

## Accentual Verse

The very first entry in the volume *An Exaltation of Forms*, edited by Annie Finch and Katherine Varnes, is an essay by Dana Gioia about accentual verse.

He says the basic principles of accentual verse has only one steadfast rule: “there must be an identical number of **strong stresses** in each line.” Here are some examples Gioia points to:

Mother Goose and children’s songs are most often in accentual verse:

One stress per line:

Rich man  
Poor man  
Beggarmen thief.  
Doctor,  
Lawyer,  
Merchant,  
Chief.  
(etc)

Two stresses per line:

Star light Star bright,  
First star I see tonight  
I wish I may, I wish I might  
Have the wish I wish tonight

A famous one from Gwendolyn Brooks (1960):

We Real Cool

*The Pool Players,  
Seven at the Golden Shovel*

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

Accentual verse was used frequently in early English oral poetry, but much of that is now lost.

Contemporary poets writing accentual verse (and there are many) frequently follow these three rules Gioia lists:

1. Four Strong stresses per line
2. Each line should have a noticeable pause in the middle of each line, with two strong stresses on each side.
3. Three of the four strong stresses should alliterate (or there should be two pairs of alliterated stressed syllables).

Even Starlight, star bright is an example with the medial pause.

**Today's Prompt: Forget these rules and just have fun counting and evening out stressed syllables among lines. You can try for more stresses per line too. Include some sound...internal rhyme, alliteration, music of some sort.**

This is Gioia's own poem "Nosferatu's Serenade" 2001.

(Google says Nosferatu is an archaic Romanian word for vampire...eeks, creepy)

## Nosferatu Serenade

I am the image that darkens your glass,  
The shadow that falls wherever you pass.  
I am the dream you cannot forget,  
The face you remember without having met.

I am the truth that must not be spoken,  
The midnight vow that cannot be broken.  
I am the bell that tolls out the hours.  
I am the fire that warms and devours.

I am the hunger that you have denied,  
The ache of desire piercing your side.  
I am the sin that you never confessed,  
The forbidden hand caressing your breast.

You've heard me inside you speak in your dreams,  
Sigh in the ocean, whisper in streams.  
I am the future you crave and you fear.  
You know what I bring. Now I am here.

Dana Goia