

Aeneid Book VI Analysis 4: More Scansion



We will work through another line together this week to consolidate our skills. Consult your six rules.

et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late

Start with rule 1. Do we need to elide any syllables? no.

Rule 2. Are there any diphthongs? No. NB:- if you say the word *chaos*, just as you would pronounce it in English even, you will hear two syllables: *cha-os*. That shows you that the two vowels *a* and *o* are not pronounced together as a diphthong. The same applies to *ta-cen-ti-a*.

Now mark the final two feet:

et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tac|ēntiā |lāte

and count the syllables in the remaining part of the line. I make it 12 so there should be **four dactyls**. This finishes the exercise really – just $\bar{\quad} \sim \sim$ throughout but let's look at the other steps to check: Vowels before two consonants? The *e* that begins the line – but we know that is long in any case. The next *e* is also followed by *t Phl*. Another *e* followed by *th* but remember that *h* does not count as a consonant. A long *o* followed by *n, l* come next. Then a long *o* in *nocte*.

ē̄t Chāos ē̄t Phlēgēthōn, loca nōcte tac|ē̄ntiā |lāte

Any vowels followed by another vowel? Yes in *Chaos* – and of course at the end of *tacentia* – but we've already dealt with that.

ē̄t Chāos ē̄t Phlēgēthōn, loca nōcte tac|ē̄ntiā |lāte

You can check the other steps. Nothing else really applies here so we have:

ē̄t Chāōs|ē̄t Phlēgē|thōn, lōcā| nōctē tēc|ē̄ntiā |lāte

All that remains is to mark the caesura in the third foot:

ē̄t Chāōs|ē̄t Phlēgē|thōn, || lōcā| nōctē tēc|ē̄ntiā |lāte

The line is from the 2022 syllabus and means: “And Chaos and Phlegethon, broad, silent places of

the night”? And the poet Virgil himself is speaking. He is awestruck by what he is about to relate. He is speaking to the gods asking permission to relate such deep things. Is it fanciful to suggest that the rhythm of the line with no spondees but galloping dactyls throughout makes us feel the rapid beating of the poet's anxious heart as he approaches the task of relating such harrowing scenes? Here is a line with no spondees from the 2023-5 syllabus lines:

ēxstrūī | mūsquē tō | rōs dāpī | būsque ēpū | lāmūr ōp | īmis. (line 224)

Why does Virgil write “galloping” dactyls here? Is it because he is picturing the hungry Trojans hurrying to build their couches and feast on the goat meat?