IN THE TEMPEST, Shakespeare situates his writing between two authorities, the poet Virgil and the monarch James I, each the possessor of a set of symbols and idioms that Shakespeare reappropriates for himself. In the process, he pays homage to their respective eminences and, at the same time, brings them into dialogic relation with each other, changing their language to suit his own purposes. In the case of Virgil, this means rewriting the Aeneid to suit a new time, a new situation; in the case of James, it means repeating the king's language about rule in a manner which also changes that language.

It is well to keep in mind from the outset that the use of Virgilian idioms in the national literature and for the language of national politics was, in Shakespeare's time, a thoroughly naturalized practice. In one of his glosses in The Haddington Masque, Ben Jonson wrote that "Aeneas, the sonne of Venus, Virgil makes through-out the most exquisit patterne of Pietie, Justice, Prudence, and all other Princely vertues, with whom (in way of that excellence) I conferre my Soveraigne." A few years earlier, Jonson had also presented James as the new Augustus in the triumphal arches that he designed for the coronation procession, a presentation that displayed the king as a peacebringer, unifier, providential ruler, and renewer of golden times.

The Virgilian idiom was used to dignify, but also to evaluate, any number of national projects. When William Strachey, writing in A True Reportory of the Wrack (dated July 15, 1610), described the first voyage of Captain Newport down the James River toward the Virginia coast, he glorified the venture by comparing Newport's arrival to that of Aeneas in Italy: "At length, after much and weary search (with their Barge coasting still before, as Virgill writeth Aeneas did, arriving in the region of Italy called Latium, upon the banks of the River Tyber) in the Country of a Werowance . . ."
within the faire River of Paspiheigh, which wee have called the Kings River . . . they had sight of an extended plaine.” On that site, “half an Acre, or so much as Queene Dido might buy of King Hyarbas,” they raised their fortress and called it “in honour of his Majesties name, James Towne.” Likewise, Sir John Davies, writing home in the same year to celebrate the progress of plantation in Ireland, quoted the lines from the Aeneid that describe the building of the walls of Carthage. But in contrast, Roger Owen, also writing in 1610, used the classical precedent to express the fear that they might be reliving a part of the story which it was not necessary or wise to repeat. Concerned over the growing dissension and bitterness of the debates in the House of Commons, he framed his objections by remarking that what they were quarreling over “is not worth the destruction of Troy.” Clearly, the language of Virgil was found readily appropriable for any number of contemporary political issues and perspectives.

Shakespeare’s reappropriation of this discourse in The Tempest is so inclusive, however, as to warrant our describing it as complete repossession; for in the play, he reworks the chiefly contested issues of national politics by rewriting some major sections of the Aeneid. Such an act of writing, with all its implications, might be approached as a manifestation of Kenneth Burke’s idea that “the organization of a work can be considered with relation to a ‘key’ symbol of authority.” According to Burke, “The work is a ritual whereby the poet takes inventory with reference to the acceptance or rejection of this authority.” Yet, in The Tempest, where the authority is bipolar—Virgil and James—the writing involves a simultaneous response to both an ancient poetic text and a contemporary political context, and thus also demonstrates a command of both sets of authoritative symbols.

In the following pages, I shall argue that Shakespeare’s involvement in the Virgilian idiom surpasses that of allusion and echo, and that his investment in Virgil’s text is so great as to constitute a formal and rigorous rhetorical imitation of the major narrative kernels of Aeneid 1–6. Moreover, Shakespeare’s management of the Virgilian idiom is matched by an equally thorough encompassment of the contemporary discourse about monarchy—a discourse that,
especially in 1610, took the form of debate as king and Parliament argued about the limits of royal power, and thus the respective merits of absolutism and constitutionalism. Shakespeare, then, is involved both in demonstrating his mastery of the master poetic discourse and in responding to the master discourses of high politics.

Part 1 of this book deals, respectively, with the means by which the discourses at issue have a presence in the play. First, I outline a theory of rhetorical imitation that incorporates the prescribed Renaissance methods for rewriting a single precursor text. This section shows why *imitatio* is more descriptive of Shakespeare’s craftsmanship than saying that the *Aeneid* is his “source,” and it explains some of the various systems by which the play imitates the *Aeneid*. I assume that my claim about how deeply indebted *The Tempest* is to the *Aeneid* both requires and justifies an extended description and discussion of imitation theory. Second, I consider three contemporary political issues—the situation of the royal children, the 1610 parliamentary debates on the royal prerogative, and the colonization projects in Virginia and Ireland—and how they might be said to have some bearing on the play. Although all three are important, I argue for the centrality of the debates on the royal prerogative, which grew out of James’s request for a financial settlement and focused on the issues of how much power a king should have, when his power might be said to have become unreasonable and transcendent, and when it could be described as having become so great that its effect was to reduce his subjects to slaves.

