

# How Writers Write Poetry 2014

CLASS FIVE • Video Transcript

Welcome back. This week we'll be talking about the sounds of poetry, the nuts and bolts of poetry, with Ricky Kenney, the professor of poetry at the University of Washington, winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets and a MacArthur Fellowship and Bill Trowbridge, the author of five books of poems. Most recently, former poet laureate of the state of Missouri. These are poets who are going to be talking to us about those building blocks of poetry -- the sounds of poetry.

And I have certainly learned a lot from both of these videos so if you've been a little bit nervous about scanning, counting meter, things like that before this is going to be a great little intro for that.

Enjoy.

My name is Richard Kenney and I've been here for the year at the Writers' Workshop and what I want to talk about is meter. I'm going to talk about fundamentals here. Meter means measure, which implies counting and numbers. In fact poetry used to be called numbers. Well, how many? Well, let me think -- one, two, three, four, five, this is my poetic line, so we will measure it as the poets' do. We have five numbers, six, as many as we need I suppose. What gets counted? Well, you could count anything I suppose, anything that you could whistle back for...in a repetitive way, so that you had a symmetrical pattern, a noticeable pattern. You could count unicorns. Five unicorns in a single poetic line would, would...well you see the problem -- it would, its sentimentality would be the least of it. What you really want to count are small things that don't have any meaning like syllables. You know where this is going. Syllables are one of the things that famously get counted in meter. What else? Well, accents or stresses, as we know, get counted. So there are syllabic meters, there are stress meters, and then the third thing, the...which is the confluence of the two, of those two traditions, and is, constitutes the great metrical tradition in English is counting both at once, which means counting feet.

What I'm going to do is illustrate how one would make a line out of, out of those...out of those simple elements and to do that, like I said, I have props. We'll do syllabics first. These represent syllables, if I have enough. Now, the simplest syllabic form -- the one that everybody's familiar with are haiku poems, right? Turnip farmer rose and with a fresh pulled turnip pointed to my road. So we have -- turnip farmer rose / and with a fresh pulled turnip (seven) / pointed to my road. Five, seven, five, easy. Stress tradition, we have, well the Anglo-Saxons, at the very root of English literature -- begin English literature wrote in stress meters. I don't, I can't speak that for you but during the Middle English period, the literary revival there was a poet called the Pearl poet who wrote Sir Gawain and the Green Knight which begins [MIDDLE ENGLISH] That's close, you can hear the bang, bang, bang, bang. There are five of those, five stresses in each line. We're going to use bolts for that. I said I wasn't going to use that word but there it is. It's five for the English tradition. So... [MIDDLE ENGLISH]. Okay -- can you see these better if I turn them? Five! Five stresses. That, that tradition survives -- comes down to us in the nursery rhyme tradition. So hinks, minks, the old



witch winks, the beggars are coming to town, some in rags and some in tags and one in a velvet gown. Hinks, minks, the old witch winks, the beggars are coming to town, the beggars are coming to town, some in rags and some in tags, and one in a velvet gown. And there you see a very famous rhythmic pattern in the literature. It's the song measure. In this case four stresses and then three and then four and then three. It can be done -- and all of them, Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon. Or, one of my favorites -- bow wow wow whose dog art thou? Little Tom Tinker's dog. Bow wow wow. Bow wow wow -- it's not very hard.

It can be done in a more complicated fashion. Gerard Manley Hopkins is famous for it. The King Fisher begins, his poem The Kingfisher begins -

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells

Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's

Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;

And Hopkins is counting stresses and these are accents that fall on particular syllables in the course of a sentence. No syllables, you'll notice I'm not counting any syllables at all, they don't figure at all in this system.

So the line hinks, minks, the old witch winks is the same length as a line which would begin Let me tell you a little story about a boy named Herb, his daddy was a noun and his momma was a verb. That's a ... that follows the pattern a lot of songs do. They don't need to count their syllables, they don't lose track of where they are. They know how many stresses there are because in the Anglo-Saxon tradition they would alliterate them, in music you strum the banjo and the music carries it. But that's the alliterative tradition and you're welcome to try it. It's a powerful way of writing and the limitation here is not that you can't hear it but that you sometimes have trouble deciding where the stresses fall in long lines.

