

*Shakespeare's Virgil: empathy and The Tempest**Leah Whittington*

Empathy is a subject that could easily find a home in any one of the sections of this volume. After all, early modern thinking about emotional identification with another person – whether described as pity, compassion, or fellow-feeling – draws from the wellsprings of both classical and Christian ethics. To attempt to separate one from the other may be not only impossible but also undesirable, especially given that Shakespearean drama often takes its energy from the very conflation or juxtaposition of ethical registers. The awakening of Hermione's statue in *The Winter's Tale* is part Ovidian metamorphosis, part Christian resurrection. Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia derives much of its power from the vertiginous blending of New Testament forgiveness and Seneca's theory of reciprocal benefits.¹

Nevertheless, in this chapter I aim to treat Shakespeare's ethics of empathy as a facet of his classicism, both because the classical aspects of empathy in Shakespearean drama are less well understood than the Christian and because a classically focused consideration of empathy illuminates *The Tempest* in a new way. The impetus for this approach comes from the rhetorical orientation of the humanist curriculum, in which learning to speak well also meant learning to inhabit and imitate the literary voices of the classical past.² While Shakespeare would have had access to ethical assessments of fellow-feeling in a variety of philosophical, religious, and political texts, his education in empathy in the schoolroom began through reading and imitating literary works of classical antiquity.

¹ For the Ciceronian and Senecan ethical background of *King Lear*, see Eden.

² Scholars have long understood the explosion of imaginative literature in England in the second half of the sixteenth century in relation to the fortunes of humanist education. Essential for this terrain is Baldwin, but see also Jones. Important historical studies of humanist education in England include Alexander and Charlton. The relationship between humanist education and Renaissance literature has been complicated and enlivened by a number of recent studies. See especially Barkan, Burrow, and Dolven. For the cultivation of emotional identification in the humanist curriculum, see Enterline.

We can trace Shakespeare's career-long preoccupation with empathy to his classical reading, and in particular, I will argue, to a sustained interest in the poetic strategy of *empathēia* in Virgil's *Aeneid*. In order to make this case, I attend first to the role of emotional identification in the Elizabethan humanist rhetorical curriculum, before turning to the specific impact of Virgil in shaping the ethical aesthetics of empathy that seem to have mattered most to Shakespeare. The essay's ultimate destination is *The Tempest*, where Shakespeare is at his most Virgilian in drawing on the poetics of empathy to orchestrate the play's famously unsettled ending.

I

The humanist curriculum, with its emphasis on reading and writing as practice for the art of persuasion, guaranteed that Elizabethan schoolboys received, along with their training in classical Latin, a rich and varied education in the emotions. For the most part, Renaissance theorists of the emotions tended toward the moderate Aristotelian view that the emotions were intrinsic and beneficial, if they were properly governed (Tilmouth 16–36).³ Thomas Wright, author of *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1604), the most extensive treatment of the subject in English before Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), argues against the Stoic position that the passions should be entirely eradicated, and advocates a more balanced vision of self-governance: "Passions are not only not wholly to be extinguished (as the Stoics seem to affirm), but sometimes to be moved and stirred up for the service of virtue" (101). Thomas Hoby's English translation of Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1561) conveyed much the same sentiment to an earlier Elizabethan audience: "The affections therefore that be clesed and tried by temperance are assistant to vertue, as angre, that helpeth manlinesse: hatred against the wicked, helpeth justice, and likewise the other vertues are aided by affections" (309). Under proper management, the emotions were seen as positive forces within the soul that provided stimulus to virtuous action, as long as they were channeled, restrained, and controlled.

In principle, the humanist educational enterprise aimed to instill precisely these principles of rational self-governance. At the earliest stages of instruction, schoolboys were taught to memorize Latin sentences that,

³ For Aristotle's view of the emotions see Cooper, Fortenbaugh, and Nussbaum. A broader study of the emotions in antiquity is Konstan. For Renaissance theories of the passions, see Susan James; Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson (eds.); and Tilmouth.

in addition to developing vocabulary and illustrating relevant points of grammar or syntax, offered guidance in the ethics of feeling. Among the collection of moral sentences known as *Sententiae Pueriles*, a text used for the lower forms in most Elizabethan grammar schools, there are numerous maxims on the subject of emotional restraint and self-control (Culmann). A census of sentences between two and five words yields the following nuggets, for example, on the topic of anger: *iracundiam tempera* (temper angeriness), *ira tormentum sui ipsius* (anger is the torment of itself), *iram compescere arduum* (it is a hard thing to keep in anger), *irati nihil recte faciunt* (angry men do nothing rightly), *ira non sedatur iracundia* (anger is not appeased by angeriness), and *irae imperans, vitam vives validissimam* (thou ruling anger shalt live a most healthful life). Even at the earliest stages of a pupil's education, learning Latin in the humanist classroom carried with it a culture of mastering emotions as well as declensions and conjugations.

