Anarchic Wills: De Factoism and its Discontents in Shakespeare and Milton

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ANARCHIC WILLS:
DE FACTOISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS IN SHAKESPEARE AND MILTON

by

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DEDICATION

For Caroline, for it all
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores the literary origins of de factoism – the political philosophy which considers any “right” to rule inconsequential to political legitimacy. My work introduces the concept of the “anarchic will,” my term for a literary character that recognizes the growing distance between an authority’s claim to power and the material fact of that power. I locate these figures in early modern drama and epic to demonstrate how their existence threatens the traditional power structures, both on the stage and in the streets of London. I argue that anarchic wills jeopardize political order at the most basic level, in a way completely unlike traditional rebellions. The imaginative literature of early modern England is rife with examples of these anarchic wills, from Falstaff in Shakespeare’s Henriad to Chaos, “that Anarch of old,” in Milton’s Paradise Lost. Rather than use de factoism to support the idea of absolutism, like Thomas Hobbes does, I conclude that de factoism produces unresolvable problems, personified in the anarchic will, which cannot coexist with absolute power.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: BY WHAT LAWFUL AUTHORITY?

When Charles I was brought to trial for high treason in 1649, he repeatedly refused to answer the charges against him. Instead, he took a stand against one singular issue. “I would know by what authority I was brought from thence,” he demanded, “and carried from place to place; and when I know by what lawful authority, I shall answer” (The Moderate). From a legal, if not survival, standpoint, Charles’s obstinacy is understandable. After all, a king of England had never before been put on trial, so there was no precedent for Oliver Cromwell and his Rump Parliament to invoke. Of course, kings of England had been deposed, assassinated, and defeated on the battlefield before the Stuarts sat on the throne, but as the Earl of Clarendon tells us, “nothing could be found in the common or statute law which could direct or warrant [his accusers]…that there might be some appearance of justice” (Hyde 326). Inevitably, Charles’s procedural challenge failed to save his neck or the monarchy. He was led to the Banqueting House at Whitehall on January 30, 1649, and executed.

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2 Though he refused to answer the charges while on trial, he did respond to earlier charges levied against him in his *Eikon Basilike*, supposedly written during his imprisonment on the Isle of Wight and published ten days after his execution. In it, Charles counters that his reign saw nothing, “more than is lawful for any king in such exigents,” when it enlisted the aid of its subjects for protection, and he also explicitly takes on the mantle of Christ’s suffering, writing, “If I must suffer a violent death with my Saviour, it is but mortality crowned with martyrdom” (Charles I 89; 179).
His execution marks the dramatic culmination of a centuries-long debate over political authority and was a decisive victory for Republicans in the English Civil Wars. Significantly, however, his death did not conclude the crisis of authority that generated the turmoil. Out of this turmoil, some of the most strikingly modern conceptions of political power ever theorized emerged, specifically, Thomas Hobbes’s *de facto* theory of authority. Owing to his fierce materialism, Hobbes articulated a theory of government that offered a new solution to the problem of political legitimacy. Since he disavowed the existence of non-material entities, Hobbes argued that subjects should not obey rulers because of their religious, legal, or even hereditary rights, but instead that subjects owed their allegiance to any existing power simply because that entity was capable of exercising that power. As Hobbes says, “Command is where a man saith *do this, or do not do this*, without expecting other reason than the will of him that says it” (*Leviathan* 165). Regardless of how they attained the power, any authority should be able to compel obedience, regardless of “legitimacy.” Hobbes goes on to say subjects do not, “flourish in

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3 The defeat of Charles II’s forces at the Battle of Worcester in 1651 was the ultimate defeat of the Royalists. The resultant exile of Charles II finally established the authority of the Commonwealth of England. See Christopher Hill’s *Century of Revolution* (p. 97) and John Morrill (p. 374).

4 According to Shapin and Schaffer, “Hobbes endeavoured to show the absurdity of an ontology that posited incorporeal substances and immaterial spirits. Thus, he built a *plenist* ontology, and, in the process, erected a materialistic theory of knowledge in which the foundations of knowledge were notions of *causes*, and those causes were matter and motion” (19). Importantly, Hobbes fought hard for his ontology because, for him, it maintained political order. Shapin and Schaffer again: “He recommended his materialist monism because it would assist in ensuring social order. He condemned dualism and spiritualism because they had in fact been used to subvert order” (99).

5 Hobbes rarely relies on Scripture to support his claims, though he does acknowledge the authority of Scripture in the commonwealth. Hobbes wants to keep his distance from theology and biblical exegesis. Not because he was an atheist or the “monster from Malmsbury,” but because he saw biblical arguments as entrenched and deadlocked. His epistemology sought to explain the benefits of sovereignty for society without Scripture so that every denomination could recognize his work. As Ioannis Evrigenis explains, “His approach to the Bible thus constituted a careful balancing act intended to reap the benefits of its authority, richness, and indeterminacy, while steering clear of the potential pitfalls involved in detailed Biblical exegesis” (163).
a monarchy because one man has the right to rule them, but because they obey him” (L 222). Power in fact, in other words, justifies authority.  

Though Charles did not formally recognize the de facto power of Cromwell’s Parliament and despite its lack of legal precedent, the king surely must have felt the full force of it on the scaffolding that cold day in January. Competing claims to the throne had sparked and stoked the Wars of the Roses, but those battles had been waged over the rights of kings, not the right of the English subjects. How did England go from a country where kings were considered divinely appointed to one where they were publicly executed? How could subjects go from venerating their monarchs as Heads of the Church of England or Virginal Mothers of the nation to endorsing the regicide of a rightful king? This radical shift in conceptions of power could not have happened over night, and it certainly could not have happened without consequence.

This dissertation tells the story of an important development in English political philosophy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through a study of characters I call “anarchic wills.” Anarchic wills are characters who, for the first time, recognize the arbitrariness of political legitimacy. That is, they begin to understand that rulers have no “right” to the sovereign power they hold or desire to hold. The anarchic will understands the widening gap between an authority’s “right” to power (de jure) and the material “fact” of their power (de facto). With the new knowledge that rights to political authority do not guarantee political authority, the anarchic will becomes both politically

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6 This reading of Hobbes is not without its controversy. In fact, Skinner himself has since changed his interpretation of Hobbes’s political philosophy. See Skinner’s “Thomas Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty,” where Skinner retracts his claim that Hobbes supported “all the most characteristic claims of the de facto theorists” (1989 95). For a full examination of Skinner’s evolving interpretation of Hobbes, see Michael Goodhart’s “Theory in Practice: Quentin Skinner’s Hobbes, Reconsidered.” See also Martinich’s Thomas Hobbes, in which he writes, Hobbes, “is not a de facto theorist,” since, “[f]or Hobbes, a government, in addition to having the power to enforce its will, must have the consent of the people” (1997 15).
independent and politically dangerous simultaneously. As my work shows, the emergence of de facto theories of government profoundly affected individual relationships with power. Anarchic wills like Falstaff, Hamlet, and Edmund express a new understanding of political power, one that rests on material control and not legal, or even ecclesiastical, rights. Free from normative obligations of obedience, the anarchic will faces political, not moral, crises. My dissertation uses anarchic wills to focus attention on the literature’s inherent de facto political philosophy – a philosophy that would not be fully developed in straightforward works of philosophy until Hobbes, almost 50 years later. This introduction will introduce the key terms relevant to the following work and then provide a brief outline of the subsequent chapters.

Broadly speaking, English political thought prior to the seventeenth century can be understood as essentially “de jure.” That is to say, questions of political authority consistently conclude with appeals to one’s “right” to rule. Almost universally, this was seen as an ecclesiastical right, a legal right, or some combination of the two. While the material reality of authority was unavoidably considered, political thought still felt compelled to defend a sovereign’s position with some sort of abstract or metaphysical property. M.M. Reese explains the deep rooted connection between civic and Christian duty, writing, “[i]n its need for order the sixteenth century insisted that political obedience was a religious duty” (33). Compelling subjugation on religious grounds meant justifying authority on those ground as well. For instance, Jean Bodin, one of the most influential Continental political philosophers of the sixteenth century, defines royal, “or legitimate,” monarchy as, “one in which the subject obeys the laws of the prince, the prince in his turn obeys the laws of God” (56). Bodin’s hierarchy describes most, if not
all, de jure understandings of political legitimacy. Subjects obey the prince’s laws which are understood as reflections of a divine order. The de jure authority, in other words, monarch or Parliament, ultimately bases its power on eternal justice.

De facto theorists, on the other hand, see the justifications as less relevant than the facts of power. Glenn Burgess broadly defines the basis for de facto theories as, “a complex variety of theories, but the essential feature they had in common was the employment of arguments that severed legality and legitimacy” (1992 88). With characteristic clarity, Bertrand Russell explains Hobbes’s political philosophy as simply, “a man has no duty to a sovereign who has not the power to protect him” (553). As Bodin’s example illustrates, sixteenth-century legal justification for sovereignty were more intertwined with ecclesiastical or theological concerns. De facto theorists argued that authority was authority only when that power compelled obedience. Arguments over legality or legitimacy, like Charles’s court-room stand, are inconsequential in de facto theories because, as Samuel Mintz explains, these theories insist, “that a subject submit to any government which has de facto control so long as that control is firm enough to secure internal peace” (Mintz 13). De facto theories disregard claims to power and substantiate only power itself. Significantly, therefore, de facto theories urge the peace of the status quo over the righteous indignation of de jure rebellions or the violent chaos of anarchy. The latter of these two oppositions will be the focus of this dissertation.

As said above, the violent political upheaval of the 1640s had been brewing for decades. Every new justification for monarchy or republic that sprung up only revealed the weakness of those claims’ absoluteness. Hobbes recognizes the arbitrariness of these sovereign claims and argues that societies should resign themselves to the obedient
subservience of those who hold power. Not all reactions to the revelation that political power has no legitimate justification were as peacefully acquiescing as Hobbes’s. The anarchic wills studied in this dissertation represent the socially dangerous, politically disruptive response to the realities on which de facto theories are based. Since they share a concomitant emergence with de facto powers, anarchic wills form an antagonistic symbiosis with those powers. Put simply, anarchic wills oppose de facto political rule, and they have three defining features. First, they experience a simultaneous freedom and enslavement, a double bind of moral liberation and political constraint. As they start to negotiate the waters of amorality, they stir up possible political dissent and therefore earn the ire of those powers that be. Some political subjects, like York in Richard II (studied at length in chapter two), understand the true nature of de facto power, but choose to fall in line with that power, easily swearing allegiance to whomever holds power. The anarchic will, in contrast, poses a threat because they will not simply subscribe to arbitrary power, nor will they peacefully be ruled, as Percy Hotspur would be, if, or when, a de jure power is installed.

An abuse of language is the second characteristic common to all anarchic wills. Especially in drama from the period, the anarchic will displays a unique ability to deconstruct language and threatens the state by obliterating the rhetoric of power. For Hobbes, the premier Law of Nature dictates that individuals in the State of Nature will rationally understand their predicament and linguistically establish the social contract, which guarantees safety. Reason propels us out of the State of Nature, in other words, and it is through language, a unique attribute of human beings, that we communicate this reason. Language, too, is as arbitrary as power, and like de facto sovereignty, Hobbes
argues that we should acquiesce to the existing structure of language and resist teasing out its chaotic potential through metaphor, abstraction, or dangerous rhetoric. Hobbes fears the seductive power of rhetoric, which he calls, “passion eloquent,” because, “eloquence draws others” into differing political camps (L 171). Hobbes castigates those who nefariously use equivocation because, “when they use words metaphorically, that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for, [they] thereby deceive others” (L 17). In describing the relationship between language and power in Hobbes’s commonwealth, Daniel Skinner explains, “External power, not internal semantic stability among Leviathan’s subjects, purchase Hobbesian political order” (575). When the anarchic will exploits the arbitrariness of rhetoric, they turn a linguistic act into a dangerous political statement. When individuals abuse language, through equivocation or metaphor, for instance, they endanger the common cords of understanding. According to Richard Tuck, Hobbes accepts that, “language is simply a formal system whose relationship to reality is puzzling and contentious; but it is the only tool we have to reason with” (1989 51).

Finally, the anarchic will suffers at the hands of de facto political rule because, as said above, they oppose that power. De facto powers realize, more than anyone perhaps, that their power has no basis beyond material fact. The anarchic wills’ presence in their realm threatens to throw an ordered system back into social chaos. Challenges to de jure claims of authority can be met with de jure counter-arguments, as they are in Shakespeare’s Henriad, but challenges to de facto powers are reducible only to chaos. De facto powers will quash individual anarchic wills, but can never completely diminish the threat they pose. Once de jure theories are revealed to be lacking, and once anarchic wills demonstrate the arbitrariness of political sovereignty, the only avenue to political stability
is to accept, like the de factoists, that the peace of submitting to power is better than the turmoil of political upheaval.

While ultimately the pragmatics of peace drive all de facto theories of sovereignty, especially Hobbes’s, the realization that power is arbitrary threatens to disturb that peace. By the time Hobbes, “the most articulate spokesman for de facto government,” writes Leviathan, the disparity between an authority’s claim to power and the material fact of that power had been substantially developed (Sharpe 118). Prior to the execution of Charles I, however, the notion that sovereignty was not granted by God, law, or heritage wreaked more existential havoc. As the gap between power de jure and power de facto widens, some literary characters feel the chaotic abyss open underneath them. Anarchic wills are the figures who confront this dreadful disparity and challenge the de facto powers that be. Liberated from legal and normative obligations of political obedience, anarchic wills experience a new kind of political freedom. It is not, however, the liberating freedom of Leveller republicanism.

My dissertation prioritizes the struggle with political authority over divine dilemmas. This preference did not always have precedence. While studying Shakespeare’s poetry and politics some thirty years ago, John Alvis wrote that since, “Shakespeare’s characters consult not only their native inclinations and the laws of their

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7 Miriam Reik notes, “Ironically, Hobbes’s ‘traitorous and rebellious tenets’ grew out of a near-utopian vision of the possibility of establishing a permanent peace among men,” a sentiment I also find in Hobbes’s writing (86).

8 This reading of Hobbes is not without its controversy. In fact, Skinner himself has since changed his interpretation of Hobbes’s political philosophy. See Skinner’s “Thomas Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty,” where Skinner retracts his claim that Hobbes supported “all the most characteristic claims of the de facto theorists” (1989 95). For a full examination of Skinner’s evolving interpretation of Hobbes, see Michael Goodhart’s “Theory in Practice: Quentin Skinner’s Hobbes, Reconsidered.” See also Martinich’s Thomas Hobbes, in which he writes, Hobbes, “is not a de facto theorist,” since, “[f]or Hobbes, a government, in addition to having the power to enforce its will, must have the consent of the people” (1997 15).
state, but, concurrently, certain transcendent prescriptions decreed by the spiritual God,” his characters, “must reflect upon the political consequences of Christian belief,” and that ultimately, “The political subject necessarily embraces the religious subject” (11). This is an accurate reading of Shakespeare’s political thought, to a point. However, when we read his work, and the work of other early modern poets, we find a bifurcation of this concurrent consultation of divine and political laws. Because of the post-Reformation turmoil, the anarchic will starts to question the, “transcendent prescriptions decreed by the spiritual God,” and then questions the political laws those prescriptions supported (Alvis 11). In other words, the religious subject and political subject disengage from their embrace. Hamlet, for example, immediately comes to mind. At the play’s beginning he will not even consider suicide because it violates the creator’s canon (1.2 129-32). By act three, however, even though he has spoken to a spirit from beyond the grave, he allows his mind to wander into more suicidal thoughts and away from those biblical prohibitions against it (3.1 55). Significantly, as Hamlet drifts further from Christian order, he becomes less of a threat to himself and more of a threat to the political order of Denmark, and even couches his eschatological musings in political terms. His own soul is no longer in the balance. Hamlet changes the drama from a study on the nature of the afterlife to a study in political turmoil. 9 This example from Hamlet will be explored more in chapter three, but for now I use it to demonstrate how the poets of imaginative literature wrestled with the same crisis of authority as the era’s great prose writers.

In fact, poets and playwrights often addressed the political tension before the political theorists. For instance, D.R. Woolf finds that Thomas Heywood’s Edward IV 1 & 2 (ca. 1600), “offers as bald a statement on the de facto theory as one can find before

9 See p. 115 of this dissertation.
the civil war” (38). Indeed, Heywood’s character “Hobs the tanner” in Edward IV 1 displays a common sense pragmatism when explaining his ability to shift royal allegiance. When asked by the disguised Edward IV if he hates the house of York, Hobs replies, “Why, no; for I am just akin to Sutton Windmill; I can grind which way soever the wind blow. If it be Harry, I can say, ‘Well fare, Lancaster.’ If it be Edward, I can sing, ‘York, York, for my money” (King Edward IV 1 3.1). Hobs’s honest response and warm hospitality earns him the king’s favor, but his willingness to go along with whoever wears the crown reveals a certain disillusionment regarding notions of royal majesty. Still, Hobs the tanner represents the ideal de factoist in that he easily, peacefully obeys whoever holds power. The anarchic will reacts differently. The anarchic will’s awareness of the monarch’s de facto authority threatens the political stability that Hobs, the tanner, and Hobbes, the philosopher, espouse.

Certainly, political philosophy responds to the dilemma as well. Since Hobbes is one of the first political philosophers to describe a (hypothetical) political past to support his prescriptive political present, his work will prove indispensable for a study of the anarchic will. However, while Hobbes gives us a complete philosophical treatise which encapsulates the era’s political strife, it is clear that the writers of imaginative literature had been hard at work on the same issues for decades prior to the Civil Wars.

Specifically, the burgeoning political philosophy we find in Shakespeare’s plays is a particularly Hobbesian version of de factoism and a uniquely Hobbesian deconstruction of de jureism. That is to say, the histories and tragedies of Shakespeare, specifically the ones studied here, repeatedly critique de jure authorities. Crooked kings fall and are replaced by “rightful” rulers, but Shakespeare never writes straightforward
political propaganda. As I hope to show, even his most conventionally heroic history play, *Henry V*, includes enough cracks and criticisms to seriously interrogate the “legitimacy” of Henry, and subsequently royal authority in general.\(^\text{10}\) Since Hobbes’s *Leviathan* offers such a comprehensive and important de facto theory for the period, my study will read Shakespeare as anticipating Hobbes. Therefore, I will rely on many of Hobbes’s key concepts to situate the underlying political philosophy of Shakespeare’s drama.

The practice of reading Shakespeare as a political thinker has seen somewhat of a resurgence of late. More specifically, scholars have been turning to Hobbes to help interpret the playwright. Alex Schulman’s *Rethinking Shakespeare’s Political Philosophy: From Lear to Leviathan* (2014) was published during this dissertation’s completion. Both our works describe a similar phenomenon in English political thought, and look to the period’s imaginative literature for its expression, but where Schulman sees the increase of secularism in political legitimation leading to “the rise of modern secular nationalism,” I find more expressions of a particular kind of political philosophy, de facto political philosophies (1). My dissertation has much to say about Schulman’s work and will periodically return to it, for now, however, I want to echo Schulman, who argues, “Shakespeare is surely as relevant a voice for thinking through the problems of politics as Sophocles;” we read Shakespeare as a viable, valuable voice in the long narrative of political philosophy (4).

\(^{10}\) I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare intentionally protests the existing power structure in his dramas. Though Elizabeth I thought his depiction of Richard II hit a little too close to home, as she did with Thomas Hayward’s *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIII* (1599). I am not sure Shakespeare ever definitively takes a political stance.
The editors of *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought* (2009) acknowledge that certain early modern poets – Spenser, Sidney, Milton – have been read as political thinkers, but these editors point out the glaring, conspicuous absence of scholarship focusing on Shakespeare, “as a participant in the political thought of his time” (2). In an attempt to help correct this oversight, this dissertation reads Shakespeare as a political thinker. This dissertation will also read Milton in light of Hobbes.

Since my project aims to discuss the imaginative literature of early modern England, I will consider how John Milton responds to Hobbes’s de facto political theory in his masterpiece, *Paradise Lost*. This dissertation will argue that among its many functions, Milton’s epic grapples with the political philosophy elucidated by Hobbes prior to its publication. Throughout his career, Milton opposed essential tenets of Hobbes’s philosophy in his own treatises and pamphlets. His *Areopagitica*, for instance, notably supports a freedom of the press that, while a bit too conservative for today’s taste, was quite radical in its time. The unchecked printing of information could potentially unsettle a civil and obedient society, therefore Hobbes would never go so far as to say, as Milton does, “Read any books what ever come to thy hands, for thou art sufficient both to judge aright, and to examine each matter” (1005). Perhaps most significant of all, though, would be Milton’s “On the Tenure and Kings and Magistrates” in which he defends the regicide of Charles I.\(^{11}\) Conceptually, the act of beheading a king would be abhorrent to Hobbes. Practically, the act of beheading this particular king sent

\(^{11}\) Not only does Milton defend Charles I’s execution, he simultaneously concedes, and scoffs at, one of Hobbes’s most important claims, writing, “No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free,” alluding to Hobbes’s State of Nature (1060). Milton, however, considers man’s first free state as Edenic perfection and not the chaotic State of Nature. It is only after the Fall, therefore, that men, “among themselves . . . doe wrong and violence,” until “they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury” (1060).
the nation into civil war and Hobbes into exile. Milton’s erudite and civically responsible argument for the reasonableness of killing the king worked against Hobbes’s most foundational principles.

Chapter one of my dissertation, “De Factosim and Its Discontents,” will provide a more in-depth overview of the movement in English political philosophy from the overwhelmingly de jure models in the sixteenth century to the de facto theories of the seventeenth. Using sources that garner little attention in literary studies of the period, the first chapter will look at the challenges faced by political thinkers in the 1500s and how they attempted to address the growing problem of political legitimacy through ecclesiastical, legal, and natural laws. Furthermore, the opening chapter will demonstrate how the growing disparity between a power’s “rightful” claim to power and the material fact of their power gives birth to the anarchic will.

“’Be rul’d by me:’ Authority and Anarchy in Shakespeare’s Henriad,” the second chapter, will analyze the most explicitly political of Shakespeare’s dramas. In their depiction of historical kings of England, Richard II, Henry IV 1 & 2, and Henry V offer a direct commentary on the shifting notions of political power during the period. Usurpation, rebellion, and realpolitiking run throughout these plays and offer particular insight into the political justifications for de factoism and the heroic façade of de jurism. As the chapter epigram from Richard II illustrates, every king from these four plays pleads for the same essential authority. How they attain authority, how is it threatened, and how they respond can all be explained with a focus on the disparity between de jure and de facto justifications for power. These plays dramatize the tension between abstract notions, like honor and justice, and physical realities, like real estate and breached walls.
With the underlying emphasis on material conquest, however, Shakespeare opens up an avenue of skepticism towards these attempts to justify authority through the law or the church. A study of the Henriad will also allow ample room for Sir John Falstaff, one of the most rotund and articulate anarchic wills.

Chapter three, “Antic Dispositions: The State of Nature and the Nation State in Hamlet and King Lear,” will juxtapose two of Shakespeare’s “high tragedies:” Hamlet and King Lear. Read as foundational myths for political systems, these plays ponder the political ramifications of the anarchic will’s presence in society. By utilizing tragic protagonists, Shakespeare can personify the impact of chaos on a de facto regime. For example, Hamlet’s complexity of character – previously diagnosed as oedipal, existential, clinically depressive, and/or exemplary of the modern individual – represents the individual’s difficulty in acclimating to de facto powers, in my reading. This leads him to the conclusion, “The king is a thing…Of nothing,” thus posing a political threat to Denmark’s security (4.2 25-6). When Fortinbras ascends the Danish throne, literally because no one else can, the play offers one of the period’s more striking dramatizations of de factoism.

If Hamlet dramatizes the conclusive civic peace that de facto powers bring, then King Lear offers us a glimpse of what happens when anarchic wills dethrone de facto powers and leave the nation in a state of anarchy. Lear’s progression, or perhaps

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12 That is, read in a way that highlights how these plays attempt to explain how and why humans coalesce into political systems in the first place. As M.J. Tooley explains, Bodin, who wrote in the mid-sixteenth century, was one of the first sought to understand the origin of the political state, not just the powers its rulers held; not even Machiavelli attempted this (Tooley xiv). Still, it seems poets more often explored how suited humans were for society. Alvis says, “Shakespeare provokes his serious readers to consider in what sense this propensity to live in political community is natural to human beings” (5). Hamlet and King Lear delve into what it means for man to be a political animal, and as we will see, they both consider the first causes of society and do not take the notion of man-as-political-animal for granted. This is a question the anarchic will wrestles with in the dramas and poetry studied in this dissertation.
regression, from “King Lear” to simply “Lear” nominally notes the shift, and split, of de jure and de facto power. What Lear misunderstands, and what his Fool makes clear, is that he cannot give away the political authority of monarchy and expect to retain the majesty. While Lear personally suffers from this *hamartia*, the polis suffers as they realize, with him, “the great image of authority: a dog’s obeyed in office” (4.6 154-6). As Edmund and Lear – the play’s two anarchic wills – threaten and oppose Britain’s de facto powers (Regan and Goneril), they throw the realm into social chaos and send ancient Britain back to a Hobbesian State of Nature.

Chapter four of my dissertation will show how Milton responds to Hobbes with a new model for political authority, one which is unavoidably and perhaps unintentionally Hobbesian, that is, de facto at its core. Titled, “Free to Fall in the Waste Wide Anarchie of Chaos,” this chapter demonstrates how Milton re-conceptualizes political authority in the aftermath of the English Civil Wars and Hobbes’s philosophy. It will closely study Milton’s Satan, Adam and Eve, as well as the poem’s anarchic archon, Chaos. When considering these characters as politically anarchic, Milton’s epic increasingly resembles Hobbes’s political philosophy. Despite his antipathy to Hobbes, Milton cannot escape a few of his fundamental, de facto concepts (covenant theory and pre-social chaos, to name a few). Faced with the task of reaffirming God’s de jure authority, Milton must now confront these ineluctable tenets. However, the problem of free will and the problem of “that anarch old,” Chaos, in Milton’s theodicy force the poet to reluctantly acquiesce to Hobbes’s de factoism (*PL* 2.988). Milton’s aggravated inability to successfully refute
Hobbes leads him to a new iteration of the anarchic will, one internalized with a new psychological tension.\textsuperscript{13} Milton’s solution is to transform the anarchic will into free will.

This dissertation delineates the post-Reformation rift between de jure and de facto bases for political authority and describes what happens when literary characters face new conceptions of power. No longer bound by traditional notions of subject-hood, these characters become anarchic wills, wills terrifyingly free from political constraints. As we see with Hamlet, this new liberation necessarily puts them in opposition to the forces which would try and contain them. Using Foucault’s dynamic understanding of subversion and containment, Stephen Greenblatt argues that the hegemonic society creates Marlowe’s Jew of Malta, the “other,” to solidify its own identity. In this way, Barabas is “brought into being by the Christian society around him” (Greenblatt 1978 299). This dissertation argues that by the end of the sixteenth century, Christian order is no longer the issue. As the anarchic will shows, it is the shift in political order that brings these outsiders into being. Scholars have often opposed the characters I call anarchic wills to Christian order. However, as we believe this dissertation will demonstrate, their proper antagonist is de facto political order.

This dissertation argues that the anarchic will personifies the products of political dysfunction that Hobbes eventually theorizes. As Zachary Lesser (and others) have shown, these plays were not forgotten when the curtain fell. Using Marlowe’s \textit{Jew of Malta} as a case study, Lesser shows how in 1633, nearly forty years after the play’s first performance, “the politics of Marlowe’s play would have been at the center of a larger

\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, Kenneth Borris finds a psychological turn here: “For Satan, Adam, and Eve, Sin introduces them to an inner chaos, and Satan’s journey allegorically amplifies that psychic event” (113). Borris reads Chaos as pure allegory and therefore reduces its dramatic force as a character among like figures. I reach a similar conclusion regarding the internalization of chaos, but my study will focus more on Chaos.
polemical controversy over the future of the English Church” (113). In other words, these dramas had lives of their own, in print and circulation, which affected civic, religious, and as this dissertation argues, the political climate of any time that read them. Early modern English literature was inextricably linked to the historical and political realities that were the subject of political philosophy. Because of this interconnectedness, an intellectual history of de factoism in the early modern period that does not directly engage with the literature of the Renaissance is simply incomplete.
CHAPTER II

DE FACTOISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

No study of early modern political philosophy can begin with anyone but Machiavelli. It is impossible to overstate Machiavelli’s influence and impact on political thought in the sixteenth century. His groundbreaking emphasis on describing, and not prescribing, man as a political animal laid an epistemological foundation upon which we still build knowledge today. His work inspired intellectual titans, like Montaigne and Bacon, who famously believed, “we are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do, and not what they ought to do” (1973 165). My work acknowledges the immense debt to Machiavelli, but I want to move away from such well-trodden ground. In an important way, I want to distance my study from Machiavelli, not to downplay or dismiss Machiavelli’s influence, but merely because I believe an over reliance on Machiavellian politics, especially as received in the tradition of the Elizabethan stage, unfairly categorizes politically subversive characters as “stage Machiavels.” For instance, Shakespeare cites Machiavelli, by name, three times in his entire works, in The Merry Wives of Windsor, I Henry VI, and 3 Henry VI, but while he pejoratively calls characters, “Machiavels,” he seems to use the name as a popular

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14 For some of the most recent work on his reception in England, see Alessandra Petrina’s Machiavelli in the British Isle: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince, especially pages 14-32 for his reception in Elizabethan England.
15 For more on Bacon’s debt to Machiavelli, see Richard Kennington’s “Bacon’s Humanitarian Revision of Machiavelli.”
shorthand for political villain, rather than a touchstone for complex political commentary. Most of Shakespeare’s ambitiously evil creations were not copied from the pages of *The Prince*. In fact, one of this dissertation’s aims is to provide readers with another category of protagonist or antagonist, a more precise, historically sound category that properly reflects the political strife of the time. I take heed of Felix Raab’s warning that we should exercise caution when labeling every “politic villain,” that is characters full of political ambition and empty of morality, an expression of “Machiavelli” (57).

In *The English Face of Machiavelli*, Raab traces the complex and evolving reception of Machiavelli in England. Just as they presaged the Renaissance in terms of poetry and painting, the city-states of Italy experienced the Renaissance in political thinking a century or so before England. In fact, it was not until the seventeenth century that Machiavelli was reevaluated as more insightful than other European men of letters. Raab argues that the political turmoil of the 1640s revivified Machiavelli, specifically his, “preoccupation with *de facto* power … for it was the *de facto* quality of political rule which was in the forefront of [Machiavelli’s] mind,” and as this dissertation will argues, in the minds of English political philosophers and poets (104; 118).

As with most scholarship, Raab’s work has been challenged. Most recently, Alessandra Petrina has critiqued Raab for his oversimplified interpretation of Machiavelli’s critical reception in the period. However shortsighted his interpretations of Machiavelli’s reception may be, Raab nevertheless provides us with useful insights

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16 In *1 Henry VI*, York calls Alanson, “that notorious Machevile;” *3 Henry VI* finds Gloucester, the future Richard III, soliloquizing that he can “set the murtherous Machevil to school;” and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the Host associates political subtlety with Machiavellianism, rhetorically asking, “Am I politic? Am I subtle? Am I a Machivel?” (5.4 74; 3.2 193; 3.1 101).

17 According to Petrina, Raab misinterprets the survival of Machiavelli’s works in Elizabethan England as an uncritical reception of Machiavelli’s works in Elizabethan England, “and presupposes an attitude of unbiased critical study and analysis” in the period (2).
into the de facto strains of Machiavelli’s work. “If the king is king *de jure,*” Raab writes, then, “Machiavelli is irrelevant” (118). “But as soon as the *de jure* nature of kingship begins to be questioned,” he continues, “we have begun to move towards the Machiavellian ambit of *de facto* political power” (118). In any event, both had the most significant impact on English political thought *after* the effects of de factoism were dramatized on the stage.

Ultimately, I want to give Machiavelli due credit for directing attention away from normative ideals and towards material realities. At the risk of oversimplification, the distinction between reality and right, de facto and de jure, will be the most pivotal dichotomy in my dissertation. Rather than spark a new field of de facto political theory, Machiavelli’s work initiated a backlash of de jure philosophies in the sixteenth century. Coupled with the Reformation tensions between church and state authority in the 1530s, English political thought in the 1500s was overwhelmingly concerned with the rights of sovereign rule. Machiavelli ushered in the split, but it would take more than a century for his work to find expression in the politics of England.

Written three years after Machiavelli’s *Prince* Desiderius Erasmus’s *Education of a Christian Prince* (1516) is a direct response to the Florentine’s controversial work (Jardine vi). In it, Erasmus tries to correct Machiavelli’s pragmatism through prescriptive lessons of what ideal sovereignty looks like. Erasmus directs his pedagogy to the soon-to-be Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, and he begins his lesson by sanctifying sovereignty through appeals to divine rule. Erasmus opens his lesson writing, “there is something beyond human nature, something wholly divine, in absolute rule over free and willing subjects” (1). For Erasmus, however, absolutism does not follow from this divine right.
Because Christian princes are still bound by a moral sense of justice, they cannot arbitrarily enact laws. Rather, they must ensure that their laws, “conform to the ideals of justice and honour” (79). When justice dictates the law, then, “the prince is obeyed by all and himself obeys the law” (79). As we will see, the progression from justice to law to prince is the critical distinction of de jure claims to power.18

Erasmus has been called the “prince of the humanists,” and as scholars have shown, the impact of classical humanism on political thought was exhaustively profound.19 Certainly it influenced the political service and writing of his English friend, Thomas More. In reaction to the Protestant tenet of sola Scriptura, Christopher Hill notes how, “More in 1530 said that it was a ‘pestilential heresy; to suppose that ‘we should believe nothing but plain Scripture’” (1993 15). For humanists, like Erasmus and More, Truth had many inroads, Scriptural and Classical alike, and as new problems arose for court and clergy, these humanists looked to older authorities for inspiration and substantiation. After the Reformation, influential thinkers like Thomas Cranmer, Richard Sampson, and Thomas Cromwell, faced with the undesirable task of justifying Henry VIII’s newly acquired authority, relied on Grecian and Roman authorities as much as they relied on Scripture.20 However, unbeknownst to these “court humanists,” citing ancient writers like Cicero introduced complications into once straightforward concepts

18 For more on the education of princes, the problem of Elizabeth’s successor, and Shakespeare’s drama, see Aysha Pollnitz’s “Educating Hamlet and Prince Hal,” in which she writes, “1 and 2 Henry IV show that the prince had precisely the sort of upbringing that Erasmus had claimed would fashion only idle bullies and tyrants” (129-130).
19 See Peltonen’s Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570-1640, Tuck’s Natural Rights Theories Their Origin and Development, Burgess’s British Political Thought, 1500-1660, and Hankins’s “Exclusivist Republicanism and the Non-Monarchical Republic.”
20 Though they still relied heavily on Scripture to justify their king’s desires, as Sampson writes, “The word of God is to obey the king, not he bishop of Rome” (Sampson in Burgess 36). English humanists of the 1500s also looked to the late-medieval Italian principalities as models, as Peltonen and Burgess have shown (Peltonen 9).
Concepts like republicanism, for instance, which shifted depending on which translation a scholar followed, and could mean the difference between a “citizen” of a commonwealth or a “subject” of a kingdom (Hankins 460; Burgess 52-3).

Significantly, therefore, Sir Thomas Elyot begins his Book named the Governor (1531) with a clarification on the Latin roots of the “public weal.” Elyot draws a distinction between the “public” (in Latin, *populus*) and the “commonality” (in Latin, *plebs*), but his project is one of the earlier works of sixteenth-century political philosophy, not an etymology textbook. Elyot wants to make it clear that when he endorses the public weal, he means the wealth of the non-commoners, the noble elite (1-2). This is because, for Elyot, a “common weal” (or *res plebian*) would, “take away order from all things,” and without order nothing remains, “except some man would imagine eftsoons *Chaos*, which for some is expound a confuse mixture” (2). The mutability of this singular word encapsulates the political problem of the early modern period, and as Elyot’s explanation demonstrates, the problem *is* the threat of mutability, or the confused mixture of “Chaos.”

