From Cumae to the Po: Italian Itineraries in Aeneid 6

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1 Early in Aeneas and the Sibyl’s visit to Elysium in the sixth book of the Aeneid, the two katabatic travelers enter fields featuring their own sky, stars, and sun (638-41). There they witness souls participating in various sorts of recreation, Orpheus and Aeneas’ illustrious Trojan ancestors among them (642-55). Aeneas next observes other groups dining and performing in a chorus (656-7). The passage reaches a crescendo with a list of Elysian inhabitants: those who were wounded fighting for their country, chaste priests, pious vates, seers, and innovators, with Musaeus at the center (660-7). In the midst of his description of this section of the Underworld, Vergil supplies a curious geographical detail that links Elysium with the Eridanus, a mythical river that by Vergil’s time had long been associated with the Po (656-9):

\[ \text{conspicit, ecce, alios dextra laevaque per herbam} \\
\text{vescentis laetumque choro paena canentis} \\
\text{inter odoratum lauris nemus, unde superne} \\
\text{plurimus Eridani per silvam volvitur amnis.} \]

Behold—Aeneas caught sight of others to the right and left across the grass, dining and singing the cheerful paean in a chorus through a grove fragrant with bays, out of which above on earth the mighty stream of the Eridanus rolls through the forest.

2 The object of the present paper is to explore some implications of the Po’s presence in these verses. My primary goal is to contend that this reference connects Aeneas’ Elysian telos to the Po region, just as the entrance to the Underworld in Aeneid 6 is closely linked to Cumae. Further, I consider these two geographical reference points in the context of Aeneas’ katabasis in order to propose that the mention of the Eridanus...
evokes aboveground travel from Cumae to the Po corresponding to his Underworld journey.

3 To be clear, my proposition in this paper is not that *Aeneid* 6 presents Aeneas literally traveling underground from Cumae to the Po. Despite the geographic elements and the hodological nature of aspects of Aeneas’ *katabasis*, the Underworld of Book 6 resists being mappable. Vergil likewise leaves the precise geo-spatial relationship between the *Aeneid*’s Underworld and upper world uncharted. Moreover, since in *Georgics* 4 Aristaeus encounters subterranean rivers with aboveground courses ranging from Scythia to Italy during his watery *katabasis* to his mother’s home (4.365-73), it is clear that in the Vergilian conception the subterranean has a complex spatial relationship with the upper world. Rather, I shall argue that the symbolic geography of the Book 6 links Elysium to the Po region. Philip Hardie, in his article, “In the Steps of the Sibyl: Tradition and Desire in the Epic Underworld,” observes more broadly about *Aeneid* 6 and Greco-Roman *katabasis* traditions that: “In the capacious kingdom of Death anyone who has ever lived, anywhere in the world, is present in one place and one time” (2004: 143). While Hardie is concerned with the implications of this conception of the Underworld on tradition and memory in *Aeneid* 6, he also points eloquently towards how the Underworld has a global scale and an intricate relationship to the world above. Perhaps then we should not be surprised that Aeneas’ katabatic journey has connections across Italian geographical space.

4 Part I of the paper surveys references to travel and geography in *Aeneid* 6 in order to show that connecting aboveground travel through Italy to Aeneas’ *katabasis* resonates with the geopoetics and travel thematics of the epic, as well as recalling the journey aspect of Underworld traditions from the *Odyssey* onwards. This section provides a foundation for re-approaching Vergil’s reference to the Eridanus-Po within the context of travel and geography. Part II considers literary and mythical traditions about the Eridanus that form the background for Vergil’s reference to it in *Aeneid* 6. This section also reviews previous interpretations of Vergil’s description of the Eridanus. Part III looks at how Vergil’s mention of the Eridanus engages with ancient ideas about rivers and subterranean fluvial passages, and with the related notion that the Underworld was accessible through bodies of water and other geological formations around the Mediterranean. This section of the paper builds on the discussion of Vergilian geopoetics and travel in Part I to conclude that rivers’ fundamental role in defining geographic space in Roman contexts creates a strong link between Vergil’s reference to the Eridanus and the Po region through which its aboveground course runs. In addition, the Po’s connection to Cisalpine Gaul in Roman mental geography combines with the *Aeneid*’s engagement with the notion that the Underworld stretches beneath various regions of Italy to suggest a symbolic aboveground journey from Cumae to the Po corresponding to Aeneas’ *katabasis*.

The final section of the paper (Part IV) explores how a Cumae to the Po itinerary recalls Vergil’s own movements around Italy and his connections to these regions. While the *sphragis* to the *Georgics* presents Campania as a space for Virgil to compose his poetry, through the reference to the Eridanus, Virgil’s *patria* flows into Elysium and the Parade of Heroes. I argue that the link to Vergil’s *patria* recalls the first pronouncement of his epic project at *Georgics* 3.1-48, where his poetic ambitions are presented as a metaphorical temple on the banks of the Mincio, a tributary of the Po. A connection to Vergil’s *patria* also complicates *Aeneid* 6’s depiction of the Elysian afterlife and Rome’s future glories by linking them to references to the
costs that civil war exacted upon the Po region in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. Throughout the paper my approach is influenced by the “spatial turn” and “mobility turn” that have occurred across cultural studies over the last few decades. The spatial turn examines space not as an objective, inert dimension in which activity occurs, but as socially constructed and, in turn, a fundamental factor in the construction of societies and individuals. The mobility turn highlights the movement of humans and things through the places and spaces that the spatial turn brings to the fore. The mobility turn also analyzes movement in relation to sedentarism and other sorts of immobility. By applying these concepts to the *Aeneid*, this paper aims to elucidate some of the ways that Virgil’s poetry reflects upon the role of space and mobility in the epic tradition and in the Roman experience.

5 Before proceeding further, let us consider an additional reason to think of Cumae and the Po as two important points of reference in Aeneas’ *katabasis*. Vergil’s description of the entrance to the Underworld at Avernus contains an intertext with Apollonius’ *Argonautica* (*Aeneid* 6.237-41):

*spelunca alta fuit vastoque immanis hiatu,*
*scrupa, tuta lacu negro nemorumque tenebris,*
*quam super haud ulle poterant impune volantes*
*tendere iter pennis: talis sese halitus atris*
*faucibus effundens supera ad convexa ferebat.*

There was a cave, deep and dreadful with a huge mouth, jagged, sheltered by a dark lake and gloomy groves, over which no birds could safely wing their way; such an emission pouring from its black mouth was borne to the world above.