But, if the schoolmasters believed they were teaching the governance of unruly emotions, the methods of instruction applied in the later years of grammar school meant that, in fact, pupils experienced themselves as subjects of a much wider range of emotional experiences. Without the lost records from the King's New School at Stratford-upon-Avon, we will never know precisely what Shakespeare learned, or even whether he attended grammar school at all; but if, as seems overwhelmingly likely, Shakespeare had some formal schooling in the 1570s, his education would have been channeled through rhetorically inflected reading practices that stressed the cultivation as much as the restraint of affect (Enterline 9–32). Students who mastered the fundamentals of Latin morphology and syntax through Lily's *Latin Grammar*, the *Disticha Catonis*, Aesop, Terence, and Mantuan moved on in the upper forms to more advanced compositional exercises focused on the orator's goal of arousing emotion in the audience. The textbooks used to teach rhetorical *pathos*, Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, shared the conviction that in order to inspire emotion in his audience the orator must first feel that emotion himself. Students were regularly asked to perform exercises in composition that encouraged emotional identification, as they mentally transported themselves into the psychic world of another (often fictional, often female) person, whose emotional experiences they were meant to make their own.

The exercises in *ethopoeia* compiled in Reinhard Lorich's frequently reprinted edition of Aphthonius's *Progymnasmata* offer a particularly illuminating view into the affective imagination of the budding Elizabethan

orator.⁴ Of the nine topics for which sample speeches are provided, only one involves a historical figure (the Lutheran theologian Gerhard Goldenhauer), and only one involves a moral type (a rich man who has suddenly become poor); the other seven examples of *ethopoeia* invite students to impersonate literary figures from classical antiquity, almost all women, and almost all imagined in situations of extreme passion. One example supplies the speech Niobe might have spoken over the dead bodies of her children; another imagines Andromache's words upon the death of Hector; another traces the emotional conflict of Medea as she is about to kill her children; another treats Hecuba after the destruction of Troy. In following the models laid out for these exercises, the schoolboy trained himself to adopt the speech, gestures, and emotions of these grieving women as his own. He placed himself inside the mind of a fictional heroine, bringing her suffering to life and embodying her feeling. The humanist schoolroom, in other words, was a laboratory for compassion.

There were, of course, places outside the schoolroom where Shakespeare would have encountered theories of emotional identification; by the early seventeenth century a writer interested in the mechanics of compassion had many resources at his disposal, situated variously on a spectrum from warm advocacy to cautious suspicion. On the one hand, pity was considered a mark of Christian charity, an experience of grief for another person's suffering that promoted acts of generosity and secured the bonds of society. Augustine's *City of God* makes the case for pity as an instrument of social justice and civic responsibility: "And what is compassion but a fellow-feeling for another's misery, which prompts us to help him if we can?" (9:5, 285). On the other hand, a strain of Stoic thought intermittently resurgent in the early modern era stressed the moral peril of pity.⁵ In his treatise *De Clementia*, Seneca rigorously distinguishes between *clementia*, a rational decision to mitigate deserved punishment, and *misericordia*, a "defect of the mind" incompatible with a reasoned administration of justice (2:4, 145). This view finds its way into Thomas Elyot's *boke named the Governour* (1531), which defines mercy as "a temperance of the minde of hym that hath power to be avenged, and it is called in Latin clementia, and is always joined with reason" (2:7, 136). Pity, for Elyot, following Seneca, is a mental defect: "For he that for euery litle occasion is meued with compasion, and beholdynge a man punisshed condignely for

⁴ I use the 1572 edition. For the popularity of Lorch's edition of the *Progymnasmata*, see Mack 27. For the impact of Lorch's exercises in *ethopoeia* on early modern schoolboys' experience of transgendered subjectivity, see Enterline 92–4 and 134–9.

⁵ For the persistence of Neo-Stoicism, see Kraye.

his offence lamenteth or wailthe, is called piteous, whiche is a sicknesse of the mynde, where with at this daye the more parte of men be diseased” (136). Justus Lipsius, whose *De Constantia* (1584) also falls within the neo-Stoic tradition, contrasts the merciful man who “will look at another man’s misfortune with eyes that are humane but, nonetheless, steadfast” with a man in the grips of pity: “the vice of a petty, insignificant mind, that loses heart at the spectacle of someone else’s evil” (1:12, 55). In his *Discourse of Civill Life* (1606), Lodowick Bryskett echoes the positive effects of pity articulated by Augustine, but also cautions against its propensity to disrupt, subvert, and upend social norms: “Pittie ought alwaies to be before men, as a thing without which they are unworthy the name of humanitie: yet must not this pitie extend so farre for any particular ... as thereby to confound the universal order of things” (35). If compassion by its very nature involved taking on another’s suffering as if it were one’s own, too much compassion threatened to overturn distinctions of status, social role, and hierarchical order.

Shakespeare may have encountered philosophical, religious, and political treatments of empathy such as these in his adult reading, but the evidence of the plays suggests that his approach to fellow-feeling was profoundly shaped by his early humanist training in rhetorical *pathos*. In thinking about the social, interpersonal, and aesthetic implications of compassion, Shakespeare tends to turn not to conduct manuals, sermons, political tracts, or formal treatises on the passions but to scenarios like those imagined in Aphthonius’s exercises in *ethopoeia*. One need only think of Lucrece giving voice to the woes of Hecuba before the tapestry of Troy or Hamlet’s “What’s Hecuba to him” to see Shakespeare’s mind leafing through the book of his memory to the pages of those original school-room scenes. Emotional identification is thoroughly intertwined in these moments with Shakespeare’s classical education.

II

The examples of Lucrece and Hamlet introduce another reference point crucial to the story of Shakespeare and empathy: Virgil. Both of these characters exercise their emotional imaginations on the representation of the sack of Troy, the ur-site for which is Aeneas’s narrative of the fall of the city in Book 2 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.⁶ The importance of Virgil to

⁶ For the impact of the Elizabethan grammar school curriculum on Shakespeare, with particular reference to Virgil, see Baldwin and, most recently, Wallace.