I argue that, in the rehandling of these discourses, Shakespeare constructed an argument for constitutionalism, the ideology most directly in competition with absolutism. His rhetorical strategies involve representing the importance of the monarch’s godlike and fatherlike roles, along with representations of the “necessary” powers of the monarch; but these validations are accompanied by equally strong ones of the constitutional principles of consent and reciprocity. Although the latter, in relation to the king’s position, comprise an oppositional stance, Shakespeare casts the argument in epideictic form, a choice consonant with the use of Virgil and
also with the idiom of the contemporary masque. The result is an incorporation of the most highly regarded traditions and forms of praise into a play that offers instruction and advocates a course of action consistent with what James’s critics wanted the king to do. In other words, the play presents the constitutionalist argument in a comely manner that is, in itself, an exemplary illustration of how to argue with the king without accusing him or otherwise diminishing his dignity.

Part 2 offers a detailed discussion of Shakespeare’s rewriting of the Aeneid as that project is represented in the play's three scenes of spectacle—the harpy banquet scene, the betrothal masque, and the glistering apparel episode—and in the part of Ferdinand from 1.2 to 5.1. A great deal of attention is paid here to what in Virgil is now where in The Tempest, but generalizations about the direction in which Shakespeare is transforming Virgil are also central to the discussion. My main point is that in many cases the rewriting of the Virgilian text (often the reversal of it) results in a presentation of the heroic that praises reciprocity, along with discipline, auster­ity, retrenchment, and limit. The play demonstrates the value of limit by displaying royal figures—a duke, a king, a son—in a va­riety of circumstances whereby they subject themselves to disci­pline, regret that they once usurped power, and decide to relin­quish it. The play also retells the story of Dido and Aeneas through the story of Ferdinand and Miranda, a version of the ancient story in which lust is replaced by a disciplined and reciprocating love relationship.

Part 3 concentrates on Prospero, on the combination of Virgil­ian patterns that Shakespeare used in constructing this character, and on the issues and language of the political debates of 1610, which Prospero, especially in his relations with Ariel and Caliban, replicates. In Prospero’s displays of magic—now punishing the wicked, now threatening the faithful—exist symbolic representa­tions of how power can manifest itself. These scenes suggest how much good a great power can accomplish, but also the circum­stances under which a powerful figure may choose to diminish his power. Shakespeare presents this last idea by using a “bridging device,” that is, a “symbolic structure whereby one ‘transcends’ a
conflict in one way or another.”7 By writing so that his own relinquishment of his life in the theater can serve as an available parallel, and by having directly claimed and defined his own authority all through the play by his partnership with Virgil, at the end of the play Shakespeare is in a position to offer a representation of what the king’s response on this issue should be: he, too, should give up some of his magic.

Many books have been and could be written about The Tempest. The one I have chosen to write is not about Shakespeare and a literary tradition—Virgilian, romance, or any other. Rather, this book is deeply committed to the practice of historicizing the literary text and constructing “specific and localized contexts”8 that can suggest the rhetorical situation within which that text was produced. I assume that to pursue such a methodology expands the possibilities for describing The Tempest, as well as for circumventing some of the limits that seeing it as a transcendent, universal work impose upon it. This commitment to a historical method also entails treating the Aeneid as a “warehouse of society’s resources and tools”9—that is, it entails understanding the Aeneid as a text that many writers and speakers in Shakespeare’s time found useful, and for different purposes. Be this as it may, I also assume that Shakespeare was interested in defining and securing his place as an artist in his society. Thus, while this book considers the politics of imitation, it also takes into account (even relishes) the craft of imitation, by attending closely to the details of both Shakespeare’s text and Virgil’s. Finally, I assume throughout that Shakespeare’s own politics here, as elsewhere, involved a response to the conflicts among the dominant ideologies of his time, that he frequently took positions in relationship to those conflicts, and that his plays can be seen as participatory events in their historical present.