6 Vergil’s depiction of Avernus with its fumes toxic to birds engages with Apollonius’ description in *Argonautica* 4 of gases, likewise noxious to avians, that are released from the site where Phaethon fell into the Eridanus (596-603):

> ἐξ δ᾽ ἐβαλον μύχατον ῥόον Ἡριδανόιοι·
> ἔνθα ποτ᾽ αἰθαλάνετι τυπέλι πρὸς στέρνα κεραυνῷ
> ἰμμιδίης φαέθων πέσεν ἰμματος Ἡλιὸιο
> λίμνης ἐς προχοας πολυβενθέος ἡ δ᾽ ἐτι νῦν περ
> τραύματος αἰθιμένου βαρύν ἀναιδηκεί αἰτμόν.
> οὔ δέ τις ὦδωρ κενο περάτα κουφα ταυνύσσας
> οἰωνός δύναται βαλέειν ὑπερ ἀλλὰ μεσηγὸς
> φλογμῷ ἐπιθρῶσκει πεποτημένος.

They entered the innermost stream of the Eridanus, where once Phaethon, struck by blazing lightning, fell half-burned from Helios’ chariot into the outpouring of a deep pool. Even now it still emits noxious vapor from a smoldering wound. Nor is any bird able to stretch its wings and fly over it, but in mid-flight it falls into the flame.

7 Vergil’s allusion to Apollonius here is well established. Yet in my view there is an additional dimension of the intertext has not yet been appreciated. Namely that, via Apollonius, *Aeneid* 6 connects Avernus and the Eridanus. The allusion encourages thought of Apollonius’ Eridanus at the beginning of Aeneas’ *katabasis* at Cumae and, in turn, recollection of the entrance to the Underworld at Cumae when the Eridanus is mentioned later in *Aeneid* 6. It is this connection, as well as the geo-spatial and travel dynamics that the connection creates, that will be the focus of this paper.
I. Surveying the Territory: Travel in *Aeneid* 6

Underlying my argument about an aboveground journey evoked by Aeneas’ *katabasis* is the importance of travel in Vergil’s epic. From Aeneas’ Mediterranean wanderings after the fall of Troy to the pronouncements of Roman *imperium* extending to the edges of the earth, the *Aeneid* offers a vision of the Roman world that is predicated upon travel, both in the mythological past and in the Augustan present. As Alessandro Barchiesi observes (2017: 151): “With a plot that spans three continents and embraces the majority of the ethnic groups and nations around the Mediterranean, the *Aeneid* is the most international among ancient epic poems (‘internationale Epik’, cf. Norden 1999 [1901] 149).”

Among all of the travel in the *Aeneid*, the sixth book stands at the crossroads on many levels, functioning as a nexus of the journeys within the poem. *Aeneid* 6 offers a vantage point in the middle of the epic for characters and readers alike to look back at the journey from Troy and forward to Aeneas’ movements through Italy as well as the journeys of his descendants in the service of Roman imperial expansion. Book 6 opens with the Trojans at sea, though by the second verse they are arriving at Cumae, whose shores are called Euboean (*Euboicis Cumarum ...oris*), an epithet that brings to mind journeys of colonization from Aegean Greece to Magna Graecia. While the other Trojans make camp (5-8), Aeneas stays in motion, ascending to the temple of Apollo and to the Sibyl (9-13). Cumae, in addition to being the Trojans’ first stop in Italy, is also the terminus of Daedalus’ flight from Crete (14-17), a journey memorialized by Apollo’s temple, whose doors bear images that in turn evoke still further travel: the annual voyage between Athens and Cnossos undertaken in recompense for the death of Androgeus (20-3) and the wandering that the labyrinth forced upon the Minotaur and its victims (24-7). The latter is an internal journey, but also one that is aimless and seemingly perpetual, like Aeneas’ up until this point in the poem. Vergil’s description of the labyrinth as an *inextricabilis error* (“insoluble wandering,” 27) resonates with his presentation of Aeneas’ wanderings as *errores* (first at 1.755). Within Book 6 the parallel between the *error* of the Minotaur’s maze and Aeneas’ is reemphasized when Deiphobus refers to Aeneas’ travels as *errores* (532-3): *pelagine venis erroribus actus/an monitu divum?* (“Do you come driven by your wanderings over the sea or by the gods’ instruction?”). Moreover, Daedalus’ solving of the labyrinth’s *error* brings him, like Aeneas, to Cumae.

Even what Daedalus is unable to depict on the doors of the temple to Apollo recalls travel, as Vergil fills in the blanks that the artist left with a mention of Icarus’ fatal flight, his death echoed in the falling motion of Daedalus’ hands (30-3). Moreover, both Icarus’ death and Daedalus’ hands enact downward motions that anticipate Aeneas’ *katabasis*.

Once Aeneas meets the Sibyl, more travels and descriptions of travel arise. Aeneas recounts his journey to Italy during his prayer to Apollo (58-61). The Sibyl confirms the end of Aeneas’ wandering at sea, yet prophesies subsequent journeys to the future site of Lavinium and to Pallantium (84-97), the latter described with travel terminology as the *via prima salutis* (“first path to safety,” 96). She also sends Aeneas into the woods on an expedition for the golden bough. Moreover, the Sibyl guides Aeneas through an Underworld that is presented as a place that one not only travels to, but also through. From the outset, Aeneas’ *katabasis* is described with the terminology and imagery of movement and travel. For example, *iter* is used nine times in Book 6, appearing at
prominent moments, as the following survey indicates. When Aeneas pleads with the Sibyl for her help getting to the Underworld, he asks her to teach him the *iter* (109). Three verses later Aeneas utters the word *iter* again to describe his travels after Troy, undertaken alongside his father: *ille meum comitatus iter* (“[Anchises] accompanied me on my course,” 112). This repetition of *iter* emphasizes the parallel between Aeneas’ katabatic journey and the travels that he undertook with Anchises after leaving his home. Similarly, as Aeneas and the Sibyl move through the unlit first portions of the Underworld, Virgil compares it to an *iter* through a forest on a dark night (270-2). After meeting Palinurus, as Aeneas and the Sibyl draw near the Styx, Vergil again presents their movement through the underworld as an *iter*: *ergo iter inceptum peragunt* (“So they continued on the journey that they had begun,” 384). Vergil also refers to Aeneas and the Sibyl’s movement as an *iter* at 477, subsequent to his interaction with Dido, an encounter in turns characterized by the latter’s complete lack of motion (469-71) and by her swift movement away from Aeneas (465-6, 472-3). The language of movement is also reflected in Vergil’s use of *via*, a word appearing eleven times across Book 6, especially at liminal and interstitial moments in the *katabasis*, where the poet sets them down a path from one episode of the narrative to another. Vergil emphasizes the Underworld *viae* upon which Aeneas and the Sibyl progress as they set out on their journey (260), as they pass from the monster-filled *vestibulum* to the banks of the Acheron (295), and again at the point when the path through the underworld divides into two routes (540). By one *via* lies the *iter* to Elysium; the other goes to Tartarus (541-3). Vergil’s repeated uses of *iter* and *via* emphasize the journey aspect of the *katabasis*, putting Aeneas and the Sibyl in motion through the Underworld and creating a sense of movement away from the Cumaean entrance towards Elysium and Anchises.

