

Aeneid Book VI Analysis 5: Scansion Practice



In the last lesson we looked at a line which galloped along in dactyls dum-di-di, dum-di-di, dum-di-di, dum-di-di, dum-di-di, dum-di (Sorry, but that's how I think of it!) the poet's heart racing with terror at what he was about to relate. What about a line where there are mostly spondees? What kind of effect would this have?

Let's look at line 390 step by step:

umbrarum hic locus est, somni noctisque soporae:

Syllable ending in *m* elided:

umbra(rum) hic locus est, somni noctisque soporae:

Final two syllables *or-ae*. Final foot spondee or Trochee? *ae* is a diphthong so must be long. Now we can find the fifth foot:

umbra(rum) hic locus est, somnī nōc | tīsquē sōp | ōrāe:

Nine remaining syllables three spondees and a dactyl.

Vowels followed by two consonants are long:

ūmbra(rum) hīc locus ēst, sōm | nī nōc | tīsquē sōp | ōrāe:

This reveals the fourth foot is a spondee:

ūmbra(rum) hīc locus | ēst, sōm | nī nōc | tīsquē sōp | ōrāe:

Syllable between two longs must be long:

ūmbṛā(rum) | hīc locūs | ēst, sōm | nī nōc | tīsquē sōp | ōrāe:

Second foot has three syllables so must be a dactyl:

ūmbṛā(rum) | hīc lōcūs | ēst, sōm | nī nōc | tīsquē sōp | ōrāe:

Caesura in the third foot:

ūmbṛā(rum) | hīc lōcūs | ēst, | | sōm | nī nōc | tīsquē sōp | ōrāe:

Say the line out loud. Remember the long syllable is **longer** not **louder** than the short. It should be about twice as long as the short syllable. This has quite a different rhythm to the line we looked at in the previous lesson because there are four spondees here. This gives quite a slow feel to the line. Can you remember the translation? Who is speaking?

This is the place of shadows/ghosts and of sleep (and) of soporific night. The speaker is Charon the ferryman. Perhaps the four spondees emphasise the static nature of sleep and the ideas of “soporific” night. Read the line again as if you were Charon. Give him a fierce, slow snarl!

Choose some more lines to scan and compare your results with *Pedecerto*

<http://www.pedecerto.eu/public/scansioni/scansioni>