Now, now we come to the great tradition, as I said, the accentual syllabic tradition where I said you count both. Well, how do you do two things at once? The obvious way to do it is to combine them and that's where my, that's where my props come in. So a stress will be coupled with a number of unstressed syllables and you call that grouping a foot. In English there are really just two rhythms that we're trying to approximate. A rhythm would be a repetitive pattern of a stress followed by some number of unstressed syllables which is always the same so that it would sound symmetrical.

So, and in English there are really just four of these. There are two rhythms, one is the heartbeat; lub dub lub dub lub dub lub dub, dub lub dub lub. This one, I'm going to couple them together. When I do that what I have is a trochee, from your position. The bolt and the nut. There's two rhythms that, that we try to approximate using these feet. One is the double rhythm and that's the rhythm of the heartbeat, it's an easy way to remember it. The heart goes, let's say the heart goes lub dub lub dub lub dub. It goes unstress, stress, so I just made an iamb here with the unstressed syllable which is the

nut followed by the bold lub dub. Now, in a long string if I say lub dub lub dub lub dub lub dub and I ask Chris back there or somebody else, you know, I don't remember where I started, did I start on a lub or a dub? He would shrug and say, why does it matter? And this is the difference, the distinction between a trochee and an iamb, is really minimal. They're both trying to approximate this rhythm which is, propagates all the way through the literature.

Now, the other rhythm that the feet, poetic feet try to approximate is a, is a triple rhythm. It's called a triple because there are three syllables in it. Two of them are unstressed ----- Now, instead of, instead of lub dub I have didi dum didi dum didi dum and these can be strung together in nursery rhymes - hey diddle diddle the cat and the fiddle has a bunch of them, a bunch of these in it. It could be, literature also particularly in former centuries uses these feet. They're called anapests and dactyls. The anapest rises up to the stress and the dactyl falls down from it. The dactyl and the trochee are the falling, the falling feet. Bum bum or bum bum bum and the anapest and the iamb are the double and the triple rising feet and out of these, out of these props you can build a poem. \

There are two measures which are common. One is the pentameter line, the long line, which resembles/sounds like speech and the other is the short line or the song measure and songs are in it and many serious poems too.

Okay, so this goes, shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. Alright, it works. I'm tired of love, I'm still more tired of rhyme but money gives me pleasure all the time. That works. The opening lines of Keats' famous odes,

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,

Excuse me. That sounded really foolish and that's, that's sort of the point of these meters. The meter is purely mechanical and it isn't a feeling creature, it's really a robotic sort of mechanical thing made out of nuts and bolts like this. It only... It only knows stressed syllables and unstressed syllables and for this reason it's really important to understand that when we say stress in the context of accentual syllabic meters what we're talking about is the stress, illicit stress, or allowable stresses within a single word. So if a word accepts a stress, if a syllable in a word accepts a stress, if the dictionary says it accepts a stress, primary or secondary doesn't matter, it just gets a stress as far as the meter's concerned but you, feeling creature that you are will not read it foolishly like that in a singsong fashion. You will read it naturally and so if I read, if I read that Shakespearean line again and say, shall I, I won't, the ... my robot reads it, shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Well, I would say, shall I compare thee to a summer's day? And, how many stresses is that? Well, the number of stresses that I, of actual stresses that I give it is four. So the robot reads it relentlessly and ruthlessly, giving the same amount of stress to each of the stressable syllables. The prepositions, the conjunctions get as much juice as the nouns and the verbs. They get as much stress as anything that one would wish to emphasize, when one read it in a dramatic fashion. An actor can read a line differently one day from another day, differently on Thursday than he does on Tuesday. Meter never changes. The meter is always ticking along underneath the surface, simply striking every allowable syllable, every syllable which can, which the dictionary will, in which the dictionary will permit a

stress whereas you will read it normally. So in a, in a line like that, shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Shall I compare thee to a summer's day. We have four, four rhetorical stresses, four voice...voice stresses, or rhythmic stresses we would say, but there are five metrical stress. Don't worry about it.