The descriptions of movement during Aeneas’ *katabasis* are also a way in which the poem emphasizes how this episode is yet another journey for the hero who from the opening of the *Aeneid* is defined by his motion, much tossed on land and sea (1.3). Along these lines, it is noteworthy that the first familiar souls that Aeneas encounters in the Underworld—Leucaspis, Orontes, and Palinurus—are fellow Trojan travelers who met death at sea during those seven years of wandering: *ventosa per aequora vectos/ obruit Auster* (“The South wind overwhelmed [Leucaspis and Orontes] as they voyaged over windy seas,” 6.335-6); *qui Libyco nuper cursu…/ exciderat puppi* ([Palinurus,] who on the voyage from Libya...had fallen from the stern,” 338-9). These souls who lost their lives while sailing recall Aeneas’ own previous journeys while also anticipating Aeneas and the Sibyl’s crossing of the Styx in Charon’s boat. During this latter trip the focus is on Aeneas’ mass and the strain it places on the skiff rather than the progress across the river, until suddenly they are *trans flavium* and being let out on the bank (410-16).

Passing over further analysis of the travel terminology in the various sections of the Underworld through which Aeneas moves as he sees the different sorts of the untimely dead (426-534) and the aforementioned divide in the katabatic *via* that provides a vantage point for the description of Tartarus (548-627), we find that the travel terminology continues as the two travelers arrive in Elysium. When Musaeus addresses Aeneas and the Sibyl he uses *trames*, here with a sense similar to *via*, to describe the route to reach Anchises: *facili iam tramite sistam* (“now I will set you on an easy path,” 676). As Aeneas finally reaches Anchises, the latter is reviewing souls destined to be reincarnated and make the journey back to the upper world: *animas superumque ad lumen ituras* (“souls destined to pass to the light above,” 680, cf. 720-1, 750-1). After
catching sight of his son, Anchises tearfully addresses him in a manner that emphasizes Aeneas’ journeys to reach him (687-8, 692-3):

venisti tandem, tuaque exspectata parenti
visit iter durum pietas?....
quas ego te terras et quanta per aequora vectum
accipio! quantis iactatum, nate, periclis!

“Have you come at last, and has the devotion your father counted on conquered the difficult journey?” .... “I welcome you after you have traversed what lands and what seas! Tossed, my son, by what dangers!”

Anchises describes Aeneas’ arrival as pietas having conquered an iter durum (687-8). The language in 687-8 recalls Anticlea in the Odyssey’s nekyia remarking to her son how difficult it is for the living to visit the dead (Od. 11.155-6). In 692 Vergil has Anchises use phrasing that presents Aeneas’ journeys on land and sea in a manner that evokes the opening description of Odysseus’ travels in the Odyssey (1.1-4), as well as Catullus’ journey to his brother’s grave in poem 101.14 In addition, the presence of iactatum in 693 after terras and aequora in 692 introduces an allusion to the first description of Aeneas’ travels at Aeneid 1.3 (multum ille et terris iactatus et alto [“that man much tossed on land and sea”]), which in turn again refers to the depiction of Odysseus’ travels in the opening of the Odyssey.

When Anchises begins describing Aeneas’ future descendants in the Parade of Heroes, another sort of mobility is evoked, as his words are replete with descriptions of conquest and the military movements empire-building entails.15 Here Book 6 points to the travels of Romans who are agents of imperium, a type of travel that reminds us that Aeneas’ journeys in the first half of the Aeneid are through places that will become part of the Roman empire. Among the most explicit references to imperial mobility, conquest, or colonization in the Heldenshau are: the founding of the Alban colonies (773-6); Rome as the center of worldwide empire (781-2); Augustus’ empire extending to the edges of the earth (794-805); the civil war between Caesar and Pompey (830-1); Mummius’ conquest of Greece (836-40); the Scipios in Africa (842-3); and M. Claudius Marcellus with the spolia opima, fighting Carthaginians and Gauls (855-9). Anchises’ apostrophes during his speech also relate colonial and imperial themes, and depend upon travel to be fulfilled. Thus he encourages Aeneas to “extend his might” and “colonize the land of Ausonia” (extendere vires/...Ausonia... consistere terra, 806-7), and he appeals to tu...Romane to rule nations with imperium (851). Moreover, Anchises’ prophecies about Aeneas’ descendants not only foretell future travel; as Kris Fletcher observes, it is also the poem’s most elaborate justification of why Aeneas’ journey to Italy is necessary.16 Book 6 also ends with travel, travel as quickly paced as in the opening verses of the book, as Aeneas ascends from the Underworld, returns to his fleet, and sails to Caieta in the final four verses (898-901). This paper endeavors to uncover, in the midst of all of this movement, an additional journey from Cumae to the Po implied by the reference to the river in 6.658-9, verses to which I now return.

II. Vnde Superne: Vergil’s Elysian Eridanus

The preceding excursus points to the prevalence of travel and other sorts of movement in Aeneid 6. As in other katabasis narratives, Aeneas’ progress in Book 6 is also marked by references to rivers.17 When Aeneas first asks the Sibyl about the entrance to
Underworld, he describes it as at a backflow of the river Acheron (106-7). Charon and his ferry are located at a convergence of the Acheron, Cocytus, and Styx (295-7, 323). Subsequently, Aeneas observes the Phlegethon river surrounding Tartarus with its flaming streams (550-1). When the Sibyl asks Musaeus in Elysium where to find Anchises, river crossing becomes metonymical for their katabasis, as she explains that in order to see Aeneas’ father “we have sailed across the great rivers of Erebus” (magnos Erebi tranavimus amnis, 671). Her words here recall verse 134, where she describes Aeneas’ request to go to the Underworld as a desire “to sail the Stygian Lake twice” (bis Stygiros innare lacus). In part of his reply to the Sibyl, Musaeus notes that Elysium features riverside living: riparumque toros et prata recentia rivis/ incolimus (“we inhabit cushioned riverbanks and meadows freshened by streams,” 674-5). The Parade of Heroes likewise occurs adjacent to a river, in this case the Lethe (705, 749). The rivers that Aeneas encounters during his journey through the afterlife may also resonate with the tradition, unmentioned but likely alluded to in the Aeneid, that Aeneas himself ended his mortal existence at or near the Numicus River. Finally, as already noted, when Aeneas first reaches Elysium, the Eridanus-Po makes an appearance.