Exacerbating this confusion was the impending break with the Catholic Church. Kevin Sharpe explains how, “For all that it underlines the vital authority of the word, the Reformation rendered Scripture, God’s Word, unstable and multiple” (108). The Word was essential not only for eternal salvation of the soul, but for terrestrial justification of

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21 Hobbes, too, would remark on the danger of classical texts, writing, “there was never anything so dearly bought, as these western parts have sought the learning of the Greeks and Latin tongues” because “by reading of these Greek and Latin authors” men have developed the habit of “favoring tumults” (*Leviathan* 141). Tuck also notes how Essex’s 1590s circle expressed a renewed interest in Tacitus and took, “a Tacitean approach,” to its interpretations of Richard II’s reign, thus contributing the Earl’s rebellion, discussed in chapter two (1993 105).

22 Sir Thomas Smith’s *De republica Anglorum* (1583), for example, defines a commonwealth as a cohort formed when men come together and are, “united by a common accord and covenants among themselves” (10). The printed marginal notation labels this section of Smith’s work with the word, “Respublica,” so that early modern readers could quickly access this topical issue.
political rule. As Sharpe notes, the instability of Scripture meant more than just religious unease, it also had, “profound consequences for Christian princes” (108). When the Reformation challenged Scripture, in other words, it challenged the Scriptural, de jure, bases for authority. Written for Henry VIII three years prior to the Act of Supremacy and during the tense time when the king sought the annulment of his first marriage, Elyot’s *Governor* sought to reinforce the ecclesiastical rights of Henry’s sovereignty. Since Henry needed to circumvent or supersede the Pope’s divine authority, Elyot’s work exemplifies the kind of de jure political philosophy that immediately follows the English Reformation in that it works hard to legitimize the king’s new authority through divine righteousness. Without the Pope’s intercessional approval, Henry lost a powerful justification for the power he held.

When Elyot writes, “Of the noble and most excellent virtue named justice,” he begins the chapter with his account of Cicero’s mythological, political pre-history:

Tully saith that at the beginning when the multitude of people were oppressed by them that abounded in possessions and substance, they espying someone which excelled in virtue and strength, to him they repaired; who ministering equity, when he had defended the poor men from injury, finally he retained together and governed the greater persons with the less, in equal and indifferent order.

Wherefore they called that man a king. (159)

In Cicero’s version, endorsed by Elyot, material possession does not grant sovereignty. Instead, an equity-based justice and virtue draws the impoverished together and eventually comes to rule the wealthy and powerful. Cicero’s sovereign warrants obedience by right of his egalitarian sense of justice, “the most excellent and
incomparable virtue,” which, “is so necessary and expedient for the governor of a public weal that without it none other virtue may be commendable” (159). Contrary to Hobbes, who says our natural rights do not come from anyone or anything, Elyot reminds his readers, “The ancient civilizations do say justice is a will perpetual and constant, which giveth to every man his right” (159). We will see how later political philosophies of the century turned to the law (both the ancient Common law and the codified Constitution law) and eventually more universal “natural” rights, but Elyot’s work reveals the mixture of classical and Christian authorities indicative of the early sixteenth century.

Some de jure theories sought legal grounds for authority. These included appeals to antique laws, appeals to English common law, and appeals to English constitutional law. As far back as the thirteenth century, Henry of Bracton argued for the legal boundaries of monarchy. Integral to Bracton’s argument, of course, was the divine nature of justice-inscribed laws. According to Bracton, “Law is a general command, the decision of judicious men, the restraint of offences knowingly or unwittingly committed, the general agreement of the res publica. Justice proceeds from God, assuming that justice lies in the Creator, [jus from man], and thus jus and lex are synonymous” (22). Bracton’s influence stretched into the later sixteenth century and informed “ancient constitutionalists,” like Edward Coke, who sought to invoke historical precedence and the integrity of common law to constrain monarchical power vis-à-vis delineated rights.23

Not all de jure theories of sovereignty appeal to ancient tradition or law, however, and by the end of the sixteenth century, writers like George Buchanan and Richard Hooker had developed fleshed-out theories of natural rights, the Law of Nature, and even

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23 See Burgess’s Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution in which he explores Coke’s complex relationship with the Magna Carta, a document of common law, and Parliament, a body who grants that law a practical agency (176).
proto-Hobbesian States of Nature. Buchanan’s *De Jure Regni Aput Scotos*, for instance, describes a pre-Hobbesian, explicitly Christian, “Law of Nature,” where God has, “created in [man] an inner light by which he should distinguish between good and evil. Some call this faculty Nature, others call it the Law of Nature,” but Buchanan believes, “it to be of divine origin” (23). For Buchanan, individuals coalesce into social groups, not because pure reason dictates it, but because our innate, God-given understanding of morality, what Plato (and others) would call, “Right Reason,” is naturally written on our hearts by God. Buchanan flirts with a theory of natural rights independent of divine intervention, but ultimately validates his theory with divinity. Even as late sixteenth-century thinkers like Buchanan edge towards a more modern understanding of political authority, they never abandon the underlying divinity of social politics. Robin Headlam Wells concludes, “not even the radical Buchanan denied that kings ultimately derived their authority from God” (122). Divine order was at the root of all de jure theories. Simply the title of a 1569 collection of sermons and homilies printed “to be read in every Parish Church” reveals the deep connection between church and state. *An homilie against disobedience and wylful rebellion* offers hope that England, “shall live in true obedience,

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24 Talbert explains Hooker’s solution, which was “the exercise of power based on wisdom and true religion” (65). That is, “By God’s word manifested differently but nonetheless definitely in the Law of a commonweal,” and importantly, “it could be seen that England already had an excellent policy to which the ecclesiastical one was geared . . . the English monarch” (49). Hooker’s appeals to Natural and civic law are rooted in Divine revelation.


26 J.W. Allen also describes how, in Buchanan’s theory, the sovereign only rules through consent of the ruled, that the authority of the people is essentially, “inabrogabilis” (337). However, though, “Political authority can be rationally conceived only as derived from the people,” in Buchanan’s system, Allen points out that it is, “held conditionally” (340). Hobbes agrees that power is derived from the people, but that is should be held unconditionally, and that it does not matter, as it does for Buchanan, if “A king . . . assumes powers not given to him and disregards law” (Allen 339). Buchanan counsels us to treat these kinds of rulers as tyrants and enemies to God. Hobbes would say the de facto ruler necessarily assumes power and circumscribes (or circumnavigates) law.
both in our most merciful king in heaven, and to our most Christian Queen in earth” (*An homilie against disobedience*).

As the example of Buchanan shows, despite these steps towards more empirical foundations, the sixteenth century never completely abandons supra-natural bases for political authority. Perez Zagorin explains, “In the Middle Ages, and right down to Richard Hooker at the end of the sixteenth century, natural law was thought of as embodying ethical rules which were prior to and above the enactments of earthly communities. Knowledge of these rules was implanted in men’s minds by God” (175-6). As Glenn Burgess writes of John Ponet, the Protestant protestor under Mary I, his, “coherence lay…in its religious conviction, in the search for political weapons that could be pressed to serve in God’s cause” (2009 65). The same could be said of Thomas More’s protest against Henry VIII’s Oath of Supremacy or of Sir Philip Sidney’s service and sacrifice in the Thirty Years War. Compared to the seventeenth century, when, “political ideas were becoming detached from the religious associations in which they had been steeped, and were taking a decided secular tone,” the political philosophies of the 1500s, even at their most humanist, classical, or republican, were sought de jure justifications for their positions (Zagorin 4). With so many entities vying for power, new justifications were sought out and considered. These new considerations, along with the other, violently radical issues raised in the wake of the English Reformation, forced authorities to justify themselves anew and precipitated the rapid developments in English

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27 According to Raab, Ponet, “working wholly within a theological framework,” “converted conservative into revolutionary doctrine” (19).
28 For more on Sidney’s political philosophy and its theological underpinnings, see Talbert pp 89-117.
political philosophy. Lucien Febvre describes the chaos of the sixteenth century as, “Theologians quarrelling with each other; princes following now one of them, now another, in the space of a few months...these were the disparate elements in a confused situation” (279). As Philip Lorenzo has recently demonstrated, the intense debate and vehement declarations of what constitutes, “jurisdiction,” “is symptomatic of the difficulties facing any conceptualization of sovereignty in the early seventeenth century” (3). Hobbes’s solution was to change the discourse and disregard any and all appeals to sovereign jurisdiction. After the trial and execution of Charles I, he saw no alternative.

The term “de facto” has its first recorded instance, in English application, in 1602 (“de facto”). This supports Woolf’s observation that, “one begins to note an embryotic tendency toward ‘de factoism’” at the end of the sixteenth century (37). Despite earlier writers, “like Bodin, Montaigne, and the neo-stoics, particularly Justus Lipsius,” Woolf holds that, “Only after 1640 did the issue of rule by conquest, and the legitimacy of a de facto regime, acquire more than a theoretical interest,” when traditional, de jure justifications, “gradually yielded to more pragmatic attitudes” (37; 39). For Hobbes, nothing was more pragmatic than peace after the turmoil of the English Civil Wars, and he would explain his theory in the first comprehensive work of political philosophy

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29 For example, Sir Thomas Smith’s *De republica Anglorum* (1583), which provides an early justification for constitutional monarchy, and Charles Merbury’s *A Briefe Discourse of Royall Monarchie* (1581), which explains the benefit of hereditary monarchy and the dangers of elected ones.

30 “de facto,” *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973. p. 651. See also “The ’de facto’ act of Henry VII” from *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* (p. 1-12) and Kenneth Pickthorn’s *Early Tudor Government: Henry VII* (p. 151-66) for the late-fifteenth-century precedent, where it should be noted, “the phrases de facto and de jure do not occur…and that it draws no distinction and makes no comparison between the two sorts of king” (Pickthorn in Daly 105). As we will see, this is the crucial difference between the late-medieval and the Renaissance understanding of monarchical authority.

31 See also Burgess in “Usurpation, Obligation and Obedience in the Thought of the Engagement Controversy,” whose “providentialist de facto arguments” strike me as contradictory: “Ascham, like Rous, advances a de facto theory that is fundamentally providentialist. In one way or another God provides governments for the purpose of providing peace and stability necessary for the individual to lead a life of piety and godliness” (523-4).
written in English, his *Leviathan*, published in 1651.\textsuperscript{32} But his work was not entirely *sui generis*.

As said at the beginning of this chapter, Machiavelli’s influence on sympathetic theorists lay somewhat dormant during the sixteenth century. Towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign, however, the branches of his work were bearing fruit. For instance, Hugo Grotius, the Dutch legal scholar, takes up Machiavelli’s methodology and tries to interpret the world, not as it should be, but as it is. Grotius represents one of the most important thinkers of his time because he represents the seventeenth-century’s new empiricism. As new scientific discoveries challenged the inherited wisdom of the ancients and philologists like Lorenzo Valla challenged the Church’s historical claims with undeniable linguistic proof, early modern thinkers scrambled to find solid, incontrovertible truth claims across religious or historical ideologies. This new historical awareness – “the significance of historical difference,” as Thomas Greene calls it – is one of the defining characteristics of the early modern period, and because of it, deductive, universal political truths, or “natural rights,” became increasingly important for political philosophers (171). With normative ethics on the ropes, empiricists like Grotius attempted to discern natural rights which transcend politics, religion, and history. According to Deborah Shuger, while he was studying ancient jurisprudence, Grotius found that, “Roman law functioned as both descriptive and a normative science; it was open to theorization precisely because it was felt to embody rational principles of justice and fairness” (65). Grotius’s legacy, therefore, is that he begins to disentangle law from

\textsuperscript{32} Even Hobbes’s detractors, like Hugh Trevor-Roper, give him credit for his writing. In fact, the only reason Trevor-Roper includes Hobbes in his essays on *Men and Events* is because his style is compact and free of rhetoric, and he fit all his thoughts into one compact statement, *Leviathan*, that was “timely” (236-7).
justice, descriptive from normative ethics. His *Laws of War and Peace* (1625) established
the minimal, core beliefs that any society must acknowledge: the fundamental right to
self-preservation and the fact that no social life is possible if life can be indiscriminately
extinguished (Tuck 1989 25).

Though Grotius is almost never mentioned by name, his work echoes throughout
the political philosophy of Hobbes (Tuck 1989 62).\(^{33}\) While Grotius provided Hobbes
with a deductive model for arriving at truth claims, Francis Bacon provided the young
philosopher with a new epistemology. Bacon’s place as the father of the scientific
revolution of the seventeenth century stems, in part, from his materialism. Inspired by
Montaigne’s solipsism and no longer satisfied with inherited knowledge of the world,
Bacon sought to empirically test his personal thoughts about the world. Bacon’s
methodology illustrates how observable, physical, and material proof slowly took
precedent over faith based speculation and reliance on scholastic models. At the root of
this experimental model lies the material reality of the world. According to Zagorin, the
seventeenth century represents, “the declining theological-transcendental mode of
thought [that] was at last disintegrated and the first phase of the Naturalistic-immanental
mode of thought consummated” (3). The seventeenth-century’s new empiricism, which
denied hylomorphism’s formal aspects and relied exclusively on matter for its truth
claims, established a mechanistic, material worldview. With increased attention to the
tangible matter of the universe, the seventeenth century departs from earlier modes of
political thought. Earlier medieval modes, like Sir John Fortescue’s understanding of
English law, which Ellis Sandoz explains, rely on, “the historically ancient and the

\(^{33}\) Martinich also notes the conspicuous absence of Grotius’s name in Hobbes’s writing and speculates,
“that it was because Hobbes wanted to look as original as possible” (1999 108).
ontologically higher law – eternal, divine, natural – [which] are woven together to compose a single harmonious texture” (Sandoz 7). For the seventeenth-century political philosopher, ancient history and ontology are called into question. As a result, the harmonious texture that Fortescue weaves comes apart and political thinkers rely on them less and less. With less need for metaphysical criteria, political philosophers could push earlier theories, like those concerned with natural rights, into new territory. ³⁴ This material reality would inform all of Hobbes’s writing and thinking. According to John Aubrey, Hobbes’s friend and first biographer, Bacon, “would often say that he better liked Mr. Hobbes’s taking his thoughts, then any of the other, because he understood what he wrote” (Vol. 1 331). The importance of tactile reality over superstitious rumor would be one thing Hobbes understood so clearly. ³⁵

One of the period’s strictest materialists, Hobbes likens the entire universe to a mechanical device. From the movement of the stars to the movement of the body, “life is but a motion of limbs,” he tells us in the introduction to *Leviathan*, continuing that the heart is a spring; the nerves, strings; and the joints wheels (3). This materialism would lay the groundwork for Hobbes’s empiricism and his de facto political philosophy. Material matter is indispensable for Hobbes’s worldview since reality is concrete, hard, and, importantly, non-normative. ³⁶ Historically or culturally pliable things like ethics, morals, and even language do not have physical counterparts in the material world. This is not to say that Hobbes cannot recognize the influence of non-material fancies on the real world.

³⁴ Indeed, this is the critical moment when theorists start writing less about subjects’ duty and more about citizens’ rights. See Zagorin p. 169-70.
³⁵ According to G.A.J. Rogers, we find Bacon’s influence in Hobbes’s, “commitment to the utilitarian benefits that the natural sciences can generate” (415).
³⁶ Hobbes’s relativism is made clear in his musings on language: “For these words of good, evil, and contemptible are even used with relation to the person that useth them, there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves” (*Leviathan* 28-9).
His explanation of witchcraft is telling. “For as for witches,” he writes, “I think not that their witchcraft is any real power, but yet that they are justly punished, for the false belief they have that they can do such mischief, joined with their purpose to do it if they can, their trade being nearer to a new religion than to a craft or science” (L 10-11). In other words, Hobbes could distinguish between imaginary fancies, which were came from the confused combination of material realities, and the concrete impact those fancies could lead to. His materialism led to his staunch plenism, a feature of his worldview refuted through Robert Boyle’s experiments with the air pump, but one that still has important influence on his political philosophy. Though Hobbes would never utilize experiments to substantiate his claims, a fact, among other prejudices, that kept him out of the Royal Academy of Science, he nevertheless took Bacon’s notion of a Novum Organum to heart. In fact, though Hobbes was wary of citing ancient experts, like Aristotle, simply because they were ancient, and though he disdained appeals to abstract metaphors as foundations for philosophical claims, his own political system was based on an intellectual exercise of fancy.

To ground his philosophic principles, Hobbes asks us to imagine the world of pre-political, pre-social man. Using what he knows about human nature in society, Hobbes deduces what life outside society (in this earlier “State of Nature”) must have been like. Briefly, the State of Nature is the metaphoric pre-history of civilization that Hobbes uses as the groundwork for his political philosophy. It is the primordial ooze out of which politics evolves, and because “Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind,” it is a world of pre-social equality (L 74). This is no egalitarian utopia, however. In the State of Nature life is a chaotic, zero-sum game, because, as Hobbes
explains, “if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end...endeavor to destroy or subdue one another” (L 75). There is no property, no “mine or thine” – “but only that to be every man’s, that he can get; and for so long as he can keep” (L 78). This state of equality leads to a “continual fear and danger of violent death,” which leads to Hobbes’s most famous declaration, “the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (L 76). An apolitical state, this condition has no justice (or injustice). Significantly, its amorality stems from a lack of leadership. “Where there is no common power,” Hobbes writes, “there is no law; where no law, no injustice,” because, “The desires and other passions of man are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions that proceed from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them” (76).

The amorality of Hobbes’s Nature is somewhat unique among early modern thinkers. For the influential medieval scholar, Henry of Bracton, and his early modern student, Buchanan, men in the State of Nature have an innate, God-given sense of justice. In *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae*, Bracton writes, “Natural law is that which nature, that is, God himself, taught all living things” (26). When injustice occurs, it occurs because men take action against that divine lesson. Furthermore, “Justice proceeds from God,” Bracton explains, “and thus *jus* and *lex* are synonymous” (22). The innate sense of justice establishes the criteria for civic laws, and can therefore be used to establish sovereignty, in the older, de jure model. Bracton describes the complex interplay of *lex* and *rex*: “The king must not be under man but under God and under the law, because law makes the king. Let him therefore bestow upon the law what the law bestows upon him, namely rule and power,” thus rendering the king unable to do
anything, “save what he can do de jure (33). Like all de jure claims to power, power follows law and law follows justice in Buchanan’s State of Nature and Bracton’s Law of Nature. Preston King explains that Bodin takes a similar approach, for “[i]n Bodin we discover a proponent of order but also of justice, not merely on the assumption that justice was as desirable as order, but on the additional assumption that there could be no order without justice” (53). For proponents of de jure political authority, civic order flows from some morally superior source.

For Hobbes, however, justice follows law and law follows power. In other words, sovereign authority determines laws and laws determine what is just and unjust, not vice versa. The State of Nature is a world without justice. This was one of Hobbes’s more radical sociological deductions and resulted in many of the charges of atheism and heresy against him. Essentially all earlier political theories appealed to some sense of eternal, pre-existing justice. Indeed, the divine right of kings is only an argument for a particular monarch if the divine power bestowing that right is just. In his recent history of Homo sapiens, Yuval Noah Harari poses the most important question facing anthropological sociologists and political historians today: “how did humans organize themselves in mass-cooperation networks, when they lack the biological instincts necessary to sustain such networks?” (131). Harari asks his question in a chapter aptly title, “There is No Justice in History,” and, significantly, he reaches the same conclusion as Hobbes. “The short answer,” Harari writes, “is that humans created imagined orders and devised scripts” (131). Harari never mentions Hobbes by name, but one of the imagined orders he

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37 According to Ken Pennington, Bracton, “underscored the unity of the law and the prince. Law made his prince; therefore the king could only make law that respected the integrity of the legal system and recognized the limitations that law imposed on his sovereignty” (429). See also, Constance Jordan’s “Interpreting Statute in Measure for Measure” for an exploration of Bracton in Shakespeare’s problem play, especially pages 103-4.
goes on to describe is our imagined sense of justice, which we sustain through a common belief in its superiority. In other words, twenty-first century anthropologists, historians, and sociologists are returning to ideas set down by Hobbes in the middle of the seventeenth century to help explain the origins of our social order.

Since justice does not occur naturally in the world, Hobbes dismisses it as an intrinsic quality of the world. As far as Hobbes is concerned, the only innate, “natural” qualities mankind possesses in his uncivilized state are the desire for self-preservation and the ability to reason. The desire for self-preservation generates hostility because each individual feels compelled to protect their lives by any means necessary. Reason is paramount for our success as a society because through it, we logically conclude that our best hope for self-preservation is peace, that we should “seek peace and follow it,” which is a conclusion “found out by reason,” according to Hobbes (L 80; 79). This rational conclusion forms the basis of the social contract, which is the logical decision, arrived at from a passion for survival, that we should relinquish our right to self-preservation and create social order through a universal consent to be governed. “For as long as every man holdeth this right of doing anything he liketh,” Hobbes writes, “so long are all men in the condition of war” (L 80). Entering into the social contract means giving up the right of doing anything we like and ending the condition of war.

It also means submitting to an authority that can enact laws, and, more importantly, compel obedience to that civic-stabilizing legislation. Hobbes describes this as the moment when, “every man should say to every man I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner” (L 109). Prior
to this agreement, which constitutes Hobbes’s famous “social contract,” the State of
Nature instills fear and anxiety in every anarchic individual. Hamlet experiences a similar
fear in his anarchic state, and Hobbes’s description of the fear sounds remarkably like
Hamlet, who has “no pleasure, but on the contrary a great deal of grief, in keeping
company where there is no power able to over-awe them all” (L 75). The authority each
man authorizes is the power to over-awe them all. The amalgamation of this authority
and each social-contractually obligated citizen forms the Commonwealth, or “Leviathan.”

Despite his reputation as a hardline absolutist, the core of Hobbes’s theory could
actually be used to support any power. Using Charles’s execution as a starting point,
Preston King says the generally accepted understanding of Hobbes’s theory, “would
imply that it was wrong and mistaken to overturn King Charles,” however, Hobbes would
actually be quick to point out, “that, having overturned him, it would be equally wrong to
challenge whoever subsequently and firmly held the reins of power” (58). In other words,
Hobbes wanted firm, consistent political authority, not factions vying for their “rightful”
place on the throne. According to King, Hobbes, “was content to demonstrate that no
other form of government, if stable, was essentially different;” thus, Hobbes’s “theory of
sovereignty as surely destroyed the theory of the divine right of kings as Locke
demolished Filmer” (58, my emphasis). This is why Hobbes could have been used to
justify pledges of allegiance in the Engagement Controversy of the seventeenth century.

G.E. Aylmer explains how, “writers urged acceptance of the Commonwealth and
subscription to its loyalty oath, called the Engagement, on the basis of what has been
accurately, if inelegantly, called ‘de factoism’. On this view, obedience is owed and
allegiance due to any government which is effectively in power and affords its subjects
minimal protection against external enemies and internal disorders, regardless of its righteousness *de jure*” (141). For Hobbes, therefore, and for the other de facto theorists who wrote in the seventeenth century, the pragmatism of peace drove political thought. There is a clearly noticeable rise of pragmatic attitudes towards authority, accompanying the developments of sixteenth-century English humanism (Peltonen 196). This pragmatism was also to affect politics in the following century.

However, though de facto theories like Hobbes’s would gain traction in the 1600s, de jurism still persists in the seventeenth century. In John Wallace’s overview of pamphlets during the Engagement Controversy, he notes “how embarrassed the Rump Parliament was by its newly-acquired power, and how urgently it appealed to providence to justify its authority” (384). One of the most important de jure theorists for the republic, Anthony Ascham, bases his interpretation of the Engagement controversy on providence. As Irene Coltman explains, “Ascham showed how to break an oath without being foresworn,” because endorsed equivocation as a viable means of self-protection (203). According to Ascham, if you swear an oath with the intention of keeping it, only to break it down the line, then you maintain your innocence. Swearing allegiance to someone without authority should be punished, since, according to Ascham, “one can only be loyal to the powerful” (Coltman 203). Since for Ascham God’s will dictates earthly powers, continuing to honor a pledge of allegiance to a dethroned ruler actually works against God’s will (Coltman 205). There is a certain amount of defeatism to Ascham’s pragmatism, which is why Zagorin says he represents, “the malaise of the sceptic” (66). And while some, like Coltman, consider him a republican de factoist,

Ascham’s de factoism still contains bold traces of de jure justifications for power, since it often relies on divine principles, either scriptural or practical. Saying, as he does, that we should obey the powers that be because nothing happens without God’s will is not de factoism, but the hurried construction of a system using the crumbling bricks of de jurism. The intense desire to justify the authority that Parliament already held reveals how England’s “crisis of authority” was about more than just who had authority. It was fundamentally about what legitimated that authority.

Even though Ascham’s theory flirts with the kind of totalizing arbitrariness of Hobbes’s work, its emphasis on the pragmatism of providence reflects a resignation that relies on divine order.\(^39\) It should be noted that theological justifications for both royalists and roundheads never completely vanish in the 1600s. Another important proponent of divine order, this time for the Royalists, was Robert Filmer. His *Patriarcha* (1680) is one of the most important examples of a de jure justification for absolute monarchy and the divine right of kings. Filmer and Hobbes both agree that absolute sovereignty is the ideal form of government, but they come to their shared conclusion by significantly different methods.\(^40\) Filmer looks to Scripture for a holy blueprint for political hierarchy. Since, the “subordination of children is the fountain of all regal authority, by the ordination of God himself,” then, “the exercise of supreme jurisdiction” is the king’s purview, making him “Pater Patriae” (57; 61). If God gave Adam supreme authority over his family, Filmer argues, and if we are all descendants of Adam, then submitting to the rule of a monarch means submitting to the heredity of our common ancestor.

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\(^{39}\) Ascham’s quasi-neo-stoicism will be explored in chapter three when I study Hamlet’s act five transformation from anarchic will to providential de factoist.

\(^{40}\) For Filmer and de factoism see James Daly’s *Sir Robert Filmer and English Political Thought*, pp. 104-123.
Filmer’s work is important because it signals the death knell of such hard line
divine justifications for political sovereignty. Published towards the end of the
seventeenth century, Filmer’s work recalls the much older works of Erasmus and Smith.
And though James I and Charles I had each espoused a fervent belief in the divine right
of kings (the former less so than his son), by the 1600s the English populace needed more
than just Bible verses to legitimate their sovereign authority. Locke’s response to Filmer,
in his *First Treatise of Government* (1690), encapsulates the epistemological shift
initiated by Bacon. Locke dismisses Filmer’s claim on this simple grounds that, as Roger
Woolhouse writes, “we cannot show of any particular ruler that he is one of Adam’s
heirs” (525). Locke’s matter-of-fact dismissal of Filmer reflects both the new-empirical
logic and the growing disregard for supra-natural justifications for political authority.

Locke’s work also reveals that after the slow dissolve of the more metaphysical
bases for sovereignty, political philosophers were left to reckon with Hobbes, whether
they wanted to or not. There is a clearly noticeable rise of pragmatic attitudes towards
authority, accompanying the “shift in the development of English humanism,” as Markku
Peltonen writes (196). Driving political philosophy’s turn towards de factoism more than
anything, however, was the political strife and civil war of the 1640s. The execution of
Charles I and the establishment of Cromwell’s Protectorate turned the potential energy of
de factoism kinetic. The Rump Parliament’s problem of precedent was solved, Zagorin
suggests, when de factoism becomes, “the unofficial theory of the commonwealth”
(63).

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41 By the 1640s, the Levellers start churning out politically liberal pamphlets. The fear and apprehension of
crumbling political authorities, which characterizes Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas, turns hopeful and
optimistic in these pamphlets. See Wallace’s “The Engagement Controversy 1649-1652 An Annotated List
of Pamphlets.”
As we will see, the emergence of de facto realities and the simultaneous challenge to de jure theories, can be better understood with an attention to the literary characters prior to, and after, the English Civil Wars. The difference between political legitimacy and sovereign power is a dominant theme of Shakespeare’s drama from as early in his career as *King John* (ca. 1595). An early exchange from the play reveals the stakes for the titular ruler. When challenged by the French ambassador, King John rests his authority on his, “strong possession and our right,” to which the blunt Queen Mother immediately clarifies, “Your strong possession much more than your right” (1.1 39-40). Furthermore, anarchic wills appear over and over again in Shakespeare. Troilus, at his most mentally anguished, expresses his anxiety as a conflict of authority:

O madness of discourse,

That cause sets up with and against itself!

Bi-fold authority, where reason can revolt

Without perdition, and loss assume all reason

Without revolt. (5.2 142-46)

Troilus experiences the dread of the anarchic will. In their initial application, de facto theories are frightening because they shake the foundations of all epistemological belief. The following chapters explore how the above outlined shift, from de jure theories to de facto theories, are reflected in the imaginative literature of Shakespeare and Milton.

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42 Other scholars have noted proto-Hobbesian strains in Shakespeare. Schulman, for instance, reads Troilus’s dismissal of reason as an antithetical expression of Hobbes’s first Law of Nature. When Troilus begs Hector to embrace “manhood and honour,” Schulman glosses it as a rejection of the Hobbesian notion that “unadulterated ‘reason’ would not just advise ending this war, it would advise avoiding all physical peril” (*T&C* 2.2 46; Schulman 43).
CHAPTER III

“BE RUL’D BY ME:” AUTHORITY & ANARCHY IN SHAKESPEARE’S HENRIAD

“In his essay, “Of Great Place,” Francis Bacon advises those who wish to “[p]reserve the right of [their] place” to “stir not questions of jurisdiction;” but “rather assume thy right in silence and de facto,” and not, “voice it with your claims and challenges” (Bacon 1667). Bacon does not warn courtiers about overestimating or overextending their power, and he does not tell them to downplay their authority. He says they should not vocally raise the issue of their power. The more effective way to maintain position, Bacon explicitly writes, is to assume a de facto claim to power, a power that speaks for itself. What Bacon suggests, therefore, is the essence of de facto political philosophy: that material control matters more than the stated reasons behind that control. Bacon’s advice also offers an important explanation for why de facto powers have supremacy. When he warns those of great place to keep silent about their status, he keeps them from initiating a conversation about their power. As this chapter will show, when authorities attempt to verbally justify their power or legitimate their position with a de jure claim, they reveal the weakness of their claim and open up a dialogue that inevitably questions their authority.

Bacon served Queen Elizabeth during the final years of her reign, and as such, had ample opportunity to witness the detrimental results of political power-jockeying. Certainly the most dramatic and literal attempt to seize power in her waning years was
the Earl of Essex’s failed rebellion in 1601. After periodic and intermittent conflicts with Elizabeth and after deserting his undesirable post in Ireland, the “dazzling but paranoid” Essex set off through the streets of London to demand an audience with the queen and reclaim his place at court (Guy 310). Essex, the erstwhile darling of Elizabeth’s court, expected others to join his small entourage as it marched towards the palace. His faith was disastrously misplaced. The rebellion fizzled and Essex was tried for treason. Even though Essex was a friend and former colleague of Bacon, Attorney General Coke saw no reason why Bacon should not serve the prosecution. A doomed man at the moment of his apprehension, Essex was found guilty of treason and promptly executed. One must wonder if Essex was on Bacon’s mind when he extolled the virtues of political silence.

Of course, the most tantalizing aspect of this historical moment for literary scholars is the role Shakespeare played in Essex’s rebellion. In an effort to work the populace into a rebellious frenzy, Essex commissioned a revival of Shakespeare’s Richard II at the Globe the day before his revolt. Perhaps the most circulated anecdote about this event is Elizabeth’s supposed reaction to the incident, “I am Richard II, know ye not that?” If Elizabeth is Richard in this apocryphal telling, then Essex could be a failed Bullingbrook. For when we dig deeper into Essex’s state of mind after his revolt, we find expressions of the anarchic will. In a letter written while incarcerated, Essex laments, “The indissoluble duty which I owe to Her Majesty is only the duty of allegiance, which I will, nor never can, fail in,” but also that he is “freed, being

43 Penned by the pseudonymous, “R. Doleman,” the contentious and explosive Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England (1594) was dedicated to, “the Right Honorable the Earle of Essex of Her Majesty’s Privy Councell,” whom Doleman considers, “no man is in more high & eminent a place or dignitie at this day in our realm, then your selfe” (Doleman). Scholars once considered Doleman’s penname to belong to Robert Parsons, the late sixteenth-century English Jesuit, but we now has substantial reasons to doubt his authorship, see Houliston.
dismissed, discharged, and disabled by Her Majesty” (Devereux 500). Essex writes of feeling conflicted, torn between his duty to Her Majesty and the realization that Her Majesty may be unjust, “I can neither yield myself to be guilty, or this imputation laid upon me to be just” (501). In his letter, Essex exhibits symptoms characteristic of the anarchic will as he expresses a new awareness of political power’s amorality. The image of a distraught figure, struggling against a de facto power will haunt the other anarchic wills studied in this dissertation and in the plays this chapter examines.

Elizabeth was much more cunning than Shakespeare’s Richard II, but she was correct to read contemporary politics into the history plays of her day. History plays of the early modern period were politically charged, commenting more on the state at the time of their production than the time of their setting. Written between 1595 and 1599, Shakespeare’s Henriad is composed of four plays that feature three monarchs. The dramas that depict Richard II’s deposition, Henry IV’s troubled reign, and Henry V’s victories abroad, feature rulers desperately trying to legitimize their authority, both theologically and legally. At the end of their individual plays and at the end of the entire tetralogy, however, we see that it is only the physical act of force that acquires or maintains authority for these rulers. When the dust settles, these kings are kings; not through any normative notion of authority, but because they control the material of the kingdom. Significantly, none of these rulers claim their authority on this de facto basis. Instead, these three separate rulers repeatedly rely on theological or legal justifications – that is to say, de jure justifications – to prove the legitimacy of their reign.

With the underlying emphasis on material conquest, Shakespeare opens up an avenue of skepticism towards their attempts to justify authority through the law or the
church. These plays depict individuals who recognize the paucity of de jure claims and the reality of de factoism’s material foundations. The anarchic wills of these plays find themselves at the end of this avenue of skepticism, navigating the treacherous alleys of unbelief. The Henriad features anarchic wills as kings, roguish knights, fathers and sons, and even early modern theater-goers. As these figures learn and teach the realities of political power, we will see rulers, subjects, and citizens disillusioned with the divinity of monarchy, left to face the chaotic effects of this realization.

To help readers through these four plays, I would like to use the eponymous epigraph of this chapter, “Be rul’d by me,” as a conceptual refrain because it acts as the quintessential command of a de jure ruler. This claim, spoken by Richard II in the opening act of his tragedy and which is thematically echoed by the two subsequent monarchs, expresses a frustration of the impotence that utters it. As these monarchs discover, a real ruler need not compel their subjects with verbal pleas. Furthermore, as Bacon understands, when an authority vocally demands obedience, he allows the petulant subject space to respond, “Why should I?,” thus starting a conversation, a verbal back and forth that mirrors a possible exchange of power. Without the power to back up the verbal command, a sovereign is left with the problem of justifying their authority. In *Reading Authority and Representing Rule in Early Modern England*, Sharpe points out that Henry VIII was the first English monarch to utilize print and widespread publication, “in an attempt to enhance his authority and make it sacred” (109). As Bacon could have warned him, however, Sharpe says, “Such control was not only beyond him,” but through the attempt, “Henry unwittingly contributed to the very debates and differences he wrote to suppress” (109). When rulers start to vocalize their power, or when they attempt to
justify their authority through any other means besides material conquest, they reveal both the lack of their authority and provide the means by which their power can be challenged. These monarchs’ “be rul’d by me” moments unsettle the flimsiness of de jure claims to power, reveal how all political authority ultimately relies on material control, and how the resultant anarchy affects individual characters.