And this happens in many, many lines. Any line that has a conjunction or a preposition or some grammatical word like that will... will often have fewer stresses than ...than five. Rhythmic stresses - the meter goes along underneath the surface without any problem. And that's just about the whole story really. I could illustrate with ...I could illustrate with four beat lines, I could illustrate with five beat lines but just to do a couple more. The opening lines of Keats' ... I'll do two of the odes. The Ode on the Grecian urn begins,

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
 Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,  
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme

Now, if you want to hear the robot read that. Metrically it would go like this:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
 Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,

It sounds idiotic to put an accent on and. One wants to accent slow and time. Thou foster-child of Silence, slow Time. It's a beautiful line. Well that disjunction, that disharmony, that counterpointing effect is really what makes accentual syllabic poetry so thrilling because the part of your body adjusts itself, your physical nature adjusts itself to the clock of the meter and expects these stresses to come and when they don't come there's a little bit of a...little bit of a ---, little bit of hair goes up on your neck a little bit sometimes. You get a... have a physical response. There's one other version of that. The next line is, Sylvan historian, who canst thus express. Now Sylvan can't be pronounced Syl-VAN but the robot wants to go, Syl-VAN historian canst thus express. Can't do it. So what do you do? Well, it's really easy. You'll just flip the iamb around into a trochee. Now, you have a trochee. Sylvan - and now we revert to iambs - historian who canst thus express and this happens all the time. It happens very often in the first position of a, of a poetic line. The opening of The Ode to Autumn is,

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness  
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun

Well, you know, you could imagine that that was made out of trochees because it starts with season. Season can't be pronounced seas-ON. Now my robot wants to say seas-ON of mists and mell-OW fruitfulness but I can't so I, again, turn the iamb around, make a trochee of it and I go Sea-son, then I revert to iambs, of mists and mellow fruitfulness and now we're done. It's okay. Everything works out. The ... If I were to take more time, I won't, you should, you read...read poet...the great poems and you'll find these effects happening all the time.

In the context of this little chat I'm saying don't worry about it. It's okay if, if the meter gets violated occasionally it's fine as long as you get, as long as you revert to the pattern. And, again, the pattern doesn't have to be the way that one would actually say the line. The syllables which, where accents are supposed to strike, as in the case of five of them in a pentameter line, they simply have to be able to accept stress. So with these, with these props I've been trying to show how the armature can be laid out for a metrical line. What you have to do, but how does one write one? One simply speaks and moves syllables around so that they can fit the pattern and if you just have to say something and it doesn't quite fit the pattern don't worry about it as long as it- as long as you recover and return to the pattern. Is it possible to write this way and sound anything like a normal human being? Will it necessarily sound like some sort of faux Shakespearean? No, it isn't very difficult at all to do this day and night. The fact is I could speak that way for a long time without you noticing. I guess I'll say one last thing, these meters don't exist in the world. They exist in your nervous system and I'll demonstrate. That I propose that there are two rhythms, the heartbeat and the hoofbeat, I will propose that there are, of all the possible meters, and if you say there are six, there are; dimeters, trimeters, tetrameters, pentameters, and hexameters, and there are anapests, dactyls, iambs, and trochees, that should be twenty four meters that you have to memorize. It's not that way. There are really only a few that actually happen and they are, the lines, the meter which resembles song and that's called the song measure or ballad measure.

And that's, either, that's some combination of four feet and three feet and hinks minks works that way, Betsy from Pike works that way, Clementine works that way, the Yellow Rose from Texas works that way. And Tiger, tiger, burning bright in the forest of the night...many, many poems work that way. All the Christmas Carols you know, all of the ballads you know, work that way. They're some combination of four stresses and three stresses, four stresses and three stresses. Four, four, four, four, something like that. The other famous line is the, is the line which approximates speech and that's the, in English, that's the pentameter line and this is the nature of poetry. It's a ... it's a ...it's DNA is the twining of the strands of song and speech. Speech which resembles song, song which resembles speech.