16 As quoted at the beginning of the paper, the Aeneid presents the Eridanus thus: unde superne/ plurimus Eridani per silvam volvitur amnis, 658-9. Regarding Vergil’s phrase unde superne, there are three interpretations. The ambiguity lies mostly in superne, which can indicate “from above”, “to a higher level”, or simply “above”. There is also dispute over the related question of whether the silva in 659 is part of the Elysian nemus mentioned at 658 or is in the upper world, with most critics concluding that the silva is aboveground. Some take superne as meaning “from above”, contending that the Elysian laurel grove in 658 is to be imagined as on a hillside and the Eridanus is flowing down from the top of that hill. A second critical camp sees superne as indicating “above in the upper world” an interpretation that understands the Eridanus as simply running above Elysium, and not being subterranean at all. Although these two interpretations also evoke the Po region, in this paper I follow the most common interpretation, found in commentaries ranging from Servius to Norden to Horsfall, which is to take superne with unde to indicate that the Eridanus runs from Elysium to the upper world.

17 Why does Vergil mention the Eridanus here? The river has an extensive mythical heritage as well as some subterranean and Underworld connections. The earliest extant mention of the Eridanus occurs in Hesiod, where it is listed among the offspring of Oceanus and Tethys (Theog. 337-8). Greg Nagy deduces further connections in early myth and epic between the Eridanus and Oceanus. By the 5th century BCE the river had become the site of Phaethon’s fall to earth. Herodotus indicates that the Eridanus was thought to flow into the ocean at the edge of the earth in far northern or northwestern Europe, even as he expresses his doubt that the river exists, asserting that it is a poetic fiction (3.115). Yet already in Pherecydes the Eridanus was identified with non-mythical rivers, including the Rhone, but most of all the Po. Strabo, like Herodotus, does not believe that the Eridanus exists, but he records a tradition that placed the river near the Po rather than identifying it with the Po itself (5.215). The Padane connection is reflected in Roman contexts by Propertius 1.12.4 (Veneto...Eridano). Vergil’s references to the Eridanus in the Georgics also connote the Po (fluviorum rex ["king of rivers"], 1.482; cf. 4.371-3). From Servius onward commentators have interpreted the Eridanus-Po’s appearance in Aeneid 6’s Underworld as a reference
to the notion that the Po flows underground for some distance, an idea that Vergil himself may gesture towards when he concludes his catalogue of subterranean rivers in *Georgics* 4.365-73 with the Eridanus. Servius *ad Aeneid* 6.603 and a scholium to Euripides *Orestes* 981 offer a different link between the Eridanus and the Underworld, making the river the body of water where Tantalus spends his afterlife being punished. Where past critics have noted the Eridanus-Po’s subterranean associations in relation to its appearance in *Aeneid* 6, the next section of the paper follows the river’s flow *unde superne* to consider how the reference links Vergil’s Elysium to the Po region. Furthermore, I contextualize the mention of the Eridanus in relation to Greco-Roman concepts about rivers and to the emphasis on movement and journeys in Book 6 discussed in Part I.

### III. From the Underworld to the Upper World

So far, we have seen that Vergil’s mention of the Eridanus-Po may resonate with subterranean and Underworld traditions about the river. This section aims to shift the focus to what the reference to the Eridanus may reveal about the connection between Vergil’s Underworld and the upper world, and about the relationship between Aeneas’ katabatic journey and aboveground itineraries through Italy. I consider two factors that encourage this shift in focus to the upper world: (1) rivers possess fundamental importance for Greco-Roman conceptualizations of geographic space and for defining and orienting oneself within space; and (2) the *Aeneid* presents the Acheron river, similar to the Eridanus, as flowing between the Underworld and the world above at three different points, as if the Underworld lies beneath much of Italy. This second point will provide new support for interpreting *unde superne* as describing the Eridanus-Po flowing from Elysium to the upper world. Finally, this section argues that the geo-spatial role of rivers, along with the *Aeneid*’s presentation of the Underworld stretching beneath Italy, combines with the broader travel thematics of Book 6 to suggest a symbolic aboveground journey from Cumae to the Po corresponding to Aeneas’ *katabasis*.

As noted at the beginning of the previous section, rivers are an important geo-spatial feature of the Underworld in *Aeneid* 6 and in *katabasis* traditions more generally. Yet this aspect of the Underworld is but a shade reflecting the geo-spatial role of rivers in the upper world. Bodies of water are critical to Greco-Roman conceptualization, formation, and demarcation of landscapes, geography, boundaries and borders. The geo-spatial functions of water are reflected in the many ancient toponyms derived from rivers, springs, and lakes, as well as in the way that, from Herodotus to Seneca to *periploi* and *itineraria*, ancient geographical descriptions reference bodies of water to mark segments of a journey and to organize space. Rivers in particular could be conceptualized as natural, social, and political borders on scales from the local to the continental. Consider, to take a handful of famous examples, Caesar’s riverine divisions of Gaul at the opening of the *Bellum Gallicum*, his crossing of the Rubicon, or rivers such the Nile, Phasis, or the Tanais, thought of as the boundaries between Africa, Asia, and Europe. Yet if (in both the ancient and modern world) rivers offer good ways of demarcating space and conceptualizing boundaries, they also encourage interaction at and across those boundaries by providing water for drinking and irrigation as well as food sources that attract human activity and settlement. Moreover, while a waterway
might hinder the land traveler, who must find some way to ford it, rivers themselves are always in motion, and also allow for modes of water transportation that promote movement, trade, and cultural interaction. Thus rivers can be at once conceived of as borders and also as the zones of intensified cultural and economic exchange. C. R. Whittaker explores in his discussion of frontier zones throughout the Roman empire. This double-sidedness of rivers is demonstrated by the Po itself, conceptualized at times as a border, dividing the Cispadane and Transpadane regions. Yet the Po is in other instances conceived of as the central artery of Cisalpine Gaul. While I do not suggest that the reference to the Eridanus-Po at Aeneid 6.558-9 activates all of these notions about rivers, the role of waterways in conceptualizing geographical space links rivers to specific places. It follows then that the reference to the Eridanus-Po flowing from Elysium to the upper world does not just characterize Vergil’s Elysium, but also evokes the aboveground region through which it runs.

