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Revisiting Virgil's Heroes' Parade: An Apocalyptic Historical Review

Alon Deutsch

Abstract: This paper reexamines the Heroes' Parade in Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid* through the lens of apocalyptic literature, specifically the 'historical apocalypse'. It seeks to reveal how Virgil recontextualizes common themes and motifs found within the apocalyptic genre to support Rome's imperial ideology. Drawing on a comparative analysis with the cloud vision in *2 Baruch*, this study explores how both texts employ a divinely mediated review of history yet serve different purposes. While historical apocalypses typically offer consolation to oppressed communities, Virgil's account celebrates Rome's imperial destiny and proclaims the dawn of a new age—an era of salvation inaugurated by Augustus. Through this adaptation, the *Aeneid* transforms the Heroes' Parade into an imperial manifesto, positioning Augustus' reign as fulfilling a divine plan and elevating Rome's history to a transcendent, prophetic plane. In this way, the parade reinforces Augustus' legitimacy and Rome's preordained supremacy.

Keywords: *Aeneid* 6, Heroes' Parade, Apocalyptic Historical review, Augustan propaganda

INTRODUCTION

In *Aeneid* 6, Virgil crafts a katabatic narrative that intertwines Rome's mission with divine guidance. This is epitomized in the Heroes' Parade, which lies at the heart of Aeneas' descent to Hades. This pivotal episode resonates with themes commonly found in apocalyptic literature, which John Collins defines as

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹

The Heroes' Parade exemplifies these themes and integrates them into the Roman ideological framework.² This paper reexamines the Heroes' Parade, analyzing its

¹ Collins (1979), 9.

² Although Virgil's narrative does not fully conform to the apocalyptic genre, it demonstrates familiarity with apocalyptic themes and motifs, indicating an engagement with Jewish ideas. The specific texts Virgil may have encountered and the means by which he was exposed to these motifs lie beyond the scope of this paper. Recent scholarship, however, underscores the broader interest of Greek and Roman intellectuals in Jewish literature, including the Septuagint and pseudepigrapha, which may have facilitated the integration of apocalyptic motifs into Roman thought. See Horsfall (2012); Bremmer (2013); Hejduk (2018), 76–8; Schiesaro (2020), 68–71.

apocalyptic elements and their interaction with two key sub-genres: the otherworldly journey apocalypse and the historical apocalypse. It argues that Virgil weaves visionary and eschatological elements into the Heroes' Parade to convey a divine plan for history that legitimizes Augustus' reign and glorifies the Roman Empire—thus creating a unique form of historical review.

Apocalyptic literature often frames historical review within visionary and auditory contexts, guiding the audience through humanity's journey from its origins to the final cosmic event. Departing from conventional linear storytelling, it instead presents history as a series of episodic, prophetic scenes that culminate in divine judgment. These scenes shape the chapters of human history into a trajectory orchestrated by God.³ In *Aeneid* 6, Virgil adopts a similar model through the Heroes' Parade, presenting a sequence that reflects a preordained course of events. Here, Roman history is not simply recounted but projected as an unfolding manifestation of order predetermined by fate and the gods, culminating in Augustus' reign. Such a narrative mirrors the apocalyptic tradition, viewing history as a divinely constructed timeline. This perspective is exemplified in texts like *2 Baruch*, written in the late first century A.D. under the pseudonym of Baruch ben Neriah, the scribe of the Biblical prophet Jeremiah.⁴

Aeneas' descent into the underworld marks a thematic shift from the traditional katabatic narrative, which focuses on heroic quests, toward an exploration of hidden knowledge and prophetic revelation. In the *Aeneid*, both the Cumaean Sibyl and Anchises serve as mediators, with the latter assuming a quasi-prophetic role.⁵ They reveal not only the geographical layout of the underworld but also eschatological insights influenced by Pythagorean-Orphic thought. Through these figures, Virgil mirrors apocalyptic conventions. As Christopher Rowland observes, the apocalyptic genre fundamentally seeks to reveal divine mysteries.⁶ In such literature, esoteric truths are typically accessible only to a select few and are conveyed through visions or revelatory dialogues with divine or semi-divine figures. Virgil introduces Aeneas' descent by first seeking the approval of the chthonic deities (Verg. *Aen.* 6.264–7), signaling his intent to disclose mysteries usually reserved for the initiated.⁷ In doing so, Virgil reveals esoteric truths to his audience in a manner reminiscent of an apocalyptic writer.⁸ This transforms *Aeneid* 6 into a vehicle for conveying transcendent insights into Rome's destiny and imperial mission.

Many scholars contend that apocalyptic literature often emerges within communities facing crises, serving the dual purposes of exhortation and consolation through appeals to

³ Murdock (1967), 167–8.