Richard II

To this end, Shakespeare juxtaposes two different ruling strategies at the beginning of Richard II, one from the current monarch and one from the soon-to-be king. Richard II’s tragedy opens with a drawn out display of the king’s ineffectual authority. Two noblemen come before the king, each accusing the other of treason. When Mowbray and Bullingbrook enter the king’s presence, they use the proper amount of courtly flattery, but then quickly re-engage in their personal quarreling. Throughout the scene, Bullingbrook expressly backs up his verbal threats with the promise of violent, physical action. “[F]or what I speak,” he boldly asserts, “My body shall make good upon this earth,” drawing an explicit connection between his words, his body, and the material realm (1.1 36-7). Bullingbrook realizes that political authority must have more than just an ephemeral, divine sanction. It must have physical power. He continues, “What my tongue speaks my right-drawn sword may prove” (1.1 46). This literal saber-rattling, this display of physical authority, is juxtaposed with Richard’s ineffectual verbiage, reducing the king’s authority to mere display. If Mowbray, or anyone else, has missed the point, Bullingbrook adds, “Look what I speak, my life shall prove it true” (1.1 87).

Of course, Bullingbrook’s political position does not carry the same speech-act power as the king’s, but as the scene unfolds, we see Richard struggling with his inability
to govern through words alone. “Wrath kindled gentlemen,” he pleads, “be rul’d by me; / Let’s purge this choler without letting blood” (1.1 152-3). This command illustrates a few important aspects of Richard’s weak rule. First, it illustrates Richard’s failure as an authority figure. The charge sounds less like an authoritative injunction and more like an embarrassing plea. He orders them to forgive each other and bring their feud to an end, but they refuse. Richard’s plea reveals how little his subjects esteem his authority. No one considers him a very authoritative king. If they did, he would not have to practically beg them to obey him. Second, rather than end the conflict, Richard’s statement initiates a debate. This debate is central to the political problem of the early modern period. What Richard enacts with this statement is what, according to Sharpe, happened to Henry VIII when he attempted to deploy print media and had to endure the unintended consequences of political debate. Richard’s attempt to express his authority in these opening scenes have the same effect on his subjects. Third, Richard’s grammar reveals some important features of his inability to rule. Richard structures his command in the passive voice. By making his subjects the implied subject of his command, he subtly shifts the power dynamic. He puts himself at the rhetorically weak end of the sentence and relinquishes emphatic power to his subjects. This moment displays his willingness to hand over his power to his nominal subjects. Richard places too much faith in the de jure foundations for his authority, and he fails to provide appropriate political leadership on the ground. Since Richard sees himself as a divinely appointed ruler, this shortcoming rhetorically suggests the paucity of de jurism.

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44 For more on Shakespeare’s history plays and speech act theory, see Joseph A. Porter’s *The Drama of Speech Acts: Shakespeare’s Lancastrian Tetralogy*, and Robert Hapgood’s “Shakespeare’s Thematic Modes of Speech: Richard II to Henry V.”
Furthermore, when we look at the command that follows it, “let’s purge this choler without letting blood,” we see how this misprision of power affects his decision making (1.1 153). Embedded in the humoral pun is a weak command, which belies a skittish reluctance to deal with this problem with the physical violence it requires. In fact, Richard seems unaware of the feud’s severity even as he attempts to moderate it. After one of Bullingbrook’s virulent rants, Richard excitedly turns to Mowbray, “How high a pitch his resolution soars! / Thomas of Norfolk, what say’st thou to this?” (1.1 109-10). Richard seems to enjoy, as a spectator, this very real conflict in front of him. Richard giddily hears their argument, relishes their beautifully poetic threats, and then expects them to shake hands in peace on the basis of his command alone. “Lions make leopards tame,” Richard tells the noblemen, keeping the reality of the situation, that two men mean to kill one another, at a distance with the mammalian metaphor (1.1 174). Richard is clearly in over his head in his attempts to mitigate their personal and political conflict, to the point where Mowbray can respond to his animal allegory, “Yea, but not change [the leopard’s] spots” (1.1 175). In this, and other scenes like it, Richard merely plays at being king. Therefore, his order for the men to “forget, forgive” comes off as naïve and ultimately proves ineffectual (1.1 150). If “rights” to power really carried weight, the verbal sparring would be enough. Richard could verbally command his subjects to obey. They would kowtow to his voice because it carried the weight of de jure authority. From the opening act, Shakespeare shows us that this is not that world.

Towards the scene’s end, Richard starts to realize the difference between the power he should yield and the power he can capably exert. He tells the noblemen, “We were not born to sue, but to command,” a statement which would sound imposing coming
from the mouth of Henry V in his opening scene, but Richard must follow this up with a recognition of his own weakness, “Which since we cannot do to make you friends / Be ready, as your lives shall answer for it” (1.1 196-9). Bullingbrook and Mowbray entered the king’s presence prepared to back their words with physical violence. After the king ineffectually pleads for their subjugation, he concedes to their desire. This concession leads to the duel preparation scene where Richard again misunderstands the nature of political authority. The two enraged noblemen advance on each other, towards the physical manifestation of their verbal threats, only to have Richard stop them almost at impact. He orders them to lay down their swords and after a lengthy explanation on the particulars of his present decree, banishes the men. One could read this as an endorsement of the king’s regal power, since the closer the men come to blows the more hyperextended Richard’s “grace” appears. However, when considering effectual leadership, Richard’s actions turn out to be the tragic catalyst for the entire play. Had Richard allowed the men to physically clash and fight with material, mortal consequences, he would have no need to exile them both then face the return of Bullingbrook. Richard’s inconsistent ruling and reluctance to exercise material force shows a weakness not fit for an earthly king, a weakness others will exploit.

For Shakespeare, this weakness is enough to spark the political tragedy since it leads to the rebellion that dethrone the impotent Richard and crown a king who can move men to action. Richard’s tragic flaw lies in his lack of self-awareness. Perpetually aloof while on the throne and schizophrenic when deposed of it, he can get no true sense of self. As these opening scenes illustrate, he also has no true sense of monarchical power. He mistakes the title of king with the authority that real estate carries in England. In fact,
Richard is not deposed because he has no “right” to the throne. He is not overthrown because of religious intolerance or genocidal persecution. Richard is deposed because he threatens the noblemen’s material property, gobbling up their estates and taxes.

Significantly, Bullingbrook returns to England because his real estate, his inheritance is in danger, and he rises to power because he has control of England’s material wealth, through his rebel supporters. When welcoming a few fellow traitors, Bullingbrook tells them, “All my treasury / Is yet but unfelt thanks, which more enrich’d / Shall be your love and labor’s recompense,” to which they metaphorically, and literally, reply, “Your presence makes us rich, most noble lord” (2.3 60-3). The lands he plans to appropriate with force will make him abundantly wealthy with real estate. When he becomes the leader of the most landed gentlemen in England, he becomes the de facto ruler of England. Richard puts faith in the natural elements to support his position, calling on spiders and toads to envenom the rebels’ feet (3.2 14-22). Bullingbrook rallies men with the pragmatic purpose of restoring or retaining their property, real estate, tangible, and material goods. Richard considers himself England’s “lawful king,” and demands that that rebels, “show us the hand of God / That hath dismiss’d us from our stewardship” (3.3 74; 77-8). Bullingbrook’s successful rebellion and Richard’s deposition undercuts these de jure claims and enforces the true de facto nature of political authority. The “Armies of pestilence,” that, “God omnipotent, / Is mustering in his clouds on [Richard’s] behalf,” never materialize to battle Bullingbrook’s forces (3.3 87; 85-6). Bullingbrook does not need a legal claim or a divine power on his side to gain

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45 Lorenz writes, “that by the time Richard leaves for Ireland, he will have de facto already lost his authority and power – arguable the substance of sovereignty” (49). As this dissertation argues, power is unarguably “the substance of sovereignty,” and therefore I would pre-date the loss of Richard’s authority to the moment when Bullingbrook, who possesses the most material property, assumes leadership of his fellow countrymen.
sovereignty. His material control establishes him as the de facto king of England before he even takes the crown. Once he embodies England’s material wealth, then he can symbolically represent England as the head of state.

For centuries, English political thought recognized this dual nature of monarchy. Since its publication in 1957, Ernst Kantorwicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies* has been indispensable in discussions of this point in Shakespeare’s Henriad. Essentially, Kantorwicz applies the medieval political theory of the King’s Two Bodies to *Richard II*. According to this theory, the king has two bodies: The Body Politic, which is the abstract, immortal idea of the State committed to managing government issues and rule, and The Body Natural, which is the physical, mortal coil of the king subject to infirmity and death (Kantorwicz 7). Kantorwicz further explains, “The King’s Two Bodies thus form one unit indivisible, each being fully contained in the other. However, doubt cannot arise concerning the superiority of the body politic over the body natural” (Kantorwicz 9).

What Shakespeare reveals over the course of *Richard II*, however, is the undisputed superiority of the body natural over the body politic. Kantorwicz studies the body of Richard II in depth, focusing on how the notion of The King’s Two Bodies allows for the psychological split of Richard’s “unkinging.”

Ernest Talbert describes Richard’s dilemma, which manifests itself when the “right” of his power is divorced from the reality of his power, as a schism between hereditary right and virtuous right. “The sacred name of ‘King,’” Talber writes, “was not only inherited but also merited, and the problem of order became intense and perilous when those two attributes were not united in one

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46 Most look to the moment when Richard shatters his hand-held mirror, literally dashing his image to piece. Richard, alone in his cell, has ample time to poetically render his sad state, reflecting, “Think that I am unking’d by Bullingbrook, / And straight am nothing. But what e’er I be, / Nor I, nor any man that but man is, / With nothing shall be pleas’d, till he be eas’d / With being nothing” (5.5 37-41).
person” (199). Like Kantorwicz and many others, Talbert interprets Richard’s breakdown as a personification of this fissure in the political position of kingship. Once the true nature of England’s politics has been exposed, the whole nation will feel the repercussions.

Richard’s deposition tears the Body Politic of England and the Body Physic of Richard apart. What is often neglected is these Richard-focused readings, however, is the fact that while one mortal body is being “unkinged,” another human form is becoming politically incorporated. What many studies of the play overlook is that the effects of this incorporation are just as existentially traumatic for Henry IV, nee Bullingbrook, as they are for Richard Plantagenet. To only consider Richard’s tragedy is to miss the other psychological traumas unfolding onstage. Richard is not the only one who investigates the troubling nature of the new reality he has found himself in. From Hotspur’s love of honor, to York’s sycophantic de factoism, characters respond differently to the new reality of political power in England. Characters who fall between Hotspur’s idealized virtues and York’s political pragmatism are the focus of this dissertation. Let us now turn to the first anarchic will, John of Gaunt, to see how he grandfathers in an attitude of anarchy through his linguistic loopholes.

Even though he delivers one of the most nationalistic speeches ever written about Albion, John of Gaunt actually threatens the stability of England more than Northumberland’s growing faction or Richard’s growing avarice. When he initially castigates Richard, Gaunt argues for an abstract, de jure notion of kingship. Within his vivid imagery, however, Gaunt continually returns the material property of the realm.

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47 When Winston Churchill needed a conception of England to inspire hope in Great Britain’s darkest hours during the Battle of Britain, he echoed John of Gaunt’s speech in his June 4, 1940 address. See Never Give In!: The Best of Winston Churchill’s Speeches. Pp. 210-214.
Gaunt paints a vision of England as “this sceptred isle,” one that begins with abstract qualities like “majesty” and invokes idealized locales, like Eden, but these rhetorical flourishes eventually give way to more realistic conceptions of country, from the metaphorical, “precious stone set in the silver sea,” to the more exact, practical, “blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England” (2.1 39-41; 46; 50). Even Gaunt’s example of the state’s global renown in, “Christian service and true chivalry,” rests on the exploitation of the Holy Land during the Crusades (2.1 54). Gaunt’s conception of England changes from magisterial to material in his elegy for England, like notions of political sovereignty will transition from “rights” to the “facts” of authority. Therefore, Gaunt’s fundamental problem with Richard in this speech, that he has become “landlord of England” instead of a king is, to say the least, complicated (2.1 113). Discussing the moral nationalism of Gaunt, Schulman argues, “Shakespeare consciously transforms history’s Gaunt into a nostalgic counterpoint to the changing order” (131). Most readers have located a similar nationalistic nostalgia in Gaunt’s speech. However, rather than serve as a counterpoint to the changing order, as an anarchic will, Gaunt helps usher the most radical of all changes to the political order.

Richard has started to learn, perhaps too late, that material wealth can guarantee power more than hereditary claims, and he has been scouring the nation for funds to fill his war chest. Gaunt’s condemnation is therefore technically accurate, but fundamentally flawed since he means to distinguish between landlord and king. Significantly, the only time Richard cuts off his uncle’s tirade is when Gaunt informs him, “Thy state of law is bond-slave to the law” (2.1 114). Gaunt mistakenly thinks because Richard has become a
landlord, he is now subservient to the law. According to Fortescue, however, a king is already under the law:

A King of England can not, at his pleasure, make any alterations in the laws of the land, for the nature of his government is not only regal, but political. Had it been merely regal, he would have a power to make what innovations and alterations he pleased, in the laws of the kingdom . . . but it is much otherwise with a king, whose government is political, because he can neither make any alteration, or change in the laws of the realm without the consent of the subject. (26)

The political reality that both Richard and Gaunt fail to realize is that the role of king is the role of landlord. Richard never fully grasps this reality and therefore only plays at being king. Gaunt’s tragedy is that his prophecy will more accurately describe his son’s reign (blessedly, he does not live to see it). Essentially, Gaunt offers an apt description of de factoism, but he coats it in metaphors appropriate for de jure claims.

Gaunt’s speech appeals to anglophiles because Gaunt gives such a rousing defense of England’s purity. He also seems to suggest there is some kind of behavior intrinsic to British kings that Richard fails to exhibit. When we look at Gaunt’s other advice, to his son, Bullingbrook, we find a subtle difference in his attitude towards royal prerogative and power. Repeatedly, Gaunt counsels his son to step back and re-contextualize his troubling conditions into more soothing terms. Prior to Gaunt’s death-bed prophecy, when the king initially exiles Bullingbrook, Gaunt tells his son not to dread banishment, since “All places that the eye of heaven visits / Are to a wise man ports and happy havens” (1.3 275-6). At first glance, this may appear to be merely some fatherly advice to look on the bright side of things, a stoic truism. Dain A. Trafton, reads
beneath the surface of Gaunt’s counsel and finds sovereign endorsement, writing, “On the surface, Gaunt argues simply that a wise man makes the best of everything. Beneath his stoicism, however, lies his belief in the sanctity of kingship” (87). As we will see in the next chapter, Shakespeare offers plenty of stoicism (and a critique of its political effectiveness) in *Hamlet*. In the Henriad, however, stoicism finds no foothold. Political pragmatism and a commonsense approach to authority run throughout the play, but Bullingbrook never displays a stoic effort to maintain emotional stability in the face of inevitable calamity.

When we continue to read Gaunt’s advice, though, we find more than banal platitudes. For instance, he counsels Bullingbrook to, “Think not the King did banish thee, / But thou the King” (1.3 279-80). In other words, he tells his son to pervert the king’s proclamation into his own reality, recognize the king’s inutile words, and to use his own words to reconceive the punishment. In a realm where de jure powers ruled, the king’s words would be enough. In a politically ideal world the king speaks with regal finality. However, what Gaunt reveals in his counsel is a dismissal of speech act power. He teaches his son that words, even a king’s, have as much power to affect reality as anyone’s. Given the king’s supposed authority, this lesson sparks the political disruption that will plague the first three plays of the Henriad. Gaunt does not just encourage Bullingbrook to rebel against a king, he teaches him that proclamations do not compel political obedience, and does so through equivocation.

In an essay that explores Shakespeare’s use of equivocation, Lawrence Berns writes, “Shakespeare provides his flawed characters not merely with excuses, but with powerful cases that must be taken seriously” (41). This is what Robert Heilman calls
“case-making,” and it is an example of how the anarchic will utilizes language to threaten political order. Through this “case-making,” Gaunt equips Bullingbrook with the rhetorical skills necessary to support the legality of his return from exile. Just as language remains susceptible to the inaccuracies of signifiers, so too does political authority remain susceptible to the failures of de jure claims to power. Robert Weimann takes the “poststructuralist concept not only to the linguistic discontinuity between signs and meanings but to the rupture between authority and power,” in his important study of how the theater affected political authority (202). Remember that Hobbes warns us of language’s ability to disrupt power and authority, and that equivocation is the basic tool for the anarchic will. Gaunt may not realize the full impact of this lesson, but it will send his son on a crash course to the crown, newly aware of the weakness of righteous claims. As Bullingbrook becomes King Henry IV, he suffers the results of his own anarchic will. After exploiting the disjunction of the divine and the political, Henry can now only pretend to rule with confidence.

I have already said that Bullingbrook is the de facto ruler of England before Richard gives him the crown. Significantly, however, Bullingbrook never justifies his authority on his de facto material control. Using the lessons his father taught him, Bullingbrook plays with language, like a brilliant legal tactician, and justifies his return from exile on the basis of a new name: “As I was banish’d, I was banish’d Hereford, / But as I come, I come for Lancaster” (2.3 113-4). Applying the letter of the law, but not the spirit behind it, Bullingbrook engages in “case-making” and stretches the language here to justify his actions. Since Schulman never explores the de facto nature of Hobbes’s

political philosophy, some of his observations fall short of their full significance. For instance, when discussing Richard II’s appeal to divine authority, he writes, “One hears the Hobbist advisor at Bolingbroke’s side: \textit{not to worry, sir, those are mere words, insignificant speech}. In these circumstances one man’s profanation is another’s sacred duty” (133). The Hobbist might whisper such nominalist suggestions in Bullingbrook’s ear, but the real Hobbist would add, \textit{you control most of England’s material real estate and command most of its martial forces, let Richard talk about being king, you are England’s real political authority}.

Gaunt’s earlier lessons of “reasoning” out a better interpretation of his punishment have manifested themselves into equivocation. Leading Bullingbrook to the conclusion, “I am a subject, / And I challenge law. Attorneys are denied me, / And therefore personally I lay my claim / To my inheritance of free descent” (2.3 133-6). Shakespeare, famously critical of the legal profession, puts the flimsiness of legal justification on display.\textsuperscript{49} J.A.R. Marriott explains how, “Craftily and carefully [Bullingbrook] began to prepare for the overthrow of the ‘constitutional’ regime for the establishment of a legal deposition” (64). He clearly ignores the regal imperative to stay out of England, but his “legal” justification is merely semantic. Like all equivocation, Bullingbrook’s statements are technically “true,” but they rely on an abuse of language. The abuse of language is a key feature of the anarchic will because it disrupts the linguistic communication necessary for social order. As we will see, Bullingbrook represents one many such instances where the anarchic will recognizes the mutability of language. Just as rulers shift under the crown of power, so too do signifieds shift under

\textsuperscript{49} The fact that one of his rebellious ruffian in \textit{2 Henry VI} wants to “kill all the lawyers,” as the first order of business for their new regime has become a learned expression for those who criticize the profession today (\textit{2H6 4.2 76}).
As said above, Kantorwicz reads Richard II as a tragedy of King Richard’s identity (24-41). Richard’s progressive mania makes sense with the philosophic/political notion of the King’s Two Bodies in mind. He feels himself being pulled apart because, politically, he is torn in two. Philip Lorenzo relies on Shakespearean wordplay in his Tears of Sovereignty to explore the tears of Richard’s personal misery, an expression of the trauerspiel, and the tearing apart of his regal power (17-18). But while readers, like Lorenzo, rightly give the majority of their attention to the process of Richard’s unbecoming – it is his tragedy, after all – we should also consider the psychological ramifications that Henry IV experiences as he becomes king. What existential crisis might this affect? Alex Schulman argues that the demise of the ancien regime, “makes possible a new conception of the self,” for Richard, but he does not explore how Bullingbrook’s new self-conception, and subsequently his new conception of political power, changes during the play (139). As Henry IV 1 & 2 show, the king undergoes some painfully complex emotional stress. Many readers locate the source of this stress in how Bullingbrook got the crown. Timothy W. Burns, for example, writes, “Bullingbrook is wracked by guilt: he never gets over having committed the sin of Cain, as he calls it, as much as he always wanted the outcome of that sin, that is, the throne” (7). Burns

50 For more on Richard II and the trauerspiel tradition, see Zenon Luis-Martinez’s “Shakespeare's Historical Drama as Trauerspiel: Richard II - and After,” in which he cites, “the mournful experience of history” as essential to an understanding of Richard II and the Henriad (674). As a play that endorses aesthetic value over historical action, he argues that the play should be read as trauerspiel, the post-Enlightenment expression of tragedy which dramatizes, and values, the suffering of ordinary individuals over powerful heads of state. Therefore, Luis-Martinez reserves the term “tragedy” for classical Grecian drama (674).
therefore finds elements of Claudius’s tragic dilemma in Bullingbrook’s laments. However, where most readers interpret this anxiety as an expression of regicidal guilt, I would like to suggest that it looks a lot more like the tragedy of Richard’s descent – from divine to human being and his subsequent madness – only in reverse. Rather than take on divinity when he wears the crown, Bullingbrook’s new authority throws his own humanity in sharp relief. Let us look at how to Bullingbrook attains the crown to see how he becomes disillusioned with the notion of kingship and himself.

To officially get the title for the power he already wields, Bullingbrook gives Richard an ultimatum. If his lands and title are technically restored, then Bullingbrook says he will, “lay [his] arms and power,” however, if Richard refuses to comply, then he will, “use the advantage of my power” (3.3 39; 42). In other words, Bullingbrook is the one who explicitly categorizes their conflict as a power struggle. Richard was crowned king through hereditary rights. He confused this right with divine appointment, though neither claim would be strong enough to withstand Bullingbrook’s forces. Because of Richard’s pitiable, sympathetic state and Bolingbroke’s “ambiguous” triumph, S. Schoenbaum considers Shakespeare’s Richard II, “an odd choice to rouse the rabble,” because, “After all,” he writes, “the play hardly comes across as an inflammatory tract in favor of deposition and regicide” (99). Schoenbaum has the benefit of history to support his claim (Essex’s attempt to stir up sedition failed), but while the play does not champion deposition and regicide it nevertheless fails to condemn deposition and regicide. Its polemical aloofness is precisely the point. It calmly, matter-of-factly reveals the puissance of material power over royal appeals to divinity and heavenly aid. As

51 “O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven, / It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t,” Claudius prays, unable to ask for forgiveness, “since I am still possess’d / Of those effects for which I did the murther: / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen” (Hamlet 3.3 36-7; 53-5).
Schoenbaum later eloquently writes, “Richard may prattle about Divine Right, but in his world power is wielded not divinely, but by men” (103). Henry IV comes to the same conclusion, and it devastates him. When Henry IV realizes the de facto nature of his own ascension, it cannot help but radically alter his own self-perception. Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin Gish have recently looked into this moment and what it reveals about “Shakespeare and the Body Politic,” and argue that Bullingbrook’s usurpation, “required a fundamental reorientation in the political awareness of his subjects, from seeing themselves as Christians who happen to live in a Britain to understanding themselves to be members of the British body politic who also happen to be Christian” (20). Dobski and Gish are describing the sea-change in political philosophy at the heart of this dissertation, and their attention to how this affects the national population will be examined with Henry V at the end of this chapter. I note their contribution here because it illustrates, again, how scholarship favors either Richard or England’s subjects, but rarely gives attention to the radical shift in Bullingbrook’s understanding of self. Imbued with the knowledge that his only claim to the throne is physical might and material property, Henry IV faces new challenges for his own sense of self. Over the course of his ascension to the throne, he learns that royal virtues are not intrinsic to royal power. He rules with a new awareness of his own self representation. In this sense, he faces an identity-shattering crisis every bit as powerful as Richard’s. Richard looks at shattered mirrors when his identity unravels. Henry looks to his genetic mirror, Hal. Both, however, feel the ramifications of a splintered identity.

Before we turn to Henry IV 1 & 2 and examine the psychotic state of Henry IV, I would like to look at a character that seemingly has no qualms about Bullingbrook’s new
sovereignty. Initially challenging Bullingbrook’s rule, only later to embrace it wholeheartedly, the Duke of York has an important role in this play, not, however, as an agent of dramatic action, but as a mouthpiece for de facto subjugation. Since he aligns himself so easily with de facto powers, he also gives us a useful counterpoint to the anarchic will. For most of the drama, York remains a staunch defender of Richard’s royal power and position. When Bullingbrook prematurely returns from his exile, York is there to greet him with admonishments:

   Even in condition of the worst degree,
   In gross rebellion and detested treason.
   Thou art a banish’d man, and here art come,
   Before the expiration of thy time,
   In braving arms against thy sovereign. (2.2 108-12)

Bullingbrook and his cohort tolerate York as he relentlessly scolds the men as villainous traitors and usurpers. Even when not lambasting the legitimacy of their mission, he constantly needles them for small infractions of royal protocol. When one lord refers to King Richard as simply, “Richard,” York takes offense and corrects the rebel, “It would beseem the Lord Northumberland / To say King Richard,” (3.3 7-8). It comes as a shock, therefore, to hear that York is the first to announce and endorse Bullingbrook’s new royal appellation.

   After Richard’s abdication and Bullingbrook’s ascension, York inaugurates the new reign and announces the monarchial name change: “long live Henry, fourth of that name!” (4.1 112). Not everyone can reorient their sovereign allegiance as quickly, however, and York’s willingness to serve whoever wears the crown is not a universal
attitude in the play. But it is a startling universal attitude in York. In fact, Shakespeare exaggerates the level York’s commitment to the new de facto king by putting the nobleman in a moral conundrum between loyalty to his family and loyalty to his (new) sovereign. York discovers that Aumerle, his son, has joined a “dark conspiracy” to assassinate King Henry IV (5.2 96). Without hesitation York chooses his royal lord over his own flesh and blood, and York never considers aiding his son’s escape or even begging for the king’s pardon. Aumerle’s life is only spared through his mother’s fierce supplications for the king’s forgiveness (5.3 87-146). What York represents, therefore, is the ideal subject for any realm because he unselfconsciously and completely gives his allegiance to whoever holds power. He not only pledges allegiance to the new king, he helps vocally install the new king, a man who he previously reprimanded as a traitorous villain. Like Hobs the tanner in Heywood’s drama of political authority, York refuses to fight the tides of political change. Indeed, Hobbes the philosopher would approve of York’s loyalty to sovereignty over loyalty to a particular sovereign.

Henry IV 1 & 2

York’s attitude often gets obscured by Richard’s self-elegiac soliloquies. Richard’s psychological trauma also obscures the anxiety of Henry’s state of mind, which remains an understudied aspect of the Henriad. Indeed, the very character of Henry IV gets lost in the dramas that bear his name. I am not the only one to notice that Henry IV receives less critical attention than the future Henry V. Trafton notes the inattention and holds the poet accountable. “Shakespeare withholds from Henry the vividness that his

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52 The Bishop of Carlisle immediately responds to York’s declaration, “Marry, God forbid!,” and challenges Henry’s ascension as usurpation (4.1 114). “What subject can give sentence on his king? / And who sits here that is not Richard’s subject?,“ he asks, in the presence of York, who has just named Bullingbrook, King Henry IV, not to mention the new king himself (4.1 121-2).
story seems to warrant,” he writes, “Henry has not been granted the moments of high
dramatic intensity, the triumphs and the agonies, that make a hero. His is a study in grey”
(Trafton 83). Trafton concludes, “the special intention of Henry’s portrait…is neither
tragic nor heroic, but essentially political” (83). If we read Bullingbrook/Henry IV as an
anarchic will, then we can have it all three ways. He can be a politically tragic hero. As
Henry IV 1 & 2 show us, anarchic wills can wear the crown too, and as a self-hating de
factoist, Henry IV embodies this complex configuration of power. When we think of
Henry IV as an anarchic will, an individual who struggles with the ramifications of this
new political landscape, then we can reconsider his role as the titular, tragic hero. Henry
IV gains the crown but he also gains a new, disturbing perspective on the world of
politics and himself. Dobski and Gish consider the political consequences of Henry IV’s
ascent. “Bullingbrook’s usurpation,” they write, “whether he intended it or not, also
required a fundamental re-orientation in the political awareness of his subjects, from
seeing themselves as Christians who happen to live in Britain to understanding
themselves to be members of the British body politic who also happen to be Christian”
(20). I think Dobski and Gish do us a great service in drawing the distinction between
Christian-Britons and British-Christians. In fact, their dichotomy sums up the shift from
the de jure political philosophies that dominated the sixteenth-century to the de facto
theories that come into prominence in the seventeenth. However, I find little textual
support, from Henry IV 1 & 2, for their claim. Their focus on the political ramifications
for Henry’s new subjects reveals the focus of much modern scholarship on these plays
and their political themes. However, Shakespeare rarely gives voice to the common
subject in his dramas.53 Instead of focusing my attention on how the usurpation affected

53 The three citizens who discuss the power struggle of Richard III provide the rare example that proves the
the subject, I would like to use Dobski’s and Gish’s notion of “a fundamental re-orientation in the political awareness” and apply it to the sovereign. In other words, what happens when a politician assumes a divine throne? As the wielder of real power in a realm ostensibly ruled by another, Bullingbrook knows from experience that de jure claims to power mean nothing without material control. When we read Henry IV’s reign in this light, we see his tragic suffering.

The root of this tragic suffering is his realization that material reality hides in the guise of divine abstraction. The thin veneer of divine authority that coats the de facto crowns is symbolically represented in Henry’s plans for the Crusades. Henry thinks that if he can somehow mobilize a campaign against an infidel army, then his reign will be divinely validated. The ultimate irony, of course, is that the Crusades were essentially a series of Church-sanctioned plundering expeditions, the theologically justified pilfering of material goods. The fact that Henry never makes it to Jerusalem, the holy city, but instead dies in London’s “Jerusalem” adds a final bitter irony to a position partly attained through equivocation.

As I alluded to earlier, much has been made of Henry’s guilt over taking the crown from Richard, and his psychological state is in shambles throughout his two plays. In fact, he describes his mental state with the plays’ first line, “So shaken as we are, so wan with care,” and his grief always returns to the crown itself, not merely the regicidal act which led to it (1H4 1.1 1). For instance, when he later laments his tormenting lack of sleep, he frames the complaint in political, not moral, terms. He begins the soliloquy, “How many thousand of my poorest subjects / Are at this hour asleep!,” and though he wants the forgetfulness of sleep to give his guilty conscience rest, he cannot help but
reach a political conclusion, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown” (2H4 3.1 4-5; 31). The king’s psychological troubles stem from his disillusionment with kingly authority; they are a political ailment. Therefore, my reading of Henry IV (and later Claudius) greatly differs from interpretations, like Blair Worden’s, which find a moral corruption at the heart of these figures’ distress. Of Henry IV, Worden writes, “Like Macbeth and Claudius he becomes a study in the psychological consequences of committing a murder, not of seizing a throne” (26). If Richard had an unrealistic understanding of why he ruled England, then Henry IV understands it all too well. The fifteenth-century chronicler, John Hardyng, attributes the public support of Bullingbrook, “For hatred more of kyng Richardes defection / Then for the love of kyng Henry” (Hardyng in Marriott 100). Shakespeare imbues his version of Henry IV with an awareness of this low-level public endorsement. Henry IV does not rule with divine majesty so much as barely hold the kingdom together, like a con-artist trying to keep track of his various guises. He asserted his de facto power to get the position, but his desire to be more than a material power, along with the knowledge of his own humanity, weakens his hold and his political strategy. When Bullingbrook takes the crown and name of Henry IV, we get a chance to see his political philosophy in action. To help situate this point, I would like to go back to the “Be rul’d by me” phrase.

Henry IV faces many challenges to his authority. Most prominently, the rebels who helped put him on the throne in Richard II now want him off of it. However, there is an important distinction between rebellions and anarchy. If York represents the ideal de factoist, then Percy Hotspur, with his commitment to honor and chivalric courage, personifies the ideal de jurist. Though Mortimer chastises his brashness, Hotspur’s sense
of honor always guides him. Mortimer’s assessment of Hotspur is telling. Hotspur has “want of government” but he is not anarchic. Mortimer’s main complaint echoes Aristotle’s warning that the virtue of courage can become exaggerated to the fault of recklessness. I draw attention to this moment because it helps explain the distinction between anarchic, and merely rebellious, wills. While Hotspur clearly represents rebellion in the plays, it is important to note how he is not truly anarchic. His commitment to the virtue of honor makes him easily led. Hotspur is so myopic in his pursuit that his actions are utterly predictable. In fact, Hotspur is notably immune to the force that makes so many of Shakespeare’s characters unpredictable and problematic in that he is not interested in the love, honorable or carnal, of a woman. His defiance is as ordered as clockwork and he is never surprising. The next chapter examines how Claudius manipulates Laertes’s similar sense of honor in Hamlet, and chapter four argues that Satan, Beelzebub, and the other demons of Pandemonium engage in the same kind of predictable rebelliousness (albeit with vice and not virtue as their ends). Characters like Hotspur and Satan revolt, but their revolutions do not splinter existing systems into pre-social chaos.

These figures rebel to establish new monarchies; they still have laws and organized systems for governance. They desire the revolution that G.K. Chesterton describes as, “Revolt in the abstract,” which the true anarchist in The Man Who Was Thursday, explains, “is – revolting. It’s mere vomiting” (13). At the risk of opening up a

54 “Though sometimes it show greatness, courage, blood,” he tells Hotspur,
    And that’s the dearest grace it renders you –
    Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,
    Defect of manners, want of government,
    Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain. (1H4 3.1 180-3)

55 When Katherine, his wife, bluntly asks if he loves her, Hotspur snaps, “Love, I love thee not, / I care not for thee, Kate. This is no world / To play with mammers and to tilt with lips” (1H4 2.3 90-2).
Blakean can of worms, Hotspur, and the version of rebellion that he represents, looks more like Blake’s Orc, a figure of cyclical insurgence that becomes a matter of course. As the agents of insurmountable social flux, anarchic wills are something different. Their continued presence onstage or in society would wreak havoc on society because they represent the threat of anarchy. Though Hobbes defines “rebellion,” as, “but war renewed,” and would recognize the danger of Hotspur in society, anarchic wills, like Falstaff, threaten the safety of society as lords of misrule. As Hobbes and others believe, social order, even tyrannical order, is preferable to chaos.

Therefore, while Hotspur has “want of government,” he is not anarchic (1H4 3.1 182). His appeals to the virtue of honor prevent him from conceptually challenging the foundations of de jureism that support Henry IV’s monarchy. The “theme of honor’s tongue” as he is called, tells his comrades, “By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap / To pluck bright honor from the pale-fac’d moon” (1H4 1.1 81; 1.3 201-2). In light of the play’s previous action, this kind of optimism sounds almost like naiveté. It belies a belief in the ennobling virtue of power that Richard II works hard to demolish. Hotspur loses his life at Shrewsbury, but this “king of honor” never questions his cause, he never faces psychological annihilation (1H4 4.1 10). He lives, fights, and dies for the virtue of honor. His experiences never lead him to the disillusionment of others, like Richard, who famously concludes that Death keeps his court “within the hollow crown” (R2 3.2 160). Hotspur might feel differently about honor if he faced Douglas’s challenge on the battlefield.