And those are the two...the two principal measures or line lengths. The short line, the long line and the two rhythms are the heartbeat and the hoof beat. The hoof beat is only really used nowadays for...it's used principally in light verse, in humorous verse. But I started to say the meters exist, they don't. They're often talked about as though they're in the world but they're really just ways of talking about things that happen in the world which are strings of rhythmic patterns which appear in speech. And so the line, shall I compare thee to a summer's day, pentameter line, is it really? Well, in the, if the next line is - thou art more lovely and more temperate and the poem, rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, yes it's a pentameter line but if that poem were to have continued, let's say, shall I compare thee to a summer's day, thou art too prim and arch more like February, say, complaining into March. Okay, now we have, shall I compare thee to a summer's day, no, thou art too prim and arch (four, three) more like February, say, complaining into March.

Now we've, I've made a little ballad out of that. Does that mean that this ballad measure has one pentameter line? No, it just has, it has a stressed tetrameter line that just has a few extra syllables in

it. What I'm trying to propose is that, is that I began with counting and numbers, just like professors always do and it's not about numbers and counting at all. That's just the mind trying to understand it at a level of detail which is, in practice, all but irrelevant. The truth is, these things are biological effects. They're happening in the body and music is the proof of that. If you find yourself moving to music then, then you know that this happens in a very immediate kind of way.

I left the question of, the journalist's questions of who, what, when, where, why, how, I tried to concentrate a little bit on what and how but the who, where, when? Everybody, always, that's who and when. There's no, it's a cultural universal. The anthropologists haven't found a culture where this doesn't exist. One presumes, there are bone flutes that go back to the caves, one presumes that this kind of thing was going on from the beginning. It's everywhere. Where? It's not only in poetry it's, in fact, over the last century metrical verse, having dominated the tradition and probably all, all the Western poetic traditions in England, the only ones I know anything for, since the beginning. In the last century meter took a backseat to some other poetic effects but the advertisers and the --- shamans didn't leave it behind.

We often, we hear metrical constructions probably more often in advertising than, than, at least average people out there on the street probably hear them in that context and the context of music more often than they do in the context of poetry. Why? Well, the advertisers know that counting gets peoples' attention. The music people know that we're all drinking wine, aren't we, why wouldn't we want to be here? We like it. You sometimes hear the meter's used because it, it enhances, meter was a technology or a method which enhanced memory, okay. It's not untrue, it's true. It strikes me, it's true in the sense that groceries enhance digestion. One presumes, there are bone flutes that go back to the caves, one presumes that this kind of thing was going on from the beginning. It's everywhere. Where? It's not only in poetry it's, in fact, over the last century metrical verse, having dominated the tradition and probably all, all the Western poetic traditions in England, the only ones I know anything for, since the beginning. In the last century meter took a backseat to some other poetic effects but the advertisers and the --- shamans didn't leave it behind. We often, we hear metrical constructions probably more often in advertising than, than, at least average people out there on the street probably hear them in that context and the context of music more often than they do in the context of poetry. Why? Well, the advertisers know that it kind of gets peoples' attention. The music people know that we're all drinking wine, aren't we, why wouldn't we want to be here? We like it. You sometimes hear the meter's used because it, it enhances, meter was a technology or a method which enhanced memory, okay. It's not untrue, it's true. It strikes me, it's true in the sense that groceries enhance digestion. We, because we're inclined to. The answer is the same as for music. Why? Because we like it. It's pleasing to us both in the hearing and the composition. I guess that's...that's it.

Hello, I'm Bill Trowbridge and I'm a poet from Missouri and I've come here today to talk about syllabic stress in poetry. More specifically, about meter in poetry and more specifically than that, about meter in free verse which may strike some people as rather odd sounding. However, in the MFA program I teach in I find a number of our students come in who are writing in free verse, most of them are writing in free verse, and who think of free verse as basically, well - free from what? - well, free from rhyme, free from meter. So, those are things that they assume that they don't

have to pay much attention to anymore, if any attention. I think that's a misconception and, for a number of reasons.