⁴ *2 Baruch*, also known as *The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*, follows a similar pattern of historical review found in other apocalyptic writings, such as *The Animal Vision* (*1 En.* 89:59–90:19), *The Apocalypse of Weeks* (*1 En.* 93:1–10; 91:11–17), and other works within the historical apocalypse genre. The quotations from *2 Baruch* are taken from the translation by Stone (2013), while all translations of the *Aeneid* are my own.

⁵ Reitz et al. (2019), 687.

⁶ Rowland (1982), 9–11. These enigmatic revelations span a wide spectrum and may include: 'cosmological or ontological truths. It may be the disclosure of God's general plan, of hidden heavenly realities, unknown earthly truths, the real layout of past events, or a description of things to come'. See Bull, Lied and Turner (2012), ix.

⁷ Luck (1973), 159–60; Bremmer (2014), 186.

⁸ e.g., *1 En.* 37: 4–5; *3 Bar* 17: 1.

divine authority.⁹ Such literature typically offers both reassurance and resistance, addressing the distress of oppressed audiences through visions of divine justice. For example, Anthea Portier-Young classifies texts like *Daniel* and the *Apocalypse of Weeks* as ‘literature of resistance’, written to inspire hope by challenging foreign rule.¹⁰ These texts provide a forward-looking perspective, anticipating an imminent resolution to contemporary tribulations.¹¹

In contrast, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, commissioned by Augustus, affirms Rome’s god-sanctioned supremacy and the stability ushered in by Augustus’ rule. Far from offering solace to an oppressed audience, the historical review within the Heroes’ Parade glorifies Augustus’ redemptive acts. It celebrates the salvation from the turmoil of ongoing wars and unprecedented peace, along with the prosperity and elation that defined his reign. By portraying a harmonious and thriving Rome, Virgil’s vision diverges sharply from the themes common in apocalyptic literature, commemorating a golden era rather than offering consolation to people facing adversity or subjugation.

The following sections will delve into specific elements of *Aeneid* 6 to support this argument. First, I will explore the characteristics of historical review in apocalyptic literature, focusing on the cloud vision in *2 Baruch* as a representative example. Following this, I will analyze Aeneas’ encounters with the souls in the Elysian Fields, which lay the groundwork for the Heroes’ Parade and provide the necessary context for interpreting the procession. I will then discuss Virgil’s Heroes’ Parade as a distinct form of historical review. Finally, I will examine the political implications of this parade, demonstrating how paralleling themes in apocalyptic literature within Virgil’s historical review enhance Augustus’ legitimacy and elevate Rome’s imperial mission to a divinely ordained status. By placing the Heroes’ Parade at the center of this analysis, I support the view that Virgil’s purpose in *Aeneid* 6 is to praise Augustus and promote his propaganda. This challenges interpretations that view it as a veiled critique. Additionally, the approach offers a fresh perspective on the debate surrounding Virgil’s political positioning, encouraging a reassessment of his alignment with or critique of Augustus.

HOPE AMIDST DESPAIR: HISTORICAL REVIEW AND THE VISION OF THE CLOUD IN *2 BARUCH*

Historical review in apocalyptic literature often unfolds within visionary frameworks and through intermediary figures, tracing humanity’s journey from its origins to the eschaton. Rather than adhering to a linear narrative, these reviews typically present episodic, visionary sequences that conclude with divine reckoning. This transcendent perspective portrays both the past and future as elements of prophecy, with each chapter of human history contributing to an eschatological climax.

The use of pseudonymity and post-event predictions (*vaticinia ex eventu*) reinforces the text’s authority. Primordial figures like Enoch are depicted as both authors and ancestral voices, endowed with unique insights into humanity’s fate and empowered to

⁹ Hellholm (1986), 27.

¹⁰ Portier-Young (2011), 140.

¹¹ DiTommaso (2021), 84.

'predict' events throughout history.¹² Their role imparts timeless wisdom to the deterministic worldview, in which humanity's path unfolds as part of a divinely crafted plan, with God foreseeing all events destined to occur.¹³ This portrayal of authoritative figures is crucial, as it underscores the broader themes of predestination and symbolism inherent in apocalyptic literature.

As Collins observes regarding historical reviews, 'the predetermination of history and the imminence of the end are the most consistent and fundamental messages conveyed by the *ex eventu* prophecies of the Jewish apocalypses'.¹⁴ This observation highlights a characteristic of apocalyptic literature, which often utilizes historical events not as objective records but as vehicles for conveying symbolic and theological meanings. In his analysis of the portrayal of King Antiochus in *Daniel 7*, Jürgen Lebram notes that the author adopts a symbolic apocalyptic historical framework (*symbolisch-apokalyptische Geschichtsschema*),¹⁵ wherein factual recording of history is secondary to theological reinterpretation. Rather than adhering to strict chronology or historical accuracy, apocalyptic writers recast events as symbols imbued with eschatological and theological significance.¹⁶