King Henry IV personally meets his foes at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1 Henry IV. A common practice at the time was to equip multiple knights with copies of the

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king’s armor to serve as decoys and safeguard the king. Douglas, fighting for the
rebellion, continually encounters and dispatches these false kings. Expressing his
frustration and fatigue, he cries out, “Another king? they grow like Hydra’s heads” (5.3
21). Whittling them down one by one, he finally finds Henry IV and asks, “What art thou
/ That counterfeit’st the person of a king?” (5.4 27-8). Coming as it does, after Douglas
has slain multiple “kings,” we could read this as a sincere question. He is already killed
three or four false kings, so his skepticism is understandable. However, I would argue
that this question asks for more than just the identity of a beaver-drawn man in armor.

The notion of a counterfeit king, as Douglas calls him, the concept of feigning
kingship to fool others offers a striking metaphor for the entire tetralogy. Superficially, it
speaks to the rebellion’s “cause,” a counterfeit proves the existence of the genuine article.
Thus, Douglas’s battlefield frustration expresses a desire for this ideal monarch, what the
rebels fight for. Simultaneously, however, Shakespeare also dramatizes the ease of
mistaking monarchy. The theater-going audience would not be able to tell the difference
between actors wearing regalia any more than the character of Douglas as he plays this
whack-a-mole regicide. The defensive strategy for the battlefield, the façade of royalty,
can conceptually make its way back to the throne room as well. Counterfeit kings on the
battlefield, counterfeit kings on the throne – the rebels make a distinction, but the play
takes a more ambiguous stance. With so many kings crossing the stage, Shakespeare
seems to challenge the notion of any individual’s “right” to power, based on some innate
quality. Erasmus also associates the habiliments of royalty with the wardrobes of actors.
“If all that makes a king is a chain, a scepter, robes of royal purple, and a train of
attendants,” he rhetorically asks, “what after all is to prevent the actors in a drama who
come on the stage decked with all the pomp of state from being regarded as real kings?” (Erasmus 15). Erasmus and Shakespeare both answer, “nothing.” However, whereas Erasmus uses his point to substantiate an innate, essential quality of sovereignty, “something beyond human nature,” as he writes, “something wholly divine, in absolute rule over free and willing subjects,” Shakespeare uses the complex layering of royal garb and false monarchy to reveal the lack of essential qualities in royal sovereignty (1).

To be sure, even at the beginning of the seventeenth century, monarchs considered themselves inherently regal. In 1603, the first year of his reign, James made a case for his right to the throne in terms of satisfying, “a people so loving, so beautiful, and so dear to us,” who, “in yielding their loyalite and obedience towards our establishment in those Rights, which under God wee doe enjoy” (James). This represents an ideal admixture of popular consent with God’s justice supporting the decision (and the monarch). Shakespeare’s ability to stage king after king in the same play subtly challenges claims made by the like of James. The rebels who fight for honor threaten Henry IV, but they do not threaten the notion of monarchy, the political status quo, that James relies on in this proclamation.

If the rebel forces are not the true threat to the idea of monarchy, then where does Henry IV direct his “Be rul’d by me” charge? Who most occupies his authoritative attention? Certainly, his former revolutionary allies, now rebellious adversaries challenge his claim to the throne, but the real drama of these two plays centers around his relationship with Prince Hal. In fact, both of the Henry IV plays are about fathers and sons and feature many paternal relationships – Northumberland and Hotspur, Henry IV and Hal, Falstaff and Hal. When we read the play as an expression of frustrated authority,
we find that Henry IV demands subject hood from his son more than he demands it of his subjects. The “Be rul’d by me” charge and what it reveals about political authority persists in this paternal relationship. Henry IV is a de facto power but he is also an anarchic will, a psychological mess. He is a danger to himself and to the Body Politic of England. Hal’s opposition to his father, as the king sees it, is also a threat to political order. The rebels consider Hal a weak link in the chain of sovereign command and will attempt to exploit the prince’s dysfunctional relationship with the king.

Anyone with a passing knowledge of adolescent psychology knows that teenagers naturally test the boundaries imposed on them. When he worries about the young prince’s moral character, the worst thing Henry IV can do is demand Hal’s obedience. This is, of course, exactly what he does. In a harsh tirade of paternal disappointment, the king accosts his son for the “vile participation” of the company he keeps and chastises the heir apparent for his lack of interest in politics (1H4 3.2 87). With Henry IV, we get to see a ruler put Bacon’s advice into practice when dealing with his subjects. We learn of his strategy when he tells Prince Hal, “By being seldom seen, I would not stir / But like a comet I was wond’red at / … / Thus did I keep my person fresh and new, / My presence, like a robe pontifical, / Ne’er seen but wond’red at” (1H4 3.2 46-7; 55-7). Henry IV lets his “majesty” do the talking for him. Rather than tell his subjects how majestic he is, he puts himself in a position to be observed, but not legally or ecclesiastically challenged. Coupled with the physical might on the battlefield, Henry IV can compel full obedience from his subjects. Learning from Richard’s foolish pomposity, Henry IV fears any non-material exercise of his authority. He offers this advice to Hal because he worries about his son’s adolescent influences. Significantly, however, Henry IV neglects Bacon’s
advice when dealing with his son. He, “stir[s] questions of jurisdiction,” and because of hereditary succession, this issue becomes both a paternal and political matter.

Chronically petulant, Hal neglects his father’s advice about regal observation. As we learn through his lone soliloquy, however, Hal has another strategy for revealing his majesty in due time. “[W]hen this loose behavior I throw off,” he tells us, he, “Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off” (1H4 208; 214-5). In the meantime, he crafts a rakish reputation with the help of the riff raff of Eastcheap. As we will see, however, Hal gets more than just a bad reputation from his time with Falstaff. Hal’s strategy for representing majesty is the exact opposite of his father’s. Rather than let subjects assume his majesty based on a lack of evidence to the contrary, Hal wants to feign a bad reputation and later “redeem” himself through feigned rehabilitation. If he learns anything from his biological father, it is how not to stage majesty. I will look more closely at this soliloquy later. For now, though, I want to look at what Hal learns from his de facto father figure, Sir John Falstaff, the tetralogy’s most anarchic will.

Falstaff has been called a lot of things. Hazlitt considers him, “the most substantial comic character that ever was invented,” and AC Bradley initiated the notion, later taken up by Harold Bloom, that Shakespeare’s larger-than-literary character got away from his own creator (Hazlitt 277). 57 I call him the most anarchic will because he verbalizes the central bifurcation of political authority into its de jure and de facto poles. From this position of skepticism, Falstaff can disregard fixed notions of language and use

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57 According to Bradley, Shakespeare, “overshot his mark. He created so extraordinary a being, and fixed him so firmly on his intellectual throne, that when he sought to dethrone him he could not” (66). Bloom enthusiastically believes, “Shakespeare gave Sir John such abundant life that even Shakespeare had a very hard (and reluctant) time in ending Falstaff, who never owed Shakespeare a death” (1999 296).
his words to alter perception. As said above, this remains a key feature of the anarchic will, the ability and willingness to abuse language. As Chief Justice puts it, Falstaff is known for “wrenching the true cause the false way” (2H4 2.1 110-11). Falstaff repeatedly bends words and events to suit his purposes, pointing out that, “A good wit will make use of anything, / I will turn diseases to commodity” (2H4 1.2 247-8). Furthermore, in dramas obsessed with the relationship between fathers and sons, Falstaff serves as an important father figure for Prince Hal.

From his position of paternal authority, Falstaff teaches the prince two important lessons regarding the nature of language and reality. First, he teaches Hal how language can manipulate factual events. Like his father, Bullingbrook, learned from his grandfather, John of Gaunt, truth can be mutable through equivocation. Falstaff performs some astounding verbal gymnastics as he plays with facts to reorient them to his good. We see these skills on display in our inaugural meeting with him. “When thou art king,” he tells the prince, “let not us that are squires of the night’s body be call’d thieves of the day’s beauty. Let us be Diana’s foresters, gentlemen of the shade” (1H4 1.2 23-5).

Falstaff makes no mention of changing his group’s habits or activities, just their nomenclature, an appropriate plan from someone who is a knight de jure and a scoundrel de facto. Falstaff wants to play on the power of impressions. If a title change means that others will speak well of him, then he will not have to change any of the many, many things he does that would lead someone to speak ill of him. He has no intention of changing his actions, the factual signifieds of his life. He only wants to change the signifiers.
One of the most famous examples of this ability to alter the recollection of events with language, comes after the Gadshill robbery. Hal’s trap, designed to expose the knight as a mere braggadocio, depends on catching Falstaff in a lie. Poins explains, “The virtue of this jest will be the incomprehensible lie that this same fat rogue will tell us when we meet at supper” (1H4 1.2 186-8). When Hal and Poins disguise themselves as thieves to rob Sir John, they know he will never admit to his inevitable cowardice. True to his large form, when Falstaff recovers and finds his comrades, he regales his companions with exaggerated numbers of highwaymen and his own heroism. Hal tries to embarrass him by revealing their part in the charade, telling him to, “Mark now how a plain tale shall put you down” (1H4 2.4 254-5). After revealing their scheme, Hal teases, “What trick? what device? what starting-hole? canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?” (1H4 2.4 262-4).

Falstaff, without so much as pausing to catch his breath, quickly replies, “By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye” (1H4 2.4 267-8). Armed with this lie, Falstaff can rewrite the rest of his past actions and recreate an alternate interpretation of the events that prove him even more heroic than before. If he recognized the disguised prince, he argues, it would have been madness to retaliate. He claims to be, “as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct – the lion will not touch the true prince” (1H4 2.4 270-2). Thus, he “was now a coward on instinct” (272-3). In this retelling Falstaff comes off as courageous in his reluctance to take up arms. Clearly, the crowd at Eastcheap have a large target in Falstaff, but with replies like these, he is not an easy target.

While Hal holds “the facts” of the prank’s execution, Falstaff retains the anarchic ability to reimagine those facts and set himself up for praise rather than ridicule. His
earlier questions to Hal, “is not the truth the truth?,” seems rhetorical at first, but when
we see how Falstaff juggles events and their interpretation, the question slowly becomes
genuine (1H4 2.4 229-30). Falstaff can use language to obscure “the truth.” Rather than
feign majesty with rare appearances, Hal learns that he can abuse language to feign
reality. As explained earlier, his father, Henry IV, practiced the same linguistic
gerrymandering when returning home from exile as Lancaster. But Henry IV does not
teach this lesson to his son. Henry IV, though he of all people should know better, thinks
projecting majesty is enough.

The most important thing Falstaff does for Hal is to show him the distance
between reality and the representation of reality. Falstaff’s materialism firmly roots him
on earth. Indeed, in some sense he symbolizes terrestrial existence. As he tells Hal while
they literally role play the father/son relationship, “banish plump Jack, and banish all the
world” (1H4 2.4 479-80). From this place of earthly, rooted physicality, he can play
with the metaphysical. Favoring a material, epicurean existence over metaphysical
abstractions, Falstaff remains the most articulate critic of de jurism. Like Bullingbrook in
Richard II, Falstaff is known for using linguistic loopholes to his advantage. This is the
first main lesson Falstaff teaches to the prince – truth is what we linguistically make it.
His insatiable appetite for the physical pleasures of the world reveals a slightly perverse
materialism. This material impulse leads him to question incorporeal entities, especially

58 See Armitage pages 42-3 on Falstaff and Hal monarchial role-playing. According to Armitage, “Falstaff
appropriates inert objects and, by fiat, demands that they be taken for something other than what they are.
His attempt at transformation fails because Hal pierces the illusion and immediately returns the properties
to their mundane purposes. Without willing consent, Shakespeare implies, both stagecraft and statecraft are
impossible: the joint-stool is still just a joint-stool” (42).
when they may lead him to physical harm. His deconstruction of the word “honor”
typifies this impulse.

Attempting to inspire Falstaff’s military service in the last act of *1 Henry IV*,
Prince Hal reminds him, “thou owest God a death” (*1H4* 5.1 126). Falstaff waits until the
prince exits before wondering aloud about the nature of this debt. He then seems to resign
himself to his fate, saying, “Well, ‘tis no matter, honor pricks me on” (*1H4* 5.1 129-30).

At first reading, he appears to dismiss the speculative question. In this case, the question
does not matter, or “’tis no matter.” But the contracted pronoun, “’tis,” could also refer to
the subject of this statement: honor. Read this way, Falstaff tells us that “honor” has no
matter. And in fact he spends the rest of this soliloquy contrasting the abstract notion of
honor with the material reality of life. “Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come
on? How them?,” he asks, “Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the
grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honor? A word”
(*1H4* 5.1 130-34). Since honor, for Falstaff, has no material property, it is not really what
moves matter. Falstaff rationally concludes, therefore, that since honor is only a word, it
is “Air. A trim reckoning!” (*1H4* 5.1 135). “Tis insensible” to him, and is therefore, “a
mere scutcheon” (*1H4* 5.1 137; 140). Remember that Hotspur is called, “the king of
honor,” an epigram that reveals just how different these two men are. This all provides us
with insight into Falstaff’s understanding of the world. Falstaff does not just celebrate the
physical, or champion the sensual over the abstract, he logically disbelieves in immaterial
entities.

Furthermore, Falstaff does not simply deconstruct the arbitrariness of language,
he calls into question an ethical quality, “honor,” which his king uses to justify the
political status quo. Like this last example demonstrates, truth is mutable, but more importantly, it can be mutable towards “virtuous” conclusions. In other words, noble qualities like “honor” or “courage” are not immune to the creative machinations of men with questionable moral character. We will look at this more closely when we examine Henry V’s justification for his campaign in France in the next part of this chapter.

The malleability of virtues, like honor, is the second lesson Falstaff teaches his surrogate son and protégé. As he turned cowardice into courage with his re-telling of the Gadshill robbery, Falstaff challenges the essence of virtue itself. Hobbes expresses a similar wariness towards those who would abuse language in order to manipulate others. He writes, “For these words of good, evil, and contemptible are … nothing simply and absolutely so,” adding, “nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves” (L 28-9). “The value or WORTH of a man,” Hobbes believes, “is not absolute… but a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another” (L 51). The value of honor is not absolutely fixed, but, like non-material-backed currency, can appreciate and depreciate over time. This is a startlingly modern conception of the virtue of honor.59 Laurie Bagby argues, “that Hobbes ends up rejecting honor as an admirable goal for men because it is too destructive. In doing so, he sets the stage for the modern skepticism about honor and the men and women who still admire and pursue it” (10). Here we find Falstaff rejecting honor for the very same reason fifty years before Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, but more importantly, Falstaff’s rejection of honor has political

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59 More specifically, Hobbes singles out “honor” as one of the most dangerous virtues for society because men falsely consider it an absolute, rather than a relative, as he sees it, quality. As Hotspur, “the king of honor,” shows, idealized concepts like “honor” or “justice” cannot be turned off like a tap when they no longer serve your political purpose.
implications in Hobbes’s scheme, since, according to Hobbes, “the sovereign is the fountain of honour” (117).

Hobbes’s concern with honor is not that its arbitrary meaning can affect the material world, rather, the problem with honor is its multivalence. In other words, as long as one sovereign establishes the meaning of honor and as long as everyone drinks from that well-spring definition, then society will function and flourish. This is why Falstaff’s deconstruction is so dangerous. Some readers, like Schulman, see Falstaff’s preferment of personal safety over valor as an expression of Hobbes’s natural right to life. “For Hobbes,” Schulman writes, “Falstaff can be accused of cowardice but not faulted with injustice” (117). Schulman’s interpretation, however, considers Falstaff’s actions in the state of nature, not the state of Leviathan. In the pre-political world there is no justice, so Falstaff’s draft-dodging could not be considered unjust. However, when the sovereign of England commands his martial obedience, Falstaff is compelled to obey. His resistance, achieved through his semantic disassembling of the socially cohesive notion of honor, poses a legitimate threat to the security of the state. When Falstaff adulterates the purity of “honor,” he introduces his own unique morality into a political system, and gives chaos a foothold.

James I similarly believed in a top-down scheme of honor as a safeguard against political anarchy. As he justifies his new place on the English throne, James invokes honor as the predicate to loyalty and explains the source of this honor, “there is in the true rules of Justice from the Sovereign to the Subject, a reciprocall office and respect, which they are bound in honour and conscience to observe” (James). James’s understanding of the bond between honor and princes has Bodinian echoes. “When I say ‘honour,’” Bodin
writes in his *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, “I mean that which conforms with what is natural and right, and it has already been shown that the prince is bound in such cases” (33). Therefore, not only are princes directly bound up in notions of honor, but a challenge to honor is a challenge to what is “natural and right,” according to Bodin. When Falstaff dismantles honor, he rattles the means by which a prince binds his people. Falstaff abuses language to transcend political guidelines and therefore does not have to play by the same rules as his rulers. Falstaff’s anarchic will is on a collision course with Prince Hal’s desired political state. Sir John’s time onstage is limited.

Falstaff remains the most aware, articulate spokesman for the anarchic will because his wit keeps him out of the widening gulf between de jure and de facto authorities. As the creator of illusions, he never seems to have any illusions about majesty, honor, or virtue. The only thing he does not understand about his world is his onetime prince, now crowned, king. The anxiety of the anarchic will hits Falstaff late. For most of his life, his exuberant dismissal of righteousness gives his physical heft a joyful buoyancy. However, Henry V’s act five rejection of Falstaff transforms the knight’s comedic life into tragedy. In King Henry V’s first public appearance, he makes good on his soliloquized promise to redeem time when men least think he will. Falstaff, giddy with anticipation at his young friend’s coronation, has no idea that the king is about to redeem his misspent time at Eastcheap.

Elbowing Pistol and Justice Shallow, Falstaff cheerfully tells them to “mark the countenance that [the king] will give me” (*2H4* 5.5 8). As the king’s train approaches, Falstaff cheers “God save thee, my sweet boy!” (*2H4* 5.5 43). The king’s reply is a cold countenance and the steely response, “My Lord Chief Justice, speak to that vain man”
In this moment, Henry V publically reveals his new master, “Justice,” and publicly shuns his old friend. Initially, the young king refuses to directly address Falstaff, but when Falstaff persists, “My King, my Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!,” the king finally addresses him, only to say, “I know thee not, old man, fall to thy prayers” (*2H4* 5.5 47). Not content with this refusal to even acknowledge Falstaff’s existence, Henry V delivers a monologue length indictment of his former kindred spirit, ultimately exiling Sir John, “on pain of death” if he should come close to his majesty again (*2H4* 5.5 64). One can almost hear Falstaff’s indomitable spirit crack in this heart-wrenching scene. Henry’s rejection of Falstaff is one of the most notable scenes in all of Shakespeare. Its harsh finality rivals any of the playwright’s characters’ final fates.\(^{60}\) The scene represents Falstaff coming to terms with the harsh reality of political power. Richard II experiences this reality in the tragedy of his deposition and Henry IV experiences it in the tragedy of his installation. Falstaff stays ahead of the calamity for a while, but the hard boot of order finds him in the end. The shock and surprise Falstaff feels at his rejection ultimately leads to his physical demise, as Mistress Quickly diagnoses, “The King has kill’d his heart” (*H5* 2.1 88).

According to Herschel Baker, “Falstaff is a threat that Hal must meet and overcome before he earns the right to power, and therefore his rejection, so necessary and painful, is the moral climax of these plays” (888). I agree that Falstaff threatens political order, but I do not think Henry V “overcomes” Falstaff. I also do not think this scene shows us Henry V claiming “the right to power.” As the second tetralogy reveals, the

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\(^{60}\) According to Alexander Leggatt, Falstaff represents a comedy of material consumption and epicurean delight, “not as a certain kind of story but as a certain attitude to life” (242). Therefore, “Hal must reject,” this attitude, “in order to prove himself the king the world of history needs;” thus, Falstaff’s comedy, “Steps into the paths of History and is crushed” (242).
king rarely holds the “right” to anything. Henry V learns everything he can from Falstaff about the mutability of language and then must exile the master. The king calls Falstaff, “the tutor and the feeder of my riots,” when he renounces their former association, their time hearing the “chimes at midnight” (2H4 5.5 63; 3.2 215). His use of the word “riots” here reveals the underlying political, not moral, motivation for Falstaff’s banishment.

Riots are public uprisings, disturbances of civil peace, and brief eruptions of anarchy. But though Henry rejects Falstaff’s imposing physical presence, he does not reject the lessons his tutor taught him.

Henry knows that Falstaff’s presence will lead to the degradation of political order, not merely immorality. Falstaff’s philosophy questions the values that de jurism, at its most ideal, rests on. Falstaff’s materialism undercuts, not only notions of virtue, honor, or other abstract values, it also heightens the disparity between what a ruler says they are and what they actually are. While Falstaff systematically deconstructs the moral girders of Christian order, it is important to note that he threatens more than just Christian order. Some scholars draw a similar distinction. For instance, A.D. Nutall calls Falstaff’s, “skeptical nominalism,” “the real philosophical opposition to Henry’s strangely ethical Realpolitik, his white Machiavellianism” (160). Here too, Nutall focuses on, as he calls it, Falstaff’s philosophical threat to the future Henry V. However, Nutall actually pits ontology against a political philosophy in this instance. I want to make a slight distinction in arguments like Nutall’s, and argue that Falstaff’s opposition to Henry is political. In other words, Henry does not reject Falstaff because Sir John’s skeptical nominalism could unsettle England’s foundation of Judeo-Christian morality. Falstaff, and the philosophy he literally embodies, is a political opposition to Henry’s de facto power.
When Henry condemns Falstaff for his moral shortcoming, like when he harangues Sir John, “Leave gormandizing, know the grave doth gape / For thee thrice wider than for other men,” he does so not for the knight’s own good or to cleanse the moral fabric of his realm (2H4 5.5 53-4). Henry wants the illusion of Christian order, but only for political reasons. As Timothy J. Spikerman puts it, Falstaff, who is so, “devoted to survival . . . that he offends ordinary decency,” “cannot be allowed to survive, in politics, which as Hal has learned . . . requires a kind of deference to the public prejudice in favor of morality” (176). Another scholar qualifies Henry V as, “a parody of a Christian prince” (Wells 97). “The realm that Falstaff inhabits is a realm of freedom,” according to Richard Strier (2011 106). Moral freedom, according to Hal and Chief Justice, but more importantly, Falstaff inhabits a politically liberal realm, one that denies the existence of any superior authority, moral, certainly, but more importantly, a politically superior authority. Falstaff, our most vocal anarchic will, threatens political order, and this is why he dies offstage in Henry V. As we shall see in the Henriad’s next installment, Henry V’s reign merely appears divinely sanctioned. As Shakespeare’s most superficially heroic ruler, Henry V cannot share the stage with Falstaff’s charismatic skepticism.

Henry V

Henry V displays a more complete understanding of de facto power than his predecessors. Unlike Richard, he has no illusions about the supernatural ability of his position, and unlike his father, he does not suffer from the political charade of kingship. John Alvis explains, “His claim upon men’s allegiance will owe less to his being the son of Henry IV than to his having proved the apt pupil of that courteous usurper, who has
demonstrated that power resides in strong arms rather than in the ceremony of legitimacy” (99). Alvis is correct, but he fails to note how important “the ceremony of legitimacy” is for Henry V. It is a moment he ostensibly has had planned for quite a while, informing us in 1 Henry IV, via soliloquy, of his intentions.

Prince Hal’s first soliloquy has garnered a lot of critical attention over the years. Like its speaker, the speech remains difficult to interpret. Hal’s initial pronouns are confusing – “I know you all, and will a while uphold / The unyok’d humor of our idleness” – making it hard to sort out his intended audience (1H4 1.2 195-6). Also, because his speech is a soliloquy, we expect the kind of soul-bearing straight-forwardness that Richard III, Viola, or even Falstaff betray when they speak alone onstage. With no interlocutors to fool or betray, Shakespeare’s soliloquizing characters can usually be taken at face value. However, Hal remains a maddeningly obscure figure even in soliloquy. For instance, he speaks of future plans, “when this loose behavior I throw off,” rather than immediate desires (1H4 1.2 208). Also, this speech draws scholars to it because of Hal’s intriguing metaphors and allusions. Those who have just read Richard II will also notice the similarity in the plays’ solar similes. Hal promises to, “imitate the sun / . . . / By breaking through the foul and ugly mists / Of vapors that did seem to strangle him,” which echoes his father’s taunts at Richard, “See, see King Richard doth himself appear, / As doth the blushing discontented sun / . . . / When he perceives the envious clouds are bent / To dim his glory” (1H4 1.2 197; 202-3; R2 3.3 62-3; 65-6). I want to focus on Hal’s biblical allusion in this passage to illustrate how the future Henry V, even at a young age, recognizes the need to establish a de jure facade to his de facto power.
This speech offers us a peek into his larger project of exploiting Christian redemption as a de jure justification for his power. Hal explains his plan for staged, calculated redemption. “So when this loose behavior I throw off,” he tells us:

My reformation, glitt’ring o’er my fault,

Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes

Than that which hath no foil to set it off.

I’ll so offend, to make offense a skill,

Re redeeming time when men think least I will. (1H4 1.2 208; 213-7)

This is a specifically Pauline notion of redemption, both in terms of the dramatic effect it has on its convert and in the specific language used to describe it. When Hal uses the phrase “redeeming time,” he reveals to us the chapter of Ephesians he has recently read, a chapter of Ephesians which describes the conversion process. “Awake thou that sleepest,” Paul says, “and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:14-16). The immediacy of Paul’s description not only mirrors Paul’s own powerful conversion on the road to Damascus, it also mirrors Hal’s metaphor of bursting through the overcast transgressions of his youth to shine as the sun in his new reign. Hal explains that the more sinful he appears, “to make offense a skill,” the greater his redemption will seem (1.2 216). No doubt Paul’s ministry benefitted from the same exaggerated conversion, from Saul the Christian murderer to Paul the Christian missionary. The more in debt Hal is, the richer he will appear when God finally redeems him. The blessings heaped on the prodigal are much more remarkable than the rights given to the worthy.
However, we must seriously question the legitimacy of this future conversion, or at least the sincerity of the prince’s motivation or it. This soliloquy reveals that Hal recognizes the need to eventually fake piety, just as he now fakes debauchery and illicit behavior. In fact, when we look closely at the Gadshill robbery, we see that the prince and his Eastcheap companions do not rob, “pilgrims going to Canterbury,” as Poins thinks, but rather money, “going to the King’s exchequer” (1H4 1.2 126; 2.2 55). That is to say, the prince robs money headed to the crown, not the church. This may not render his crime technically “legal,” but it does diminish its severity. Thus, his criminal behavior, like his eventual spiritual justification, is just a show.  

Like the show of majesty that his father displays, Hal understands the need to give his people the illusion of regality. The more divine the better, in this case. Hal has the hereditary title, but he has learned that this de jure justification for his power is not enough. He will need the hereditary right, he will need the illusion of divine right, and he will need the illusion of legal right to mask the true de facto nature of his rule.

Hal learns the language of Christian conversion from Paul’s epistle to those at Ephesus, and he also learns how to distinguish himself from sinners by it. In the same chapter Paul encourages the redeemed to, “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved,” but also to stay away from “whoremonger[s],” “unclean person[s],” those who engage with “foolish talking,” “jesting,” and who are “drunk with wine” – qualities that most readily define Falstaff, in other words (Ephesians 5:2; 5; 4; 18). Paul goes on to tell converts that they should, “have no fellowship with the unfruitful work of darkness, but rather reprove

61 As in the Protestant doctrine of justification which considers conversion a gift from God that only needs to occur once in a lifetime. The process of “sanctification,” of becoming more and more Christ-like, takes a lifetime and is never fully achieved on earth. Since his redemption is staged, Hal can transition into a Christian lifestyle with greater ease, thus appearing more sanctified as well.
them” (5:11). From the biblical allusion in this early soliloquy, therefore, we can anticipate Hal’s eventual rejection of Falstaff. Marriott suggests that this speech, “turn[s] the high-spirited reckless lad into a premature politician, a precocious prig” (141). We can glean from this soliloquy, therefore, that Henry V’s eventual conversion is just a campaign strategy. Hal will use his checkered past to make his coronation all the more glorious, and he will also end his fellowship with Falstaff in the dramatic moment of reprove we discussed earlier. Prince Hal shows real political acumen, even at a young age, as he plays the long con to appear morally legitimate to rule. He understands that everyone loves a good story of redemption and concocts the opportunity to endear himself to his populace. He gives us this rare glimpse into his plans via soliloquy in the first act of his father’s drama. He reveals another preoccupation with legitimacy in the opening act of his play.

For one of Shakespeare’s most action packed plays, the opening scene of Henry V finds us in the dark cloister of an archive with scholars debating the legality of a centuries’ old statute. Instead of military heroics, the play begins with the Archbishops Canterbury and Ely frantically digging through moldy law books in search of the legal means by which Henry V can legitimately invade France. Henry, quite plainly, states, “we pray you to proceed, / And justly and religiously unfold / Why the law Salique, that they have in France / … should, or should not, bar us in our claim” (1.2 9-12). It is clear through the reactions of Canterbury and Ely that Henry is simply reverse engineering this political situation. He wants French lands before he has the legal means to justify possessing them.
Henry V begins in a virtual echo of an earlier history play, Edward III, printed in 1596 of which Shakespeare had a hand in writing. In the earlier play, King Edward discusses his right to French lands and titles as he prepares a full on military invasion, what would instigate the Hundred Years’ War. Artois, a French defector, has brought news to Edward that King Philip IV of France, and more importantly, his three male heirs have all died, leaving a power vacuum in France. Edward, sensing the opportunity, asks after his own genealogy, “But was my mother sister unto those?” (E3 1.1 10). Artois assures the English king that his lineage, “from the fragrant garden of [his mother’s] womb,” legitimizes his claim to the French crown (E3 1.1 14). In other words, the same Salique Law that justifies Henry V’s claim to France would invalidate Edward III’s claim. At the outset of the later play, then, Shakespeare exposes the flimsiness of this legal, de jure right to France. For the rest of the play, this shades our impression of Henry’s heroic actions and noble speeches. While many readers consider this king to be one of Shakespeare’s most heroic characters, these scenes raise unresolved problems for those interpretations.

Productions of the play must also decide on how to present Henry V for the audience. It is informative, therefore, to see how productions of the play handle these opening scenes. Olivier’s 1949 version, for instance, plays the Byzantine legal reasoning for comedic effect. As Henry, Ely, and Canterbury kneel on the floor, surrounded by papers, the audience “titters” throughout and “roars with laughter” at the suggestion that the bishops’ reasoning is, “as clear as is the summer’s sun” (Olivier 11-12; H5 1.2 86). On the other hand, Kenneth Branagh’s rather self-serious 1989 adaptation has trouble

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62 Artois explains, “Three sons of [Philip IV], which all successively / Did sit upon their father’s regal throne, / Yet died and left no issue of their loins” (E3 1.1 7-9).
with the puzzling scene. Scored with dramatic pulses and edited like an action sequence, Branagh does everything possible, short of changing the lines, to stage this as an important step in establishing Henry’s noble character. Though it attempts to depict the horrors of war with verisimilitude, Branagh’s production embodies a more traditional understanding of Henry V as Shakespeare’s greatest achievement in royal heroism. This scene, which opens the entire play, gives the work an added layer of complexity which makes it resistant to such glowing, or even easy, categorization. If you want a heroic, noble king, which much of the play suggests, then you must reckon with this clearly trumped up justification for invasion.

As the king scrambles to justify the impending campaign in France, he offers us insight into his own political philosophy. Henry V has learned from his predecessors that the actions of a king must appear justified, especially when they are not. When Shakespeare showcases the flimsiness of Henry’s claim, he subtly puts air quotes around the king’s “justification.” In fact, Shakespeare’s interpretation of Henry’s claim is not universal. In William Martyn’s The Historie, and Lives, of the Kings of England; From William the Conqueror, into the end of the Rayne of King Henrie the Eight, published a decade or so after Shakespeare composed his play, Martyn writes that in the second year of Henry’s reign, Parliament asked the king to restore and refurbish, “the Religious Houses of this Kingdome,” which had become “the Cages of uncleane birds” (178). Henry complies, but then demands a portion of the Houses’ revenues. Under the economic pressure, Martyn tells us, “the fat Abbots, Priors, idle Monks, wanton Friars, and the puling Nunnes,” try to “divert this [revenue] stream into another Channell,” the English Channel (178). According to Martyn, and contrary to Shakespeare, it is not
Henry who urges the clergy to find a legal justification for his claim to France. Rather it is the clergy who introduce the idea to the king and support it. That is to say, Shakespeare presents a particular version of this pivotal moment in Henry’s reign, a version that complicates, instead of clarifies, the king’s motivations. Falstaff may be exiled, but we do not need to hear Sir John dismantle the slim legal justification when Henry’s actions here offer us a dramatization that acutely penetrates the façade of de jurism just as well.

At the outset, then, Henry desperately wants to prove that his actions are legally legitimate. However, once he crosses the channel, the Normans do not simply open their gates when presented with his thinly substantiated legal claim. Now we arrive back to the demand that his two predecessors have made. This is Henry’s “Be rul’d by me” moment, the moment when he faces opposition to his rule and realizes the limits of his authority. However, what distinguishes Henry V’s order of obedience from his predecessors’ is the physical force with which he backs it. Whereas Richard expected his words to carry the weight and Henry IV thought his paternity would compel consent, Henry V uses physical force to command subjugation. He does not gain entry into the walls of Harfleur on the basis of his legal or regal claims. The governor does not raise the portcullis because of Henry’s divine appointment. The French town consents to Henry’s demand under the threat of conquest, specifically the violent patricide and rape of its inhabitants.63 “Will you yield, and this avoid? / Or guilty in defense, be thus destroy’d?,” he asks (3.2 42-3).

63 According to Hobbes, “A commonwealth by acquisition is that where the sovereign power is acquired by force,” as Henry achieves it here (L 127). Furthermore, Hobbes writes, “this kind of dominion or sovereignty differeth from sovereignty by institution only in this, that men who choose their sovereign do it for fear of one another, and not of him whom they institute” (L 127). In other words, sovereignty by consent is not morally superior or inferior to sovereignty by conquest. They are equally legitimate methods of attaining power, a point that Shakespeare’s play dramatically demonstrates.
He threatens their material safety and only wants a material gain. Therefore, the nature or quality of Henry’s sovereignty is at stake.