Shakespearean drama has been the subject of considerable critical discussion, and scholars interested in Shakespeare's classical learning have found Virgil's persistent but elusive presence in the plays difficult to categorize or account for.⁷ With a few noteworthy exceptions, Virgilian allusions are comparatively scarce in Shakespeare – so much so that Charles Martindale concludes, “Shakespeare is not usefully to be described as a Virgilian poet ... his reading of Virgil did not result in a profound modification of his sensibility and imagination in the way that his reading of other books did.”⁸ But, if Virgil's presence is difficult to trace, it is because critics are not always looking in the right places. The most compelling recent studies of Shakespeare's relationship to Virgil tend to highlight broader bands of resonance rather than verbal references, and show Shakespeare appropriating not turns of phrase or elements of plot but poetic situations, ideological frameworks, and modes of feeling.⁹ In fact, *The Aeneid* seems to have appealed to Shakespeare not because he shared the Renaissance mania for Virgilian *elegantia* and *brevitas*, as David Scott Wilson-Okamura describes it (*Virgil* 199–242), but because of Virgil's handling of the structures of emotion. *The Aeneid* reinforced and developed the poetic habits of empathy that Shakespeare learned from his education in rhetorical affect.

The tradition of *The Aeneid* as a conduit for empathetic responses to poetry goes back at least to Augustine, whose pity for Dido is recorded in the *Confessions* as a moment of affective intoxication and spiritual self-loss.¹⁰ In Elizabethan England, the association of Virgil with emotional identification appears, to name just one example, in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, where Spenser reenacts Aeneas's tale to Dido in the Paridell and Hellenore episode of Cantos 9–10. While Hellenore is captivated by Paridell's story of suffering, Britomart remains immune to the passion aroused by the telling of a tale, resisting the temptation to feel compassion for the sufferer (Watkins 161–7). Shakespeare took a similarly keen interest

⁷ The best recent accounts of Shakespeare's classical reading are Barkan and Burrow. For a summary of research up to 2001 on Shakespeare's relationship to Virgil, see Gillespie 405–506. A recent and useful study is Martindale, “Shakespeare.” Among the most important Virgilian loci are: *Rape of Lucrece* lines 1,366–566 (sack of Troy); *The Comedy of Errors* 1.1.31–139 (Aegeon's travels); *Titus Andronicus* 2.3.21–6 (Dido and Aeneas's hunt); *Hamlet* 2.2.437–509 (Player's speech); 2 *Henry VI* 2.1.24 (quotation of *Aeneid* 1:11); *Antony and Cleopatra* 4.15.51–4 (Antony's farewell to Cleopatra); *The Tempest* 2.1.75–99 (“widow” Dido); and *The Merchant of Venice* 5.1.9–12 (Lorenzo and Jessica).

⁸ Martindale, “Shakespeare” 89–90. Nuttall, “Virgil,” echoes this sentiment when he claims “Shakespeare is seldom less Virgilian than when he is citing him” (73).

⁹ See especially Burrow, 51–91, and Heather James, *Shakespeare's*.

¹⁰ The powerful influence of Augustine's reading of Dido is traced in Desmond. See also Nuttall, “Stoic.”

in Virgil's archetypal scene of pathetic narration. The uneasy Virgilian coupling of storytelling and compassion appears in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*, as well as *Othello*, where Desdemona, like Dido, becomes a victim of her pity for a tale of hardship that breeds love for the teller.¹¹

When Shakespeare and his contemporaries imitated the narrative situation of Aeneas's relation of the fall of Troy to Dido, they tapped into a crucial facet of Virgilian poetics. Instead of narrating the events of Aeneas's journey to Rome from an objective authorial perspective – the kind of *claritas* that Renaissance commentators associated with Homer rather than Virgil – *The Aeneid* makes use of the subjective strategies of lyric and drama.¹² The result is a poem that tells the story of Aeneas's divinely ordained *translatio imperii* from multiple and discordant viewpoints, as the narrator shuttles between subjective and objective points of view, sometimes reporting events from an external perspective, sometimes from a vantage point internal to the characters. The Virgilian narrator works to collapse the distinction between the narrator's representation of the characters and their own understanding of the events in which they participate. As Gian Biagio Conte has argued, the narrator's point of view blends with the perspective of the characters, resulting in a "subjective interpenetration between character and narrator" (50). This poetic strategy of *empathia* creates a poetic situation in which, as Conte says, "the poet's narrative voice lets itself be saturated by the subjectivity of the person within the narrative," inviting the reader to empathize with the individuals through whose eyes the action is narrated (30). By telling the story through these individualized perspectives, Virgil's "subjective style" aims to summon up the reader's sympathetic imagination.¹³

Virgilian *empathia* owes a tremendous amount to the psychological and moral structures of drama, but it also has deep roots in the same rhetorical tradition that shaped humanist approaches to education. Virgilian empathy involves a thoroughgoing identification between reader and character that draws on the resources of Roman rhetorical theory, in which the orator's ability to arouse pity in a jury is linked to the adoption of an ethical *persona*. The most convincing appeals are those in which the speaker so completely identifies himself with the *persona* he imitates that he feels the very feelings he enacts. Here the best example is Quintilian,

¹¹ For Shakespeare's responses to Aeneas's tale to Dido, see Heather James, "Dido's." The Virgilian scenario of Othello's speech to Desdemona is also considered by Greenblatt, *Renaissance* 237.