The vision of the cloud in *2 Baruch* exemplifies this approach, utilizing a symbolic apocalyptic historical framework. It encapsulates enduring motifs of optimism in the face of tribulation, intricately connected to the doctrine of two aeons. This doctrine offers a dualistic perspective on history,¹⁷ contrasting a present era marked by hardship with the anticipated age of redemption. The invocation of the biblical figure of Baruch lends credibility to the author's hopeful message.¹⁸ By writing under the guise of a prophet's scribe, the author interprets world events in both direct and symbolic-allegorical terms. Composed in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the author frames contemporary events through the lens of the Babylonian conquest and destruction of the First Temple. This draws a parallel to the recent devastation and reflects the widespread anguish within the Jewish community.¹⁹

The author poignantly articulates this collective distress in his lamentation directed at Babylon: 'Now, however, see, the pain is infinite and the groans without measure, that you, see, are prosperous, while Zion is devastated' (*2 Bar.* 11: 2).²⁰ Despite the overwhelming sense of despair, the author ultimately seeks to instill hope in his audience. At the conclusion of the apocalypse, Baruch reassures the exiles of a future promise: 'And let us not look to the pleasures of the nations in the present, but let us remember what has been promised to us for the end...For the consummation of the world [or: age] will then show the great power of its ruler, as everything will come to judgment' (*2 Bar.* 83: 5–7).

¹² Collins (2012), 188.

¹³ e.g., *As. Mos.* 12: 5; *Sir.* 23: 20; *Jub.* 1: 29.

¹⁴ Collins (1977), 337.

¹⁵ Lebram (1975), 743.

¹⁶ As Klaus Koch concludes, the Book of Daniel marks the beginning of a new sub-genre within Jewish literature that depicts world history through mythological imagery. See Koch (1961), 32.

¹⁷ Harnisch (1969), 89; Ferch (1977), 135.

¹⁸ *Jer.* 32: 12–13; 36: 4–8.

¹⁹ Ferch (1977), 141.

²⁰ cf. *3 Bar.* 1: 2; *4 Ezra* 3: 1–2.

This assurance of a forthcoming resolution aligns with the overarching themes in apocalyptic literature, where the conflict between good and evil plays a key role in the unfolding of divine history. This perspective resonates with the dualistic vision in *2 Baruch*, where the current age is fraught with challenges, while the impending era promises transformation and hope.

In this context, the vision of the clouds plays a pivotal role, directly addressing Baruch's inquiries regarding resurrection and the fates of the righteous and the wicked.²¹ Engaging in a profound dialogue with the angel, Baruch expresses his concerns about the eschatological fate of both groups. The angel explains that the dead will be resurrected in their original form: the righteous will undergo a glorious transformation, while the wicked will endure intensified torment. Baruch reflects on the significance of mourning for the deceased and ultimately urges the righteous to embrace their present suffering in anticipation of the promised reward and eternal life. Following this contemplation, he falls asleep and experiences a vision that presents a symbolic review of history, unfolding in interchanging phases of wrongdoing and divine benevolence.

The structure of the vision outlines a cyclical history characterized by alternating periods of sin and righteousness, referred to as 'black waters' and 'bright waters'.²² In it, Baruch witnesses a great cloud rising from the sea and covering the whole earth, intermittently releasing both white and black rain. This cycle occurs twelve times, with each successive downpour accompanied by progressively darker waters. Ultimately, lightning appears, purifying the corruption caused by the black waters. Remiel, 'the angel who presides over true visions' (*2 Bar.* 55: 3), clarifies the vision, revealing that the cloud represents 'the duration of that world [or: age] which the Mighty One has made' (*2 Bar.* 56: 3). It embodies the entire course of history—from creation to the coming of the Messiah.

The progression of the vision begins with the black waters of transgression, tracing the narrative from Adam to the Flood, followed by the bright waters of divine favor that extend from Abraham to his descendants. This cyclical narrative continues with black waters representing the sins of the Gentile nations, including Israel's oppression in Egypt, juxtaposed with the bright waters associated with Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, and Caleb. Subsequent black waters emerge from the sins of the Amorites, who engaged in forbidden practices, as well as the transgressions of the Israelites during the period of the Judges. In contrast, the reigns of David and Solomon signify a return to bright waters, a time marked by the establishment of Zion and the Temple. The narrative further alternates between the black waters of Jeroboam's idolatry and corrupt kingship and the bright waters stemming from Hezekiah's righteous reign. This cycle culminates in the black waters of King Manasseh's impiety, succeeded by the bright waters of Josiah's reforms, the subsequent black waters of the Babylonian exile, and the eventual bright waters representing the restoration of Zion and the Temple. Ultimately, the vision concludes with the black waters that precede the final consummation and the bright waters heralding the Messiah and the new creation.

Baruch addresses the theological dilemma of God's perceived nonintervention during crises by reviewing human history and responding 'to terror with visions of hope, divine

²¹ *2 Bar.* 49: 1–52: 8.