Perhaps influenced by Aristotle’s obsession with taxonomy, early modern political philosophers devoted a lot of time to defining particular kinds of rulers through their qualities. Drawing important distinctions between republics and democracies, aristocracies and oligarchies, and kingdoms and tyrannies, writers like Charles Merbury and Jean Bodin sought to delineate rather blurry lines. Henry V’s martial movement into France and his actions there raise important questions about the nature of his reign. In Shakespeare’s England simply calling your monarch a “tyrant” was a criminal offense, and like naming an enemy a “villain,” carried more significance than modern audiences realize. This is why Tybalt confronts Romeo, whom he is ready to kill, with the words, “Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford / No better term that this: thou art a villain,” and also why Paulina calls Leontes, “tyrant,” stressing “Thy tyranny” of the harsh judgment, which has just killed the queen (R&J 3.1 60-1; WT 3.2 175; 179). Paulina is unrivaled in the vicious honesty with which she speaks truth to power, so it is significant that she repeatedly accosts Leontes with the charge of tyranny. Characters searching for the most offensive terms to describe a sovereign use “tyrant” because it carried such weight. So what constituted tyranny in early modern political thought? For Merbury, a tyrant was “hautie, cruel, viceful,” “treads God’s law and man’s law under his feet,” hates “the grave, free spoken, and virtuous man” (13). In contrast, a king is courteous, merciful and virtuous, embraces equity and justice, allows counsel, and delights in the opinion of others (Merbury 13).
Merbury’s tutor, Bodin, offers insight into a more complex distinction, the difference between despotic monarchy and tyranny. “Despotic monarchy must not be confused with tyranny,” he writes, “There is nothing unfitting in a prince who has defeated his enemies in a good and just war, assuming an absolute right to their possessions and their persons under the laws of war, and thereafter governing them as his slaves” (Bodin 57). Henry V assiduously tries to establish the legality of his invasion to satisfy this requirement. For Bodin, however, the distinction between despot and tyrant hinges on the justification for war because, “the prince who by an unjust war, or any other means, enslaves a free people and seizes their property is not a despot but a tyrant” (57). Despotism is legitimate, legally justified. A sovereign may be or can be morally corrupt, but if a despot follows the “laws of war,” then his conquest is by right and not tyrannical. According to Bodin, therefore, we could say that, at best, Henry V is a despot. However, Shakespeare devotes so much time to Henry’s tenuous justification and inundates us with the commander-in-chief’s threats of physical violence that it becomes increasingly difficult to see his foreign campaign as anything but an unjust war, making him, at worst, and according to Bodin, a tyrant. I want to argue that Henry V is acutely aware of this distinction and it informs his desire to go undercover to get his soldiers’ unadulterated opinion of him. Henry V does not come across the channel as a liberator, but as a conqueror. He learns from his father that enough manpower can overwhelm a duly appointed king, but he has also learned that he must disguise the use of brute force with patriotic or theological rhetoric. The disguise of political policy here mirrors another famous scene of disguise in the play.
In many early modern dramas, kings put on the clothes of commoners to get a true sense of their subjects’ loyalties. Heywood’s above-mentioned, *I Edward IV*, for instance, as well as Sam Rowley’s 1605 play about Henry VIII’s conflict with Wolsey, ironically titled, *When You See Me You Know Me*, feature scenes of royal disguise for common interaction. These scenes permit subjects to speak truth to power without realizing it, so their opinions are not tainted with fear. Shakespeare makes use of the familiar trope in *Henry V*. The night before a lopsided battle at Agincourt, Henry disguises himself as a common solder, “Harry le Roy,” to ascertain his men’s honest opinion of their commander-in-chief. When he plays the role of Harry le Roy, Henry introduces a certain level of meta-commentary to this scene. Throughout, Henry will talk about himself as if he were not himself. Shakespeare frequently makes use of this theatrical layering, and scholars have found it useful for teasing out key themes. Just as the male actor playing Viola playing Cesario in *Twelfth Night* offers a complex commentary on gender roles, this layering of Henry’s roles gives us a complex commentary on the nature of royalty. Shakespeare’s acute challenge to the sumptuary guise of monarchy anticipates Hobbes’s skepticism towards representation, which Bryan Garsten describes, “In simultaneously distinguishing and likening two things, representation advertises the artificiality of the identity it proposes” (523). Nowhere is this simultaneous distinction more explicit and public than on the Elizabethan stage, where, as Kevin Sharpe convincingly argues, authority “was not only represented and performed but also scrutinized as representation and performance” (116).

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64 See also, Andrew Gurr’s *Shakespeare’s Opposites: The Admiral’s Company 1594-1625* for how stage companies, especially The Admiral’s Company, benefited from “exploiting disguise” (22).

65 See Jean E. Howard’s “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England.”
In effect, both *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V* offer up a similar conclusion. There is nothing essential about masculinity or femininity just as there is nothing essential about royalty or majesty. The “counterfeit kings” scene of *1 Henry IV* reveals the same underlying truth. Henry V is not wrong then he says that he is just a man like everyone else, “In his nakedness he appears but a man” (4.1 105). Though “His affections are higher mounted,” when “his ceremonies [are] laid by,” he is revealed to be flesh and blood like everyone else (4.1 106; 105). In this moment of meta-reflection, Henry V acknowledges what his father came to learn: there is nothing inherently virtuous or righteous about the monarchy.

However, rather than resign himself to this reality, Henry doubles down on his own regal posturing. He raises the stakes when his men, Bates and Williams, discuss their culpability in the foreign war. Both men offer slightly different perspectives and opinions on the king’s responsibility, and Henry will spin some dazzling rhetoric in response to secure his position as a righteous king. While both men agree that they would rather be at home than in France, they disagree over who is ultimately responsible for the violence that awaits them at dawn. Hoping to inspire his men’s confidence, Henry offers that the King’s “cause [is] just and his quarrel honorable” (4.1 128). Williams responds with a shrug. “That’s more than we know,” he says, but it is not more than the audience knows because, again, Shakespeare offers us the possible interpretation that this war is unjust and dishonorable (4.1 129). “Ay,” Bates says, agreeing with Williams that the justifications for the campaign remain to be seen, “or [are] more than we should seek after;” but he adds, “for we know enough, if we know we are the king’s subjects” (4.1 130-2). Why does this knowledge exculpate their impeding acts of violence? Because, he
says, “if [the king’s] cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us” (4.1 132-3). Bates not only expresses a strong loyalty to Henry V, he also reveals two important elements of de factoism. First, being a king’s subject is enough justification for the king’s rule or orders. In other words, they do not follow Henry V to France because of his legal right to the lands or because obeying your earthly ruler is the Christian thing to do. They prepare to kill or be killed merely because they are the king’s subjects. As Sir Thomas Smith would have it, they are almost the king’s objects. “[T]he prince is the life, the head, and the authoritie of all things that he owne in the realm of England,” Smith explains (47). In many ways, their response represents the logical conclusion of a subject’s role in a de facto monarchy. Like York in Richard II, Bates represents a true de factoist. He realigns his allegiance to whatever power exists because he devalues anything beyond the immediate, physical present. He answers to earthly power first and foremost because it has a privileged ability to assault his physical person. The eve of battle naturally makes one consider these things.

The second element of de factoism that Bates expresses truly offends King Henry. Bates reveals the total subjugation a de facto ruler requires, even to the point where an individual cannot be held accountable for their actions. That is, when a subject agrees, through consent or conquest, to obey a sovereign, then they transfer their individual will over to that sovereign. Hobbes writes, “because the multitude is naturally not one, but many, they cannot be understood for one, but many, authors of everything their representative saith or doth in their name” (L 104). The commonwealth emerges out of many individual wills and forms one unified will, joined in the artificial person of the

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66 Smith’s De republica Anglorum was incredibly popular in the seventeenth century with eleven editions of it printed before 1640. Part of its popularity lay in its adaptability, and both Royalists and Roundheads used his political philosophy to support their sides.
state. Nigel Smith explains, “once civil society is established, just as the natural is
subsumed into the civil, so the selves of natural man become small parts of the greater
self of the commonwealth” (162). Without individual free will, there is no personal
responsibility. 67 This is the logical conclusion Bates reaches, and an important element of
Hobbes’s political philosophy. If Shakespeare were wholeheartedly endorsing
absolutism, then Henry would cherish Bates’s position, however, he recoils at this
conclusion, and argues for his own de jure right to rule. If his reign has a higher power
supporting it, then his subjects’ actions (and wills) can be their own. In this case, they can
owe their king a death through the virtue of honor. We know Henry V considers this a
reasonable debt because he holds Falstaff accountable to it in 1 Henry IV.

The issue is not as simple for Williams as it is for Bates, however. Williams holds
the king responsible because of his majesty’s declaration of war. “[I]f the cause be not
good,” he points out, “the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make” (4.1 134-5). To
drive his point home, Williams delivers one of the most realistic, sober descriptions of a
battlefield in all of Shakespeare. Possibly through hearsay or first-hand experience,
Williams imagines a soldier’s death, “some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some
upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their
children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in battle” (4.1 138-42).

Compared with Henry’s “Feast of St. Crispian’s Day” propagandist pabulum, this
meditative description would douse morale around any encampment. As the leader of this
army, Henry does not need this kind of disheartening chatter going around the campfires.

More than anything, though, the theme of Williams’s rumination highlights the material

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67 This is an important feature of de factoism’s effect on individual subjects, which this dissertation
explores in chapter four.
effects of a grizzly battlefield death, the call for a surgeon to repair a physically broken body, or the material responsibilities a dying soldier leaves behind. It is the reality of a soldier’s physical death that is so powerfully described here. Henry will be unable to deny the reality of these gruesome descriptions, however, the entire reason Williams brings them up is to conclude, contrary to Bates’s position, “if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it” (4.1.144-5). In other words, Williams holds King Henry V responsible for the men’s lives and actions. Williams vocalizes the ambiguous nature of their venture, specifically, its dubious premise. If Williams were a lieutenant with more free time to mull over his own thoughts, he might be capable of rising up against Henry’s de facto power. However, his anarchic will is immediately silenced by Henry. When Williams expresses his real feelings about their campaign – that he is there because Henry has the power to conscript his service – the disguised king launches into one of the most convoluted and complex analogies in Shakespeare’s entire canon.

For thirty eight lines of prose, Henry equates soldiers and kings with sons and fathers, servants and masters. In each instance, the subordinate commits some “imputation of …wickedness” while on legitimate business for their superiors (4.1.149). Henry says, “you may call the business of the master the author of the servant’s damnation. But this is not so” (4.1.153-5). Henry desperately wants to prove that his men have free will despite the fact that their choices are limited to possible death on the battlefield, if they “choose” to fight, or certain punishment at home, if they choose not to. “Every subject’s duty is the king’s, but every subject’s soul is his own,” is how Henry succinctly, aphoristically states it (4.1.126-7). However, faced with the cold, hard reality
of their situation, which Williams describes with powerful simplicity, Henry’s hypothetical similes about fathers and sons, masters and servants fails to inspire the men. Like most didactic truisms, its profundity withers when applied to real-world scenarios.

Henry puts on the disguise to find out how his men really feel about him and their excursion into Normandy. What he finds out, at least from Williams, obviously disturbs him. The scene deserves attention because Henry’s reaction here reveals a certain inner turmoil or conflict. As king, Henry wants his men to obey him first and foremost. They do. But when they explain the reason for their obedience, it raises the problem of free will, which raises the issue at the heart of this conflict, the issue of justified authority. What Henry learns during his outing is that his men obey him because he has the power to force their obedience. He is a de facto ruler who happens to wear the crown and sit on the throne. He possesses the accoutrement and habiliments of majesty, but more importantly, necessarily he possesses the material power of authority. This alleviates the men of personal responsibility because they have given up their wills to their sovereign. When Henry V faces this reality of his own de facto power, he recoils at the notion. According to Smith, “Leviathan [is] truly a text of revolution and watershed,” because it explains how, “the subject becomes interchangeable with the sovereign at the moment of covenanting, so that the possibility of accession to power is theoretically a possibility for everyone” (163). When Henry becomes “Harry le Roy,” he learns the startling truth of this moment. He wants his men to obey him and follow him into battle because they choose to, as Christian soldiers, or at the very least, because some musty old English law justifies the invasion. “[I]t is no English treason to cut French crowns,” he tells the reasonably skeptical soldiers (4.1 227-8). The reality of de factoism – that anyone can
rule with enough power and that the power compels obedience enough to obliterate personal responsibility – undercuts Henry’s idealistic self-perception as a righteous and just ruler. Furthermore, when we look back at the qualities Merbury assigns to tyrants, we find that he says a tyrant, “hideth himself from [his subjects], as from his enemies,” but that “the good king delighteth to be seen” (13). Therefore, Henry’s subterfuge in this scene, by its mere nature, casts aspersions on the righteousness of his reign. This often-glossed moment of the play reveals more about Henry’s character than his famous speech at Agincourt. This scene reveals the impetus for the king’s most famous speech two scenes later, and casts a dark shadow of personal insecurity over his rousing words.

So who are the anarchic wills of Henry V? With Williams’s brief moment of political rabble-rousing drowned out, with Falstaff relegated to a death offstage, and with Henry’s power spanning across the English Channel, it would appear that Shakespeare leaves no room for the skepticism of earlier antagonists to order. This is when we must recall Essex’s attempt to stir up political dissent through the theater. By staging Shakespeare’s drama, Essex wanted audiences to transpose the theatrical critique of government to the real theater of power across the Thames. In Shakespeare and Political Theater in Practice, Andrew James Hartley argues that early modern drama gives us, “politics at its most theatrical and theater at its most political, not simply because it represents politics on stage but because it has – or can have – political effects on the off stage audience” (2). One of the hallmarks of new historicism has been to trace this interplay between theater and court. Most convincingly, David Scott Kastan argues how, “the theatre nourished the cultural conditions that eventually permitted the nation to bring its King to trial, not because the theatre approvingly represented subversive acts, but
rather because representation became itself subversive...history plays inevitably, if unconsciously, weakened the structure of authority: on stage the king became a subject” (460-1). Stephen Mullaney also studies the interaction of the theater and London politics, calling the theatres, “Houses of Proteus” because they threatened stable social order from their liminal spaces (51).

As many post-modern theorists have posited, readers, and subsequently audience members, are not merely passive receptacles for literary texts. Theater-goers actively participated in shaping the meaning of stage drama, as evidenced by the authorial pleas that open many of the plays. Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, for instance, makes the implied covenant between drama and audience explicit in its exchange between the “Stage-keeper,” “Book-holder,” and “Scrivener.” Shakespeare even frames his *Henry V* with the singular “Chorus” figure who addresses the audience throughout. However, though the direct address was a familiar trope on the early modern stage, we should not discount the continued engagement of the audience throughout performance. Herbert S. Weil has demonstrated how many of Shakespeare’s characters indirectly interacted with London spectators, pointing out how Hal’s “I know you all” soliloquy could technically only address Falstaff since Sir John is the only character to interact with the prince onstage up to that point (173-4). Also, Sheldon Zitner articulates how Shakespeare

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68 See Robert Darnton’s “‘What is the History of Books?’ Revisited,” and Michel de Certeau’s “Reading as Poaching.”
69 Included among, “The Articles of agreement, indented, between the spectators or hearers at the Hope on the Bankside, in the County of Surrey, on the one party, and the author of Barthol’mew Fair,” are (1) the extent of the spectator’s criticism limited to the price of their seat, (2) spectator agrees to expect nothing more than a realistic depiction of life, and (3) the spectator is not allowed to correlate the fictional action to real life (Introduction 64-67).
70 Apparently written before Essex’s failure abroad, Shakespeare would briefly, specifically allude to the Earl in the last play of his tetralogy. As the Chorus comes onstage to introduce the final act of *Henry V*, Shakespeare compares the king’s triumphant return from France to his own contemporary, “general of our gracious Empress, / As in good time he may, from Ireland coming, / Bringing rebellion broached on his sword, / How many would the peaceful city quit, / To welcome him!” (Prologue to 5 30-4). The idealized account would differ from historical reality, however.
communicates with the audience through more than just soliloquies, asides, or epilogues, by going, “over the heads of other characters,” who happen to be onstage (Zitner in Weil 170). Weimann writes of “a residue” that remains in theatrical performance because even though the plays can be textually rendered, they “cannot quite be reduced to the status of a text” (200). Weimann argues that the source of this residue lies in “the act of performance itself, at least insofar as it involves an irreducible investment of the non-representable energy, labour, needs, and exhaustion of the actors’ minds and bodies” (200). I want to suggest that another kind of residue remains: the residue of verbal communication, of representational dialogue, which is the lifeblood of dramatic text. Conversation, even debate or disputation, brings concepts into the open air. A debate lost or even a disputation correctly answered leaves a textual residue in the minds of an audience. The anarchic will personifies this residue onstage.

Though a little more sophisticated and complex than the previous dramas, I believe this is what transpires at the end of Henry V. Shakespeare’s history of Henry V reveals the slimness of the king’s de jure claims even as it stages robust scenes of national heroism. It exposes the political reality at the bottom of even the most virtuous appeals to honor. Though the play features some of Shakespeare’s most nationalistic, xenophobic, speeches, it also provides a counter narrative of a king, who “in his nakedness […] appears but a man,” and exposes the reality of human equality that lie beneath even the most noble appeals to heraldry (4.1 105). Pollnitz similarly notes the

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71 Disputation was an important part of curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge during the early modern period. These debates covered all sorts of subject matter, including the ideal political system. Part of, “The Queen’s Entertainment at Cambridge, 1564,” was to observe Disputations in St. Mary’s Church. With the queen in attendance, the young scholars were to answer, “Monarchia est optimus status reipulicae?,” a question supplied by, “one of her own Physitians, Doctor of this University, named Dr. Hycke,” after the approval of her majesty (Nichols 170-71). According to Quentin Skinner, More’s Utopia is similarly concerned with “the best state of a commonwealth” (2010 213).
discord between the theatrical presentation of Henry V and the murkiness of what lies behind that representation, concluding, “Overall Shakespeare presents Hal as a successful king: stoic, prudent, devout, careful of his subjects’ welfare, persuasive and conquering. While the playwright leaves the manner in which he acquired these capacities obscure” (131-132). As Greenblatt notes, Henry V, “Shakespeare’s most charismatic hero,” does not, “substantially alter the plays’ overarching skepticism about the ethics of wielding authority” (2009 68). If the tetralogy’s earlier anarchic wills find their origin in the new understanding that political powers only have de facto authority, then the audiences at the Globe experience a similar awareness. 72 Daniel Juan Gil argues that Shakespeare’s, “characters are forced to recognize themselves as utterly exposed to the arbitrary sovereign power of the state, but again and against his recognition leads to a transformation in self and in the links between self and others” (1). For Gil, the new awareness leads to a benign transformation in the characters onstage. I have tried to show that this awareness has a more malevolent effect on the anarchic wills because those arbitrary powers do not wish to appear arbitrary. They realize that to maintain their de facto power, they must wear de jure garb. Therefore, the anarchic wills represent a threat to their authority and to social stability. However, the effect of these plays on an audience is a bit more ambivalent and could potentially lead to the kind of positive effects Gil suggests. He argues that Shakespeare is anti-political, that Shakespeare endows his characters with the ability to resist authority through their physical relationship with

72 The individuals making up the Elizabethan audience are not the only spectators who interpret the play for more than its staging. Gunter Walch, for instance, draws attention to the figure of the play’s Chorus, and argues, “We are gradually made aware, by the way the Chorus operates, that he cannot be relied upon to be always talking of what is acutally represented on the stage” (201). For Walch, it is through his sophisticated use of the Chorus figure that Shakespeare, “creates a unique dramatic structure in his last history play in order to do something completely different from what he had been doing in his previous histories” (203).
others through, “an eroticism that is built on the breakdown of conventionally defined persons” (12). Once again, I think Gil’s point is most valuable when applied to the physical bodies in attendance, audiences who, for the first time in English history, saw their monarchs of the recent past humanized onstage.  

Depicting both the good and bad, the turn towards humanizing monarchs reached its apex in the seventeenth century. For instance, Sir Anthony Weldon’s *A Cat May Look upon a King*, published in 1652, shows just how critical the perception of Henry V (and the notion of monarchy) had become. A product of the post-Civil War pro-Republican sentiment, Weldon’s book offers brief, scathing descriptions of every English king from William the Conqueror to Charles I. Of Henry V, he writes, “our stories mention nothing but his wars, raising of monies, and spending the blood of this poor nation” (19-20).

Earlier texts had criticized the monarchy, of course. For instance, Doleman’s *Conference* (1594) called Henry V, “the Alexander of Ingland,” for his conquering, imperial spirit (Doleman). But Doleman’s work has obvious Catholic (and Lancastrian) sympathies and is hostile to Protestants and Tudors. Thus, the incendiary text was condemned in Elizabeth’s England. Its printer was hung, drawn, and quartered and Elizabeth made it treasonous to possess a copy of Doleman’s work. By the time Weldon was publishing such retribution was nonexistent. The increased skepticism of divine royalty evidenced in texts like Weldon’s (not to mention the war that preceded it) addressed the most important political question of this or any other time: the question of political legitimacy. The question of how a government justifies its reach.

73 The next chapter will more closely explore this moment in the history of theater. See also Joan Parks’s “History, Tragedy, and Truth in Christopher Marlowe's “Edward II” for more on how Elizabethan playwrights, especially Marlowe, ushered in a radically new genre of drama.
According to John Morrill, “England was moving away from civil war in the early seventeenth-century” (349). Citing the fact that, “no peer and probably no gentleman was tried for treason between 1605 and 1641,” Morrill argues that early Stuart England was a place of peace and “probably the least violent country in Europe” (349). While the physical violence may have been tempered, and while official acts of treason, like Essex’s may have been a rarity, a psychological violence was nevertheless brewing. For Stephen Greenblatt, the plays in the Henriad “confirm the Machiavellian hypothesis that princely power originates in force and fraud even as they draw their audience toward an acceptance of that power” (1989 65). However, critics have since contested Greenblatt’s theory of containment, arguing instead for a more complex reception among audiences.74 My reading, which locates the anarchic will in Shakespeare’s audience, similarly works against Greenblatt’s notion of civil acceptance. Dissent and anarchy may not have immediately played out in the streets or on the battlefield, but they were played out onstage. The anarchic wills, in particular, affect more than civil unrest. Shakespeare’s Henriad, which is often regarded as one of the crown jewels of the Tudor Myth, unsettles the notion of political authority that Henry VII, VIII, and Elizabeth worked so hard to establish. The Tudor Myth held great power in the sixteenth century, but these four plays did not unquestionably support it.

Not supporting this myth of political legitimation could lead to jail time or worse.75 Other writers were variously accused and condemned of political treason

74 See Kiernan Ryan’s “The Future of History in Henry IV,” and David Scott Kastan’s Shakespeare After Theory.
75 Steven Mullaney points out how no matter how monarchical power was transformed or upended on the stages of London’s Liberties, the last theatrical display of power a theater-going audience would have seen were the severed heads of England’s traitors hanging on London Bridge as its citizens crossed back north across the Thames (117).
through the testimony of their work. For instance, in his *An Answer to the first part of a
certaine conference concerning succession* (1603), Sir John Hayward attempts to
ingratiate himself to James I by supporting the new king’s authority through a political
explication of his own treatise of Henry IV’s rise to power. Written in 1599, *The First
Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIII* had caught the eye and ire of Elizabeth
because the dedicatory preface allegedly supported the ambitions of Essex, landing
Hayward in jail. Released after the death of Elizabeth, Hayward promptly wrote *An
Answer* to James I immediately seeking the King’s good graces. Like Hobbes, Hayward
warns, “Sometimes Democraticall government doth draw to a pure anarchie; and so doth
the interregnum of elective principalities,” but unlike Hobbes, Hayward supports his
claim through a God-given natural reason (Hayward). He supports the, “most loved, most
dread, most absolute both borne and respected Soveraigne,” through “Natural reason,”
which shows how many things come from one (Hayward). Hayward supports James’s
succession and reign because, according to him, “The whole world is nothing but a great
state; a state is no other then a great familie; and a familie no other then a great bodye”
(Hayward). As Hayward demonstrates, even as monarchs were being humanized onstage,
they were being glorified in political thought.

Hayward’s experience also demonstrates how men of letters could persuade with
their prose. Treatises, like Hayward’s, could be read univocally. Drama, however, with its
polyglot of dramatis personae allows ideas to percolate and foment uninterruptedly.

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76 Hayward is responding to the pseudonymously penned, *Conference about the Next Succession to the
Crowne of England* (1594) mentioned before in connection to Essex’s rebellion.
77 Elizabeth ordered Bacon to look into the allegations at the time, but Bacon found nothing to substantiate
the claims. However, after Essex’s arrest, Hayward’s play was used against the Earl as evidence of his
treason. Hayward would spend three years in the Tower for the political implications of his dramatic work
(Manning).
Therefore, because the form of his work uses the dialogue of theater and the medium of characters, the anarchic will remains unavoidable. Out of the verbal exchanges that comprise dramatization, the anarchic will emerges. The anarchic wills recognize the “cease of majesty” and they threaten political stability with their new-found knowledge. When Shakespeare gives voice to these characters, something he must do as a playwright, he opens up a space for political subversion. He opens up the conversation that Bacon warns against. To some extent it is possible for a character to recognize the failure of de jure claims and still not be anarchic. Subversion can be contained, as it is with York in Richard II. The anarchic will, however, comes out of de jurism’s ashes with a profound understanding of a new political reality. When a power says “Be rul’d by me,” the anarchic will answers, “why should I?”
CHAPTER IV

ANTIC DISPOSITIONS:
THE STATE OF NATURE AND THE NATION STATE IN *H AMLET AND K ING L EAR*

Leaving behind the explicitly political dramas of the Henriad, we now turn to a few selections from Shakespeare’s period of “high tragedy.” These plays find individuals pitted against classical antagonists like fate, fortune, the natural world, or their own hamartia, and stand as the premier exemplars of English tragedy in any period. Experiencing some of the genre’s most acute suffering, Shakespeare’s tragic heroes poetically express the heights of human suffering and aestheticize the universal human theme of personal disaster. Through soliloquy and monologue these characters reveal a sophisticated, psychological inner-world remarkable for the level of depth they appear to possess. As tragic figures, they express the limits of personal suffering. As anarchic wills, these tragic heroes also reveal much about suffering in the political realm. The anarchic wills studied in this chapter – Hamlet, Edmund, and Lear – experience some of the most traumatic and disastrous crises when faced with the new reality that de facto powers rule. Like all anarchic wills, they come to the realization that de jure claims to

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78 The period (roughly between 1600 and 1604) in which he wrote, *Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth,* and *Othello,* the four plays generally considered the height of his achievement in the genre.

79 For more on the purpose of tragedy see Anthony J. Cascardi’s “Tragedy and Philosophy;” Richard Eldridge’s *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature,* J.M. Bernstein’s “Tragedy,” and David Scott Kastan’s “‘A Rarity Most Beloved’: Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy.”

80 Greenblatt says Shakespeare’s soliloquies reveal characters who exhibit, “the unmistakable mark of actual thinking” (2004 301)
power have no meaning and that the usual obligations for political obedience no longer exist.

As the political drama plays out on a psychological, personal level, the anarchic will undergoes a dramatic transformation, and because the anarchic wills studied here are also intimately tied with political authority, their actions threaten to enact a political transformation. Aristotle says a tragic hero must experience a reversal of fortune, an experience that turns their life upside down.\textsuperscript{81} When the anarchic wills of these plays experience this tragic reversal, they go from civilized society to a chaotic state of nature. To an extent, the anarchic wills in the following tragedies are Hobbes’s State of Nature personified.

The introduction outlined Hobbes’s State of Nature, but because it is so important for this chapter, I will include another brief synopsis of its characteristics. First, it is a state where all men are created equal. As equally created beings, our survival is precarious because there is no morality in the state of nature, “For in the conditions of men that have no other law but their own appetites, there can be no general rule of good and evil actions” \textit{(L 464)}. Its amorality is the second important feature of the state of nature. With no moral or legal impediments, and since everyone desires their own safety, we live in a constant state of war, either actual or under the dread of potential combat. This is the anarchic state of chaos where progress, civilization cannot get a foothold since everyone’s unchecked desires thwart development. Hobbes tells us it is, “not the appetite of private men, but the law, which is the will and appetite of the state” that establishes a society’s moral measures \textit{(L 464)}. Without a sovereign power to enact and enforce life

\textsuperscript{81} Aristotle calls this, “peripety,” in his \textit{Poetics}, and defines it as “the change of the kind described from one state of things within the play to its opposite” (679).
protecting laws, this war continues. Eventually, man rationally realizes that peace is preferable to war and that the only way to achieve peace is to submit our individual rights for self-protection to a sovereign power.

I include this brief overview of Hobbes’s State of Nature because I argue that the anarchic wills studied in this chapter confront and confirm Hobbes’s version of political pre-history. The anarchic wills studied in this chapter throw off the sovereign powers that establish the laws and justice which guarantee their security. As they eschew the political framework of civilization, they undergo a traumatic psychosis. In the characters of Hamlet, Edmund, and Lear we see this political psychosis dramatized. Shakespeare represents political discord, as Hobbes would have it, in their manic mental state. As the anarchic will takes its counterpoised position against de facto authority, it experiences a mental breakdown, a symbolic representation of the political state’s lack of well-being.

Anarchic wills threaten the political system in many of Shakespeare’s dramas and this dissertation could examine any number of them. Macbeth, for instance, leads Scotland into a quintessential example of Hobbes’s all-against-all war. A powerful anarchic will, Macbeth does not threaten Christian order, but rather political stability, the relationships that compose interpersonal civilization. Macbeth describes his antagonist: “I will not yield, / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet, / And to be baited with the rabble’s curse” (5.8 27-9). Traditionally, early-modern characters who express Macbeth’s obstinacy to power have been labeled “overreachers.”

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82 Hobbes never intends us to read his account of man in the State of Nature as a real historical moment. Rather, he asks us to imagine what man’s pre-civilization must have been like, through a deduction of our present social structures. For more on Hobbes and his complicated relationship with metaphors, see Robert E. Stillman’s “Hobbes’s Leviathan: Monsters, Metaphors, and Magic.”

83 After the entry in George Puttenham’s influential Arte of English Poesy (1589), which anglicized “hyperbole.”

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heavens with Icarus-like ambition, the overreacher always falls to damnation for their hubris. Harry Levin explains how these overreachers, “challenge the more settled ways of living” through “an assertion of man’s will [rather] than an acceptance of God’s” (26; 24). As Levin’s definition suggests, most interpretations understand the overreaching hero through their opposition to God or divinity. As said above, however, Macbeth explicitly challenges an earthly, not heavenly, authority. Macduff is a political, not theological, rival. Thus, Macduff does not wield Michael’s flaming sword of divine justice against a usurper to God’s order; he does not ascend Dunsinane to correct a divine imbalance. Rather, Macduff merely sets up a new, but not necessarily rightful, regime when he slays Macbeth. And for Macbeth, the curse of eternal damnation does not await his defeat. He confidently rejects any kind of existence after the brief candle of life expires. Instead, the jeers from his former subjects, “the rabble’s curse,” terrify him more than anything Mephistopheles could devise (5.8 29). In other words, Shakespeare pits Macbeth’s will against political power, not divine forces.

A study of Macbeth would add much to my project, but I want to focus solely on Hamlet and King Lear because the juxtaposition of these two plays offers more than just characteristic examples of anarchic wills. When compared and contrasted, these two plays affords us the opportunity to examine differing political outcomes and differing developments of the anarchic will. In Hamlet, for instance, we will see an anarchic will who struggles against de facto political power until he comes to the conclusion that divine justice guides the affairs of office. Hamlet’s “antic disposition” will develop into

84 See Alan Sinfield’s “Macbeth: history, ideology and intellectuals” for the murkiness of Malcolm’s claim: “Nor is Malcolm’s title altogether clear, since Duncan’s declaration of him as ‘Prince of Cumberland’ (i.iv .35-42) suggests what the chronicles indicate, namely that the succession was not necessarily hereditary” (Sinfield 69).
neostoic contentment as the play concludes with political peace through de facto finality. Though *Hamlet* was performed at Oxford when Hobbes a student, I do not mean to suggest that Hobbes owes a debt to Shakespeare’s tragedy or that the play inspired, even in part, his political philosophy. The play simply offers a dramatic example of Hobbes’s system. King Lear, on the other hand, will throw his ordered kingdom into disarray and experience a will transformed into anarchy as Hobbes’s State of Nature reasserts itself around and through him. Instead of concluding with political stability, like *Hamlet*, the end of *King Lear* prophesizes a period of political anarchy in the power vacuum at play’s end. If *Hamlet* ends in a firm staging of political control that develops out of the settling of anarchic wills, then *King Lear* gives us a regression of political order, from the firm rule of absolute power to the anarchic State of Nature, where no one can “over awe” anyone else.

*Hamlet*

This chapter will first discuss Shakespeare’s most notable protagonist, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, the play’s most anarchic will. Specifically, I will make five claims about *Hamlet*, the play and the protagonist in the following pages. First, I will argue that the tragedy is more of a political play than is commonly considered, so we can read the rest of the play as a political drama. Establishing this context leads to my second point,}

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85 A.P. Martinich discovers that, “Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* was performed in Oxford in 1607,” but is quick to point out, “we do not know whether Hobbes attended (1999 18).

86 I also do not mean to suggest that Hobbes cribbed his thoughts on politics from the English plays of his youth, though he most certainly would have come into contact with them. *Hamlet* was performed at Oxford when he was a student there, and A.P. Martinich even thinks he played a role in one of Ben Jonson’s one-off plays written to be performed at the Cavendish’s home (Martinich 1999 18; 1998 370). I simply mean to point out that the river of culture has many tributaries and wellsprings. Hobbes’s friend and biographer, Aubrey, remarked on Hobbes’s early engagement with literature, writing how, “Before Thucydides, he spent two years in reading romances and plays, which he was often repented and said that these two years were lost to him – wherein perhaps he was mistaken too, for it might furnish him with copy of words” (151). For more on Hobbes and seventeenth-century literature, see Richard Hillyer’s *Hobbes and His Poetic Contemporaries: Cultural Transmissions in Early Modern England* (2007).
which is that Hamlet’s psychotic break is symbolic of political disorder. During the course of the play, Hamlet comes to realize that normative ethics do not guide Denmark, as a microcosm, or the universe, as a macrocosm. As all three of the main protagonists in this chapter will demonstrate, when the political system cracks along this normative fault line, the individual suffers a mental break. As said in the introduction, this is a defining feature of the anarchic will. The third point I want to explore is how Hamlet’s mental instability threatens Denmark in a slightly, but significantly, different way than other upheavals. The state faces a few unsettling moments during the play, but Hamlet’s presence becomes increasingly dangerous in a unique way. His presence transforms Denmark into a state where, as Hobbes writes, “the condition of mere nature (that is to say, of absolute liberty, such as is theirs that neither are sovereigns nor subjects),” has come into being, which, “is anarchy, and the condition of war” (L 233). Fourth, I will argue that Hamlet’s act-five transformation, his return to Denmark, signals an acceptance of the de facto state of power. Hamlet expresses a new psychological calm when he comes back to Elsinore, both in the form of self-actualization – “This is I, / Hamlet the Dane,” and in the form of neostoicism – “there is special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (5.1 257-8; 5.2 219-20).

Finally, therefore, I will argue that the play works as a sort of dramatization of Hobbes’s hypothetical narrative of man’s rise out of anarchy into social order. The play features lawlessness, unchecked slaughter, and mayhem. “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark,” as Marcellus says, but it is not a prison as Hamlet describes it (1.4 90; 2.2 243). Rather, it is a free-for-all where political order finds no purchase. As this section argues, Hamlet’s anarchic will is responsible for the political chaos. It is only when
Hamlet returns to Denmark in act five, when he comes to terms with the material foundations for authority and recognizes that great rulers have no inherent righteousness, no necessary quality that justifies their reign, that he achieves political peace of mind. Significantly, this tranquility is based on a belief in unseen Providence (reflecting late sixteenth-century neostoicism). When Fortinbras appears at play’s end, he assumes the throne, like Hobbes’s sovereign, rising out of the equal field of men to over-awe the politically ravaged country.

Though *Hamlet* garners more praise than almost any other work in English Literature, it rarely earns such praise on the basis of its merits as a political drama. Even when one of the most important elements of the play – Hamlet’s inaction – is read in political terms it is often misread. For example, Andrew Hadfield posits, “*Hamlet* is a play that confronts its audience with the dilemma of how they would act when faced with an unjust and unpalatable succession, leaving them governed by a ruler who has obtained power by nefarious means” (203). The problem with Hadfield’s reading, and others like it, is that it takes a political dilemma and transforms it into a moral conundrum. By stretching the political dimensions of the play into a morality tale, Hadfield distorts some of the most compelling aspects of the play. Hamlet is a prince, his family drama has political ramifications. In fact, the fate of the nation is tied up in the fate of the royal family, living and dead.

