INTRODUCTION

The Tempest is one of three plays by Shakespeare (the others being Love's Labour's Lost and A Midsummer Night's Dream) for which it is generally agreed that information about "sources" is lacking. In the case of The Tempest, as well as the other plays, there is no known text with a narrative line that compellingly matches the plot constructed by Shakespeare. Nevertheless, over the years a growing consensus has arisen that there are significant and undeniable links between the Aeneid and The Tempest, even that the Aeneid had an important defining effect on the composition of the play. Attempts to describe that effect, however, have remained problematic.

How inconclusive have been the efforts to draw parallels between the narrative lines of these two works is best illustrated by some examples. J. M. Nosworthy concluded that Shakespeare's plot takes its direction from the storm–shipwreck–new love sequence in the Aeneid, but only for the first two scenes. Jan Kott, on the other hand, argued that the play follows the pattern of the Dido and Aeneas narrative until midway through act 4. And Colin Still saw the entire play as relying on the Aeneid; but rather than considering the Dido and Aeneas love story the chief shaping influence, he gave precedence to Aeneas’s journey to the Underworld. Put another way, Nosworthy and Kott found that Aeneid 1–4 are crucial (through to differing degrees); Still, that Aeneid 6 is crucial. It is hard to imagine such divergence as this in any traditional source study. Having lost, by general consensus, the option of considering the two works as only casually related, we are left to conclude that, for this play at least, the method by which we assess the impact of a precursor text on a Shakespeare play needs revision. We need a method that can accommodate the repetitions, analogies, allusions, citations, and echoes that Nosworthy, Kott, Still, Gary Schmidgall, John Pitcher, Barbara Bono, Robert Miola, Robert Wiltenburg, Peter Hulme, Stephen Orgel, and others have
found or emphasized, as well as the seeming contradictions in their various conclusions.

I shall argue that we can use what we know about the theory and practice of rhetorical imitation (imitatio) to reconsider the question of the relatedness of these two works. This study pursues that relationship by considering The Tempest as a work that is a formal imitation of the first six books of the Aeneid, both in its larger patterns of theme and structure and in its smaller details of vocabulary and syntax. Many steps must be taken before one can feel comfortable either posing or granting that such a strong and deep connection exists between these two texts, and not everyone will be persuaded of the kind of genealogical link I am proposing; so much depends, not merely on noticing the connections that are easy to see, but also on finding that, in Shakespeare’s play, the Aeneid has been dismantled, reversed, and rewritten. The fundamental obstacle to pursuing such a notion, therefore, is not simply the expectation that a narrative link will be relatively obvious (as Shakespeare’s use of Sidney in King Lear is obvious), but involves the nature of imitation itself. For imitation, a method of composition taught in grammar school, was a practice founded on methods for changing (that is, for disassembling, rearranging, and redistributing) the precursor text, as well as for concealing those changes; it is a common rule in treatises on imitation that what the imitator is doing should not be made too evident.

Among the various conditions which can make recognition possible is simply the patience for “quiet meditation” that Petrarch said was necessary if one was to discover the deep similarities between texts that imitation produces. Another condition, one easier to come by, is sufficient understanding of the methods used in imitation. A reader who would recognize an act of imitation must understand the existing possibilities whereby a precursor text can make a reappearance in a new text. For without that understanding, often the codes that make recognition possible cannot even be seen. When that understanding is available, however, one can reach the point where it is possible to find, in the very act of concealing, the systems that promote revealing.

In “The Life of Ariosto” that Sir John Harington included in his
translation of *Orlando furioso*, he remarked that Ariosto privileged Boiardo for imitation because Boiardo was so familiar at the time: "he chose *Boiardo* upon whose work he would ground . . . because he said *Boyardos* worke was fresh in everie mans minde." One implication here is, as Michael Riffaterre might express it, that the text "is constructed in such a way that it can control its own decoding," and that the author who uses a very familiar system (as indeed the *Aeneid* also was very familiar), even when his use of it is extraordinarily clever and obscure, offers his audience or reader the opportunity to see that from which the text has been made. Here, as everywhere, the fact that something is hidden does not mean that it is lost. The issue is one that Riffaterre addresses in formulating his theories of text production. For him, the concealment that occurs in a literary work often exists as a means of calling attention to the genetics of a text and therefore to its artistic ideas. I would suggest that we may be able to say of *The Tempest* what he says about some of the French texts he has studied: it is a work that "conceals only in order to reveal," and it "veils" its art, "but it also points to where it is hidden and how it can be revealed."