²² *2 Bar.* 53: 1–74: 4.

providence, and the promise of justice'.²³ He does not question God's justice; rather, he anticipates the eventual enactment of divine judgment upon the nations. Consequently, the central concern shifts from whether the judgment will come to when it will occur.²⁴ This vision serves as the climax of the apocalypse,²⁵ illustrating the unfolding of world history as a dynamic interplay of cause and effect, wherein God punishes the wicked and vindicates the righteous. This understanding complements the cyclical narrative of the cloud vision, encapsulating the fundamental themes of sin, judgment, redemption, and eschatological hope woven throughout the text.

The historical review emerges as a key narrative strategy within *2 Baruch*, recounting the past calamities endured by the Jewish people. Each significant event is portrayed symbolically as part of God's salvific intervention, foreshadowing the arrival of a new era. The deliberate incorporation of chaos and turmoil within this review underscores the unfolding of a predetermined eschatological moment—one in which blessings await the righteous, whereas the wicked will face divine wrath and condemnation. As Albertus Klijn concludes, 'God is clearly bringing this world to an end in order to "renew it"'.²⁶

Ultimately, the duality of the black and bright waters in *2 Baruch* illustrates a profound theological insight: God's covenant with Israel remains steadfast despite human failures. The transformative quality of the vision indicates that while despair may dominate the present, a promising future is assured for those who remain faithful to the covenant. Thus, the vision transcends mere historical recounting to become a testament to the prospects for redemption in the face of despair, serving as a compelling narrative within the broader canon of apocalyptic literature.

VIRGIL'S HEROES' PARADE

1. Elysium's Fields: An Introduction to the Heroes' parade

Amidst the apocalyptic corpus, Judeo-Christian traditions typically employ historical surveys without venturing into otherworldly journeys.²⁷ In contrast, Virgil's *Aeneid* diverges by using Aeneas' reunion with his father, Anchises, in the Elysian Fields as an occasion for a unique form of historical review.

At the culmination of his journey through the underworld, Aeneas emerges from the depths of Tartarus into the Elysian Fields—an enchanting realm where souls engage in joyous activities such as dancing, athletic competitions, and feasting. This idyllic haven has long captivated the Greco-Roman imagination: Homer and Hesiod reserved Elysium for heroes,²⁸ Orphic sources required initiation into Mystery rites for access,²⁹ and Tibullus envisioned it as a romantic sanctuary, where lovers could bask in peace and tranquility.³⁰ Yet for Virgil, the gates of Elysium open not merely for the heroic or the

²³ Portier-Young (2011), 140.

²⁴ Harnisch (1969), 77. E.g., *2 Bar.* 12: 4.

²⁵ Leuenberger (2005), 208.

²⁶ Klijn (1970), 76.

²⁷ The *Apocalypse of Abraham* stands as an exception. See Collins (1998), 40.

²⁸ Hom. *Od.* 4.561–3; Hes. *Op.* 156–69.

²⁹ Ar. *Ran.* 318–19, 455–9. See also Solmsen (1972), 32

³⁰ Cilliers (1974), 75.

initiated but for those whose characters reflect Rome's cherished virtues.³¹ This prepares Aeneas to witness the figures who will shape Rome's destiny in the Heroes' Parade.

Upon entering the Elysian Fields, Aeneas encounters its inhabitants, revealing a hierarchical order among the souls present. At the forefront are Trojan heroes like Dardanus, along with unnamed warriors who fought valiantly in defense of their homeland. Beyond these warriors stand priests, seers, poets, and cultural pioneers who advanced human civilization through wisdom and creativity.³²

Virgil's enumeration of the Elysian inhabitants conveys a powerful message: this exclusive realm is reserved for those who embody Roman ideals and uphold its core virtues. Central to this vision is the concept of *pietas*, encompassing dedication to the homeland (*patria*), reverential worship of the gods, and commitment to familial bonds.³³ By placing patriots and warriors at the forefront, Virgil reinforces the Roman belief that a citizen's ultimate duty is service to the state.³⁴ This sentiment echoes Cicero's praise of the Republic's heroes, where he asserts that those who sacrifice themselves for the welfare of their homeland are destined for eternal happiness in the afterlife.³⁵ In this way, Virgil's *Aeneid* 6 reinforces patriotism by presenting self-sacrifice for the glory of Rome as a heroic act rewarded in the hereafter.³⁶ Thus, Virgil intertwines Roman values with an eschatological framework, portraying the afterlife as a realm where the virtues central to the Roman state receive eternal glorification.