There is another factor that supports the connection between the reference to the Eridanus and the Po region, as well as the interpretation of unde superne as describing the Eridanus starting in Elysium and then flowing up to earth level. Namely, that elsewhere in the Aeneid and, more generally in ancient sources, we find additional descriptions of bodies of water connecting the Underworld and the upper world. The most immediate example occurs earlier in Book 6. As already mentioned, when Aeneas first asks the Sibyl to take him to the Underworld, he notes that the entrance to the infernal region is characterized by a marsh fed by the backflow of the Acheron river: *hic inferni ianua regis/ dicitur et tenebrosa palus Acheronte refuso* (‘...this is said to be a doorway of the king of the Underworld, and this the shadowy swamp where the Acheron flows backwards,’ 106-7). Above I observed that the noxious vapors released at Avernus recall a similar tradition about the Eridanus in the Argonautica, creating a parallel between the two places. By having rivers flow from the Underworld to the upper world at both the entrance to the Underworld and at Aeneas’ Elysian telos, Vergil provides another correspondence between Cumae and the Po.

In Aeneid 7 the Acheron emerges at two additional points in Italy, a feature that in my view furthers the sense that Aeneas’ katabasis does not take place only beneath Cumae, but is on some level also connected to Italian geographical space more generally. Moreover, given the emphasis in Aeneid 6 on the katabasis as travel discussed in Part I, Vergil’s references to Underworld entrances around Italy reinforce the notion that when Aeneas comes to the Eridanus, he has made a journey that symbolically corresponds to an aboveground trek from Cumae to the Po region. In Book 7, after Allecto has set in motion the war between the Trojans and Latins, she seeks a return to the Underworld, described in fluvial terms as the “home of the Cocytus” (*Cocyti...sedem*, 562). She finds an entrance at Ampsanctus and its crater lake (Modern Valle d’Ansanto in Campania). Vergil describes Ampsanctus, with its sulfurous gases, as a vent of Dis, a place where once again the river Acheron breaks through to the upper world (568-70):

```latex
hic specus horrendum et saevi spiracula Ditis
monstrantur, ruptoque ingens Acheronte vorago
pestiferas aperit fauces
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Here are displayed a frightful cave and the exhalations of fierce Dis. A great chasm opens its poisonous jaws where the Acheron breaks forth...

Vergil’s depiction of Ampsanctus with its noxious gases and the Acheron’s stream recalls the Cumaean entrance to the Underworld in Book 6. Poisonous gases and water
ascending from infernal regions are, as previously noted, elements also associated with
the Eridanus-Po. Earlier in Book 7 Latinus consults Faunus’ oracle at Albunea. There
sulfurous gases are again emitted, this time from a fons: 

\textit{fonte sonat saevamque exhalat opaca mephitim} (“[Albunea] which echoes with a spring and darkly breathes
forth deadly gas,” 83-4). Vergil compares Latinus hearing a prophecy from Faunus with
a description of a priest at Albunea having an experience evocative of a nekyia and
engaging in conversation with the Acheron (7.86-91):

\begin{quote}
huc dona sacerdos
cum tulit et caesarum ovium sub nocte silenti
pellibus incubuit stratis somnosque petivit,
multa modis simulacra videt volitantia miris
et varias audit voces fruturque deorum
conloquio atque imis Acheronta adfatur Avernis.
\end{quote}

Here when the priest has brought his offerings and lay down on the skins of felled
sheep and sought sleep in the stillness of night, he sees many shades fluttering in
strange ways, hears varied voices, and enjoys conversation with the gods, and
speaks to the Acheron in the depths of Avernus.

23 Like the Underworld entrances at Cumae and Ampsanctus, Albunea includes the
emission of gases and the Acheron.16

24 On one level, with these references Vergil engages with the notion that places around
the Mediterranean where noxious gases were released were linked to the Underworld.
Such places are termed in sources variously as Plutonia, Charonea, Acheronteia, or
spiracula.37 Servius relates that Varro composed a list of such locations in Italy (ad Aen.
7.563). Similarly, the repeated mentions of the Acheron reaching the upper world find
parallels in other sources. Herodotus 6.74, Pliny NH 2.231, and Pausanias 8.17 report
that the Styx runs aboveground in Arcadia near Nonacris. According to Strabo 5.4.5, the
Styx and Phlegethon feed springs near Avernus. Lucan 9.355 links the Lethe in North
Africa to the Underworld river of the same name. These traditions of rivers running
from the Underworld to the upper world offer further support for the interpretation
of Vergil’s description of the Eridanus as flowing from Elysium to the world above. At
the same time, by having the Acheron flow into the upper world at three different places,
Vergil brings into the Aeneid the notion of the Underworld stretching beneath Italy.
This notion is reinforced by the connection to the Po region that the reference to the
Eridanus creates.

25 As this section has demonstrated, when Vergil references the Eridanus he names a
river that in Roman mental geography is tethered to the Po region. Moreover, by
having the Eridanus flow from the Underworld to the world above (unde superne) Vergil
engages the concept found elsewhere in the Aeneid and more broadly across classical
literature that the Underworld has outlets around Italy and the Mediterranean. These
two factors combine with the geographical and travel elements of Aeneas’ katabasis
(and the Aeneid more broadly) to suggest an aboveground itinerary corresponding to
his Underworld journey. That is, from Cumae to the Po. The next section of the paper
will argue that the full significance of such a journey lies not just within the Aeneid; it
also lies in the Roman context in which the epic was written, and especially in the
points of contact it has with Vergil’s own life and previous poetry.
IV. From Cumae to the Po: Vergilian Resonances