I suppose, first of all, I might bring up Paul Fussell's good statement about free verse that he makes in his book *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, which is again, I think probably one of the best books even though it's kind of old right now to understand how meter works. He has a chapter on free verse there where he says that free verse is to be understood in the way that during the Cold War the term free world was understood. Free world in those days every place that wasn't communist which included various dictatorships and totalitarian states and so, free world meant free, sort of, and so he said free verse should be thought of in that same way- free, sort of. If the student thinks, or poet thinks, that he or she is completely free of rhyme and meter that of course then makes you disregard use of internal rhyme in free verse, which I could talk a lot about but I'm talking about meter right now and syllabic stress so you really can't get free from meter which involves syllabic stress. If you look a word up in the dictionary you'll see that, there'll be an accented syllable and some unaccented syllables and if you try to free yourself from that you wind up talking very oddly. Like the pur-POSE of this story is...and sounds like you haven't quite mastered the language yet. So, in a sense you're...you have to go with those things when you are, when you're writing a poem. Now, so you have these stresses bouncing around and if you're not taking account of them, you're not going to be aware that quite often they will, they will, drop in to, even in a free verse form, they will drop into metrical feet.

Remember there are six basic metrical feet, iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, spondaic, and pyrrhic ----- but but quite frequently a line of free verse will start falling into one, or even a series of those feet and if you're not aware of that, if you're not following that, paying attention to it, there's a very good possibility that, first of all, you're going to be missing an opportunity to make something else going on in the line other than the sense of the line. There's also the possibility that the stresses as they're falling, if you're not watching out for them, are going to basically undermine the sense of the line.

Now, before I start giving you examples of free verse, I want to go back to Alexander Pope's old dictum - the sound should seem an echo to the sense. He says that in his famous essay on criticism. He gives some examples. As a matter of fact, Pope, as he's talking about this demonstrates that simultaneously, as part of his genius, and one thing he talks about is that sound should seem an echo to the sense. What I want to emphasize and what I think he shows in that poem too is that the, the rhythm should be an echo to the sense. The use of stresses in those words should be an echo to the sense of the line. An example, out of Pope's poems to start with, which is, admittedly, a formalist poem but this will get us going at any rate. There's a couplet in there where Pope is talking about speeding up and slowing down lines and he's talking about the mythic character, the character Ajax whose trying to throw a huge rock at someone. And the line is, when Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw the line too labors and the words move slow. Okay, he's using cacophonous sound there, words that are not easy to pronounce together quickly which slows the line down and that's the sound echoing the sense. But if you, if you listen to that line, When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight - some rock's vast weight - there's three heavy accents there to throw the line too labors, there's three more heavy accents in a row and the words move slow so he's stacking that line with

basically spondaic rhythm to do what - You get this sense of heaviness, don't you, of strain in that line, and that also slows the line down. So, and here, so sound is echoing the sense of the line and also the use of meter, use of syllabic accents, is slowing down that line too and it should slow down, the line should strain. The words should move slow enough because that's what it's about.

Now, it shows the opposite in the next line.

Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,  
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main.

Not so, when swift Camilla... if you listen to that line there are no spondees in that line. It's basically very smooth iambic, Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,  
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main - ba dum ba dum ba dum ba dum - like that. Still we have the euphony, sound and words that are easy to pronounce together so that can be - that line goes fast to that way but it also goes fast because there's no clumps of heavy accents there. There's that just completely smooth iambic which allows the line to hurry along. As a matter of fact, Pope is kind of showing off with that little demonstration because the line about Camilla is in fact, iambic hexameter instead of pentameter so he's showing that you don't really notice it when you hear the line because it's moving so fast. So he's just showing off which is what Pope likes to do, I think.

So, that's what I mean when I talk about the, the effective use of syllabic stress or meter in free verse. You know, those stresses are going to be there and what you need to do, I think, to take advantage of this, is to learn how to scan a line. This is something that some people can pick up pretty quickly, seems fairly obvious to them and they can move into it easily. It's always been surprising to me that, that some of our brightest students in the MFA program take a look at a poem and are asked to scan the line and just throw up their hands and say, I, you know, can't tell an iamb from a trochee. So, it's going to be more difficult for some people than others but I think, again, if you can get past that throwing up the hands stage and learn to just roughly scan a line if you will, you can begin to pick up on these things in your own free verse.