In addition to this political and patriotic message, Virgil weaves religious and philosophical ideas throughout the narrative. As Aeneas traverses the Elysian Fields, Anchises imparts to him the knowledge that certain souls will undergo purification and rebirth: 'For these souls', he declares, 'destiny has decreed the gift of new bodies' (*quibus altera fato corpora debentur*).³⁷ Before reaching Elysium, souls must be purged of their transgressions, a process that varies in intensity. Some achieve purification swiftly, while others endure a thousand-year journey of soul-cleansing. Only after this ordeal are they permitted to return to the mortal realm, reincarnated into new, predestined appointed bodies (*in corpora...reverti*). This depiction of rebirth draws upon Pythagorean and Orphic doctrines and is governed by divine will.³⁸ Yet Virgil subtly reinterprets these ideas. Unlike the Pythagorean or Platonic focus on the soul's purification for spiritual ascension, Virgil emphasizes a distinct goal: patriotic service to Rome.³⁹ Here, the cycle of rebirth is not solely about spiritual cleansing but rather prepares souls for future contributions to the state.

³¹ Williams (1964), 55–6.

³² Verg. *Aen.* 6.648–65.

³³ Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.66. On the concept of *pietas* in Roman thought and its development, see Wagenvoort (1980).

³⁴ Emilie (1944), 540.

³⁵ Cic. *Rep.* 6.13; 16. Elsewhere Cicero emphasizes piety toward the gods and family. For some references see Wagenvoort (1980), 7–10.

³⁶ Russell (1997), 20.

³⁷ Verg. *Aen.* 6.713–14.

³⁸ Bremmer (2014), 203–4. For a brief discussion about the soul in Pythagorean-Orphic doctrine, see Bordoy (2013), 161–70. On Virgil's Pythagorean-Orphic influences, see Zetzel (1989); Molyviati-Toptsis (1994), 37–46.

³⁹ Otis (1959), 171.

This philosophical and religious structure sets the stage for Aeneas' encounter with the unborn Roman heroes by the streams of Lethe.⁴⁰ These souls, destined to reincarnate, are on the brink of shaping Rome's future and fulfilling their roles in the grand narrative of history. Through this portrayal, Virgil not only embeds the afterlife within a distinctly Roman ideological context but also links the destinies of individual souls to the destiny of the Roman Empire—both shaped and orchestrated by the gods. Here, in the Elysian Fields, the past, present, and future of Rome converge. As Aeneas stands on the threshold of this realization, he is poised to witness the parade of heroes destined to embody Rome's fate. This procession culminates in Augustus, who serves not only as its pinnacle but also as the instigator of Rome's imperial prominence.

2. The Heroes' Parade in the Light of Apocalyptic Historical Review

Employing the conceptual framework of apocalyptic historical review, we can examine how Virgil crafts a narrative that aligns Rome's destiny with providential design while advancing Augustus' imperial agenda. The Heroes' Parade serves as a crucial literary device, presenting an overview of Rome's past to project a future consistent with both divine decrees and Augustus' political vision. This reading contributes to the ongoing scholarly debate over whether the *Aeneid* should be understood as 'pro-Augustan' propaganda or as a subtle 'anti-Augustan' critique.⁴¹ Viewing the parade through this perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how Virgil's portrayal of Rome's heroes of old reinforces Augustus' legitimacy.

After the depiction of the purification and rebirth of souls destined to shape Rome's future, Anchises reveals to Aeneas a grand procession of Roman heroes who are to ascend to earth. This parade elegantly interweaves auditory and visual elements, including a prophetic oration and picturesque imagery of souls, poised to be born. The procession commences with Silvius, Aeneas' future son, followed by Procas, Capys, Numitor, and Aeneas Silvius—all kings of Alba Longa. Romulus, the founder of Rome, heralds the emergence of the city. Subsequently, Julius Caesar and Augustus are celebrated for their pivotal roles in expanding and glorifying Rome. Anchises also points out Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, and Ancus Marcius—early Roman kings who contributed to the establishment of the state—as well as representatives of the Tarquin dynasty. Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic, is highlighted alongside heroic families such as the Decii and Drusi, followed by Torquatus and the patriotic general

⁴⁰ Williams (1964), 50, 58.

⁴¹ As Francesco Sforza (1935) puts it: 'Was Virgil sincere in his praise of Augustus and of the Eternal City...Is there, beyond the face meaning of the Aeneid, a second and hostile meaning?' (97). Cecil M. Bowra (1933, 18) suggests that when Virgil depicts the merciless death of Turnus by Aeneas he has in mind Augustus—not the statesman of his later years, but rather as the ruthless avenger of Julius Caesar's assassination. Adam Parry (1963, 78) takes a more cautious approach in his interpretation, contending that while Virgil glorifies the accomplishments of Rome in achieving peace, he also acknowledges the horrific cost associated with those achievements. Cf. Weeda (2015), 109. For further discussion, see Schmidt (2001), 145–71; Farrell (2001), 11–28.