¹² Wilson-Okamura, Virgil 138. For Virgil's integration of the forms of Greek drama, see Hardie.

¹³ For the term "subjective style," see Otis 41–96.

who describes a rhetorical version of Virgil's *empathia* in Book 6 of his *Institutio Oratoria*:

When an advocate speaks for a client the bare facts produce the effect; but when we pretend that the victims themselves are speaking, the emotional effect is also drawn from the persons [*ex personis*]. The judge no longer thinks he is listening to a lament for someone else's troubles, but that he is hearing the feelings and voice of the afflicted. (6.1.25)

The effect of *ethopoeia*, as Quintilian would have it, is to mediate the relationship between the advocate's client and the judge. The act of impersonation itself is an essential part of *ethopoeia*'s emotional power. When the orator adopts the persona of someone in distress, he is able to arouse even more pity in his audience than if the victim were to speak for himself: "pleas become more effective by being as it were put into their mouths, just as the same voice and delivery of the stage actor produces a greater emotional impact because he speaks behind a mask" (Quintilian 6.1.26). The artful mediation of the orator turns out to be essential for bringing about the desired emotional effect. This is not simply because the orator is trained in eloquence and knows how to speak well but because of the mimetic function of the "mask" itself. For Quintilian, emotion mediated by an orator is more compelling than if the sufferers were to speak for themselves. Virgil, then, by adopting the voices of multiple characters and focusing the narrative through their individual perspectives, performs a version of the rhetorical impersonation used by advocates in the courtroom to move and persuade. When Virgil allows the narrator's voice to be fragmented and segregated, as different characters emerge to tell the story from their own unique perspectives, to represent the world *in persona* as they see it, the poem reaches out to the reader like an orator – or an actor – trying to engage the faculty of empathy.

This poetic technique permeates nearly every episode of *The Aeneid*. Critics have explored its effects with reference to scenes ranging from Dido's love for Aeneas to the games of Book 5 (Otis 41–61), but I will consider a passage that we know took root in Shakespeare's imagination – Aeneas's voyage to the island of the harpies (*Aeneid* 3:199–269). For modern readers this moment is mildly memorable at best, but in the Renaissance it was a favorite site for allegorical readings that equated the harpies with avarice or female lust (Boccaccio 10:61; Spenser 2.7.23). Shakespeare draws on this moral resonance in Ariel's harpy-esque disruption of the banquet in *The Tempest*, and the episode gave him access to a compelling instance of *The Aeneid*'s technique of empathetic narrative.

Aeneas encounters the mythological bird-women in the course of his wanderings from Troy to Carthage, and the lead-up to their appearance is presented from his perspective of anxiety and dread. Aeneas sees the storm that drives his ships within range of Phineus's island as a dark force from which even the waves shrink back in horror (*inhorruit umbra tenebris*, 3:193). After the Trojans arrive on land, the story continues to unfold from Aeneas's point of view. The unexpected arrival of an unattended herd of cattle is a welcome sight:

*buc ubi delati portus intrauimus, ecce
laeta bouum passim campis armenta uidemus.* (3:219–20)

Gaining that landfall, making port, what do we see
but sleek lusty herds of cattle grazing the plains,
flocks of goats unguarded, cropping grassland. (trans. Fagles 3:266–8)

As Aeneas describes his unfolding feelings of surprise and pleasure – the anxiety of *ecce* resolves quickly into the relief of *laeta* – the reader is made to experience the sequence of events exactly as Aeneas feels them. When the harpies arrive to disrupt the scene, the abrupt intervention *ut subitae* (3:225) communicates Aeneas's experience of being jolted out of the elation of deliverance. An onslaught of present-tense verbs (*adsunt*, 3:225; *quatunt*, 3:226; *diripiunt*, *foedant*, 3:227) conveys Aeneas's rising panic as the harpies swoop down on his men, and the rapid sequence of dental sounds in the description of their cries (*tum vox taetrum dira inter odorem*, 3:228) makes his teeth chatter with trepidation.

Given that Aeneas is the narrator of the entirety of Book 3, it is not surprising that the description of the harpies is invested with the emotional colors of his response. To Aeneas, Celaeno is an ill-omened prophet (*infelix vates*, 3:246) and the whole race of these bird-monsters inspires dread (*dira*, 3:235). It is more startling to discover Aeneas advancing the subjective viewpoints of other characters in the midst of his own narrative. When he describes how his companions launched themselves into battle with the harpies, he imagines what it was like for them to confront creatures so bizarre (*inuadunt socii et noua proelia temptant*, 3:240). Even for Aeneas's sea-worn companions, the experience of fighting the bird-women is *nova*, strange. When Celaeno prophesies that the Trojans will reach Rome only when they are so hungry that they are driven to eat their very tables, Aeneas shifts into the subjunctive to inhabit the minds of his men as they beg the harpies, whoever they might be (*sive deae seu sint dirae obscenaeque uolucres*, 3:262), to reverse the pronouncement of doom. The sudden change of mood, which relocates the perspective of narration from Aeneas to the hypothetical viewpoint of his men, divides the

episode into multiple epicenters of feeling, insisting on the reader's sympathetic involvement with the inner lives of the characters, even those, like Aeneas's men, who are left unnamed. Along with a store of information for his mental commonplace book under the heading "harpy," this episode in *The Aeneid* offered Shakespeare a model for a poetic structure of affective identification, intertwining the perspective of the reader with the emotional viewpoints of characters within the narrative.