When King Hamlet’s ghost appears to Hamlet and informs him of his “murther most foul,” the ghost makes it clear that Hamlet is not just responsible for avenging his

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87 *Hamlet*, the gospel of Bardolatry, earns more hyperbolic praise than any of his other work. Harold Bloom provides a typically bombastic example, “You cannot get beyond *Hamlet*, which establishes the limits of theatricality, just as Hamlet himself is a frontier of consciousness yet to be passed. I think it wise to confront both the play and the prince with awe and wonder, because they know more than we do” (2003 7).
father’s life, but also his father’s “crown” and “queen” (1.5 27; 75). In fact, the ghost stresses the political implications of his murder first and foremost, lamenting how, “so the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forged process of my death / Rankly abus’d” (1.5 36-8). The ghost of Hamlet’s father does not use his brief time on earth to express paternal love or encouragement to his grieving, emotionally wrecked son. His concern is with the political state of Denmark (and his own soul), not the emotional state of his son. The ghost’s preoccupation with politics is concomitant with an emotional distance between the deceased ruler and the living heir. As Bloom points out, “The spirit does not speak of any love for his son, who would appear to have been rather a neglected child” (2003 4). The exchange between the ghost and Hamlet concern political matters much more than personal ones, and Shakespeare sacrifices the paternal bond that could be shared to the political situation at hand. This emotional distance challenges readings of the play that want to attach too much significance to Shakespeare’s own life at the time of Hamlet’s composition. For instance, Greenblatt, gives great significance the fact that Shakespeare was experiencing “the death of his son and the impending death of his father – a crisis of mourning and memory” that “constitue[ed] a psychic disturbance that may help to explain the explosive power and inwardness of Hamlet” (2004 318). Greenblatt mistakes political drama for familial drama in this instance, or at least, the concern of family, the emotional weight of conversing with lost loved ones, simply is not present in the exchanges Hamlet has with the ghost of his father. If Shakespeare used this scene as a

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88 The ghost is fettered to a Purgatorial timetable. When the cock crows, it “Awakes[es] the god of day, and at his warning, / . . . / Th’ extravagant and erring spirit his / To his confine” (1.1 152; 154-5). The ghost spends much of his time lamenting how scarce his time on earth is, “My hour is almost come / When I to sulph’rous and tormenting flames / Must render up myself” (1.5 2-4). See also, Greenblatt’s Hamlet In Purgatory for a more complete interpretation of the ghost’s relationship to Purgatory (especially p. 229-230), and the entire work for the play’s relationship to the Catholic state of Limbo in Protestant England.
surrogate conversation with his son, Hamnet, then the playwright was a cold and distant father. No, the real importance of this scene is the revelation that Denmark’s king has been assassinated and that the future of the state hangs in the balance.

The trouble with Denmark is laid out in act one, scene one, and sets up the political background of the entire play. Once the drama turns inward, to Hamlet’s psychosis and the interior of Elsinore, we tend to forget the threat of foreign invasion. However, when we consider the political crisis, we find that Shakespeare has chosen a complex, rather convoluted set of circumstances. The threat against Denmark, the threat that has Bernardo and Marcellus on guard in the first place, is not merely invasion from a foreign force. It is more delicate and complicated because it involves rights to conquered lands. As Horatio explains, King Hamlet and Old Fortinbras decided that a parcel of contested lands would be lawfully conceded to the victor of combat. King Hamlet, “smote the sledded Polacks on the ice,” and earned legal claim to the lands (1.1 63). The reason for Denmark’s anxiety at the start of the play is that Fortinbras’s nephew has, “Shark’d up a list of lawless resolutes…to recover of [the Danes], by strong hand / And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands / So lost by his father” (1.1 98; 102-4). Young Fortinbras disregards the, “seal’d compact / Well ratified by law and heraldry,” that demarcates the lost lands to Denmark, and threatens to illegally seize the territory (1.1 86-7). Shakespeare could have simply established the Norwegian threat as a fight over uncontested land or gone to the well of nationalist xenophobia that ran so deep in the early modern period and said Denmark was at war with Norway because they were Norwegian. After all, the Montagues and Capulets simply have “ancient grudge break to new mutiny,” to set off their tragic conflict (R&J Prologue 3). Instead, Shakespeare
chooses to frame the drama with this convoluted scenario. The lands were, “Lost by [Fortinbras’s father], with all bonds of law,” Claudius explains, joining the refrain that establishes this as a dispute over lands de jure (1.2 24). The added layer of political explanation is reminiscent of the opening scene of Henry V explored in the last chapter. Fortinbras has no “right” to the lands. He plays fast and loose with the “laws,” like Henry V, and recognizes that physical force can and, in the case of Hamlet, does suffice for political rule.

In this way, Fortinbras comes to symbolize de facto power. We will return to Fortinbras in a bit, for now, just keep in mind that he is an emblem of the power that explicitly does not have a “right” to rule, who nevertheless achieves power at play’s end. He gets power, but only because there is literally no one else to take it. This is a most literal instance of “assuming” power. Fortinbras, from his constant presence in the periphery, frames the entire action of the drama. His military movements have the Danish guard on high alert in the first place, and the play’s last words are his.

Now that we have situated the play in a political realm, we can address one of the tragedy’s most puzzling aspects, indeed, one of its most mysterious and oft-questioned aspects: Hamlet’s madness. First, as to whether or not Hamlet feigns his psychosis or not, I take the position that it starts out as a ruse, but eventually becomes authentic. After privately speaking with the ghost of his father, Hamlet makes Horatio and Marcellus swear that when he acts insane, they will not reveal the night’s events: “How strange or odd some’er I bear myself - / As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on” (1.5 170-2). What begins as a calculated effort to appear insane, however, turns genuine as the play progresses. Many plausible explanations for Hamlet’s madness
exist. Characters offer their theories, scholars have offered many, and Freud even
established his career on the source of Oedipal desire in Hamlet’s madness. I argue that
what Claudius calls, “Hamlet’s transformation,” is a symptom of Hamlet’s political world
being in disorder (2.2 5). If we diagnose his problem in this way, then we can more
clearly understand Hamlet’s earlier countenance.

When we first meet the young prince, he wears the inky clothes of mourning to
match the inward grief he cannot overcome. Hamlet fulfills his filial duty to grieve at the
loss of his father, a demonstration that others approve, up to a point.89 Wearing dark
clothes, taking a brooding posture, and soliloquizing about the poor state of human affairs
are all features of the “malcontent,” the stock character of early modern drama so familiar
to theater-goers of the time. And while Hamlet certainly fits the description of this
archetype, he is more than just a mouthpiece for discontentment. Before he learns of his
father’s murder, Hamlet’s anxiety stems from his own fierce sense of morality, his
cripplingly rigid sense of righteousness.

A deep sense of order and righteousness defines Hamlet’s character early in the
play. The unyielding morality is the basis for his, “I know not seems,” response to his
mother (1.2 76). Gertrude acknowledges the customary period of grief as a good thing for
Hamlet to express. That is, she approves of his grief within the guidelines of socially
sanctioned mores. Her advice is morally sound. Still, Hamlet challenges the customary,

89 Claudius condones Hamlet’s obsequiousness until it becomes “obstinate condolement,” “impious
stubbornness,” and “unmanly grief” (1.2 93-4).
and gross in nature” (1.2 135-6). To hear Hobbes – sounding an awful lot like Hamlet – describe it, the State of Nature is a world of, “no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct, but only that to be every man’s that he can get, and for so long as he can keep it. And thus much for the ill condition which man be mere nature is actually placed in” (L 78). The natural world is amoral and unruly for Hobbes, and Hamlet holds Denmark in the same regard. There is very little grey area in Hamlet’s worldview. The actions of others, men and women, are either right or wrong. When Horatio asks about the king’s late-night revelry, Hamlet explains that when Claudius “takes his rouse” and “drains his draughts of Rhenish down,” it is because of a Danish custom, not necessarily because of some defect in Claudius’s character (1.4 10). However, though Hamlet is “to the manner born,” he would still see the custom, “More honored in the breach than the observance” (1.4 14-16).

Erik Erikson offers us a useful way of thinking about Hamlet’s psychological development in his description of how adolescents often take a proactive role in developing their own identities through, “self-decreed moratorium[s], during which they often starve themselves, socially, erotically, and last but not least, nutritionally, in order to let the grosser weeds die our, and make way for the growth of their inner garden” (44). Erikson even uses the same horticultural metaphor as Hamlet, and to a large extent Hamlet attempts this self-weeding during his anarchic phase. If we think of his inner turmoil, his chaotic mind as a metaphor for the political state of Denmark, then we can read his attempt to weed out the grosser parts of his inner garden as an attempt to reshape the state into his idealized world. The only problem, of course, is that Hamlet does not have the de facto power to safely enact his wishes. Therefore, his attempts to reorient
everyone else, like Ophelia and Gertrude, results in more destruction and chaos. His psychologically anarchic state bleeds over into the political state.

Even when the activity has been sanctioned by custom and common practice, Hamlet still takes issue with it. This exchange reveals how Hamlet expects the world to adhere to a particular sense of order, a specific understanding of “right” and “wrong” and he explicitly associates this morality with its political implications. He worries about the perception that other nations will have at the sight of such debauchery, fearing that it “makes [Denmark] traduc’d and tax’d of other nations” (1.4 18). Even though the evening’s imbibing is an accepted practice, Hamlet still finds it that it inappropriate and reprehensible.

That these values might be exclusively Hamlet’s never seems to occur to the prince, but my point is not to suggest Hamlet’s idiosyncrasy or solipsism. The point is to suggest that these initial moments with Hamlet introduce us to a character who struggles to reconcile the real, material world to a larger sense of righteousness. The world is not as-it-should-be for Hamlet and it deeply disturbs him. Theodore Spencer argues that *Hamlet* dramatizes, “the conflict between the two views of man’s nature which was so deeply felt in his age. On the one side was the picture of man as he should be – it was bright, orderly and optimistic. On the other was the picture of man as he is – it was full of darkness and chaos” (94). When we focus on the play’s politics, which it repeatedly asks us to, then we can see that the same dichotomy applies to the politics of early modern England. The optimism and order that Spencer describes is Hobbes’s social contract, the darkness and chaos of man as he is, is the State of Nature. The dramatic irony for Hamlet is that his struggles for order actually cast him into a personal chaos that bleeds over into
the socio-political world he inhabits. We should remember Hamlet’s state at the
beginning of the play when we look at his changed nature in act five. There, we will see a
Hamlet eerily calm and accepting of the world as-it-is.

The world around him does not adhere to the rigid morality, the fixed sense of
righteousness, he demands. As the play progresses, Hamlet tries and fails to orient his
will to some useful standard. His first soliloquy dismisses suicide since God’s law forbids
it, but by the third act, he actively contemplates ending his life, and, significantly, uses
the metaphor of political exile to do it, concluding, “But that the dread of something after
death— / The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns— puzzles the
will” (3.1 77-9, my emphasis). Earlier, Hamlet’s willful desire for suicide was thwarted
by a staunch morality, God’s canon against self-slaughter. Now, those divine laws do not
concern him, nor does the divine justice supporting them. Furthermore, as he abandons
the religious injunction against suicide, Hamlet considers himself a political outcast.
According to Andrew Fitzmaurice, Hamlet is pondering a political dilemma at this
critical moment, calling this soliloquy, “a meditation on the possible withdrawal from
political life, not a contemplation on suicide” (154-5). Fitzmaurice and I part critical
company over the extent of Hamlet’s eventual political withdrawal, but here we are in
agreement. Hamlet’s concern is political, not eschatological. As his will is puzzled,
pulled further from the theocratic political system on which it once rested, his will
becomes more and more anarchic.

However, like Hamlet’s idiosyncratic objection to the Danish custom of
debauched revelry, his anarchic will does not speak for all of Denmark. Aside from
Horatio, who offers his limited service in support of his friend more than in support of
treason, no one besides Hamlet seems upset that Claudius is now the king.\footnote{Horatio agrees with Hamlet that Gertrude’s wedding, “followed hard upon,” the heels of King Hamlet’s funeral and he agrees to help the prince observe Claudius in his attempt to, “catch the conscience of the King” (1.2 179; 2.2 605).} Hamlet does not lead an organized rebellion against Claudius or rally the support of the Danish people to overthrow tyranny. In fact, Claudius seems to be a fairly capable head of state. And while some may object that Claudius is a tyrannical despot whose reign needs to be threatened, the political thought of the time was a bit less decisive when it came to assassinating tyrants. Sir Thomas Smith, for example, tells his mid sixteenth-century readers what to do when a commonwealth finds itself governed by an evil ruler. After citing a few historical examples like Dionysus and Caesar, Smith urges caution, writing, “Certain it is that it is always a doubtful and barbarous matter to meddle with the changing of the laws and government, or to disobey the orders of the rule of government, which a man doth find already established” (5). In other words, even if you find yourself subject to a ruler with questionable morality, or even one who suspiciously obtained the crown, you should be wary of disturbing the status quo because it may lead to more havoc and civil unrest.\footnote{Smith makes the distinction between kings and tyrants on three elements: their method of obtaining power, their method of rule, and to whose end they rule. A king comes to the throne through election or succession, he rules by law, and he “seeks the profit of the people as much as his own,” while a tyrant takes the crown by force “against the will of the people,” does not rule with the law, and seeks his own wealth or the wealth of his faction or kindred (6).} Hobbes explains the predicament: “men that are possessed of an opinion that their obedience to the sovereign power will be more hurtful to them than their disobedience will disobey the laws, and thereby overthrow the commonwealth, and introduce confusion and civil war” (L 366). If the powers-that-be have a strong enough hold to maintain peace, then let them be. This is especially true in times where war threatens the peace of a kingdom, which is why Smith gives special allowances for absolutism in times of war in his eighth chapter, “Of the absolute king” (7). Just as
Hamlet’s exaggeration of grief shows an unschooled understanding of the nature of the world, his enmity towards Claudius, which threatens the realm with anarchy, shows an unschooled understanding of the nature of politics. Though Claudius certainly achieved power through nefarious means, he gives no real indication that he means to rule with a self-serving iron fist.

I do not mean to suggest that he is the model for sovereignty. He committed fratricide to get his throne, but Denmark could do a lot worse. Shakespeare was at his best creating diabolical monsters, like Richard III, and he does not give us that with Hamlet’s uncle. Even The Winter’s Tale’s Leontes, who flies into jealous rage and then lapses into decades-long despondency, would be a less desirable king than Claudius. While it is true that Claudius creates the potential for political disorder with the murder of his brother, he deftly, and non-violently, establishes civil security and his own authority. Throughout his first monologue the new king puts his new authority on display. He establishes his matrimonial right to the throne through his “imperial jointress,” Gertrude; he diplomatically responds to Fortinbras’s military movements; and he even flexes his authority over Polonius’s by inserting himself into a family decision (1.2 9). Superficially, for all intents and purposes, the state of Denmark seems to be fairly stable. The only political problem that Claudius mishandles is the Fortinbras front, and that is because must rearranges his sovereign responsibilities to deal with the Hamlet problem. For instance, when Polonius meets Claudius with news of the English ambassadors’ visit

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92 Claudius does not send a military envoy in response to Fortinbras’s martial movements. He tries diplomacy first. “[W]e have here writ,” Claudius explains, “To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras / . . . / to suppress / His further gait herein” (1.2 27-8; 30-1).

93 Though important courtiers would have been required to seek the sovereign’s permission for all manner of things, Claudius stages Laertes’s request to return to France in order to show his new court the comprehensive reach of his power. True, he does defer to Polonius, “Have you your father’s leave? What says Polonius?,” but this exchange takes place in full view of the Danish court (1.2 57).
to Norway and of Hamlet’s madness, the king eagerly demands that he address “the very cause of Hamlet’s lunacy” first (2.2 49). Polonius, oblivious when interacting with Hamlet, but astute when it comes to political intrigue, urges the king to “Give first admittance to th’ ambassadors” and their correspondence (2.2 51). Claudius’s interest is well-placed, however, because Hamlet’s mental instability threatens Denmark just as much as a foreign invasion. While Fortinbras’s martial movements do concern the Danish court, Hamlet’s mental state, his ability to reason, becomes a more dangerous political threat.

The state and reason are intricately linked in the play. Horatio warns Hamlet not to follow the ghost because it “might deprive your sovereign of reason, / And draw you into madness” (1.4 73–4). This very much happens to Hamlet and the way Horatio expresses the warning reveals a popular understanding of reason in early modern England. Published around the time of Hamlet’s composition, Robert Mason’s Reason’s Monarchie (1602) equates mental composure with an orderly state. Describing for early modern readers the Platonic metaphor, Mason writes, “As the magistrate is said to be the head; and the people, the body of the commonwealth: so hath Reason added a third matter to give life unto this body, and to be, as it were, the soul of this head and body, which is the law whereby all the parts thereof are kept in order” (106). Mason continues, “The superficies, and the Chaos, or Cuball partes, [reason] understandeth, that in her entrails are many veins for water to pass…Reason hath searched into the refining

94 His advice to Reynaldo for keeping tabs on Laertes, “By indirections find directions out,” encapsulates his general political strategy, which, while it may rely on subterfuge, is certainly not inefficient (2.1 63).
95 Hobbes will take up the useful metaphor as well, writing, “For by art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth, or State (in Latin Civitas), which is but an artificial man…in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body…by which fastened to the seat of the sovereignty every joint and member is moved to perform his duty” (L 3). Hobbes’s description of the state as a body is, of course, most strikingly rendered on Leviathan’s frontispiece.
of things into a perfections, which nature itself hath not yet brought to maturity and ripeness” (41). As explained earlier, reason is also integral to Hobbes’s metaphor of political pre-history, since our rational faculty leads us to the necessity of the social contract. Other animals, or “beast[s], that want discourse of reason” to hear Hamlet tell it, have their own means of self-defense (1.2 150). “To make covenants with brute beasts is impossible,” Hobbes explains, “because, not understanding our speech, they understand not, nor accept of, any translation of right, not can translate any right to another; and without mutual acceptation, there is no covenant” (L 85). Therefore, when we talk about madness in Hamlet, when Hamlet’s “reason” is questioned and investigated, we can follow Mason’s example and apply these discussions to questions of political sovereignty. Reason refines chaos in Mason. In Shakespeare, when reason ebbs, social chaos flows. The sentiment is expressed throughout the play. For example, in act one, scene two, Claudius tells Laertes “you cannot speak of reason to the Dane / And lose your voice” (1.2 44-5). Claudius emphasizes the vocalization of reason – Laertes “speak[s] of reason” and is guaranteed not to lose his “voice,” – because the king relies on rhetoric and reason for social stability (1.2 44-5 my emphasis).

When Hamlet’s grief turns manic, he compromises national security. He accidentally assassinates a high-ranking state official when he stabs the arras-hidden Polonius, and he is out to assassinate the crowned king. Underneath these treasonous actions, however, is an anarchic understanding of political legitimacy. Hamlet does not just want to kill his father’s murderer – he wants to kill a king. And Hamlet never

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96 Similarly, when Nicholas Bodrugan encouraged Edward VI to use reason when dealing with Scotland, he wrote, “Nature the wise mother of all things, when she ordained all beasts with some natural munition, as horn, spur, tooth or nail…gave [mankind] reason” (Bodragon).
distinguishes between tyranny and monarchy. As Hamlet tells Guildenstern, “The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing – /…/ Of nothing” (4.2 27-8; 30). Hamlet is at his most dangerous when he comes to this politically nihilist conclusion. His attitude reveals a pessimistic hostility towards the notion that monarchs are simply men. Hamlet’s grotesque description of the circle of life – that even kings experience – enhances the materiality of de factoism: “A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat / of the fish that hath fed of that worm” (4.3 27-8). Hamlet will express a similar understanding of the regality of men in act five, but with a significantly different attitude towards this reality.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern offer a slightly similar, slightly less-grotesque metaphor for how others feed of a king’s body. For them, the safety of the king means the safety of the nation, “To keep those many many bodies safe / That live and feed upon your Majesty” (3.3 9-10). “The cess of majesty / Dies not alone,” Rosencrantz adds, “but like a great gulf doth draw / What’s near it with it” (3.3 15-7). But Hamlet’s insanity represents a specific kind of threat to Claudius’s crown. As an anarchic will, Hamlet does not just jeopardize a monarch, he jeopardizes the idea of monarchy. In fact, Claudius fears Hamlet’s mania more than composed challenges to his reign, saying, “There's something in his soul / O'er which his melancholy sits on brood; / And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose / Will be some danger (3.1 164-7). Claudius is correct when he says, “I like him not, nor stands it safe with us / To let his madness range” (3.3 1-2).

Hamlet threatens the realm because his willfulness would lead to anarchy. “His liberty is full of threats to all,” Claudius bemoans, “To you yourself, to us, to every one” (4.1 14-5). Claudius’s anxiety reveals a key aspect of the anarchic will, their threat to social order
and stability at a fundamental level. Anarchic wills do not threaten political order with calculated sabotage or organized political subterfuge. They represent a social unease or anxiety that is far worse than strategic rebellion. Hamlet’s murder of Polonius is a case in point, because it is an accidental assassination caused by Hamlet’s deteriorating mental state. Hamlet does not righteously slay Polonius. His antic passions get the better of him. His mania threatens Denmark more than the usual taking up of arms. Again, Hobbes offers a way to discern rebellion from anarchy, “they that are subjects to a monarch cannot without his leave cast off monarchy and return to the confusion of a disunited multitude” (L 111). When Hamlet threatens Claudius, he threatens the return of this confused and disunited polis. Accomplishing his goal, bringing about “the cess of majesty,” would throw Denmark into the state of confusion that Hobbes describes, the state of confusion that Hamlet’s mental chaos symbolizes. The play offers a dramatization of this subtle distinction as well, when Laertes returns from France to avenge his father’s murder.

Hamlet is more of a threat to Denmark than Laertes’s more traditional insurgency, and Claudius proves this with his cool, collected handling of Laertes. Note the description of Laertes’s insurgency to avenge Polonius:

The rabble call [Laertes] lord,

And as the world were not but to begin,

Antiquity forgot, custom not known,

The ratifiers and props of every world,

[They] cry, ‘Choose we, Laertes shall be king!’

Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds,
The people have risen up against their king and now support a potential usurper. According to the messenger here, they are already calling Laertes their king. Laertes has public opinion on his side and could potentially exploit this swell to take the crown. The pitchforks are raised and the torches are lit, and political revolution is at the doorstep of Claudius’s kingdom. However, while the messenger’s language gives the impression that Denmark teeters on revolution, Claudius remains calmly composed. When Laertes returns with his small insurgency, Claudius confronts him:

What is the cause, Laertes,
That thy rebellion looks so giantlike?
Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.
There's such divinity doth hedge a king
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will. (4.5 121-6)

Claudius recognizes that because a sense of righteousness fuels Laertes, he may be rebellious, but he is not anarchic. Laertes is controlled by his sense of honor. Like Hotspur, his sense of order and propriety still guides him, so Claudius knows he can manipulate that sense of order and manipulate Laertes into his service. Laertes never really threatens the kingdom, in the same way that Hotspur never stands a chance to topple Henry IV. The real threats to both of these realms are more vocal, antic, and anarchic.

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97 Chapter four will explore how Milton’s God similarly controls Satan through the fiend’s unwavering devotion to dishonor and vice.
For the first four acts of the play, the threat that Hamlet poses increasingly gains momentum. The last words he speaks in act four, “my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth,” give the impression that he has left behind all apprehensive hesitation and decided not to act his vengeance, no matter the cost (4.4.66). Even the letter he sends ahead of his return to Denmark strikes Claudius as ominous enough to elicit Laertes’s help in explaining it. However, when he finally returns, in act five, Hamlet is composed, controlled, and has a newfound mental stability. Scholars have long associated Hamlet’s act five constancy with the neostoicism of Justus Lipsius, the belief that reason compels our rational submission to Providence or God’s will. As Lipsius writes in De Constantia, “we are born into a kingdom where obedience to God is true liberty” (I. 14). The resolve, fortitude, and emotional constancy that Hamlet exhibits in the play’s last act perfectly fits Lipsius’s philosophy because it belies Hamlet’s renewed sense of duty – a dominant theme of both the play and of Lipsius’s work. As opposed to Essex’s interpretation of Tacitus, Anthony Grafton argues that it is in the later stoicism of Tacitus that “Lipsius found a simple guide to life,” one that he makes popular in On Constancy, “in which, as he said, he taught subjects their duty: that of suffering what their lords inflicted on them” (386). To further establish the connection between Hamlet and Hobbes, Victoria Kahn explains how, “central to Hobbes’s politics is the idea that the creation of a stable society depends on people being brought to see their duty” (1996 332). When Hamlet tells Laertes, “I am not splenitive and rash,” he admits that his previous actions have been irrational and dangerous (5.1.261). And though he goes on to fight Ophelia’s brother over who loved her most, he concludes the struggle by saying, “it is no matter. / Let Hercules himself do what he may, / The cat will mew and dog will have his day,” expressing his
resignation to the natural order of things (5.1 292). Fitzmaurice finds stoic retreat in the Dane’s new attitude towards power, writing, “Shakespeare’s contemporaries would have seen Hamlet not as a modern subject but as a man who withdraws from the corruption of political life” (140). I agree with Fitzmaurice that Hamlet would not have struck Shakespeare’s contemporaries as particularly “modern,” but I not consider his stoic stance in the later part of the play to be a withdrawal from political life so much as a providential resignation that God’s divine plan will sort out the corruption. Of course, for Hamlet, this means conceding political legitimacy to Claudius, a known regicide and fratricide. Hamlet seems willing to forgive this corruption of family and political order, and a passive forgiveness is not the same as withdrawal. While Hamlet’s debt to Lipsius is well-trodden territory, I want to examine how his new-found worldview affects his interactions in act five in order to showcase the de factoism at the root of Hamlet’s neostoicism.

Early in the play, Hamlet desperately wants the political world to operate with morality. When it does not, he loses his mind. It is only when he accepts the de facto nature of power that he achieves mental stability. Initially, when Hamlet first recognizes “the cease of majesty” in politics, he frantically lashes out. He realizes a key component of de facto theories of government: that anyone can rule, that “rights” to power mean nothing. As said above, this goes against almost all political thought at the start of the seventeenth century. When Hamlet comes to this conclusion, his character changes in a few important ways.

First, his willingness to engage in equivocation comes to an end in act five. Prior to this, he uses puns and double entendre for many purposes. In fact, we are introduced to
Hamlet with wordplay as he explains that his relationship with his uncles is, “A little more than kin, and less than kind,” and he uses puns to speak truth to power, replying to Claudius’s urging that they have a more familial bond, that, “I am too much in the sun” (1.2 65; 67). He uses innuendo and linguistic insinuation to tease Ophelia and/or feign his lunacy. He uses it to affect madness when talking with Polonius, as in the following exchange:

Polonius: “What do you read, my lord?”
Hamlet: “Words, words, words.”
Polonius: “What is the matter, my lord?”
Hamlet: “Between who?”
Polonius: “I mean, the matter you read, my lord?” (2.2 191-5)

Throughout the play, Hamlet constantly gives people crooked replies to straightforward questions. Like all anarchic wills, Hamlet uses wordplay to abuse language and corrupt reason, both of which are necessary for political order. He persists in his equivocation and literalism until he meets his match with the grave-digging clown who refuses to directly answer Hamlet’s questions. Hamlet offers a frustrated reply that anyone who spoke to him earlier could have uttered, “How absolute the knave is! we must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us” (5.1 137-8).

The Hamlet who speaks to the clown is obviously a transformed Hamlet, but what sparked his metamorphosis? Significantly, his change occurs after an encounter with, “a

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98 As the court takes their seats for the players’ production, Hamlet uses sexual innuendo and double entendre to tease Ophelia. In one of the more vulgar Shakespearean puns, he asks her, “Do you think I meant country matters,” to which she replies, “I think nothing, my lord,” setting him up to fire back, “That’s a fair thought to lie between maids’ legs” (3.2 116-9).

99 Hamlet asks, “Whose grave’s this, sirrah?,” to which the sextant matter-of-factly answers, “Mine, sir” (5.1 117-9). Hamlet retorts, “I think it be thine indeed, for thou liest in’t,” prompting the grave digger to fire back, “You lie out on’t, sir, and therefore ‘tis not yours; for my part, I do not lie in’t, yet it is mine” (5.1 122-4).
pirate of very warlike appointment,” a perfect symbol for the limits of his anarchy (4.6 16). Pirates operate in a boundary-less world, a world without political sovereignty.100 Pirates are literally unmoored from land, and, like the anarchic will, metaphorically unmoored from political obligations. Hamlet tells Horatio that while in the company of pirates, he recognized that, “in my heart there was a kind of fighting / That would not let me sleep” (5.2 4-5). Here, Hamlet verbalizes, elucidates his manic state of the previous acts. The anarchic pirates brought him to the limits of his political mania. When he returns from the pirates, he is on his way back to political subjugation. Furthermore, when he returns, he gives credit to divine providence for guiding the vessel that propelled him home. Hamlet realizes, with Lipsius, that, “if you have spread your sails to the winds, you do not follow the impulse of your will, but of the winds,” whose spirit is “the governor of the universe,” the, “same prudent intelligence that daily makes the heavens turn” (Lipsius 63).

Hamlet concludes that the world is governed by divine providence, and sounds remarkably like Lipsius who asks, “For if all these things are not merely allowed by God, but unleashed by Him; then what else are you doing – you who murmur, you who repine – but seizing (insofar as it is in you) the scepter and will of His authority?” (63). The political mania in Hamlet, the play, is mirrored in the character’s psychological antics. He is a mess, like Denmark, until he realizes that rulers are merely men, made of flesh and blood. When he returns to Denmark in act five Hamlet returns with an awareness of the inherent equality of men, a conclusion he reaches through a rational understanding of

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100 See Grotius’s Mare Liberum for a legal description of the sovereign-less sea, in which Grotius explains, “the sea is common to all, because it is so limitless that it cannot become a possession of any one” (28).
man’s materiality. Even great historical leaders, like Alexander and Caesar, are all just men:

Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust; the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel? Imperious Caesar, dead and turn’d to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away. (5.1 208-214)

Hamlet’s realization is expressed with a hyper-focus on the material of bodies, the material reality of life. What Hamlet expresses in the graveyard is not merely that we all die. Since Shakespeare utilizes political leaders to convey this point, we can say that Hamlet realizes something profound about the nature of political rule – that anyone can rule. Rather than throw Hamlet into a depression, like Henry IV, this revelation offers the comfort of order. Hamlet’s new-found understanding of the body’s decay verges on Falstaff’s materialism. However, whereas Falstaff’s ontology releases him from the political order, Hamlet’s situates him in it. For Hamlet, this is a triumph, a moment of self-actualization or realization. Providence’s guiding hand absolves Hamlet of his filial duty to both avenge his father and take his place in hereditary succession. When Hamlet resigns himself to providence, he also submits his will to a larger power, like Bates and York from the Henriad. Burgess describes, “providentialist de facto arguments,” as theories that argue how, “In one way or another God provides government for the purpose to provide peace and stability” (1986 524). The frequent citation of Paul’s letter to the Romans exhibits this kind of providential de factoism.\(^\text{101}\) Hamlet’s resignation to

\(^{101}\) Easily the most frequently cited biblical passage of political theory from the period is Romans 13, which opens, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). Paul goes on to echo Christ’s command that Christians should
providence is a resignation to de facto power of this order. Using providence to justify his own actions and the actions of others also means Hamlet can justify any political authority that happens to hold power.  

The graveyard scene stages an important epiphany of memento mori for Hamlet, but it is more than just a sobering reminder that death awaits us all. Its focus on political leaders again supports my claim that the play is more political than is usually assumed, but the scene also shows how Hamlet’s material worldview has taken hold. At one time he worried about the nature of the afterlife and questioned the existence of demons. Now, when he sees dead bodies, is surrounded by them in the graveyard even, he assumes a materialist’s posture. His attitude about life starts to mirror the sextant, a man whose occupation keeps him literally grounded and gives him a unique understanding of how physical bodies decompose. In the graveyard, Hamlet becomes a materialist and a de factoist. His unwillingness to challenge authority resembles characters like Heywood’s Hobs, or York of Richard II. Hamlet’s readiness to “let be” is a readiness to let God sort out the political conflict. The lack of justice, order, or observed laws early in the play once drove Hamlet to paranoia and fear. As said above, though he calls Denmark a prison, he truly hates it for its amoral liberty. At one point in the play he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, “there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so” (2.2 249-50). This reveals a very Falstaffian attitude towards moral absolutes, but where Falstaff would relish the malleability of morality, Hamlet seems disgusted by it at the beginning

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s” when he tells the Romans, “Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due” (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:7).

102 This explains Hamlet’s casual, almost callous attitude towards the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, deaths he set in motion, but deaths that he can now say, “heaven ordaint” (5.2 48).

103 Careful readers will learn, with Hamlet, why, “A tanner will last you nine year,” in the ground before it gets “pocky” (5.1 168; 166).
of the play. Later in the drama, he takes a more stoic stance in the face of this mutable morality. By the end of the play, Hamlet decides to submit to whatever power exists, and he uses the language of providence to express it, telling Horatio:

   There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be [now], 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it [will] come – the readiness is all. Since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what isn't to leave betimes, let be. (5.2 219-224)

As far as the security of the state is concerned, Hamlet’s belief in, “a divinity that shapes our ends,” is the best attitude Hamlet can have (5.2 10). His antic disposition is gone and he is now the model for political obedience.104

   This explains his endorsement of Fortinbras and the Norwegian’s final resting place on the throne. At the very end of the play, Fortinbras assumes power in the most egregious, literal application of the word. The slaughtered party hears artillery fire as Osric explains, “Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland, / To the ambassadors of England gives / This warlike volley” (5.2 349-52). With no one else to challenge him, Fortinbras’s rhetoric of political right, “I have some rights, of memory in this kingdom, / Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me,” is absurdly comical (5.2 389-90). He can verbally claim his authority de jure, but since all other possible claimants to the throne lie dead at his feet, the justification appears ludicrous to the play’s audience. Not all readers share this interpretation of Fortinbras’s ascension. Hadfield, for instance, wants to find a strong strain of republicanism in the play, and argues that Fortinbras is,

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104 Some may object that Hamlet’s actions in the play’s final duel argue against my interpretation, but it is important to remember that Hamlet does not enter the competition with a plan to kill Claudius. On the contrary, though he acknowledges a shared suspicion with Horatio about the integrity of the challenge, Hamlet still accepts it.
“elected by the dying Hamlet who has only been king for a matter of minutes” (191). One would be hard-pressed to find textual evidence that supports his notion that Hamlet has been king for any amount of time. Clearly, judging from Claudius’s power, the hereditary laws at work in Shakespeare’s Denmark do not guarantee such immediate rulings on matters of succession. Rather than legitimately gain the throne, Fortinbras simply assumes power because no one else is able. While some productions edit out Fortinbras’s storyline entirely and conclude with Hamlet’s expiration, if we keep in mind the political reading of the play, then we can recuperate the very dramatic ending that Fortinbras brings. Hamlet, once our anarchic will *par excellence*, sacrifices himself to the reality of de facto political order symbolized with Fortinbras.

Hobbes would approve of Shakespeare’s portrayal of power transfer at the end of *Hamlet*. It symbolically represents a (relatively) peaceful change of de facto sovereignty and argues that when unchecked emotions and “deliberation” guide a political agent, then chaos knocks at the gate of civilized order. The peaceful transition of power was a major concern for early modern political thinkers. Merbury’s *A brief discourse of royall monarchie* (1581) vigorously argues against elected monarchy because it allows space for chaos to potentially occupy. “As what a monstrous Inconvenience is that when *sede vacante* after the Prince is dead,” Merbury writes, “and before a new can be chose, the whole state remaineth in a very ANARCHIE, without king, or any kind of government” (22). In *Hamlet*, the threat of anarchy exists with the prince’s presence. Only when Hamlet relinquishes his idealized worldview and faces the materiality of existence, does he find the mental stability that allows Denmark its Pyrrhic peace.