Camillus. The parade culminates with references to Scipio Africanus, Fabius Maximus, and concludes with Marcellus, Augustus' nephew.⁴²

The parade functions both as a reflection of Rome's past and as a projection of its future glory. Its structure provides a panoramic view of Rome's history and invites interpretation as a form of historical review. This interpretation is substantiated by several compelling considerations. First, the parade spans over a thousand years, interweaving both legendary and historical personages. These include the regal lineage of Alba Longa, the mythical founders of Rome, and eminent figures from the Republic, including Brutus, Pompey, and Caesar. Second, it articulates a deterministic framework, allowing Virgil to delineate the trajectory of Roman history as propelled by divine will, extending from its primordial origins to the Augustan era. Lastly, Virgil adeptly conflates past and contemporary events into an ensemble of prophetic anticipation, imbuing them with a sense of awaited fulfillment.

The similarities between the Heroes' Parade and apocalyptic narratives become even more evident, as both present their historical reviews as the narrative's climax. In the *Aeneid*, the pageant serves as the high point of Aeneas' katabasis, revealing his divine mission. This is foreshadowed in Aeneas' dream, where the shade of his father urges him to journey to the Elysian Fields. There, he declares, 'you will acquire knowledge about your entire lineage and the city that will be bestowed upon you' (*tum genus omne tuum, et quae dentur moenia, disces*).⁴³ In this context, Virgil anticipates a series of enlightening revelations that Aeneas is destined to receive upon their forthcoming reunion in the depths of the underworld.⁴⁴ Moreover, both the *Aeneid* and *2 Baruch* emphasize a structured historical framework in which events unfold according to a divine plan, underscoring the interconnectedness of past occurrences and future promises. In both texts, these events are presented through visual imagery that requires interpretation by an intermediary figure—Anchises in the *Aeneid* and an angel in *2 Baruch*. Given these points, it is inescapable to read the Heroes' Parade as a form of historical review.

3. Tracing the Path of Glory: The Heroes' Parade and Its Political Implications

Despite these similarities, the Heroes' Parade diverges in significant ways that warrant further analysis. While apocalyptic literature anticipates a future of hope and redemption, Virgil's narrative is firmly anchored in the present—specifically, the era of Augustus. In this context, the Pythagorean doctrine of soul transmigration serves as a secondary layer, providing a backdrop that accentuates the parade's primary purpose: to advance a political message that exalts Augustus and underscores his central role in shaping Rome's destiny. This political framework is evident in Virgil's depiction of the parade, which blends narrative and political ideology to highlight the emperor's role in securing peace and restoring order.

During the time when Augustus commissioned Virgil to compose a Roman epic, peace prevailed across the empire. The closing of the gates of the Temple of Janus symbolized

⁴² For a brief discussion on the structure of the parade, see Horsfall (2020).

⁴³ Verg. *Aen.* 5.736.

⁴⁴ Fratantuono and Smith, (2015), 647.

this peace, marking the end of civil wars.⁴⁵ Augustus was hailed as a savior and referred to as 'the greatest protector of the Roman nation' (*optime Romulae custos gentis*).⁴⁶ He consolidated his authority over the Roman state and ensured that peace (*otium*) was maintained, free from internal strife and violence.⁴⁷ Augustus' preservation of the Roman order earned him the status of 'second founder' (*alter conditor*).⁴⁸ His 'remarkable achievements' (*ingentia facta*) were recognized with divine honors throughout the Roman Empire—distinctions typically reserved for deities whose extraordinary deeds merited such reverence.⁴⁹

Given this, the Heroes' Parade should be approached with careful interpretation, as it serves as a vehicle for Virgil to exalt Augustus within a political and propagandistic framework. Its structure reveals a process in which illustrious individuals are depicted as the culmination of the soul's purification, preparing for reincarnation into a new corporeal vessel.⁵⁰ At its core is the depiction of Augustus:

*Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
Augustus Caesar, Divi genus, aurea condet
saecula qui rursus Latium regnata per arva
Saturno quondam*

(Verg. *Aen.* 6.791–3)

Behold! Augustus Caesar, descendant of the divine,
the one oft prophesied for you,
who shall again usher in the golden age
across the fields of Latium,
a time once ruled by Saturn.

Virgil's Heroes' Parade intricately weaves together myth, history, and divine providence, positioning Augustus as the central figure in Rome's narrative. His divine lineage (*Divi genus*) is emphasized, as are the prophecies repeatedly forecasting his arrival (*promitti saepius*). This imminent arrival heralds an era characterized by unprecedented prosperity and harmonious coexistence (*aurea condet saecula*). These verses not only reaffirm his connection to the deified Julius Caesar but also imbue the parade with a panegyric tone, celebrating his accomplishments and the spread of Rome's power across the inhabited world. This is further evidenced by Anchises' subsequent references, which foretell that

⁴⁵ Plut. *Num.* 20.1–2; Seut. *Aug.* 2.22.

⁴⁶ Hor. *Carm.* 4.5.1–2. Cf. Cass. Dio. 53.16.4.

⁴⁷ Hor. *Carm.* 4.15.17–20.