Aeneas’ aboveground journeys through Italy in the *Aeneid* do not take him further north than Pallantium, although the Mantuans that join the Trojan side in Book 10 bring him into contact with Transpadanes (198-203). The aboveground itinerary from Cumae to the Po evoked by Aeneas’ *katabasis* however, mirrors Vergil’s own movements around Italy during his lifetime. Campania and Cisalpine Gaul were, of course, two places of great importance to the poet, summed up in the opening of his supposed epitaph recorded in Donatus: *Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc/Parthenope* (“Mantua gave birth to me, the Calabrians snatched me away, now Parthenope holds me,” *Vita* 36). Vergil’s connections to Campania are also indicated in the *sphragis* of the *Georgics* (4.563-4), in a fragment of a letter from Augustus to Vergil preserved in Priscian that places the poet in Naples (*GL* 2.533K = *Aug. Ep. fr.* 35 Malc.), and in *Catalepton* 5.8-10 and 8, which associate Vergil with the Naples-based Epicurean Siro. A papyrus upon which Vergil’s name appears, interpreted as indicating that he visited the Villa of the Muses at Herculaneum, offers further evidence of his activities in the region.  

While the Campanian starting point of Aeneas’ *katabasis* locates him in the area where Vergil spent time as an adult, the reference to the Eridanus configures Aeneas’ journey to see the shade of his dead *pater*, Anchises, as bringing him from Campania to Vergil’s Cisalpine *patria*. Connecting Elysium to the Po is potentially a sentimental move for Vergil as a Transpadane poet: paradise as *patria*. The issue of *patria* is central to the *Aeneid*’s story of the Trojan migration to Italy and of the struggle of transitioning from one *patria* to another. In addition the importance of *patria* to Vergil’s poetry is evident from the beginning of his oeuvre through the juxtaposition of Tityrus staying in his homeland and Meliboeus departing from it. Vergil highlights this issue by having Meliboeus repeat *patria* twice in the poem’s opening: *nos patriae finis et dulcia linquimus arva;/ nos patriam fugimus* (“I am departing the bounds of my homeland and its lovely fields; from my homeland I am going into exile,” *Ecl.* 1.3-4). In Eclogue 1 rivers are linked to *patria* as well, since included among Tityrus’ good fortune is getting to stay among *flumina nota* (“familiar waterways” 51). An etymology of Mantua offers an additional reason to think of Vergil’s *patria* in relation to the Underworld. *Aeneid* 10.198-200 derives Mantua’s name from the prophetess Manto. Servius, however, connects the city’s name to the Etruscan god Mantus, the equivalent of Pater Dis (*ad Aen.* 10.198). By linking the Po to Elysium, *Aeneid* 6 may offer an oblique reference to Mantua’s chthonic connection, allowing the Underworld to flow into the Po region and the Po region to flow into the *Aeneid*’s infernal spaces.

Vergil’s reference to the Eridanus in the middle of the *Aeneid* offers particular resonance with the depiction of his Mantuan *patria* at the mid-point of the *Georgics* (3.1-48). Here, in lines that anticipate the *Aeneid*, Vergil states that he will return to his homeland bearing poetic glories (10-12). He pledges to construct a temple on the banks of the Mincio, his native river and a tributary of the Po. The setting for the temple “on a verdant plain” (*uiridi in campo*, 13), “beside the water” (*propter aquam*, 14) “where the great Mincio wanders” (*ingens...errat/ Mincius*, 14-15) offers parallels to the description of Elysium in *Aeneid* 6. There Virgil again refers a *campus* (6.653), greenery (*per herbam*, 656) and a great river flowing (*plurimus Eridani...volvitur amnis*, 659). The poetic glories that in *Georgics* 3 Vergil predicts he will bring to Mantua—the Muses,
Idumaean palms, and the epic poetry for which the temple is a metaphor—also have correspondences in the verses surrounding the reference to the Eridanus in Aeneid 6. Directly prior to mentioning the Eridanus, Vergil describes Aeneas observing inhabitants of Elysium “singing the cheerful paean in a chorus through a grove fragrant with bays” (laetumque choro paena canentis/ inter odoratum lauris nemus, 657-8). This Elysian chorus in the midst of laurel beside the Eridanus-Po gives the scene an Apolline, poetic dimension, similar to the manner in which Vergil locates his future poetic honors and endeavors at Mantua on the banks of the Mincio in Georgics 3. Likewise, Vergil’s claim in Georgics 3.18 that he will drive chariots beside the Mincio is reflected in Aeneid 6 a few verses prior to the Eridanus reference when Aeneas catches sight of Ilus, Assaracus, and Dardanus with their chariots (650-1). In addition, the description of Dardanus at 6.650 (Troiae Dardanus auctor) recalls the description of Apollo at Georgics 3.36 (Troiae Cynthius auctor). Finally, Vergil’s image of Envy in the Underworld at the conclusion of the description of the temple at Georgics 3.37-9 resonates with the katabasis of Aeneid 6. The mention of the Eridanus in Aeneid 6 recalls the opening of Georgics 3 in that Vergil symbolically situates the Po region in the middle of the Aeneid, much as in the mid-point of the Georgics, by means of a metaphorical temple, Vergil situates his future epic endeavors in the Po region. From this perspective the reference to the Eridanus in Aeneid 6 reverses the flow of rivers and texts, channeling back to the Georgics and up the stream of the Mincio to the first pronouncement of Vergil’s epic project.

Much as the Mincio flows near the Po, Vergil places near his Elysian Eridanus another Underworld river, the Lethe, with the latter river serving as the site of the Parade of Heroes, as noted above. By locating the souls of future Roman heroes in an area connected to the Po region, Vergil offers a vision of Rome as deeply connected to a larger Italy. Such a vision could accord with Octavian/Augustus’ incorporation of Cisalpine Gaul fully into Italy in 42 BCE. Conversely—or perhaps simultaneously—connecting the Heldenshau to the Po region points towards negative effects that Rome’s imperial project had upon the area during Vergil’s own lifetime. From this perspective, the many soldiers that Roman generals, especially in the 1st century BCE, drew from the Po region to fill the ranks of armies—souls in many cases destined to go from the battlefield to the Underworld—loom over the Parade. Indeed, a connection to the Po region might be read into the verse that follows the reference to the Eridanus and begins the list of inhabitants of the area: hic manus ob patriam pugnando vulnera passi (“here was a group that endured wounds fighting for their patria,” 660). Along similar lines, the links between the Po region, Elysium, and the Parade of Heroes also point Vergil’s readers back to his laments in the Eclogues and Georgics about land confiscations in his patria (Ecl. 9.27-9, Georg. 2.198-9). In short, by engaging with aboveground Italian geography in this section of the Underworld, Aeneid 6 finds another way for the cost of empire to cast its shadow upon Anchises’ triumphal vision of the future.