This study is concerned with the conditions under which the play text was produced, that is, written. So far these conditions have been identified as including the procedures for imitative writing and also the choice of Virgil's text as the material for this particular imitative act. But another point to consider is the question of belatedness, of writing "after" another. While this issue can be expressed in the distinctly Bloomian form of focusing on the need of the poetic "son" for self-authentication, it can also be taken in another direction, as Thomas Greene does in his study of imitative texts. For Greene, consideration of the issue of belatedness takes the form of speculating on how the poet perceived the relationship between the historicity of the precursor text and his own historical moment.

In Greene's formulation of the problem, the imitative writer's "dialogue with the past" always risked being incomplete by virtue of the "historical breaches" that ultimately could not be mended. But one of the results of having so to contend with the past was that the imitator developed a more acute sense of the concrete moment
in which he himself was writing, a sense that, in turn, also "shook [the] absolute status" of the precursor text "by calling attention to the specific circumstances of its production." "The radicality," Greene continues, "is present a fortiori in the humanist imagination which asserts a limited but shaping power of the imagination over the passage of history." 10

Greene's attention to the historical is consistent with the assumption that a text made over for another time cannot, by definition, be an ahistorical, disinterested, freestanding aesthetic production; it cannot be a culturally innocent text. In addition to the impossibility of a writer ever transcending the cultural and ideological mentalité in which he has been constructed, this point about historicity also involves other issues, including that of the responsiveness or "addressivity" 11 of all writing. Even as we say that all writing is intertextual and "utterance is filled with dialogic overtones," 12 we can also add that in all writing, the writer or speaker is involved in an act of communication which requires him to formulate a concept of his audience. 13 In the case of imitative writing, where the writing will partly be a response to a precursor text, the characteristics of that response will be affected by the interests and characteristics of the audience to whom the writer now speaks. 14 They will also be affected by the position or set of positions—in relation to the precursor and to the audience and their stances on various issues—which the poet wishes to take.

In the process, it can be assumed that what the imitative poet selects from and responds to in the precursor will always relate to the values of the society in which he himself lives, but also that his recasting of the precursor will be governed by and supportive of his own ideological position, whether that position is supportive of the dominant ideology or critical of it. The transforming of old art for a new time thus becomes an act of ideological intervention. And the production of a new text modeled on an old one exists, in itself, as a historical event. 15

What form this intervention will take depends to a large extent on the genre that is being imitated as well as the genre in which the new work is cast. In the cases of epic, of Renaissance imitations of Virgil, and of other forms of heroic poetry, the specific form of
writing is epideictic, a discourse of praise that involves articulation of a society’s commonly held values. But while epideictic does indeed praise, it also always presents itself as praise even when the object of the writing includes significant evaluative and interventionist strategies.

During the reign of James I, the epideictic function was performed on a regular basis by the court masque, a genre richly constructed from classical materials. The occasional nature of the masque, along with its epideictic rhetorical stance, provided a means not only for approving but also for criticizing the court, and not only by way of the antimasque. For example, in Oberon, performed on January 1, 1611, Ben Jonson produced a masque that would praise, even flatter, Prince Henry and the entire Jacobean court. But instead of using as the vehicle for this praise Henry’s preferred form of representation as a warrior and conqueror, Jonson presented the prince in Oberon as a figure of love. In assigning Henry this role, a part which Henry himself danced, Jonson privileged a value different from those represented by war and conquest and thus offered the prince an alternative to the policies and interests that he had favored.

In this example, as elsewhere, what presented itself as praise could also possess the force of correction, even reprimand. Thus the range and method of epideictic are very broad, and remain so even when the rhetorical stance is strictly that of praise with no shifting to epideictic’s alternative, blame. For a later reader to gain access to what the further implications of any such praise might have been, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the rhetorical situation to which the writing was a response.