⁴⁸ Littlewood (2001), 918.

⁴⁹ Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.5–17.

⁵⁰ Harrison (1978), 193–7.

‘Rome’s empire will extend beyond the Garamants and the Indians’ (*Garamantas et Indos proferet imperium*), signifying the farthest reaches of the known world.⁵¹

This thematic thread aligns with Virgil’s deterministic ideology, as Augustus is portrayed as the destined figure to restore order and usher in a golden age—a theme already foreshadowed in Jupiter’s discourse in the *Aeneid*’s first book.⁵² Jupiter reveals to Venus, Aeneas’ mother, the enigmatic mysteries of Fate (*fatorum arcana*)—scrolls that contain Rome’s predestined future. Much like celestial tablets that preserve hidden prophecies,⁵³ these mysteries reveal a divine plan within which Aeneas’ predetermined path unfolds. Jupiter assures Venus that an ‘eternal Empire’ (*imperium sine fine*) will be bestowed upon Aeneas’ descendants,⁵⁴ and prophesies the ‘sealing of the fearsome gates of war’ (*dirae ferro et compagibus artis claudentur Belli portae*).⁵⁵ Thus, from the beginning of the *Aeneid*, it becomes clear that Virgil crafts a narrative in which divine forces orchestrate history,⁵⁶ with each event heralding Augustus’ reign as the pinnacle of human history.⁵⁷ His legitimacy as a monarch is not merely a mortal proclamation; it is a divine investiture granted by Jupiter himself.⁵⁸

In contemplating this procession, it becomes imperative to contextualize the challenges Augustus faced upon ascending to power.⁵⁹ He encountered significant obstacles due to the association of monarchical rule with tyranny—an association deeply ingrained in the Roman mindset during the final years of the Republic.⁶⁰ To overcome this challenge and validate his authority, Augustus needed to demonstrate that his rule was in harmony with the traditional values encapsulated in the *mos maiorum*. He explicitly committed to refraining from roles that might contradict these traditions, strategically positioning himself as a custodian of Rome’s heritage.⁶¹ This backdrop provides a framework for understanding how the Heroes’ Parade aligns with Virgil’s agenda, portraying Augustus as both a restorer of Republican governance and a reconciler of his absolute *imperium* with traditional Roman values.

⁵¹ Verg. *Aen.* 6.794–5. In his *Georgics* (2.124), Virgil identifies India as the world’s outermost region (*extremi sinus orbis*). Anchises’ additional geographical references, such as the Caspian, the Maeotic, and the Nile, emphasize the vast extent of Rome’s dominion. The mention of figures like Liber (Bacchus) and Herakles, who traversed fewer lands than Augustus, highlights his unparalleled greatness. See Verg. *Aen.* 6.798–805. As Otis (1964, 302) observes, Augustus is depicted as surpassing Herakles and Bacchus, highlighting his universal dominion. According to Dueck (2003, 216), this also evokes Alexander the Great, who sought to surpass Dionysus and Herakles in both conquest and geographical reach.

⁵² Ganiban et al. (2013) 189.

⁵³ I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Stefan Krauter for bringing this interpretation and its equivalence to my attention. On the heavenly tablets and their content, see Najman (1999); Martínez (2013).

⁵⁴ Verg. *Aen.* 1.279.

⁵⁵ Verg. *Aen.* 1.293–4. i.e. the gates of Janus’ temple.

⁵⁶ Loudon (2009), 6.

⁵⁷ Ganiban et al. (2013), 13–14.

⁵⁸ Grebe (2004), 48–9.

⁵⁹ For an analysis of the political and social conditions in ancient Rome that led to the collapse of the Republic and the establishment of Augustus’ rule, see Shotter (1991), 3–20.

⁶⁰ Glinister (2006), 24–5.

⁶¹ *Res Gestae*. 6.

Virgil's literary craftsmanship further advanced this political agenda by interweaving prophecies into Aeneas' narrative, forging a direct link between Aeneas and Augustus. As scholars like Sabine Grebe have noted, this artful device solidified Augustus' legitimacy in the eyes of the Roman populace, presenting him as the divine successor to iconic forebears.⁶² The Heroes' Parade further reinforced this connection, strategically linking Augustus to eminent figures like Romulus, the founder of Rome, and Numa, the lawgiver and architect of its religious institutions.

