts to rest the so-called *free verse* movement. At least I would have thought so, but the believers still push on in their ignorance, thinking that if you make enough noise then someone will listen.

As Eliot notes, it is a belief or an assumption that *vers libre* (a) exists and (b) is a school of sorts consisting of theories to revolutionize poetry and attack the iambic pentameter. The fact is that the *vers libre* or *free verse* is a misnomer and does not exist at all.

Vers libre is a poor excuse for the inability to adapt, be creative and to build on the strength of solid foundations. It is the creativity aspect that is generally missing for most, resulting in prose rather than poetry.

The novelty meets with neglect; neglect provokes attack; and attack demands a theory.

There is great difficulty in defining *vers libre*, but this should not be surprising for a form that does not truly exist. Eliot sites three points commonly used to define *vers libre* being:

(a) absence of pattern, (b) absence of rhyme and (c) absence of meter

How many times have we heard these chanted in unison by the herd?

The idea of the absence of meter is absurd! I cannot even begin to comprehend such a belief, or that it is possible. Every verse, no matter how good or bad can be scanned. For those of whom undertake metrical analysis, metrical feet will always be found. As to this being useful for the poet themselves is debatable. However, it would be the aspect of repetition that would be noticeably missing, not the metrics themselves.

This would lead onto the next which is the absence of pattern. But the diminishment of intricate formal patterns has nothing to do with the advent of *vers libre*. There have always been changes and developments in form and structures as poets experiment. As is expected, some work and others do not.

This would leave the last being absence of rime. Lo! This too has nothing to do with *vers libre*. Take a look at blank verse!

As we see, there is nothing that clearly identifies or defines *vers libre*. Hence we have no choice but to deny the existence of *vers libre*, and so it remains a fictitious concept developed in confused minds.

Vers Libre does not exist, for there is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos.

["The New Statesman" \(Volume 8\) March 3, 1917 at the Internet Archive](#)

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