Now, what I want to do next is to give you some examples. Not from eighteenth century formalist poetry, but some examples from free verse about how meter starts operating in free verse. I think it's going to be easy, maybe more effective, if you don't have the poem in front of you, which you can have of course. We're.. this is a video, I'm not handing out samples because it sort of gets your mind off looking at the line and gets your mind more on hearing the line. So I think you, it'll be maybe easier to focus on hearing the accents, not the sounds but the accents, as they unfold in this line. This is a poem - I'm going to start with a poem by Ted Kooser called Looking for You Barbara. I'm just going to read excerpts from these poems, not the whole poem. Just to sort of focus on the place where I think it's clear that something's going on with meter or syllabic stress, to again, reflect the sense of the line. It's a poem about a guy whose probably had a few too many, driving around town late at night looking for Barbara, his girlfriend, apparently. So the poem,

I have been out looking for you,



Barbara, and as I drove around,  
 the steering wheel turned through my hands  
 like a clock. The moon  
 rolled over the rooftops and was gone.

I was dead tired; in my arms  
 they were rolling the tires inside;  
 in my legs they were locking the pumps.

Can you hear that anapestic movement? Da da dum, da da dum, da da dum, da da dum. The steering wheel turned through my hands like a clock, the steering wheel turned through my hands like a clock, da da da da da da da da da dum. So you have that anapestic beat here. Anapests lining up in this free verse poem. Now, maybe it's obvious to you, it's obvious to me - I've looked at this poem a number of times - that, why he's doing that. There is a sense of a kind of reeling here, isn't there, the guy is like driving around in circles and things are not focusing all that well and so that sort of looping sense that you get from those rolling anapests there, are supporting the sense of the line, are reinforcing the image that he's trying to create in this poem. So, free verse but metrical effects going on there and once I think that, you know, if you were to rewrite these lines and take out those anapests something would be lost, in this particular part of the poem at any rate.

Okay, here's another example from a poem called Cakey by Denise Duhamel from a book of hers called Cakey which is about Barbie and Ken. All the, all the poems have to do with Barbie and Ken and in this particular poem they discover that they, they have no sex organs and such and so they're going to have to try and find some substitute for sex for plastic dolls and so they decide the best they can do is try to exchange heads. So,

They decide to exchange heads  
 Barbie squeezes the small opening under her chin over Ken's bulging neck socket. His wide jawline jostles.

Alright, let's linger on the Ken line there. Over Ken's bulging neck, Ken's bulging neck socket. You hear those spondees coming in. His wide jawline jostles. So what do we, alright, we've got spondees, we've got these heavy accents going on, sort of like I was talking about with the Pope poem but what's going on here is, in fact, sort of similar. Ken, this thick, clumsy, oafish sort of character as he's being portrayed here with his bulging neck socket. You have again the accents going on that, in a sense, reinforcing, supporting the sense of this sort of heavy, thick character then shortly after this. Okay, his wide jawline jostles atop his girlfriend's body loosely, okay now here's, check out this simile coming up, like one of those nodding novelty dogs destined to gaze from the back of windows of cars. Like one of those nodding novelty dogs, you hear again the anapest coming up, in this case, in this context they're reinforcing that sense of the goofy, novelty that should see people having in the back of their car. The nodding novelty dog destined to gaze from the back seat, back windows of cars. There's a bunch of anapests in this free verse poem in this, in this part and I hope you can sense, you can feel how they're reinforcing the sense of that line.

This brings me to another point, what exactly sense gets supported by whatever pattern of accents you're working on, if you're using anapests or if you're using spondees, it depends, it has to be looked at in the context of the particular poem. It's not just something you can say, well this always has that effect. That's, you know, that's really too simple of a way to put it. This, this has various kinds of effects depending on, you know, depending on the context. You always have to look at the context of the poem and think about the context of the poem when you're using these accents and don't just think that the, the spondees can only be used for one purpose or the anapest is always this kind of, galloping, loopy sort of thing. Sometimes the anapest can be kind of high sentence tone. James Dickey wrote a number of his earlier poems with anapest where he was trying to come across with, relate those public sort of language there. So they're not always these light, skippy sort of things. Depends on the context.

