Virgil and The Tempest offers a new assessment of the art and politics of Shakespeare's comic masterpiece by examining its relationship to both the contemporary political context and to Virgil's Aeneid. Challenging the view that The Tempest supports the absolutist theories and policies of King James I, Donna Hamilton instead shows how the play presents an argument for a limited monarchy.

Virgil and James I each represent a set of symbols and idioms that Shakespeare appropriates for his own use in The Tempest. In the process, he pays homage to their respective eminence and brings them into dialogic relation with each other, changing the language to suit his purposes. This means rewriting the Aeneid to suit a new time and situation, and it means subtly altering the king's language to present a strong argument for constitutionalism.

Scholars who have emphasized the “transcendent” Shakespeare have sometimes failed to recognize the playwright's passion for resistance, a passion nowhere more cunningly present than in The Tempest. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plays were characterized by an indirection that only a practiced rhetorical skill could produce, a skill that purchased not only safety, but respect, authority, and power. This skill was equally useful to writers engaged in oppositional politics and to apologists for the established authority. Shakespeare's work, therefore, cannot be fully appreciated by today's readers without being sufficiently historicized.
Virgil
and
The
Tempest
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For Gary