Only when that knowledge is available can one be aware of the element of persuasion and argument in epideictic. Praise functions as encouragement and support for politics already undertaken or as an argument for the alternatives. When Jonson compared James to Augustus in the triumphal arches that he designed for the occasion of James’s coronation, he was supporting the image of James that James himself favored. That same level of support is also evident in the prefatory material to the Workes (1616) of James, where the bishop of Winchester, James Montagu, represented the
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king as the Prince of Peace, one who had restored the peace of Augustus. 22

There are other instances, however, in which praise has an obviously corrective thrust. For example, in one of the correspondences of Salisbury to James during the Parliament of 1610, the lord treasurer, distraught that James had not yet achieved a financial settlement with Parliament, urged the king to keep better records of expenditure: "it is for your Majesty to do as the Roman emperor did, who when public treasure was much exhausted, called forthwith for the book which he termed the book of remembrance." 23 With this admonition, Salisbury managed to praise James, even as he criticized him, merely by associating him with an ideal image of Augustus. Like Jonson's representation of Henry as a figure of love, Salisbury's response to James invoked an ideal in order to urge a different course of action. Many examples do not offer their criticism as directly as this one, but the element of persuasion and argument is nonetheless strong. 24

In 1610–11, the rhetorical situation within which Shakespeare was writing The Tempest was characterized by considerable public controversy over values. King and Parliament, locked in a dispute over the king's financial settlement, had been arguing the opposed values of constitutionalism and absolutism. Also under way was a great national effort for the colonization of both Virginia and Ireland, an effort that excited nationalistic feelings of pride, offered new opportunities to many for power and wealth, but also provided situations in which there were quite overwhelming possibilities for failure in the face of enormous conflicts over the relationship of rule and subjection. In placing himself between Virgil and the contemporary moment, Shakespeare also situated his imitation generically within the conventions of romance and masque, contemporary versions of the heroic that promoted epideictic strategies. In this context, he presented a narrative of travel, rule, love, and education that praised the values of order, discipline, and reciprocity.

Although these values may seem to a later time to be as transcendent as Jonson's attention to love in Oberon, articulated at this moment in time, these values can also be understood as presenting
a commentary on contemporary issues, and most particularly an anti-absolutist argument for limited monarchy. Shakespeare's method of arguing is to bring to the fore an uncontested value, the method which Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca highlight in their discussion of the persuasive role of epideictic: "the argumentation in epideictic [sic] discourse sets out to increase the intensity of adherence to certain values, which might not be contested when considered on their own but may nevertheless not prevail against other values that might come into conflict with them." In privileging discipline and reciprocity in the context of granting the value of rule and order, Shakespeare articulates generally held values of the time which could never have been contested on their own, but which were in danger of not prevailing against the value that was coming in conflict with them—namely, the value of absolute rule. In featuring the value of discipline and reciprocity in a context that does not pit these values against others (for example, the value of making a ruler more powerful), the play proceeds, not by focusing on a conflict, but as though the values it espouses were beyond question. In fact, the chief proponent of discipline and limit in the play is Prospero, the established authority.

My point, then, is at least twofold. First, in the Renaissance an imitation of Virgil was always ideologically oriented, and newly so for its own historical time. Second, while use of epideictic would in itself be part of the requirement for heroic poetry, epideictic also offered poets and dramatists committed to commenting on ideological conflict the means by which to do so. It offered them a noncontroversialist rhetorical stance, and one that was as politically proper as it was politically shrewd. For to speak through epideictic was, ultimately, to speak by indirection. As Puttenham had explained:

in negotiating with Princes we ought to seeke their favour by humilitie & not by sternnesse, nor to trafficke with them by way of indent or condition, but frankly and by manner of submission to their wils, for Princes may be lead but not driven, nor they are to be vanquisht by allegation, but must be suffred to have the victorie and be relented unto: nor they are not to be chalenged for right or justice, for that is a maner of accusation.
Writing from the point of view of giving explicit instructions in decorum, that is, in “comelynesse” and “decencie,” Puttenham left it to the reader to infer that “decencie”—which often proceeds from and thrives on forms of indirection—provided a way of speaking that secured one’s safety with no sacrifice to personal integrity, to ethical function, or even to clarity.

Because imitation, like other forms of writing, is more accessible when it is located historically, any consideration of the procedures of imitation must be accompanied by a consideration of the scene of writing. In the following section, I shall first discuss the theory of imitatio, along with some examples of how one can see that theory operating in The Tempest. Next, there is a discussion of the political topics, languages, and arguments of 1610–11 that seem to have made the strongest impact on the process of contemporizing the Virgilian idiom for The Tempest.