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105 “Deliberation,” in Hobbes’s sense: “is it called *deliberation*, because it is a putting an end to the *liberty* we had of doing or omitting, according to our own appetite or aversion” (*L* 33).
With *Hamlet*, the play, Shakespeare stages a de facto authority coming to power. The personal crisis that Hamlet, the prince, experiences early in the play mirrors the anxiety and social turbulence that a nation would feel when it realizes its governing body has no essential quality that qualifies it for power. Would a governed body, therefore, be satisfied with Hamlet’s neostoic reliance on Providence and the de facto power of Fortinbras? It is hard to say. My reading of the play has little sympathy for what I regard as Hamlet’s political naiveté. Hamlet dies in the belief that Fortinbras’s power, which is de facto in Technicolor, has de jure authority. ¹⁰⁶ I think the play reveals that while stoicism is a good way to cope with intolerable situations in your personal life, it is no solution for political problems. Fortinbras does not need Hamlet’s “election;” that “right” does not aid his ascension to the throne any more than Hamlet’s deathbed protest (if he offered one) would impede Fortinbras’s progress. Misinterpreting the authority, legitimacy, or potency of Hamlet’s election can lead scholars, like Julia Reinhard Lupton, to overstated conclusions about Hamlet’s death-rattle election. Interpreting this moment, Lupton argues, “*Election*, moreover, borrowed from theological, juridical, and ethical discourses, and thus forming a theological-political knot,” creates, “an opening within the waning sacral sovereignty of *Hamlet* for new forms of political thinking, affiliation, and embodiment” (71). Rather than initiate new ways of thinking about political sovereignty, however, I would argue that Hamlet’s endorsement instead satirizes the weakness of de jure claims. As Hamlet proclaims his vote on the blood-stained and body-strewn stage, we see how utterly unnecessary his election is. The harsh juxtaposition of a physical assumption of power, literally over dead bodies, with Hamlet’s endorsement gives this

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¹⁰⁶ Once again, Fortinbras assumes power, not even through the rigors of conquest since he did not have to conquer the land like Henry V was forced to do, by merely sitting down.
scene a powerful dramatic irony. Hamlet does not live to see the coronation of Denmark’s new monarch, but the play-going audience would have.

King Lear

With his last breath, Hamlet “elects” Fortinbras, and his new-found faith in Providence transforms this election into a divinely sanctioned action. By right of election and by right of Providence, Fortinbras, therefore, becomes king of Denmark. In the reality of the narrative, however, the audience sees that Fortinbras is the only one who can take that power. Even without Hamlet’s election, he would have assumed power. It is a powerful staging of de facto authority, one that Hamlet conveniently misses because of his death. Nevertheless, the end of the play offers a powerful dramatization of political stability. We see the potential for political disruption experienced in Hamlet’s anarchic will and we see the resolution of this conflict in a power that asserts itself with de facto force.

King Lear, in contrast, gives us a dramatic picture of political philosophy as it will develop in the seventeenth-century. Rather than resolve the problem of authority, King Lear steadily spins further and further away from political stability. In Lear’s tragedy, political rule is not so easily established or maintained. The civil war and political upheaval that looms in Hamlet comes to dominate the world in Lear. De jure justifications for power cease and the de facto power that concludes Hamlet with confidence is absent in Lear. The conclusion of Lear’s tragedy reveals what happens

107 According to R.A. Foakes, “Lear has no history in spite of his great age,” so, “the past is a blank” in the play (181). Foakes uses the absence of history to release the play from history so that it “can always therefore be seen as essentially a contemporary play” (181). Ultimately, Foakes argues that Lear’s tragedy represents the political pessimism of the late twentieth century, so applies the play’s perpetual relevance to the most modern of times. I would like to apply the notion of an evergreen Lear to date of its composition, and argue that it prefigures the political bleakness of the seventeenth century.
when de facto powers do not reign, and presents us with the looming specter of social chaos.

In order to work our way through this political drama, this section of chapter three will look closely at two anarchic wills, Edmund and Lear, to show how they challenge the play’s de facto powers and send ancient Britain into social chaos. In contrast to Hamlet’s resignation to Providence, the anarchic wills of King Lear refuse to submit to the powers that be. Instead, they resist de facto political order and pose a continual threat to social stability.

Because the family was such a familiar microcosm of social stability for the Renaissance, King Lear centers around two family dramas. Each of the anarchic wills studied here represent one of those families. First, this section will study Edmund, one of Shakespeare’s most vocal villains to see how he uses language and perceptions of reality, like Falstaff, to exist outside the social, moral, and most importantly, political spheres. We will see how Edmund continues to threaten political order even when Regan and Goneril have political power. Next, this section will read Lear as an anarchic will who rules by right and in fact at the play’s beginning, but who learns the true nature of political authority – its de facto core – over the course of the drama. Rather than come to Hamlet’s conclusion, however, Lear learns a much more troubling lesson about human nature, the state of nature, and the state of power. Rather than purposefully step outside the political system like Edmund, Lear accidentally casts himself out of the political order when he relinquishes his de facto power.

As the play opens, Kent and the audience are introduced to Gloucester’s illegitimate son, Edmund. Somewhat callously, Gloucester distinguishes Edmund from
his other son, whom he had “by order of law” (1.1 19). In this moment, Edmund’s father immediately establishes his son’s identity in legal terms. He is not the son by law, or even by hereditary right, simply the son in fact, born out of physical passion. Edmund is a son de facto, a child of materialism, and as such, is obsessed with the socially constructed notion of “legitimacy.” Edmund represents one of Shakespeare’s strongest anarchic wills. Like Falstaff, he toys with language to manipulate reality, and relies on an abuse of language to alter his own and others’ sense of reality. His opening soliloquies vocalize this psychological deconstruction that spills over into social anarchy in two ways. First, they reveal important notions of legitimacy, and second, they express the play’s overall absence of divinity.

Edmund begins his deconstruction of social order when he pledges allegiance to “Nature,” his “goddess” (1.2 1). As we will see, this is not the same nature that Cordelia endorses and that Lear appeals to, the ordered nature of the Great Chain of Being. Instead, it is a Hobbesian sort of Nature, where “plague of custom,” that is, common law, does not perpetually, or pre-, exist (1.2 3). Edmund realizes, through his anarchic deconstruction of language, that laws only work when both parties agree to them. Hobbes says as much when describing “civil laws,” which he likens to “artificial chains,” which men “by mutual covenants have fastened at one end of the lips of that man or assembly to whom they have given the sovereign power, and at the other end to their own ears” (L 138). Edmund decides to dishonor his side of the social contract, and strike out on his own, back into the “natural” state of man, “where every man is enemy to every man” (L 76). Lear’s quasi-abdication has shaken some of Britain’s subjects, like Edmund, loose.

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108 Timothy W. Burns says, Gloucester, “deprecates the law in favor of the beauty of the mother and the pleasure of the sexual act that produced the child” (136).
Now that Edmund is “subject to no civil law,” as Hobbes would say, “he hath no other rule to follow but his own reason” (L 212).\footnote{This is contrast to one “that lives in a Common-wealth; because the Law is the publique Consciente, by which he hath already undertaken to be guided” (L 212).} It is to this Hobbesian kind of Nature that Edmund’s “services are bound” (1.2 2). Edmund prays to Nature, subscribing himself to Hobbes’s amoral, pre-political state and using the power vacuum of Lear’s abdication as an opportunity for self-imposed exile from the civil order of ancient Britain (1.2 1-3).\footnote{According to Schulman, “Edmund identifies natural with moral order in order to destablise, not underwrite, existing authority” (111). This destabilization is the greater threat to the realm, the most dangerous threat the anarchic will poses.}

Arguing for the importance of common law in the establishment of the seventeenth-century’s “current constitution,” which superseded all other authorities, Burgess emphasizes reason’s role. According to Burgess, citing common law was not a conservative, thoughtless reflex, but an appeal to the legacy of reason. “The law of England was good law not because it was old,” Burgess maintains, “but because it was rational” (1993 19). Hobbes says that rationality propels us out of the State of Nature.\footnote{For more on the difference between “law and custom,” see Bodin Book I, Ch. X, “The True Attributes of Sovereignty,” specifically pages 43-4.} When Edmund eschews common law, however, he does so rationally, applying the same sophistry that Falstaff relies on, and he re-enters a Hobbesian state of anarchic nature.

Once Edmund leaves reason behind, he can then tease out language with Falstaffian ease. Questioning his social status, he asks, “Why bastard? Wherefore base?...Why brand they us / With base? With baseness, bastardy? Base, base?” (1.2 5; 9-10). Like Falstaff’s dissection of “honor,” Edmund mulls over the language of morality, repeating the condemnation and its root word over and over until it reaches semantic satiation. The word, and the morality it signifies, loses all meaning. Since the immorality of his conception does not affect his physical, material form, Edmund dismisses it. His
“dimensions are as well compact,” his, “shape as true / As honest madam’s issue” (1.2 6-9). That Edmund determines his fitness based on his physical composure and not his moral state is important. Edmund’s social status is treated as an almost biological quality. Fortescue relays a proverb, that even in the fifteenth century he counts as, “an old saying;” “’If a bastard be good, it is mostly by accident, or special grace; if wicked, it is but his nature’” (154-5). This is the nature that Edmund fights against, a nature reliant on the social construction of civic matrimony. He begins with a deconstruction of the biological process of his birth and then proceeds to his cultural status: illegitimate. “Fine word, ‘legitimate’!” he spews (1.2 18). Edmund sneers, satisfied in the knowledge that the label signifies no essential qualities of the labelled. As we have suggested, legitimacy is the central issue of political thought and political strife during the period. The play’s subsequent exploration of what establishes political authority concludes with similar contempt for notions of legitimacy. The play suggests that any political claim to legitimacy will fold with just a little pressure.

Edmund’s second soliloquy, stated after his father takes the forged-letter bait, further expresses the abject poverty of metaphysical presence in the universe of King Lear. Edmund scoffs at his father’s gullibility and uses the opportunity to express his disdain for the foolishness of those who believe in, “spherical predominance” (1.2 122). “This is the excellent foppery of the world,” Edmund says, when we attribute our actions and their consequences to “heavenly compulsion” guided by the stars (1.2 117; 121). He sarcastically explains his astrological sign and the placement of heavenly bodies at his birth to illustrate how inconsequential the heavenly sphere is this play. Edmund’s dismissal of astrology would go against Hobbes, who, according to Edwin Curley, “is
skeptical of . . . judiciary astrology," though he is not opposed to, “astrology in general (the theory that celestial events exercise some influence in terrestrial events)” (*Leviathan* notes 49). Astrology in a materialist/determinist’s worldview makes sense. Edmund’s desire to his own will, to work against the machine of the universe and the machine of politics makes him an anarchic will. Thus, in a gesture completely antithetical to the end of *Hamlet*, Edmund takes his destiny into his own hands. Stepping out of the controlled universe, via a linguistic dismantling of social mores, Edmund becomes an anarchic will, and like all anarchic wills he will threaten de facto political order. Let us therefore look at the power Edmund opposes in this play.

After he willingly, surreptitiously challenges the authority of his father, he disrupts the political powers that have come into being: Regan and Goneril. In Harry Berger, Jr.’s “*King Lear*: The Lear Family Romance,” we are asked to reconsider where characters fall on the play’s “ethical poles” (27). Berger explores Lear’s “darker purpose” and opens up readers to the possibility that Regan and Goneril might be able to claim, with their father, that they are “more sinned against than sinning” because of the emotional abuse heaped on them in the first act (3.2 59).¹¹² Berger’s ultimate goal is to muddle the distinction between the play’s heroes and villains, and he does so by challenging us to understand these individuals as members of a complicated, dysfunctional family. Berger never tries to relieve Regan and Goneril of their ethical responsibilities, however, and argues, “The political issues in Shakespeare are inseparable from and modified by questions of moral authority and legitimacy” (334). Machiavelli famously observed that, despite our idealized desires, political and moral

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¹¹² Berger points out that Lear doles out his land on the condition that his daughters jump through some humiliating hoops so he can reduce them to, “sitting up and begging, crowing for cheese” (30).
authorities rarely comingle. Hobbes explores the ethical source of authority in more depth and argues that sovereignty does not need moral legitimacy, that, in fact, political authorities determine morality through the establishment of laws. If we separate the political issues of *King Lear* from the moral authority and legitimacy that Berger finds inextricable, then we can better understand the nature of Regan and Goneril’s complaints against their father.

Most importantly, Regan and Goneril have a politically-founded grievance with Lear. After giving up his power, Lear cannot expect to wield any, and yet infamously he does. For instance, he is astonished at the lack of respect his presence earns. “The King would speak with Cornwall,” he bellows, “the dear father would with his daughters speak, commands – tends – service” (2.2 290-1). As a king in name only, Lear’s former subjects give their former sovereign the respect that his diminished power deserves.

Regan responds with an accurate, if unpleasant, political reality:

> O, sir, you are old:

> Nature in you stands on the very verge

> Of her confine. You should be ruled and led

> By some discretion that discerns your state

> Better than you yourself. (2.2 335-9)

She pleads, “I pray you, father, being weak, seem so” (2.2 390). I once thought she meant for her father to act his age. Now I understand it as a charge for him to act according to his political position, his place in this royal family. It is not physical weakness, in other

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113 “How praiseworthy it is that a prince keeps his word and governs by candor instead of craft,” Machiavelli writes in *The Prince*, “Yet the experience of our own time shows that those princes who had little regard for their word and had the crafiness to turn men’s minds have accomplished great things, and in the end, have overcome those who governed their actions by their pledges” (62).
words, which Regan bases her prayer on, but his political weakness. Shakespeare is not supporting the biblical notion of “Pater Patriae” on which Robert Filmer relies. Rather, the play challenges this familial model for authority. Lear may have chosen the wrong successors, and a case for Cordelia’s righteous reign could be made, but Lear gave over his authority. The problem is not that Regan and Goneril will not subordinate themselves to Lear, but that Lear does not understand his new role of subordinate. Hobbes warns us not, “to grieve [others] with tongue,” before qualifying, “unless it be one whom we are obliged to govern; and then it is not to grieve, but to correct and amend” (L 17). Lear improperly “grieves” Regan and Goneril – powers by right and in fact – in this manner, while they attempt to “correct and amend” his anarchic will.

*King Lear* challenges the familial model for obedience and it also affords us an opportunity to discuss how important the family was for early modern political thought. It was not simply that the family provided a useful, familiar image for divine authority, like Filmer suggests. For some writers, like Bodin, the family was the essential structural component of society. Bodin begins his entire project with a definition of the “commonwealth” that depends on the family: “a commonwealth may be defined as the rightly ordered government of a number of families . . . by a sovereign power” (1). Bodin recalls the familiar metaphor of the family as microcosm of the state, but, following Aristotle, he goes further to distinguish the family as, “not only the true source and origin of the commonwealth, but also its principal constituent” (6). The *paterfamilias*-as-king model is not as important to Bodin as the actual family unit itself. Explaining Bodin’s emphasis on the family, Preston King writes, “the ultimate or last legal unit within the state, for Bodin, was not the individual but the group . . . most importantly – the family”
(82). That is to say, the foundation of any state, which the singular ruler stands atop is the family. Since it constitutes the top and bottom tier of the nation, Bodin, “assumed [the family] to be more important to the state structure than any other apart from the office of the sovereign” (King 82). Thus, the family drama of King Lear does more than invoke the familiar microcosm of authority. The slow decay of the family unit represented in the drama signals a corruption of the state’s foundation. Not only, therefore, is the head of state wrecked, but so is the bottom of the state.

It stands to reason, then, that everything in between – all commerce, art and agriculture – are ruined in Lear’s Britain as well. In fact, this is what Hobbes says will happen in a state of war. “In such a condition,” he writes, “there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, no culture of the earth, no navigation . . . no commodious building . . . no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society” (L 76). According to Richard Ashcroft’s “Leviathan Triumphant: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Wild Men,” it is through Hobbes that, “the Wild Man and the anarchist became synonymous labels to be applied to any enemy of the order and ‘civilization’ of English society” (142). It is not just that the anarchic will threatens the particular political ruler. As Hobbes feared and as Lear demonstrates, the anarchic will threatens to dismantle society completely. An anonymous pamphlet from 1641 suggests that this kind of social breakdown was happening in London during the seventeenth century. The dolefull Lamentation of Cheap-side Crosse: Or old England sick of the Staggers decries the breakdown of commerce and industry during civil strife. “It is a generall and common complaint,” the essay explains, “that trading employment and commerce in the Common-wealth is so astonished and dead, that all Callings and Vocations, are faine to make a
cessation from their usuall wayes and endeavours” (1). In other words, people were not only worried about their eternal souls, but were concerned about the cessation of commercial enterprises too. *The dolefull Lamentation* sounds remarkably like *Lear* and *Leviathan* when it describes, “the present doubtfulness and disturbance of the Times, which were never so full of faction, detraction, and contradiction, as at this present, men being onely full of windre opinion, so that the world is growne into a new confused Chaos, or a Babell of bailing, and foolish disputing” (1). The personal psychological devastation in *Lear* is immense and thorough, but the tragedy does more than merely ruin individuals. As Ashcroft posits, it is symbolic of an anarchic threat to civilization. If we read the family suffering alongside Bodin, then it becomes a symbol for complete social breakdown.

For many early modern political thinkers, social breakdown was the worst fate a nation could suffer. Bodin, for example, hates anarchy more than anything, even tyrannical rule. “[T]he cruellst tyranny,” Bodin writes, “does not make for so much wretchedness as anarchy” (142). Early in the play, Regan and Goneril justifiably antagonize their father. The de facto powers that be cannot (and should not) acquiesce to his desire for political honors. Margot Heinemann argues, “it is Lear’s refusal to listen to wise counsel, his insistence on his own will as paramount and absolute, that opens the way to chaos and disintegration,” but her interpretation comes from the play’s first scene, when King Lear, still in power, divides his kingdom (157). I would take Heinemann’s point and apply it to every instance when the self-deposed Lear considers his will to still be absolute. To treat him as a king, a royal sovereign, when he has no regal power would compromise Regan’s and Goneril’s own authority, and lead to the chaos and
disintegration that Heinemann notes. Lear may not like it, Kent may not like it, the audience may not like it, but Regan and Goneril have a justified complaint with their father and his petulant behavior. For better or worse, theirs is the de facto power controlling Britain. This is the power that Edmund and Lear challenge and destroy.

As the drama unfolds, Regan and Goneril display more of the “cruelest tyranny” of which Bodin writes. Goneril’s feelings for her husband’s human decency start to wane while her feelings for the morally deficient Edmund grow. This makes her jealous of Regan, who, “But being widow, and my Gloucester with her, / May all the building in my fancy pluck / Upon my hateful life” (4.2 85-7). This metaphor of destruction foretells the disintegration of their neighboring realms and rule. Edmund, an anarchic will, drives himself between the two and splits the de facto powers up, explaining, “To both these sisters have I sworn my love, / Each jealous of the other as the stung / Are of the adder (5.1 56-8). Regan expresses disgust at the, “strange oeillades and most speaking looks,” that Goneril gives, “To noble Edmund,” while Regan argues, “My lord is dead; Edmund and I have talked, / And more convenient is he for my hand,” than Goneril’s (4.5 27-8; 4.4 32-4). Goneril even signs her letter to Edmund, “Your (wife, so I would say) affectionate servant” (4.6 263-4). The romantic conflict between Edmund, Goneril, and Regan reaches its apotheosis at the beginning of act five, which, significantly, is when the military conflict begins in earnest. The emotional assault Regan and Goneril undergo initiates the martial assault that will end their rule. The political authority in Britain simultaneously faces the threat of foreign forces and of domestic strife. After Regan begs Edmund to “Be not familiar” with her sister, Goneril reveals in an aside, “I had rather lose the battle than that sister / Should loosen him and me” (5.1 16; 18-9). When their
death is reported, Edmund admits, “I was contracted to them both,” and resigns himself to his own fate, “all three / Now marry in an instant” (5.3 227-8). The anarchic will is not just a threat to honorable or righteous political regimes. As Edmund proves, and as Falstaff would have shown, they pose a threat to whomever holds power, with enough time, their unchecked presence leads to chaos.

The play’s other anarchic will threatens the realm with less pernicious intent, but he threatens it nonetheless. The play’s tragic hero, King Lear exhibits all the features of the anarchic will. He experiences a debilitating freedom, teases apart the moral fabric of the universe, and threatens de facto political order.

The opening scene of Lear gives us the mirror image of Henry V’s opening scene. In Henry V the king holds physical power and scrambles to find a way to make his power righteous. In Lear the king gives his material control away and then scrambles to find a way to keep his (non-existent) power. As the play dramatizes succession anxiety, it dramatizes a futile search for weakened de jure justifications. Lear personifies the weakening state with his decision to abdicate:

Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and ‘tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthened crawl toward death. (1.1 36-40)

Lear wants to retire his political authority, his legal authority to govern the material of Britain and still keep his majesty. If Lear were to walk offstage and never return, his former realm may have experienced social peace. However, the play’s political trauma
begins when he attempts to keep his titles and honors, while others take the responsibility of rule. His desire to, “retain / The name, and all th’addition to a king,” while giving away, “the sway, / Revenue, [and] execution of the rest” to his daughters and their husbands demonstrates a dangerously unschooled understanding of political power (1.1 136-9). As political philosophers were learning in the period, political authority does not work like this. The events of the play reveal this sobering truth. Lear wants the majesty of monarchy without the authority of monarchy.

Kent, who has a preternatural sense of politics, immediately criticizes Lear for his delusion. “What wilt thou do, old man?” he asks, immediately using the familiar pronoun “thou” and the derogatory, but accurate, description “old man” (1.1 147). “Think’st thou that duty shall have dread to speak, / When power to flattery bows?” he continues, “To plainness honor’s bound, / When majesty stoops to folly” (1.1 148-50). Lear’s foolish abdication of power is well trodden territory, in the drama and the scholarship, but I draw attention to the moment to contrast it with Edmund’s decision to leave political order. Whereas Edmund consciously steps out of political order, Lear accidentally banishes himself from it. Edmund is fully aware of where his anarchic will shall lead him. Rather than purposefully step outside the political system like Edmund, Lear accidentally casts himself out of the political order when he relinquishes his power de facto and attempts to retain his de jure majesty.

Lear becomes an anarchic will on the heath. Here, he enters a Hobbesian State of Nature and regresses out of ordered society into a realm with no social rule or order. Significantly, Lear also undergoes a fierce deterioration of reason, expressed in mental insanity, on the heath. As Hamlet demonstrated, when individuals experience the anarchy
of political solitude, their reason suffers. Nicholas Bodrugan, secretary to Edward VI, explains the relationship between reason and power to his young king. “Nature the wise mother of all things,” Bodrugan writes, “when she ordained all beasts with some natural munition, as horn, spur, tooth or nail;” rather than give men an outward defense, “gave him reason” (Bodrugan). When Lear wanders into Nature, she reclaims the gift of reason and dismembers his humanity. Significantly, the heath is also a place where language breaks down, and, as noted, the breakdown of language spells disaster for political order in Hobbes’s schema.

Previously seen as a reflection of divine design, as in Bracton and Buchannan, Shakespeare gives us a different version of Nature in King Lear. For instance, when Edgar, disguised as Tom O’Bedlam, enters, he brings with him a cacophony of ballad snippets and drunken expressions, babbling, “Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind. Humh! go to thy cold bed, and warm thee,” pieces of nursery rhymes and hawking calls, “Pillicock say on Pilli-cock hill. Halloo, halloo, loo, loo;”114 and uttering literal gibberish, “Tom’s a-cold – O, do, de, do de, do de” (3.4 48-9; 75-6; 58). Eventually, Lear’s cohort start to distrust language altogether. Gloucester, attempting to settle the raving Lear, says, “No words, no words; hush” (3.4 177). Lear’s ravings bespeak his insanity, so his companions would obviously rather have him silent. Hamlet’s equivocation-laden exchanges with Polonius recall a similar moment when words lose their explicit meaning. On the heath, in the wilderness, language breaks down. Since man uses language to escape the State of Nature, when language is lost, man is thrown back into that chaotic state where the social contract is null and void. In Lear, the breakdown

114 Hamlet babbles a similar cry when feigning his madness, “Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, [birds,] come” (1.5 116).
of language signals a descent into anarchy.\textsuperscript{115} The physical environment of the heath threatens their life and liberty.

Of course, the loss of Lear’s clothing and rational expression pale in comparison to what the wilderness does to notions of divine justice, which guide Hamlet and sixteenth-century political thought. According to Northrop Frye, “\textit{King Lear} is in many respects the spookiest of all the great tragedies, and yet nothing explicitly supernatural or superhuman occurs in it” (1986 107). I agree that the play is Shakespeare’s most unnerving drama, not, however,\textit{ despite} its lack of the supernatural, as Frye suggests, but\textit{ because} its harsh materiality excludes the supernatural. \textit{Hamlet} has ghosts, \textit{Macbeth} has witches, and even \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} has fairy kings and queens. Lear lacks any realm but the terrestrial, any world beyond what we see onstage. When characters address the “gods,” as many do, the audience cannot help but hear the deafening reply of their divine silence.\textsuperscript{116} This accounts for the play’s overwhelming nihilism, which Shakespeare increases as his characters repeatedly call out for divine assistance, usually in the form of justice.

Like the play’s preoccupation with “nothing,” the natural world dominates \textit{King Lear}. In most Shakespearean dramas, the state of nature usually mimics the state of man – when human affairs spin out of control, the heavens respond in kind. Thus, the world turns upside down in \textit{Macbeth} when Duncan is slain. Horses eat horses and the dead rise

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\textsuperscript{115} Not only does the wilderness strip language from his humanity, it also strips Lear of his clothing. Lear’s conversation with Tom O’Bedlam convince him that humans, being animals, need no clothes. “Off, off, you lendings,” he cries, “come, unbutton here” (3.4 106-7). His nakedness symbolizes the shedding of the materials that distinguish his humanity from natural beasts. While in the wilderness, social decorum and protocol are rent along with his royal habiliments.
\textsuperscript{116} Lear prays, “Let the great gods / That keep this dreadful pudder o’er our heads / Find out their enemies now” (3.2 49-51). France finds some love with Cordelia, “Gods, gods! ‘Tis strange that from their cold’st neglect / My love should kindle to inflamed respect” (1.1 256-7). No one else has the same experience with the neglectful gods.
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from the ground. In other words, the natural world responds to human affairs. The epic contest between Man and Nature is a tired theme of Shakespearean analysis. My reading of *King Lear*, however, stresses that there is no conflict between Man and Nature in the play. In *Lear*, things become much more complicated in their simplicity. Natural phenomenon visited upon humanity do not disclose supra-natural regard for humanity in Lear’s tragedy. Storms rage in *Lear*, but as the play unfolds we realize that the tempest does not roar because Lear has been wronged. They simply roar. The meteorological does not prove the metaphysical in *King Lear*.

Act three begins with the poignant stage direction, “Storm still.” The previous act ends with Lear choosing to stay on the heath rather than take shelter with his ungrateful daughters. His verbose interactions with the storm make for some of the most powerful poetry in the play, but they are ultimately futile. What makes this futility so devastating is that Lear repeatedly calls for natural justice. Since the play takes place in a pre-Christian, pagan, ancient Britain, Lear calls on primitive iteration of earlier gods. The god of thunder was surely one of the first personifications of divinity and must have been associated with divine, righteous indignation. And up to this point in the play, it seems to be angry at the state of affairs on earth. According to the gentleman who opens act three, Lear’s purpose in the tempest is to plead for divine retribution. Lear, “Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea, / Or swell the curled waters ‘bove the main, / That things might change or cease” (3.1 5-7). Lear begs the storm to bring justice. The storm, however, simply, “tears [Lear’s] white hair, / Which impetuous blast, with eyeless rage, / Catch in their fury, and make nothing of” (3.1 7-9). It is important to note that Lear rages *with* the
storm throughout the beginning of act three. He believes it to be on his side, so he embraces its destructive power:

   Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!

   You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout

   Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!...

   … And thou, all-shaking thunder,

   Smite flat the thick rotundity o’ the world! (3.2 1-3; 6-7)

He wants nature to take its part in enacting vengeance on his daughters’ evil actions, especially since they have broken a natural order, the bond of filial love:

   I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;

   I never gave you kingdom, called you children,

   You owe me no subscription. Then let fall

   Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand, your slave,

   A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man. (3.2 16-20)

According to Lawrence Nee, “The cause of Lear’s suffering is ascribed to familial ingratitude and not divine punishment. Lear’s suffering allegedly shows that nature does not discriminate on the basis of human conventions; the order of society does not reflect on any just order in nature” (226). This is how Hobbes describes the State of Nature as well. When Lear challenges his daughters’ de facto authority, he creates a state of social confusion because though he gives them power he tries to maintain position. For the average subject in ancient Britain, there would be no, “power to over-awe them,” as Hobbes says every civilization requires (L 75). Lear reenters a State of Nature where, “The desires and other passions of man are in themselves no sin” (L 77). The reason
justice has no place in *King Lear* is because there are no laws in *King Lear*. “Nor can any law be made,” Hobbes explains, “till they have agreed upon the person that shall make it” (*L 77*). As king, Lear would have made laws and therefore dispersed justice. Now he has to call on nature for retribution and realizes he has lost his station as king. He is reduced to the slavery of geriatric infirmity. However, though he is reduced to a weakened state, he still believes in the power of the divine master he serves. This confidence means Lear can unleash a torrent of verse to warn all evil-doers that Nature’s storm is out to get them. “Let the great gods,” he bellows, “That keep this dreadful pother o’er our heads, / Find out their enemies now” (3.2 49-50).

Act three has many iterations of justice, but all of them are perversions of justice. When Lear and his motley crew meet Edgar disguised as Tom O’Bedlam, it accelerates Lear’s descent into madness. Perhaps one of the most extreme expressions of his insanity comes in the mock-trial of Regan and Goneril. Since there is no divine, legal, or civil justice, the group puts on their own trial of Regan and Goneril. In a sick parody of justice, Edgar, as Tom O’Bedlam is Lear’s “most learned justicer,” his, “robed man of justice,” while the Fool is a “sapient sir,” Justice’s “yoke-fellow of equity” (3.6 21; 36-7). Madmen preside over this mock trial, and even for a mock trial this expression of adjudication fails to satisfy any reasonable rubric of justice.

As this trial illustrates, justice has no place in Nature. For the sixteenth-century political philosopher, however, our civic sense of justice was thought to be derived from the Natural order of things. The interconnectedness of human activity and the astrological cosmos meant that political philosophers of the sixteenth century could look to the
natural world for moral guidance. As Richard Hooker writes in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594):

> Now if nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether, though it were but for a while, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have, if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself...what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve. See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world? (697-98)

For Hooker, Nature not only prescribes, but also maintains, human order. If she were to leave, as Hooker hypothetically asks here, then it would start a chain reaction of cosmic chaos down to human disorder. Hooker, though he writes at the end of the 1500s, presents a quite medieval understanding of the law of nature. Like his Scottish contemporary, Buchanan, Hooker finds divine law and order reflected in the law of nature. Lear banishes himself from society because he has faith in this kind of natural law. When his daughters break their filial bond, he interprets it as an affront to the natural order of things. In an attempt to find stability, to locate order again, Lear rushes into the natural world in a manic search for justice. What he finds, however, is not the comfort of

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117 In *The Plaint of Nature* (ca. 1160), Alan de Lille explains how Nature is “the one who formed the nature of man according to the exemplar and likeness of the structure of the universe so that in him, as in a mirror of the universe itself, Nature’s lineaments might be there to see” (118). A more contemporary example would be the seventh canto of Edmund Spenser’s “Two Cantos of Mutabilitie” (ca. 1596) in which Dame Nature adjudicates Mutabilitie’s claims for terrestrial sovereignty. In this instance, Mutabilitie makes a de jure argument for authority, “Seeking for Right, which I of thee entreat,” she implores of Nature, “Who Right to all dost deale indifferently” (7.14). Despite Mutabilitie’s strong case, Nature exerts her de facto power and commands Mutabilitie, “to be rul’d by me,” thus echoing the central dilemma of the Henriad (7.59).
“mother elements,” nor the anger of vengeful gods. He finds something that disturbs him even more: nothing.

Lear first arrives on the heath in a fit of righteous indignation. He pleads and prays to the gods of the tempest for vengeance on his daughters. He mistakes disturbances in the atmospheric pressure for cosmic reaction to his family drama. As the world rages around him, with him, and through him, he begins to question its motives, asking Edgar’s insane character, “What is the cause of thunder?” (3.6 148). Like Hamlet’s evolving attitude towards God’s “canon ‘gainst [self-] slaughter,” Lear’s fundamental beliefs are now in question (Hamlet 1.2 132). What was once so certain has become a question for a madman to answer. His time in the wilderness leads him to the devastating conclusion that there is no order in nature. With his resources exhausted, Lear must conclude that there is no justice in the natural world. Of course, Shakespeare is not the first to offer this sobering view of nature. Wells explains how Machiavelli helped set the table for Shakespeare. “By demythologizing nature,” Wells writes, “Machiavelli implied that our ideas of social justice, far from being universal and incontestable, are in fact arbitrary” (174). Just as Falstaff and Edmund discover the arbitrariness of language, Lear discovers the arbitrariness of nature. If, as Wells states, Machiavelli “implies” that we cannot look to nature for social justice, then Shakespeare dramatizes the implication with King Lear. Lear cannot submit to Providence because the winds that Lipsius describes as divinely governed, the winds that Hamlet reads as acts of God, do not register as anything but atmospheric changes in King Lear. Lear looks to Mother Nature for order and justice, but finds only inclement weather.
In his time on the heath, Lear learns the true meaning of political authority. He comes onstage and announces, “I am the King himself” (4.6 83-4). This is not a declaration of self-empowered awareness, like Hamlet’s act five proclamation. Hamlet’s declaration signals an inner peace, a resignation to the benevolent force of divine providence. What Lear expresses, after this royal proclamation, is an awareness that universal standards for justice and majesty do not exist. Lear announces that he is king over nothing.

Like the mock trial he presides over, this coronation is a gross parody of royal identity, made clear in his subsequent revelation about his daughters. Now, he finally understands their sycophantic nature: “They flattered me like a dog,” he realizes, “To say ‘ay’ and ‘no’ to everything that I said ‘ay’ and ‘no’ to was no good divinity” (4.6 96-7; 98-100). Cognizant of his daughters’ manipulation, Lear faces the sobering reality of his own lack of divinity. “[T]hey told me I was everything,” the mad King laments, ”’tis a lie, I am not ague-proof” (4.6 103-4). He ceases to think himself divine and catches a whiff of his own humanity and, “it smells of mortality” (4.6 129). Hamlet learns the same lesson while handling Yorick’s skull.\(^\text{118}\) For Hamlet, however, the memento mori, reaffirms his belief in the ordering principles of the universe. The thought of our imminent material demise helps humble his antic disposition. This moment for Lear signals a new understanding of himself, and that political authority is not divinely appointed or held. Out of this nihilism, Lear shrugs off the morality that previously guided social policy. He pardon’s Gloucester’s adultery, “Thou shalt not die – die for adultery? No!,” and commands everyone to “Let copulation thrive,” not in an echo of

\(^{118}\) At the end of his elegiac monologue, the epiphany (and smell) hit him: “Dost thou think Alexander look’d a’ this fasion i’ th’ earth?,” he asks Horatio, “And smelt so? pah! (Hamlet 5.1 197).
God’s Genesis commandment, but in an abandonment of righteousness altogether (4.6 110; 112). Lear proclaims, “None does offend, none, I say none,” exonerating Gloucester but also pardoning Regan and Goneril (4.6 164). “See how yon justice rails upon yon simple thief,” Lear tells Gloucester, “Hark in thine hear: change places and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?” (4.6 147-50). Lear once prided himself on his authority and his own righteousness, that he was “More sinned against than sinning,” now his “great image of authority” is “a dog’s obeyed in office” (3.2 59; 4.6 154-5).

Though Lear now knows that authority does not require normative qualifications, he still holds onto the sliver of hope – a daughter’s love. Therefore, he aligns himself with Cordelia and her “righteous” forces. Cordelia is the “daughter / Who redeems nature from the general curse,” and she still dies (4.6 201-2). She prays, “O you kind gods! / Cure this great breach in [Lear’s] abused nature” (4.7 15). The gods, if they exist, have proven themselves anything but “kind” up to this point. As an acolyte of divine mercy, Cordelia’s own expiration signals the weakness of her gods.