Virgilian *empathia* also works on a larger scale that was even more important for Shakespeare. The polyvocal narrative technique of *The Aeneid* forges a particularly complex relationship between the reader and the set of characters who work in opposition to the poem's dominant plot vector. Virgil demands that the reader become emotionally identified not only with the poem's hero but also with his opponents.¹⁴ This includes not only Dido and Turnus but also more minor characters such as Andromache, Juturna, and Mezentius, who command readerly empathy even in their opposition to Aeneas's imperial mission.

The example of Mezentius is especially illustrative. Apart from Turnus, Mezentius is Aeneas's most formidable adversary in the second half of the poem (Gotoff; Harrison xxi–xxxi, 236–84). When he first appears in the catalogue of Latin allies in Book 7, Mezentius is singled out for his impious contempt for the gods (*contemptor divum*, 7:648), and over the course of Book 8 he is developed into a monster of unfeeling cruelty. In Evander's assessment of the native Italic leaders who will dispute Aeneas's occupation of Latium, Mezentius figures as a uniquely despicable opponent, given to abominable forms of human torture:

*quid memorem infandas caedes, quid facta tyranni
effera? Di capiti ipsius generique reseruent!
mortua quin etiam iungebat corpora uiuis
componens manibusque manus atque oribus ora,
tormenti genus, et sanie taboque fluentis
complexu in misero longa sic morte necabat.* (8:483–8)

Why recount his unspeakable murders, savage crimes? The tyrant!
God store up such pains for his own head and all his sons.
Why he'd even bind together dead bodies and living men,
couple them tightly, hand to hand and mouth to mouth –
what torture – so in that poison, oozing putrid slime.
they'd die by inches, locked in their brute embrace. (trans. Fagles 8:569–74)

Evander's description links Mezentius to the monster Cacus, whose cruelty is described earlier in similarly gory terms (8:195–7). When Mezentius

¹⁴ This approach to the ethical narration of *The Aeneid* is advanced by Parry and especially Lyne.

enters the narrative *in propria persona*, Virgil endows him with the awe-inspiring qualities of a Homeric champion. He is given an epic *aristeia* on the model of Diomedes or Ajax, and an indomitable spirit that is simultaneously brutal and grand. By the middle of Book 10, he stands in for Turnus as Aeneas's archrival, an opponent of both the hero and the gods.

And yet, the narrator's treatment of Mezentius undergoes a rapid transformation with the death of his son Lausus – a transformation so sudden and extreme that the Virgilian technique of *empathia* stands out here no less strikingly than in the more often cited case of Dido. The shift is heralded by a change in poetic register; the fury of the battle subsides into a pastoral riverside scene, in which Mezentius attempts to clean his wounds while leaning against the trunk of a tree (*arboris acclinis trunco*, 10:835), putting his weapons to rest on the branches. The scene of pastoral simplicity corresponds to a new emotional situation of grief and vulnerability. The savage tyrant becomes the brokenhearted father, and, in one of the most eloquent laments of the epic, he turns his sorrow inward on himself, blaming his son's death on his own desire to live: “tantane me tenuit uiuendi uoluptas, / ut pro me hostili paterer succedere dextrae, / quem genui?” (10:846–8) (Was I so seized by the lust for life, my son, / I let you take my place before the enemy's sword? / My own flesh and blood!) [trans. Fagles 10:1,003–5]).

Mezentius's self-loathing transforms him into a figure of tragic isolation. The pathos of his lament reaches its highest pitch when he addresses his warhorse, finding no comfort except in the uncomprehending sympathy of a silent animal. His determination to return to battle becomes a suicidal death ride, and, in the last moments of his life, Virgil reverses the accent of characterization entirely when, with blood flowing out of his body from Aeneas's sword, Mezentius remains proud in his defeat, even as he is emotionally broken.

*hostis amare, quid increpitas mortemque minaris?
 nullum in caede nefas, nec sic ad proelium ueni,
 nec tecum meus haec pepigit mihi foedera Lausus.
 unum hoc per si qua est uictis uenia hostibus oro:
 corpus humo patiare tegi. scio acerba meorum
 circumstare odia: hunc, oro, defende furorem
 et me consortem nati concede sepulcro.* (10:900–6)

My mortal enemy,
 why do you ridicule me, threaten me with death?
 Killing is no crime. I never engaged in combat
 on such terms. No such pact did Lausus seal

between you and me that you would spare my life.
 One thing is all I ask, if the vanquished
 may ask a favor of the victor: let my body
 be covered by the earth. Too well I know
 how my people's savage hatred swirls around me.
 Shield me, I implore you, from their fury!
 Let me rest in the grave beside my son
 in the comradeship of death. (trans. Fagles 10:1,066–77)

This is a speech of breathtaking pathos and dignity. The poem pauses to fully enter Mezentius's world and to hear his disdain for Aeneas. For Mezentius, Aeneas's threats are meaningless chatter (*increditas*, 10:900). In this moment, Mezentius appears vulnerable but gigantic in his refusal to be reconciled to the poem's teleology. His local preoccupations are allowed to overwhelm the narrative perspective of the poem, and he comes into focus as a fully rounded character, insisting on the integrity and autonomy of his own experience. Mezentius is deaf to Aeneas's destiny as the founder of Rome, and, looking ahead to *The Tempest*, his proud defiance anticipates Antonio's refusal to be assimilated into Prospero's vision of reconciliation and refoundation. Virgil's ethically charged aesthetic – in which the authorial voice allows itself to be subsumed into one character's subjectivity and the reader is drawn into an empathetic identification that blurs the distinction between right and wrong – insists that even the most inveterate enemies of Aeneas and Rome are given the autonomy and eloquence to make our affections tender.