Virgil's careful organization of the procession underscores his intent to depict Augustus as both the equivalent of the gods and the inheritor of Rome's legacy.⁶³ It is structured methodically, beginning with the portrayal of Silvius, king of Alba, and progressing sequentially to Romulus. However, the deliberate disruption of this linear progression with the abrupt introduction of Augustus and Numa stands out. This intentional deviation serves as a powerful literary device, reinforcing the notion that Augustus occupies a dual role in Roman history—not only as the foundational figure of Rome but also as the catalyst behind the evolution of the Roman religious tradition.⁶⁴

Contemporary Roman sources and Augustus' actions corroborate his identification with Romulus and Numa, both revered as Rome's founders.⁶⁵ His renovation of the city following a tumultuous civil war marked the beginning of the *Pax Romana*, an age of peace and stability. This restoration transcended mere political order; it involved the revival of ancient religious traditions,⁶⁶ illustrating Augustus' steadfast devotion to the Roman gods and his commitment to revitalizing the cultural heritage of the Roman state.⁶⁷ These actions reflected the political propaganda prevalent in the literature of his era, presenting him as the 'new Romulus' and the 'new Numa' who, through peace and legislation, undertook the monumental task of rebuilding the city.⁶⁸ Consequently, a contextual analysis of Virgil's parade within its historical framework reveals its artful manipulation of narratives, mirroring techniques common in the political propaganda of the Augustan period.

Virgil adeptly portrays the principate as a seamless extension of Rome's traditional monarchy, positioning Augustus as the embodiment of the legacies of Romulus and Numa. Like these foundational figures, Augustus plays a crucial role in revitalizing Rome through his advocacy for peace, legislative reforms, and restoration of religious customs. This intricate interplay between historical reinterpretation and literary representation showcases Virgil's artistry, intertwining a historical review that is characteristic of apocalyptic literature within the framework of a descent narrative.

⁶² Grebe (2004), 37.

⁶³ On Augustus' connection to the gods, particularly his parallels with Jupiter in Virgil's *Aeneid*, see Getty (1950).

⁶⁴ Norden (1976), 326–7.

⁶⁵ Livy, 1.21.6. Numa is depicted as a founder of Rome due to the customs and laws he instituted for the Roman people. See Livy, 1.19.1; Verg. *Aen.* 6.810–11.

⁶⁶ Price (2008), 812.

⁶⁷ Gottlieb (2009), 24. Among the notable religious reforms, particular emphasis must be placed on the revival of neglected priesthoods, such as the *flamen dialis*, the restoration of public cults and festivals like the Lupercalia, and the reconstruction of temples damaged during the turbulent civil conflicts. See de Paiva Bondioli (2017), 58.

⁶⁸ Scott (1925), 95–7.

The methodical structuring of the Heroes' Parade creates a celebratory narrative in which Augustus emerges as the rightful heir to Rome's illustrious heritage. Anchises, in his prophetic role, emphasizes this lineage by introducing figures that connect Augustus to Rome's storied past, thus establishing him as the legitimate successor to this legacy. By intertwining Augustus with the divine lineage of antiquity, Virgil effectively employs the Heroes' Parade as a platform to construct a cohesive narrative. This narrative underscores the interconnectedness of Rome's historical trajectory, with Augustus as its crowning achievement.

CONCLUSION

Interpreting the Heroes' Parade in the *Aeneid* through the lens of historical review reveals its rich political dimensions. Specifically, understanding the parade as a form of historical review illuminates how Virgil crafts a narrative that advances Augustus' imperial agenda. Within this framework, the parade unfolds as a sequence of visions portraying Augustus as the chosen instrument of the gods—destined to fulfill their divine mandate and establish a lasting empire.

Virgil's *Aeneid* intricately intertwines mythology, history, and political ideology, positioning Augustus not merely as a ruler but as a central figure in Rome's divine narrative. The Heroes' Parade encapsulates this dynamic, transforming Augustus into a symbol of hope and stability while reinforcing the ideals of the Augustan regime. By applying the paradigm of historical review, we gain a deeper understanding of how Virgil shapes our view of Rome's past, presenting a future imbued with divine purpose—one where Augustus fulfills the divine will and ensures the continuity of Rome's glory.

This interpretation positions the *Aeneid* in relation to the broader genre of apocalyptic literature. It highlights how Virgil applies shared techniques, not only in otherworldly journey apocalypses but also in the 'historical apocalypse,' where history is framed as a divinely orchestrated sequence leading to a predetermined conclusion. Although Virgil's narrative and apocalyptic texts like the cloud vision in *2 Baruch* both depict history as unfolding according to a cosmic order, they diverge in aim. Whereas *2 Baruch* provides hope to oppressed communities, Virgil's narrative affirms Rome's imperial destiny and bolsters Augustus' legitimacy. This divergence stems from the distinct purposes of the texts—*2 Baruch* expresses a universal hope for the eschatological salvation of the downtrodden, while Virgil lauds Augustus as the redeemer of the present age and the realization of Rome's divine plan.

By strategically incorporating a historical review, Virgil not only celebrates Rome's divine mission but also elevates Augustus as its key agent. The Heroes' Parade publicly affirms Augustus' central role in executing this divine purpose. Thus, Virgil's *Aeneid* stands as a testament to the power of literature in shaping political ideologies, demonstrating how historical review can be repurposed to advance imperial aspirations and solidify Augustus' legacy.

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