Conclusion

This paper has endeavored to bring Vergilian geopoetics and travel thematics to bear on a single reference to the Eridanus-Po, to contextualize the reference in relation to journeys in the Aeneid and in Book 6 in particular, and to uncover latent aboveground mobilities symbolically enacted by Aeneas’ katabasis. In addition, I have speculated
about how this aboveground journey resonates with travel Vergil himself undertook, as well as ways in which linking Elysium to the Po region recalls Vergil’s earlier representations of his patria and imbues his Underworld with a Padane tint. If Vergil does project his home region onto Elysium and vice versa, he anticipates one of our most significant contemporary poets, Seamus Heaney. Heaney was a lifelong reader of Vergil, whose own translation of Aeneid 6 was published posthumously in 2016. In his 2007 poem “The Riverbank Field”, which features the post-script “after Aeneid VI, 704-15 & 748-51,” Heaney brings elements of Vergil’s Elysium into his own home in County Derry in Northern Ireland. The poem begins:

Ask me to translate what the Loeb gives as
“In a retired vale...a sequestered grove”
And I’ll confound the Lethe in Moyola

By coming through Back Park down from Grove Hill
Across Long Rigs on to the riverbank—
Which way, by happy chance, will take me past

The domos placidas, “those peaceful homes”
Of Upper Brough....

In these verses the topography of Aeneid 6 and Heaney’s Derry converge for a poet in motion (“By coming through...Which way...will take me past”). The Lethe flows into the River Moyola, and the river of forgetting becomes part of the topography of home, a monument of memory. Heaney’s approach is similar in a poem that appeared together with “The Riverbank Field”, “Route 110”, which maps moments from his own life onto Aeneid 6. Heaney’s receptions of Vergil here point to the way that, among the enormous variety of katabatic and eschatological traditions that Vergil engages with in Aeneid 6, he also brings something of the familiar, something of home, to his Underworld for Aeneas to experience at the climax of his katabatic journey.

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NOTES

1. The Eridanus and its association with the Po are discussed in detail below, as is the interpretation of unde superne and per silvam in the following quotation. Translations of Aeneid 6 are based on Horsfall 2013 with modifications. All other translations are my own.

2. This is an issue well analyzed in Feldherr 1999.

3. On geopoetics see especially Barchiesi 2017: 152, who uses the term in relation to the Aeneid “to describe the dynamics formed by the representation of the world, in particular its geopolitics, when it encounters the active participation of the poetic text in the making, etiology, and transformation of this world.” Cf. White 1992: 174. Interest in Vergil’s engagements with geography is longstanding: see esp. Rehm 1932; McKay 1970; Reeker 1971; Della Corte 1972; Cairns 1989: 109-128; Fletcher 2014. For recent discussion of the journey aspect of katabaseis, see

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4. In this paper I use "Po region" and "Cisalpine Gaul" to refer to roughly the same area. For the overlap between the two see *Brill’s New Pauly* s.v. "Gallia Cisalpina."


6. See Nelis 2001: 244-6 with further references. Vergil also engages with the tradition about Avernus’ gases already found in Timaeus fr. 57; Lucretius 6.740-8; Varro fr. 381 *GRF* (= Pliny *NH* 31.21).

7. As Reeker 1971: 56 n.118 observes, Tzetzes *ad Lychophron* 704 likewise connects Avernus’ vapors with the Eridanus.

8. Such narrative framing by bodies of water finds a parallel in *Aeneid* 8 where rivers offer intricate frames to the book and to the shield ecphrasis, as discussed by Feldherr 2014. See also the discussion in Section II of the role of rivers in framing and marking progress in Aeneas’ katabasis.


10. Vergil’s reference to the founding of Cumae by Greek colonists is reiterated at 6.17 and 42. Horsfall 2013: 2.66-7 sums up discussion of the anachronism of the reference to Greek colonization.

11. On similarities between Aeneas’ wanderings and the labyrinth, see Catto 1988 with further references. Cf. *Aen.* 5.588-93, where the complex equestrian maneuvers during the *lusus Troiae* are compared to the *inremeabilis error* ("unfixable wandering," 591) of the labyrinth. See Quint 2018: 109-113 on connections between the *lusus Troiae* and Book 6.

12. Cf. Clark 2001: 104 on Vergil’s expansion of “the geography of the Underworld, so as to increase the reader’s sense of the vastness of Aeneas’ journey.” See also Feldherr 1999 on mapping and resistance to mapping in *Aeneid* 6 and now Pandey 2018: 143-158.

13. Palinurus’ death at the hands of plunderers at the shore (6.358-61) also evokes travel in that it is a motif of shipwreck narratives: Horsfall 2013: 2.277. On the mention of Libya in this passage, when the Trojans were sailing from Sicily, see Horsfall 2013: 2.279-80. Palinurus also requests that Aeneas make an additional journey in order to bury his body (6.365-6), although the Sibyl prophesies a different outcome.

14. 101.1-2: *multas per gentes et multa per aequora vectus/ advenio has miseris, frater, ad inferias* (“Having traversed many people and over many seas I come, brother, to these sorrowful rites”). For the triangulation between Vergil, Catullus, and the *Odyssey* here, see Conte 1986: 32-9; cf. Hardie 2012 esp. 222-4.

15. For the theme of imperial expansion in the Parade of Heroes see esp. Horsfall 1976: 82-5. The manner in which Feeney 1986 highlights the ambiguities in Anchises’ presentation of Roman *imperium* represents an important approach to this passage in a variety of subsequent scholarship.


17. E.g., Plato *Phaedo* 111e-14b. See also Mackie 1999 on Underworld rivers in Homer. Rutledge 1971: 110 observes the importance of bodies of water throughout *Aeneid* 6. On the role of rivers in the *Aeneid* see also Jones 2005: 64-7; Feldherr 2014.
18. The Sibyl’s prophecy of the Italian War likewise emphasizes rivers, comparing the “Tiber foaming with much blood” (Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine, 6.87) to the Simois and Xanthus in the Trojan war (88-9).


21. Serv. ad Aen. 6.659; Norden 1957: 300; Butler 1920: 218-19; Paratore 1978: 315-16; Horsfall 2013: 2.454. Contra Austin 1977: 208: “…it is absurd to differentiate the silva from the nemus and to refer it to some forest in the upper world.”