III

How, then, does this Virgilian poetics of empathy make its way into *The Tempest*? In his 1969 essay "Miraculous Harp," Harry Berger offered an account of the then prevailing reading of *The Tempest*: "The action of the play is Prospero's discovery of his enemies, their discovery of themselves, the lovers' discovery of a new world of wonder, and Prospero's own discovery of an ethic of forgiveness, and the renunciation of his magical power." Berger's qualification of this critical orthodoxy has defined the contours of much subsequent scholarship about the play. This reading is not wrong, he says, but "it does not hit the play where it lives" (254). The elements for a story of recognition and redemption are all available, but they are possibilities raised only to be put aside or redirected. *The Tempest* flirts with being a story about Prospero's "discovery of an ethic of forgiveness" – in fact, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this is the story Prospero

wants to tell – but it is just as much the story of loss, the failure of fellow-feeling, and the elusiveness of reconciliation.

There are as many ways to explain this phenomenon as there are schools of thought, and the fleshing out of Berger's reading owes a tremendous amount to postcolonial and new historicist interpretations of the play (Brown; Greenblatt, *Shakespearean* 129–63). But *The Tempest's* uneasiness about the exercise of power, its doubts about the possibility of psychological regeneration, and, above all, its concern with the limits of empathy owe as much to its classical as to its New World intertexts, as much to Virgil as to William Stratchey's *A True Reportory of the Wracke*. The play is drawn toward the darker regions of tragicomedie, at least in part, by the shadowy undertow of *The Aeneid*.

The Aeneid has long been discussed as part of the imaginative landscape of *The Tempest*, and the range of opinions is vast.¹⁵ Geoffrey Bullough omitted Virgil's epic from his list of narrative and dramatic sources, but, in the introduction to the Oxford edition of the play, Stephen Orgel claims that the story of *The Aeneid* is the one Shakespeare is retelling – a story of exile, colonization, and the human cost of empire (*Tempest* 39–43). Heather James has suggested that *The Tempest* provides a deeply ambivalent response to *The Aeneid* as a prototype of the myths of foundation that were so important to the self-definition of a burgeoning English nation (*Shakespeare's* 189–221). In a similar vein, Craig Kallendorf sees Shakespeare as taking “not the precise substance of [Virgil's] colonial vision, but the process by which imperialism is questioned and qualified by ‘further voices’ that emerge in the drama” (110). If, then, critics in recent years have been warmly disposed to seeing the presence of *The Aeneid* in *The Tempest*, the distinct echoes of *The Aeneid* in the storm scene, the widow Dido episode, and the appearance of Ariel as a harpy provide encouragement to consider *The Aeneid* as a deeper and more formative – even if more remote – part of the play's genesis, poetic resources, and habits of feeling.

What interested Shakespeare about *The Aeneid* was not only its complex treatment of the discourses of epic imperialism, colonialism, and the problems of sovereignty, but also its use of empathy in a way that blends poetry and the moral imagination. As we have seen, Virgilian *empathia* is an aesthetic mode with a sharply ethical cast. The narrator's movement from one epicenter of feeling to another encourages a habit of emotional

¹⁵ Studies of *The Tempest* in connection to Virgil include Bono; Gillespie; Hamilton; Heather James, *Shakespeare's* 189–221; Kallendorf 102–26; Kott; Martindale, “Shakespeare”; Miola; Mowat; Nosworthy; Nuttall, “Virgil”; Orgel (eds.), *Tempest* 39–43; Pitcher; Tudeau-Clayton 184–224; Wilson-Okamura, “Virgilian”; Wiltenburg.

identification in the reader that amounts to a poetic education in empathy. To read *The Aeneid* is to be instructed in fellow-feeling. Shakespeare takes up the issue of emotional identification as one of *The Tempest's* key preoccupations in Act 1 Scene 2, where Miranda expresses her sympathy for the poor souls on board the storm-tossed vessel at sea.

O, I have suffered
 With those that I saw suffer – a brave vessel
 (Who had no doubt some noble creature in her)
 Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
 Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished.
 Had I been any god of power, I would
 Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
 It should the good ship so have swallowed and
 The fraughting souls within her. (1.2.5–13)

Miranda's response to the suffering of the mariners on board the distressed ship has won her the approbation of readers keen to see her as an ideal Aristotelian spectator, reacting to tragic spectacle with pity, and several critics have detected the language of catharsis in her subsequent exchange with Prospero.¹⁶ The parallelism of her sentence structure – "I have suffered" and "I saw suffer" – sets out a mirroring of feeling, the kind of epistemological bridge between individuals that Stanley Cavell refers to as "acknowledgement" (238–66). Miranda's outpouring of feeling signals her identification with the sailors and her responsiveness to their claims on her sympathy. But Miranda's readiness to take on the imagined feelings of the mariners is a more unruly response to pathetic spectacle than might be expected. As Heather James has argued, Miranda's "sympathetic passions turn out to be surprisingly volatile; they press her, in fact, to ally herself with the shipwrecked men instead of her father who has, as she suspects, conjured the storm" ("Dido's Ear" 361). Miranda's sympathetic imagination leads her to consider what she would do if she were in Prospero's position as a "god of power," and her determination that she would save the ship puts her at odds with what she perceives her father has done. Miranda's sympathy pulls her in the direction of dissidence.