Stephen Dobyns has a book called, *Best Words Best Order*, that maybe you've read and if not you should. It has a chapter in it on free verse and it also has a, a chapter on his poem *Cemetery Nights* which is a poem out of the book with that same title and his free verse is probably, his free verse chapter is probably the best chapter, the best explanation, discussion of free verse that I've ever come across and you'll notice when you read it that he's very attentive to syllable stress and metrical effects. And the other chapter, the one on *Cemetery Nights*, he's actually talking about how he went about composing *Cemetery Nights* and in that discussion you will notice that he's very attentive to accents, to use of meter there. He intends, he says, to go sort of in and out of iambs at certain points of the poem. It's generally a free verse poem but we're looking at a guy whose very very always looking at what the accents are doing for him. And I just want to look at two lines out of this because it's something we haven't seen before. He's talking about, the dead are, they're talking to each other, unfortunately the flesh is falling off of them and a couple of them decide to, to try to embrace and get romantic there in the cemetery. Two of the dead roll on the ground, banging and rubbing their bodies together. Banging and rubbing their bodies together. Banging and rubbing their bodies together, do you hear that? Boom ching ching boom ching ching, we're into dactyls here all of a sudden. This poem's been moving in iambic and all of a sudden we're in these dactyls. And once again I think you get this sense of awkwardness here, of things kind of jerking out of joint at this point when the dead are trying to do this impossible thing and you can be sure that Dobyns was very deliberate about this.

Okay, I'm going to, to end by making one final point. You will sometimes find people who are writing in free verse, when they get to the closure of the poem suddenly turning iambic on you. William Carlos Williams, the great guy, you know, one of the people who was railing against the metronomic effects of traditional poetry, you'll find him sometimes slipping into iambs when he's closing a poem. Here's a poem by Rae Armantrout, free verse poem, called *Apartment*.

It's as if subletting a friend's apartment  
even in a dream I'm trying to imagine which friend,

Okay, we have, things are kind of bouncing around here, although there is 'which friend' there's a spondee for emphasis on that,  
and I'm trying to get all my robes together

robes I really own and robes I don't

Alright, you hear 'robes I really own and really don't, robes I really own and really don't' da dum da dum da dum da dum. That's the close of the poem and I think again that there's that sense that the iambic beat can do, one of the things it can do is to give that sense of things closing down at this point, of ending, so what's more - use of stresses is supporting the sense of the line. So, I hope you'll run home and practice scanning lines and approach some of your own poems and see what you can see. I bet you're going to discover that in some places you've missed an opportunity and in other places, maybe, the, your use of stresses there that you haven't been looking at are undermining the sense of the line. You're having heavy stresses when you're trying to talk about something light or some other way that your, your rhythm is not corresponding to the sense, it doesn't seem an echo to the sense as Pope says. So, that's my little tip for today and I hope it helps. | Thank you.

After watching the two videos I just wanted to highlight some of the things that really stuck with me about Bill's ideas. First, I thought that his descriptions of the anapest and the dactyl were really great but the anapest is the da da DUM da da, sort of awkward rolling and bumping along and that the dactyl is the BOOM ching ching which is the awkward banging and rubbing of their bodies together and also that the iamb is the smooth jazz of poetry. These are examples that really help me understand it and really stick with me.

The Greek poet and Nobel Laureate George Seferis, talking about one of his most famous poems, 'Thrush', said that it began as an exercise in contrapuntal thinking and he said, why does a pianist practice scales all day long? Well, what we're doing is tuning our ears. What Bill and Rick were teaching us how to do was to tune our ears to those things that go on between syllables, between stresses, making ourselves able to hear possibilities in the language.

And hearing the possibilities between the robot mechanics of the meter and the human speech patterns I think is something that I really took from Rick's talk. What we want you guys to try this week in your poems that you're going to turn in to us is to try out the hoof beat and try out the heart beat and see where they take you. Turn in poems, both, one or the other, show us what you can do with meter.

Gallop in one direction, canter in another, see where you end up. Enjoy.