23. Papillon and Haigh 1892: 2.243; Butler 1920 218-19; Greenough, Kittredge, and Jenkins 1923: 186.


25. Hesiod also mentions the Eridanus in fr. 150.23 M-W, where the river’s association with amber is first attested.

26. 1990: 236-9: (1) Theog. 338 gives the Eridanus the epithet “deep-swirling”, which Hesiod otherwise only applies to Oceanus; (2) there is a variant reading of Il. 16.151 that changes Oceanus to Eridanus; (3) Phaethon falls into the Eridanus like the sun sets into the Oceanus; (4) both rivers are associated with poplar trees, the Eridanus via the transformed Heliades, Oceanus at Od. 10.508-12, as Odysseus comes to the entrance to the Underworld.

27. The earliest extant reference is Eur. Hipp. 735-41, although Pliny NH 37.31 also cites Aeschylus as among the first sources, perhaps a reference to the latter’s Heliades; see Diggle 1970: 4-5, 27-30.

28. Pherecydes FGrH 3 F 74 associates it with the Po; the Adriatic context of Euripides Hipp. 735-41 likewise suggests the Po. Aeschylus fr. 73 Radt identifies the Eridanus as the Rhone, but also places it in Iberia. Schol. Bern. ad Georg. 1.482 (p. 275 Hagen) (= FGrH 3 696 F 34 f) notes that Ctesias locates the river in India, Choerilus in Germany, Ion of Chios in Achaea. There is also a waterway in Athens of the same name: Plato Crit. 112a; Callimachus fr. 458 Pf.; Strabo 9.1.19; Pausanias 1.19.5.

29. Serv. ad A. 6.659: Padus vocatur: quem ali etiam ad inferos volunt tendere, ali nasci apud inferos et exire in terras (“It is called the Po, which some assert reaches even to the Underworld, while others assert that it begins in the Underworld and flows out into the upper world.”) Pliny NH 3.117 also notes that the Po runs partially underground. Plato Phaedo 111c-114b reflects traditions about subterranean rivers more broadly. Cf. Dewar 1991 on traditions about a subterranean course of the Tigris.


32. Rivers are already conceptualized as continental boundaries in Herodotus 4.45; cf. Thomson 1948: 254 for examples in Roman sources.
33. See Purcell 1996: 200 on the inherent “mobility of water.”
34. Whittaker 1994. Braund 1996 and Purcell 2012 discuss the tension between Roman conceptions of rivers as frontiers and the evidence for them facilitating communication and transport.
35. Purcell 1990.
37. See esp. Varro (Servius ad Aen. 7.563; Isidorus Etym. 14.9.1-2); Pliny NH 2.207-8; Strabo 5.4.5, 13.4.14, 14.1.11, and 14.144; cf. Cicero Div. 1.79, with the comment of Pease 1920: 232-4. Ennius fr. 222 Skutsch uses spiramina instead of spiracula, but Skutsch notes that the words are synonymous. He also catalogues several other instances of poetic uses of both words (1985: 398-9). There are of course many places conceived of as entrances to the Underworld described neither with gases nor an infernal river, such as Vergil’s presentation of the cave at Taenarum where Orpheus begins his katabasis at Georgics 4.467-8.
39. The Padane elements of Aeneid 6’s Elysium have been noted by Reeker 1971: 56; Della Corte 1972: 116.
40. For the Mantua-Mantus connection: Colonna 1999 and 2006; The Virgil Encyclopedia 2.785; Brill’s New Pauly s.v. Mantus.
41. On the importance of this mid-point not only of the Georgics but of Vergil’s entire œuvre, see esp. Thomas 1985 and 2004; Nelis 2004.
42. Giusti 2018 n. 27 reviews scholarship about the relationship between this passage and the Aeneid, including dissenting views.
43. On the Apolline context of this section of Elysium in Aeneid 6 see Miller 2009: 147-9 with Horsfall 1993 and 2013 2.452-3. Note also Orpheus’ Elysian chorus (644-7), the pious vates and those who said things worthy of Apollo (662), and the central presence of Musaeus among Elysium’s inhabitants (667-8). Rivers themselves can carry a poetic dimension, as they are among the types water presented in Greco-Roman literary traditions as metaphors for poetry, poetic inspiration, and poetic talent; see esp. Jones 2005; Worman 2015: 78-85 and 251-9; Freudenberg 2018; Rimell 2018.
45. On the relationship between the Mincio and the Po it is also worth recalling Strabo’s reference at 5.215 to a tradition that makes the Eridanus not the Po itself, but a nearby river—like the Mincio (see above).
46. Cf. Della Corte 1972: 117 who likewise sees the surroundings for the meeting between Anchises and Aeneas as evoking a Padane landscape.
47. Octavian’s extension of Italy to the Alps was the last in a series of reforms beginning in the 80s BCE to incorporate Cisalpine Gaul into Italy; see Chilver 1941: 7-10. Servius ad Aen. 1.1 sees a reflection of the tension about Cisalpine Gaul’s relationship to Italy in the seeming contradiction between Vergil’s presentation of Aeneas as the first to reach Italy in the opening lines of the Aeneid and Venus’ reference to Antenor already having founded Padua at 1.247-9, well discussed in Reed 2007: 192-3. On representations of Italy in the Aeneid, see also Toll 1991 and 1997; Ando 2002.
48. See Chilver 1941: 112-13 on the Roman military drawing on the population of this area.
49. “The Riverbank Field” as well as its companion poem “Route 110” were republished in the 2010 collection Human Chain from which I quote here (p. 47). Murphy 2016 contextualizes these poems within Human Chain and Heaney’s œuvre more broadly; see now Harrison, Macintosh, and Eastman 2019.
This paper explores the *Aeneid*’s geopoetics and travel thematics in relation to Vergil’s inclusion of the Eridanus-Po river in his description of Elysium (*Aen. 6.558-9*). The paper proposes that the reference to the Eridanus evokes an aboveground journey from Cumae to the Po region that symbolically corresponds to Aeneas’ Underworld journey in *Aeneid 6*. To support this supposition, the paper surveys references to travel in *Aeneid 6*; reviews previous interpretations of 6.558-9 as well as mythical and literary traditions relating to the Eridanus; and demonstrates the fundamental role of rivers for Greco-Roman conceptualizations of geographical space. The final section of the paper speculates about how a journey from Cumae to the Po resonates with travel that Vergil himself undertook during his lifetime, and considers ways in which linking Elysium to the Po region recalls Vergil’s earlier poetic representations of his patria and imbues his Underworld with a Padane tint.

**INDEX**

**Keywords:** Aeneid, Aeneas, Campania, Cisalpine Gaul, Cumae, Elysium, Eridanus, Geography, Geopoetics, Katabasis, Parade of Heroes, Po, Rivers, Rome, Travel, Underworld, Vergil

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