Even more importantly, Miranda's compassion for the sailors appears to be misplaced. Given what the first scene reveals about the men on board, her pity leads her to misinterpret the moral status of the sufferers. While the duress of the storm might excuse the boatswain's cocky insubordination, Antonio and Sebastian come off as wicked and unfeeling, and even

¹⁶ Heather James, "Dido's Ear"; Orgel (ed.), *Tempest* 102.

Gonzalo, with his unsavory jokes at the expense of the boatswain, is not especially attractive. This raises fundamental questions about the ethics of fellow-feeling in the play. Like the Virgilian narrator, Miranda is willing to extend her sympathy even to men who, from the play's dominant perspective, ought to be considered enemies. Her compassion operates independently of any judgment of moral worth. But how good an ethical model is Virgilian *empathia*, with its indiscriminate sympathy for both hero and opponent, for the world of *The Tempest*? In Act 1 Scene 2 empathy divides Miranda from her father and her moral judgment. Can empathy provide a solution to the fractured relationships of the play, or does emotional identification create new fractures that resist healing?

Caliban provides a crucial test case for these questions. Jonathan Bate has called Caliban “a deeply un-Virgilian creation” (247) – and indeed, Montaigne's essay “Of cannibals” had a more formative impact on Caliban's genesis – but Caliban shares several important strands of literary genetic code with Virgil's opponent-characters such as Mezentius. Like Mezentius, Caliban demands an expansion of readerly sympathy. Shakespeare goes out of his way to give Caliban a sympathetic voice that raises itself in clear-voiced opposition to Prospero. While there is no doubt in Prospero's mind that Caliban is a villain – resistant to education, ungrateful, lecherous – the play insists that Caliban's claim to sovereignty of the island is just as legitimate, if not more so, than Prospero's.

This island's mind by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first
Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me
Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,
And showed thee all the qualities o'th'isle,
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile –
Cursed be I that did so! (1.2.331–9)

Prospero established his authority over the island by means of his magic, but Caliban's claim is technically true and never refuted: he was there first (Orgel, “Prospero's” 5). Furthermore, contrary to what Prospero and Miranda say about Caliban's lack of education and moral feeling, he is remarkably alive to the beauty and wonder of nature. In his famous speech “Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises” (3.2.133–41), Caliban shows himself infinitely more worthy of sympathetic identification than the Old World philistines, Stephano and Trinculo, or their social betters, Antonio

and Sebastian, who have nothing but disdain for the natural wonders of the island. Shakespeare insists that Caliban becomes an alternative center of gravity in the play, a point of identification separate from and opposed to Prospero. As in the case of Virgil's Mezentius, we do not return to the main plotline unaffected by Caliban's alternative claims. Caliban brings out Prospero's darkness and shows us what is lost in a single-minded approach to the problems of the island.

These suggestive traces of the deep underpresence of Virgilian *empathia* resonate most fully, however, in Shakespeare's treatment of Prospero. Through the metatheatrical figure of the magician, Shakespeare explores the limits of empathy to bring about reconciliation and resolution, and, like Virgil, stages a breakdown of the structures of compassion just when they are needed most. At the beginning of the play, Prospero seems determined to stage an epic tale that will follow *The Aeneid's* movement from exile to homecoming, from loss to recuperation, while reversing Virgil's tragic ending by feeling tenderly and pardoning his suppliants. When he explains the history of the usurpation of his dukedom to Miranda in Act 1 Scene 2, Prospero leaves no doubt that he intends to make good on the occasion that has brought his enemies to the island:

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop. (1.2.179–85)

What precisely he plans to do with the Italian lords now that they are within his reach takes the remainder of the play to unfold, but it soon becomes clear that Prospero is not aiming for tidy revenge. His ambition is larger: he wants to bring about a psychological transformation in his enemies that will arouse regret for their past actions and a desire to right their wrongs.¹⁷ His means of accomplishing this emotional metamorphosis is magic, the play's symbolic analogue for the power of Shakespeare's own poetry to arouse the emotions and to generate empathy. When Ariel descends on the lords as they feast at Prospero's magical banquet to remind Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian that they are "three men of sin" (3.3.53), Prospero appears to have successfully put the emotional elements in place

¹⁷ For the political implications of Prospero's idealism, see Norbrook. For the play's treatment of contrition, penance, and restitution in light of Reformation theology, see Beckwith 147–72.

for a finale of penitence and reconciliation. According to Gonzalo, “All three of them are desperate. Their great guilt / Like poison given to work a great time after / Now ’gins to bite the spirits” (3.3.104–6). Prospero is similarly optimistic that his plan is succeeding:

My high charms work
And these, mine enemies, are all knit up
In their distractions. They are now in my power
And in these fits I leave them. (3.3.88–91)

But en route to the scene of forgiveness that Prospero envisions, Shakespeare pauses to dramatize a Virgilian episode of *empathia*, with Prospero himself as the emotional subject. As he stands dressed in his magic robes, preparing to confront the men who have wronged him, Prospero invites Ariel to speak for them, to perform the orator’s task of arousing the emotions. Ariel delivers a speech saturated with the rhetoric of compassion:

All prisoners, sir,
In the line-grove which weather-fends your cell;
They cannot budge til your release. The King,
His brother, and yours, abide all three distracted,
And the remainder mourning over them,
Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly
Him that you termed, sir, the good old Lord Gonzalo
His tears run down his beard like winter’s drops
From eves of reeds. (5.1.9–17)

This is not the first time Ariel has used his powers of rhetorical description to bring a scene to life before Prospero’s eyes, but it is his debut for pathetic narrative in which he conjures up a mental image of another’s suffering. Instead of dwelling on the two usurpers, Ariel narrows his lens to focus on Gonzalo, the one Italian lord who helped Prospero as he was leaving Milan – and the one who seems to share Prospero’s fantasy of a story of repentance and forgiveness. His description of Gonzalo’s tears as “winter’s drops” asks Prospero to see and feel the coldness of despair, even as Gonzalo’s melting teardrops mimetically enact the hoped-for melting of Prospero’s cold heart. Ventriloquizing the suffering of the Italian lords, and making them into independent epicenters of feeling, Ariel is given a Virgilian voice to stir Prospero’s compassion. Through Ariel’s mediation, Prospero comes near to the point of identification with his enemies:

ARIEL Your charm so strongly works
That if you now beheld them, your affections

Would be come tender.

PROSPERO Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROSPERO And mine shall.

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
 Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
 One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
 Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?
 Though with their wrongs I am struck to th' quick
 Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
 Do I take part.

(5.1.17–27)

In Ariel's plea and Prospero's emotive response, Shakespeare dramatizes the power of a pitiful tale to awaken the faculties of the sympathetic imagination – a power, as we have seen, that throughout his career he connects to *The Aeneid*. When Shakespeare locates Prospero's turn to empathy in the context of an aesthetically mediated account of suffering, he draws on the same resources of Virgilian narrative that generate Lucrece's search through the tapestry of the fall of Troy for a character to unlock her experience of woe, and Hamlet's wonder at the Player's pity for Hecuba. The rhetorical mediation of the speech – Virgil's *empathēia* and Quintilian's *ethopoeia* – is what brings Prospero to the point of fellow-feeling.

Shakespeare returns to his career-long tendency to connect emotional identification with his classical reading, as he sounds an oblique but audible debt to *The Aeneid* in Prospero's distinctly Virgilian determination to take part “with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury” (5.1.26). The source is blended almost beyond recognition, but it is enough to suggest that Shakespeare is here onto Virgil's technique. Aeneas precisely fails to overcome his *furor* in the last moments of the poem, and Prospero emerges from his transformative encounter with Ariel less altered than we might like. Ariel's description of the lords' suffering acts more powerfully on Prospero than the actual spectacle of them transfixed in the magic circle; in fact, the sight of his enemies nearly undoes the work of Ariel's rhetorical *empathēia*.

In the final scene of the play Shakespeare pushes this Virgilian strategy further by making opportune use of the notoriously problematic split between the narrator and Aeneas in the final moments of *The Aeneid*. Throughout Virgil's epic, in episodes such as those we have examined above, the narrator's strategy of *empathēia* teaches the reader to view the action from emotional perspectives other than that of Aeneas. In the final scene of the poem, the narrator continues to shift back and forth between

Aeneas's viewpoint and that of Turnus, at one moment identifying with Aeneas's rage, at another moment with Turnus's vulnerability. But, while the narrator continues to develop a feeling of empathy for the opponent, the poem's hero does not. Whether Shakespeare took Lactantius's view that *pius* Aeneas loses his *pietas* when he slaughters a man who is begging for mercy (5.10.9) or whether he thought that Turnus was justly killed, he saw the dramatic potential of the tension Virgil creates between the narrator's empathy and the hero's coldness, between the expectation of reconciliation and its lack of fulfillment.

These affective structures are among the ingredients that generate the lack of resolution at the end of the play. At first, clearly still moved by Ariel's report, Prospero expresses his fellow-feeling with Gonzalo: "Holy Gonzalo, honourable man / Mine eyes, ev'n sociable to the show of thine / Fall fellowly drops" (5.1.63–5). But, as he looks upon Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio, his empathy shows signs of cracking:

You, brother mine, that entertained ambition,
Expelled remorse and nature, whom, with Sebastian –
Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong –
Would here have killed your kind, I do forgive thee,
Unnatural though thou art. (5.1.75–9)

Prospero's choppy syntax is evidence of his growing indignation, and his declaration of forgiveness appears forced and reluctant side. When he reiterates the promise of reconciliation, it is in language that begs the question of whether or not the performance of forgiveness is spurred by genuine empathy or hardheaded pragmatism:

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault – all of them – and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know
Thou must restore. (5.1.130–4)

Stripped of Ariel's Virgilian aestheticization of suffering, Prospero no longer empathizes; he pardons, but he lacks the corresponding soft emotions. The offer of forgiveness has an undercutting high-handedness about it, even if it is a better option than revenge. Antonio never exhibits the penitence Prospero wants to exact from him, and, in a parallel way, Prospero never quite gives up the anger he feels toward his brother. The omission of Antonio's repentance is particularly important; his refusal to ask for mercy makes Prospero's assumption of the role of pardoner ever so slightly artificial. Antonio's silence leaves a vague feeling of discomfort

that something fundamental has been left unacted, unfelt, and unresolved. Antonio must be pardoned and Prospero must move on to the administration of his restored dukedom, but the failure of real empathy and the corresponding failure of remorse leave the play dangling in the energy of irresolution. The result is an aching discomfort and majestic melancholy that can only be called Virgilian.

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