Cordelia represents the purest ideal of de jure authority, so it is fitting that she explains the antagonism between her father and de facto authority, represented in the material reality of the world. “Was this a face,” she asks, “To be opposed against the warring winds? / To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder, / In the most terrible and nimble stroke / Of quick cross-lightening?” (4.7 31-5). As she physically holds her father’s unconscious face in her hands, she contemplates how his mortal frame stood up

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119 “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Reproduction and sovereignty are inextricably linked in God’s pronouncement. The same verse that commands procreation also gives man dominion over the earth.
against the natural world. She does not anthropomorphize the storm or assign it with
divine authority. Nor does she weep for her father’s abused authority. If the storm is a
purely physical phenomenon, and a symbol for de facto, or material, order, as I argue,
then Cordelia succinctly describes Lear’s antagonist. Of course, Cordelia returns as the
conquering hero, like Hotspur, under the banner of honor and majesty. Thus, Peter
Holbrook reads Cordelia’s actions in act one as heroically individualistic, and
“admirable” (16). “For Lear,” he writes, “Cordelia’s intransigence is ‘untender’, and it
can strike us that way as well. But the truth is she cannot be other than she is. It’s all a
matter of staying ‘true’ (107) – true to Lear, of course, but also, one feels sure, true to
herself” (16). In other words, Cordelia’s righteous return in act five justifies her actions in
act one because it proves her staunch individualism. I am not as sympathetic to readings
which paint her in such heroic colors. What I would suggest, in contrast to Holbrook, is
that Shakespeare wants to challenge these notions of individualism, especially when they
come at the cost of the kingdom. Cordelia, and Hamlet, whom Holbrook also cites as
similarly heroic, instead read as irresponsibly anarchic to me.120 Significantly,
Shakespeare snuffs out this brief candle and extinguishes the light of politically righteous
rule, relentlessly driving home the tragedy’s political nihilism with Cordelia’s slaughter.

Foakes says King Lear presents the “most despairing vision of suffering,” in
which, “all hints of consolation [are] undermined or denied” (1993 4). Cordelia’s death,
and the end of what she symbolizes, generates this pathos. Kent hears of Cordelia’s love
for Lear (and shame for her sisters) and is reinvigorated, “It is the stars, / The stars above
us govern our conditions, / Else one self mate and mettle could not beget / Such different

120 “Like Hamlet at the beginning of his play,” Holbrook writes, “she stands out in the court precisely
because she lacks ‘that glib and oily art / To speak and purpose not’” (16).
issues” (4.3 33-5). This is reminiscent of Hamlet’s act five belief in providence, his faith in a power guiding the plight of a sparrow. The events of King Lear, however, have undercut this notion throughout and will continue to do so. Despite Albany’s prayer, “gods defend her,” Cordelia dies, and in an inverted pieta Lear comes onstage with the dead Cordelia in his arms, “dead as earth,” again echoing Hamlet’s new-found “dust to dust” awareness of mortality (5.3 254; 259). An anarchic will to the end, Lear comes onstage with his dead daughter and physically represents an inversion of natural order, “whose common theme / Is death of fathers,” as Claudius tells Hamlet (1.2 103-4).

The juxtaposition of Hamlet and King Lear reveals the differences between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century attitudes towards political power. While both plays end with carnage – political bodies dismembered and slaughtered, Hamlet features a strong, purposeful, authoritarian figure with a firm hand guiding the realm. King Lear, in contrast, concludes with an ambivalent atmosphere around the throne, and uncertainty surrounds the British crown. In Cordelia’s death and the subsequent power vacuum no one wants to take up the crown. From the beginning, Cordelia represented de jure order, and she tried to keep everything in its right place by maintaining familial order. Pleading with her father in act one, “Good my lord, / You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I  / Return those duties back as are right fit, / Obey you, love you and most honor you” (1.1 95-98). She is an agent of order and stability, and is ultimately sacrificed to the gods of chaos. Her death initiates the final wave of causalities. Like Hamlet, this tragedy has a high mortality rate, and as a result, like Hamlet’s Denmark, Lear’s Britain has a momentary power vacuum. Albany turns to Edgar and Kent, two honorable, just, and righteous men, who should have power de jure
of their moral character, and asks, “Friends of my soul, you twain, / Rule in this realm and the gored state sustain” (5.3 318-9). If Hamlet ends with an exaggerated staging of de facto authority, assumed because no one else can lay claim to it, then King Lear almost ends with an exaggerated staging of de jure power. Edgar and Kent can claim the throne because, according to Albany, they possess some innate nobility, some magnanimous essence that qualifies them for political rule. Their response is telling. Kent replies, “I have a journey, sir, shorty to go; / My master calls me, I must not say no, sounds suicidal,” and Edgar’s closing lines are equally ambiguous (5.3 320-1). It could be interpreted that Albany takes the crown, or that Edgar reluctantly takes on the mantle of authority. The point is that it is unclear exactly what happens at the end of King Lear. Lear’s drama, a more ambivalent, problematic depiction of political succession, questions the nature of political power, but does not provide concrete answers.

Regarding the ambiguity of the play’s end, Berns writes, “At the end of King Lear it is difficult to know what Shakespeare finally decided about the relation between morality, justice, and nature; but there is no doubt that the problem, the question, has been powerfully and clearly raised” (42). Schulman also explores the play’s uncertain ending, writing, “Lear is ambivalent, suggesting people may be less likely to adhere to existing order the more rationally they examine it, at least until it changes to their satisfaction” (105).¹²¹ We cannot know “what Shakespeare finally decided” about the issues he raises, but I do want to offer a more conclusive speculation than Berns feels comfortable providing. When read in tandem with Hamlet and Hobbes, the relation between morality, justice, and nature is dissolved. Morality and justice are no longer

¹²¹ Though Schulman does find more political stability and hope in the tragedy’s last scene than I do, concluding, “Edgar re-establishes authority in the end, which is why Edgar and Gloucester pass through the mean-grinder state of nature alongside Lear” (104-5).
natural phenomenon, but necessary social constructs used to bind us to the social contract. When characters regress back into a state of nature, like the anarchic wills of *King Lear*, then the social contract is rent and chaos manifests itself. In Lear’s tragedy, the chaos looks like the power vacuum that occupies ancient Britain at the play’s end. Again, when compared to the authoritative finality of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*’s conclusion is quite frightening. The belief in a divine force ruling the universe with justice and morality has crumbled throughout the play. When we apply the dominant political thought of the sixteenth century, which saw divine law reflected in the natural world and heavenly reign reflected in earthly political rule, then we can see how devastating the amoral universe could be on a civic society.

*Hamlet* is Hobbes’s ideal version of political rule. As previously stated, it works as a dramatization of Hobbes’s political philosophy in that it showcases, in the person of Hamlet, an anarchic will who comes to terms with the de facto nature of political rule. Hamlet, the political subject, recognizes that no one has an absolute right to political authority, but accepts this material reality. The final transfer of power is so swift and complete that it stabilizes what could be a rather tumultuous power struggle, the kind of struggle that Merbury fears when he writes, “what a monstrous Inconvenience is that when *sede vacante* after the Prince is dead, and before a new can be chose, the whole state remaineth in a very ANARCHIE, without king, or any kind of government” (22). Significantly, the power vacuum that Merbury fears does not happen in *Hamlet*. Fortinbras’s de facto authority exerts itself and prevents potential anarchy.

The conclusion of *King Lear* gives us another picture of power. The ambivalence surrounding the throne threatens to perpetuate, not conclude, the political turmoil extant
in Britain since Lear’s abdication. The “nothing” that permeates the play, occupies the throne at play’s end, and like the play’s “nothing,” the power vacuum represents a terrifying lack of authority. Long considered an influence on Merbury, Bodin also comments the political vacuums that elections produce, writing, “all elective monarchies are constantly menaced by the danger of a relapse into anarchy on the death of each king” (201). The feeble “election” of Edgar (or is it Kent? Shakespeare makes it hard to discern) at the end of the play serves to heighten our awareness of this political problem laid out by Bodin. In a sense, King Lear is Hobbes’s greatest fear dramatized. Political subjects recognize that no one has an absolute right to political authority. The political subject does not resist or fight this awareness, like Hotspur, simply to reestablish a power “by right.” Instead, these anarchic wills throw society into chaos. The play dramatizes a regression from civil order to a state of lawless nature. King Lear tears up the social contract that got us out of anarchy.

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122 Burgess cites Knafla (p. 73) and J.W. Allen (p. 250-1) for Bodin’s influence on Merbury, but contends himself that, “the influence of Bodin on [Merbury’s] thought was not great” (1996 67). Burgess is much more qualified to speak to the degree of influence Bodin had, but at least in this instance, both Merbury and Bodin fear elective monarchies because of the potential for political interregnum.
CHAPTER V

FREE TO FALL IN THE WASTE WIDE ANARCHIE OF CHAOS

In the previous chapters we looked at how de facto theories of political authority find expression in the early modern drama written at the turn of the sixteenth century. As chapter one suggests, these de facto theories emerge in the political philosophy with the escalating conflicts of the Civil Wars, the execution of Charles I, and Parliament’s subsequent attempts to legitimize its authority. In the next two chapters, I argued that when we locate anarchic wills in Shakespearean drama, then the dramatic representation of de facto powers come into focus. In a sense, therefore, the de facto theories staged in Renaissance drama at the end of the 1500s prefigure the more straightforward de facto political philosophies of the seventeenth century. In an attempt to balance this dissertation, chapter four offers a study of one a poetic response to the most dominant de facto theory of the seventeenth century. To this end, this chapter reads John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as a complex counter argument to Hobbes’s *Leviathan*.

Two figures notoriously at odds with each other, an extended comparison between Milton and Hobbes can teach us much about the shifting groundwork of political legitimacy during the period. Aubrey provides us with a firsthand account of their contentious relationship, when he tells us how Milton’s, “widowe assures [him] that Mr. T. Hobbs was not one of his acquaintance, that her husband did not like him at all,” since, “Their interests and tenets did run counter to each other” (Vol. 2 72). One of their
contrary tenets was the issue of the free press. Milton supported the freedom of presses to print liberally, while Hobbes was more wary of it. Hobbes feared the unfettered proliferation of ideas, especially those classical ideas of republicanism we briefly looked at in chapter one. Most dramatically, Hobbes saw the proliferation of Greek and Roman texts as integral to the execution of Charles I. As footnoted earlier, Hobbes believed, “there was never anything so dearly bought, as these western parts have sought the learning of the Greeks and Latin tongues,” because, “by reading of these Greek and Latin authors,” men have developed the habit of, “favoring tumults” (L 141). Hobbes blames the rhetoric of these classical works of republicanism, which, “say not regicide, that is, killing of a king, but tyrannicide, that is killing of a tyrant” (L 215). Hobbes argues that the power of terminology can instill in the public, “a certain tyrannophobia (or fear of being strongly governed)” (L 215). Underlying Hobbes’s defense of tyrants and condemnation of tyrannicide is the fact that he saw (perhaps with the benefit of hindsight) that the death of a political leader could lead to rebellion or even more deaths in a civil war. Aylmer observes that de facto theories of government, “seem to require the assumption that anarchy is a greater danger, a worse evil, than tyranny” (141). Hobbes clearly held this assumption.

Milton, on the other hand, argued against prior restraint of textual production. In *Areopagitica*, he tells the story of a third century church father who receives a vision from God, telling him, “Read any books what ever come to thy hands, for thou art

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123 Written about a decade before *Leviathan*, but published (against his wishes) in 1650, Hobbes’s *Elements of Law* did not distinguish between tyrannicide and regicide, though his attitude towards the execution of a sovereign power is unsurprisingly the same. “[F]or the opinion, that tyrannicide is lawful,” he writes, “meaning by a tyrant any man in whom resideth the right of sovereignty, it is no less false and pernicious to human society, than frequent in the writings of those moral philosophers . . . from the Schools of Greece, and form those that writ in the Roman state, in which not only the name of a tyrant, but of a king, was hateful” (*Elements of Law* 168-9).
sufficient both to judge aright, and to examine each matter” (1005). Like the lifting of Jewish dietary laws (“Unto the pure all things are pure,” Paul writes in Titus 1:15), Milton says God also, “left arbitrary the dyeting and repasting of our minds; as wherein every mature man might have to exercise his owne leading capacity” (1005). Though Hobbes grants the sovereign power to “examine the doctrines of all books before they be published,” Milton allows state censorship of books after they are printed (L 113; Milton 1011). This is not to suggest, anachronistically, that Milton endorses our modern understanding of freedom of the press. He just wants to keep the waters of intellectual exploration churning so that knowledge can be produced and enhance Truth (Milton 1015). I draw attention to their disagreement because it highlights Milton’s faith in man’s ability to act with religious (and political) prudence. Their divergent attitudes here reveal a fundamental difference in each man’s view of humanity. A difference we will see again at the conclusion of this chapter.

In Milton, we see Hobbes’s fears of classical influences realized. According to Aubrey, “Whatever [Milton] wrote against monarchie was out of no animosity to the king’s person, or owt of any faction or interest, but out of a pure zeale to the liberty of mankind, which he thought would be greater under a fre state than under a monarchiall government” (Vol. 2 69). But Milton did not dream up the idea of a free state on his own. Aubrey explains, “His being so conversant in Livy and the Roman authors, and the greatness he saw donne by the Roman commonwealth, and the vertue of their great commanders induc’t him to” (Vol. 2 69). They saw eye to eye on little and at the most basic level, they subscribed to fundamentally different political views. Milton was the Cromwell-supported author of The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649) and

124 For one of the most useful interpretations of Areopagitica, see Norbrook pp. 118-139.
Eikonoklastes (1649), which defended the regicide of Charles I and vehemently challenged the notion of monarchy. As Lawrence Rhu succinctly writes, “Hobbes was Milton’s worst nightmare,” especially in politics, where Hobbes, “was Milton’s mighty opposite a defender of absolutism against the republicanism of Milton” (2004 512). Ultimately, Milton’s main contention with the English monarchy, and with Hobbes’s de facto theory, was with its arbitrariness.

For Milton, government power should never be arbitrary, and the more concentrated the power, as in a monarchy, the more arbitrary the power necessarily seems. When Kevin Sharpe reads through Milton’s Tenure, he finds that, “Many of the entries unsurprisingly support Milton’s hostility to arbitrary monarchial rule” (176 my emphasis). While Milton’s hostility to monarchy is not surprising, the tension Sharpe finds between Cromwell and Milton is surprising. “Milton,” Sharpe argues, “underlines how what emerged in 1649, still more in 1653, was never a republic pure and simple; but indeed (to invert Collinson) a monarchial republic – which was always prone to drifting back to monarchy” (175). In other words, as Cromwell amassed more and more individual power, Milton increasingly saw Cromwell’s right to that power as arbitrary and less legitimate. However, though Milton’s terrestrial republicanism abhors the monarchy, throughout Paradise Lost Milton depicts God as a powerful, righteous, and just monarch. Indeed, the poet describes God as “Eternal Justice,” a force that emanates Creation, order, and the law, and as such, becomes as a sort of archetype of de jure authority (1.71). Furthermore, God extolls the monarchial virtues of his Only Begotten

125 For more on how Hobbes and Milton disagreed over the uses and abuses of language, especially in regards to Milton’s Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, see Kahn’s “The metaphorical contract in Milton’s Tenure of Kings and Magistrates,” in which she argues that Milton’s pamphlet, “would have been particularly distasteful to Hobbes,” because of the metaphorical nature of its social contract and because “In Milton’s view, kingship is itself simply a metaphor” (83; 99).
Son. “By Merit more then Birthright Son of God,” we hear God explain, “Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign / Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man, / Anointed universal King” (3.309; 315-17). In other words, the Prince of Peace is not an hereditary title. It would appear, therefore, that despite Milton’s antipathy to the divine right of kings, he nevertheless appeals to a divine model for political authority. In Of Reformation of Church Discipline in England, Milton writes, “let not human quillets keep back divine authority. Tis not the common Law, nor the civil, but piety, and justice, that are our foundresses; they stoop not, neither change colour for Aristocracy, democracy, or Monarchy, nor yet at all interrupt their just courses” (898). Unlike some of the legal scholars of the sixteenth century, Milton disregards the antique English law and appeals to older, more divine entities – piety and justice – to establish his theory of political authority.

Milton published Of Reformation in 1641, nine years before Hobbes would publish his account of what constitutes the “foundresses” of society. In Hobbes’s account, I have noted, material power founds the law, which brings about order. Trailing along behind all of these, in a de facto theory like Hobbes’s, is justice. According to D.M. Wolfe, Milton’s law of nature was, “conceived as a code of absolute justice derived both from man’s natural reason and his reflections upon Christian principles” (418). Hobbes’s law of nature, on the other hand, while it may appear to glitter like the Golden Rule, comes exclusively from man’s natural reasoning that subservience is better than oblivion. Ultimately, the essential difference between Hobbes and Milton – their opposing views on the arbitrariness or the primacy of justice – informs their political

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126 Edwin Curley notes, Hobbes’s claim that the Ultimate Law is the Golden Rule “is more in the spirit of Machiavelli than of Jesus” (xxx).
philosophies and reveals their fundamental and fierce disagreement. “Among seventeenth-century thinkers,” Wolfe writes, “no two critics offer more diverse or contradictory interpretations of root social issues than John Milton and Thomas Hobbes” (410). Milton’s republicanism, though it requires a faith in Christian liberty, stems from divine justice and is therefore steady, righteous, and divinely sanctioned. When Milton attempts to put this de jure theory into poetic practice, especially the practice of epic poetry, important problems begin to develop.

Rather than read Leviathan as a work of epic poetry, this chapter reads Milton’s Paradise Lost as a poetic response to Hobbes’s de facto theory of government.¹²⁷ As Andrew Shifflett has shown, the poetry of Milton (and other seventeenth-century poets) was a tactical response to the harrowing political landscape of the time. Rather than stoically retreat into verse, these poets channeled their political criticisms into poetry in an attempt to engage with the hostile political climate.¹²⁸ However, as this chapter demonstrates, the utilization of poetry, especially epic poetry, for political ends brings new challenges to Milton’s political views. As Milton creates his own political origin story out of biblical source material he confronts complex narrative issues that shape the

¹²⁷ See, for instance, Sheldon Wolin’s Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory, in which he argues, “that the intentions which inform Hobbes’s political theory were epical in nature and that his theory can be understood as having an epical aim. I shall also suggest, without supplying exhaustive proof, that from Plato to modern times an epic tradition in political theory has existed and that Hobbes is one of its ornaments” (4).

¹²⁸ Shifflett explains, “Stoic discourse joins victor with vanquished in an ethical bond which is also a vexing political competition to see who can bestow the superior clemency. ‘Benefits oblige,’ observes Hobbes in Leviathan (1651), ‘and obligations is thraldome; which is to one’s equall, hateful.’ In Marvell’s defense of Milton, however, ‘Regal Clemency’ is less an ethical problem than a political function with the purpose of driving an ideological wedge between the King and official and unofficial spokesmen such as Parker. Clemency was a king’s politic alternative to outright punishment” (109). The example of this alternative is what Shifflett calls “cruelly theatrical clemency,” which saw enemies of the state violently paraded through London to Tyburn only to have their executions, which were never intended, stayed at the last minute (Shifflett 98). Stoics had a response to these moments of exaggerated clemency, “the traditional Stoic critique of the tyrant’s generosity as worthless translated powerfully for censured republicans and nonconformists like Milton,” thus, Regal Clemency “could also be a direct challenge to the King’s rule” (Shifflett 110).
politics of his heavenly, diabolical, and earthly realms. Since the generic requirements of epic affect so much of Milton’s verse, I begin this chapter with a brief look at how new considerations for epic in the Christian era affect Milton’s project and guide his narrative choices. I will argue that the paramount challenge Milton faces is the narrative problem of Chaos. Since it is the material out of which God crafts creation, Milton must be careful with how he handles this essential, foundational, and ultimately social material.

As Milton confronts the narrative problem of Chaos, he must make theological concessions to his epic cosmology. Principle among these concessions is the persistent antagonism of Chaos in *Paradise Lost*, which, as this chapter will show, has important political ramifications. As an opponent of Hobbes, Milton would rather not espouse a political philosophy based on de facto premises. However, when we look at Milton’s epic with the anarchic will in mind, then we discover a Hobbesian aspect of the poem that Milton attempts to downplay. As personifications of anarchy, anarchic wills simultaneously recognize the failure of de jure claims to power and the arbitrariness of de facto authorities. Their mere existence, therefore, threatens the de facto powers that give rise to their being. With the figure of Chaos, *Paradise Lost* offers us the archetypal anarchic will. This “Anarch old,” chief in the pantheon of anarchy, presides over misrule and disorder in Milton’s poetic cosmos and serves as the most problematic antagonist to God’s ordered creation (2.988).129

Reading *Paradise Lost* as a tale of political genesis, this chapter will make three arguments. First, it will argue that the epic rests on an essentially de facto theory of authority, one that mirrors the genesis of Hobbes’s State of Nature. As this chapter also demonstrates, there is much critical concern over Chaos in Milton’s version of creation. I

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129 Milton’s use of the word “Anarch” is the first recorded in English (“anarch”).
will provide some framework for that debate, stake my own claim, and discuss the political implications of my stance. Second, this chapter will argue that Satan is not the true antagonist of Milton’s God, the divine example of political order. Like Hotspur in the Henriad, Satan’s will may appear contrary to God’s will but actually serves divine providence in its contumaciousness. Out of this claim, I will argue that Milton purposefully embellishes the heroism of Satan to draw our attention away from the more problematic entity of Chaos. Finally, this chapter will argue that Milton solves the problem of Chaos by synthesizing Chaos’s anarchic will into Adam and Eve’s Free Will. As Chaos’s anarchic kingdom dwindles into the construction of creation, the material of disorder must go somewhere. I will argue that Adam and Eve internalize Chaos’s anarchic will and become incubators for a force that continually threatens God with the possibility of anarchy. In the end, Milton calls this, “free will,” and presents it as the quality of human agency which allows Adam and Eve the freedom to choose between following Providence or going their own way.

Before we begin this study of Milton’s specific epic, we must situate his poem in the larger tradition of epic poetry. Understanding the tradition that Milton finds himself in will help us understand some important challenges the poet faced and how his responses to those challenges helped shape the politics of Paradise Lost. To wear the laurels alongside Homer and Virgil, Milton needed to write a national epic, a poem that establishes the qualities of nation through a hero that is uniquely English, but also one universal enough to inspire the admiration of the world. Homer gives us the identity of ancient Greece in his depiction of Odysseus, and Virgil writes The Aeneid as an idealized reflection of what it means to be Roman. In his Latinate poem of praise which prefaced
the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost*, Samuel Barrow, alluding to Milton’s classical predecessors, writes, “Give way poets of Rome, give way Greeks, and those celebrated by more recent fame. He who reads this poem will think Homer sang only of frogs, Vergil of gnats” (Barrow 349). The poet’s own invocation at the beginning of Book IX situates the poem in its epic tradition and also announces the poem’s superiority to those previous classics. Milton sets his poem above *The Iliad*, “Not less but more Heroic then the wrath / Of stern Achilles,” above *The Aeneid*, “or rage / Of Turnus for Lavinia disespous’d,” and beyond the esteem of *The Odyssey*, “Neptune’s ire or Juno’s, that so long / Perplex’d the Greek” (9.14-18). As these examples show, national epics have uniquely national heroes, and Milton’s “long choosing” of epic subject matter and “beginning late” of the project is attributed to his earlier plan of writing an Arthurian epic (9.26). However, at some point, Milton abandoned the world of the medieval romances and chivalric knights to embark on his biblical epic (9.27-40). This alteration is important, not simply because it changes the subject matter of the poem, but because it reveals a significant development in early modern poetic theory.

Milton finds his desired company in the poetic pantheon, but as Barrow implies, Milton’s subject matter seems to have greater importance. When Milton abandons his epic of Arthur and begins his epic of Adam, he answers Torquato Tasso’s charge to select a subject that accommodates “the most excellent form of the epic” (Tasso 109). For Tasso, the definition of appropriate subject matter changed significantly in the Christian era. Tasso says the ideal epic now requires the true subject matter of Scripture. “In my judgment,” he writes, “the subject of an epic must be drawn from Christian and Hebrew history, not from Gentile history” (104). Practically, however, since, “such histories are
so sacred and venerable that it is impiety to change them,” this charge is problematic (Tasso 105). Tasso warns the epic poet to, “not dare reach his hand toward,” the Scriptural histories, but “leave them, in their pure and simple truth, for the pious, because invention here is not permitted” (105). There is, however, a second kind of biblical history the epic poet can, and should, use, the ones, “not so holy as to contain an article of faith within them and thus do allow some things to be added, some removed, and others changed without the sin of impudence or irreligion” (Tasso 105). Tasso chooses the Crusades as the subject of his epic, since their historical moment qualifies as, “chronicles of true religion but not of such great authority as to be unalterable” (105). Other English poets heeded Tasso’s instruction and selected less biblically important source material. According to Helgerson, for instance, William Davenant, “strove to rid heroic poetry of the trappings of pagan myth,” and selected a medieval, Christian setting for his Gondibert (220). Milton, however, charges headlong into the first and forbidden category, choosing the biblical account of the Fall of Man as his epic subject. As Milton tries to outreach his Italian predecessor and English contemporaries, he will encounter a few narrative problems that come about when crafting a biblical epic.

Essentially, Milton meets two kinds of challenges as he adapts the first three chapters of Genesis into his epic. First, he will face the technical problems of

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130 For more on Tasso’s influence on Milton, see Lawrence Rhu’s *The Genesis of Tasso’s Narrative Theory: English Translations of the Early Poetics and a Comparative Study of the Their Significance and “Romancing the Pope: Tasso’s Narrative Theory and Milton’s Demonization of a Genre,”* in which Rhu explains, how it was Tasso “who helped [Milton] to understand the resources of genre and ‘what the laws are of a true epic poem’ (Of Education 637) so he could thus employ them in his Protestant masterpiece of that kind” (1999 135).

131 Richard Helgerson explains how Milton’s subject matter set him apart from other “self-crowned laureates,” “Like Spenser and Jonson, though with still greater effect, Milton inscribed in the text of our culture a new self-presentational message. And, like them, he did so by placing himself in a strongly marked historical sequence – or rather, in his case, at the converging point of two such sequences, one of vatic poets, the other of Biblical prophets” (280).
transforming mythic poetry into narrative verse. In themselves, the first three chapters of Genesis do not contain enough material to fill ten (eventually twelve) books of epic poetry. The sheer matter of his poem will have to come from somewhere else. Milton solves this conundrum through backstory and flash-forwards into other chapters of Genesis and other books of Scripture. Another aspect to this technical issue, however, speaks to the narrative quality of epic and the elliptical quality of Genesis that are at odds. When reading Genesis for a general impression of where life comes from or how the world was created, readers can cope with plot holes and the inconsistencies are not incontrovertible. In fact, as James Kugel argues, that the lack of detail in the Bible’s books of wisdom endows them with a sense of universal truth. With less attention to particular detail, “the great underlying pattern of the universe” emerges, according to Kugel, a pattern which applies, “equally to all of humanity and lie[s] beyond a particularity of time of space” (1997 14). As a creation myth, God can speak light into existence one day and then create the sun and stars the next, but when these two contradictory actions are used in a narrative, a story that depends on cause and effect, then Milton must resolve this apparent conflict; narrative needs more cohesion.132 Harinder Singh Marjara explains the difficulty of interpreting Scripture, when he writes, “The Bible, like works of poetry, presents truth veiled by figurative, typological, 

132 For more on the difficulty of fleshing out the elliptical nature of the Old Testament, especially Genesis, see Golda Werman’s Milton and Midrash, in which Werman explains how “Midrash is always based directly on a biblical passage, in whole or in part, but the midrashic explanation may roam far from the text that inspired it” (2). Thus, midrash can help flesh out, “The elliptical biblical text, often providing readers with only the sparsest and most indispensable details of a story, invites interpretation; the midrashist describes the biblical personalities, motivates their actions, imposes meaning on events, resolves unclear statements, and shows the Bible’s relevance to life” (2). For Werman’s analysis of how Midrash influenced Paradise Lost, see chapter three, “The Midrash Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer and Paradise Lost” (pp. 42-74), in which Werman notes the many parallels between the work of Judaica (published in a 1644 Latin translation) and Milton’s epic.
anagogical, and allegorical representation of reality, and therefore any attempt to interpret the Bible literally could very easily be misleading” (10). Milton was acutely aware of misleading readers and would have felt the pressure of Tasso’s warning.

A good example of how Milton faces the challenges of making narrative out of Genesis, or what N.K. Sugimura calls, “the Problem of Narrative Intelligibility,” which he describes as, “problems inherent in literary expression,” is in Book VI when Raphael describes the pre-Creation war in Heaven (196). Since Light is the first creation, according to Genesis, and since the war in Heaven is fought before creation, Milton must find a way to explain the illumination of the angels’ conflict. Raphael tells Adam, “There is a Cave / Within the Mount of God, fast by his Throne, / Where light and darkness in perpetual round / Lodge and dislodge by turns, which makes through Heav’n / Grateful vicissitude, like Day and Night” (6.4-8). As this example shows, Milton takes pains to give his poem as much narrative integrity as possible. As the archangel Michael says, “objects divine / Must needs impaire and wearie human sense,” and Milton continually faces these sorts of complications (12.9-10). Truly, we can imagine the poet speaking through Raphael when he says, with exaggerated understatement, “For Man to tell how human Life began / Is hard” (8.250-1).

Milton’s solution leads to the second kind of problem confronting the poet as he transforms Scripture into epic, the theological problem of supplementing aspects of Scripture. Although Tasso teaches Milton that he should use biblically sanctioned subject matter for his epic, the Italian master recognizes the theological problems this poses. According to Rhu, “Tasso also experienced a reluctance to employ biblical stories as a basis for poetic creation because tenets of faith frequently derived from them. The
adjustments that a poet might want to work upon the raw material of his story would be inhibited by the sacredness of such sources, and he would have to surrender his freedom to invent” (1993 24). Utilizing biblical sources constrains poetic license, and the problem does not merely affect a poet’s work. Indeed, the poet is biblically forbidden to embellish or augment Scripture. Deuteronomy warns, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it,” while the book of Proverbs cautions, “Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Deut. 12:32; Prov 30:6). The most (literally) damning injunction comes from John’s vision of Revelation: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this Book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this Book” (Rev. 22:18-19). These are harsh warnings from Scripture that Milton would have known. As we see with Milton’s plot device of divine light above, to solve these narrative problems means inventing eschatological aspects, as well as features, of the divine. As Tasso’s fears illustrate, these injunctions stem from the knowledge that such alterations could affect later interpretations of sacred texts, thereby influencing believers’ understanding of the salvific book.

The technical and the theological problems, therefore, become intertwined. When Milton fleshes out Creation, he must elaborate on verses from Genesis and make explicit details only implied in the original account. Supplementing Holy Writ means augmenting the sacred text and could potentially lead readers to outright heresy or cause otherwise devout readers to stumble in their walks with Christ. In a prefatory poem, Milton’s friend
and contemporary poet, Andrew Marvell, echoes Tasso in his fear that *Paradise Lost*, “would ruine . . . The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song” (7-8). The fear of corrupting theological understanding through interpretation was also a political fear as well. Norman Sykes explains how Calvin’s belief that Scripture is “self-authenticated” through interpretation caused confusion and denominational fissures during the seventeenth century (Calvin in Sykes 178). Sykes concludes, that since the Bible may be the least self-evident and most difficult to interpret text ever written, the abundant printings of Bibles during the early modern period, “served but to increase the confusion; for, where everyman had a prophecy and an interpretation of hard and difficult passages of Scripture, believed to be a private revelation, the authority of the Spirit was claimed for the most diverse and contradictory theses” (180).

However fraught with potential danger Milton’s project is, he is not the first to encounter problems when pressing Genesis for interpretation. One solution to the problems posed in critical analysis or narrative construction is to read Genesis typologically, which apostles had done in the past. Milton too reads New Testament truths into Old Testament moments, but he approaches these interpretations as a writer of

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133 Marvell realizes he has no reason to fear because, “That Majesty which through [Milton’s] Work doth Reign / Draws the Devout, deterring the Profane” (31-2). Marvell explains how Milton’s poem comes close to blasphemy but ultimately works as a work of epic religious devotion. The quality of his project sanctifies it. The poem is simply too good for evil doers to make use of it.

134 In his wariness of religious faction, Hobbes finds an unlikely ally in Clarendon. As Irene Colman explains, Clarendon and Hobbes both, “opposed to a subversive political tradition that had encouraged people with moral sensitivity to participate in nearly two centuries of religious war and revolution” (41). Despite their mutual dislike of one another, both men blamed political factions for manipulating and exploiting the conscience of others – an abuse of morality for their own ends, ends which included manipulating, “those who, seeking the liberty of conscience, had been led into the false freedom of regicide” (Colman 42). “The political theory of Romans 13 assumes that the rights of the sovereign are conferred on him by God. Hobbes’ notion that they are conferred on the sovereign by the consent of the people was very offensive to royalists like Clarendon, who saw what a subversive idea this would be, if carried to its logical conclusion” (Curley xxxix – xl).

135 We will see below how the Apostle John reads Christ back into Genesis 1:1 at the beginning of his own Gospel.
narrative verse not theological exegesis. For instance, since Genesis only says a serpent tempts Eve, we must wonder if it was simply an evil animal or a creature possessed by an evil spirit. As a Christian, Milton would have applied the traditional interpretation that the serpent represents Satan. As a narrative poet, however, he now has to figure out how the serpent and Satan comingle, how Satan enters the serpent ("[I]n at his Mouth / The Devil enterd," Milton explains for the curious) (9.187-8). Also, as a storyteller, he now has to find a plausible explanation for how Satan enters Eden in the first place. His practical solution is to invent geographical aspects of Paradise to accommodate his narrative need. “There was a place,” the poet writes, “Now not, though Sin, not Time, first wraught the change, / Where Tigris at the foot of Paradise / Into a Gulf shot under ground, till part / Rose up a Fountain by the Tree of Life” (9.69-73). Moments like these, along with Milton’s strange explanation how Satan manipulates the serpent to speak, reveal some of the narrative blind spots Genesis contains. The narrative decisions also calcify certain teleological readings of Genesis, like the traditional understanding that Satan is the serpent of Genesis’s third chapter.

From Genesis 1 onward, Milton can confidently apply typological interpretations to his iteration of scripture. However, when Milton confronts the need to dramatize the actual moment of Creation, he encounters the most daunting (and most politically charged) moment in his epic. As an epic poet, Milton cannot, like the poet of Genesis, start at the beginning. Following, as he must, his epic predecessors, Milton must begin in the middle of things. Therefore, Milton faces the first of his narrative challenges when he confronts the most basic moment of a Creation story – the literal beginning. Genesis

136 “[W]ith Serpent Tongue / Organic, or impulse of vocal Air, / His fraudulent temptation thus began” (9.529-31).
begins, “In the beginning,” but the first action, God speaking, “let there be light,” gives rise to a question that theologians have long wrestled with, and one that, from a storytelling standpoint, Milton cannot escape: What was there before light? What was God doing prior to Creation? When asked the same, Augustine says, “I answer not, as a certain person is reported to have done facetiously (avoiding the pressure of the question), ‘He was preparing hell,’ saith he, ‘for those who pry into mysteries’” (Confessions 300). Augustine continues to say that whatever God did, he certainly did no creating since creation is God’s essential activity (300). In De Doctrina Christiana, Milton’s response to the hypothetical question is brusque. “Anyone who asks what God did before the creation of the world is a fool,” he writes, “and anyone who answers him is not much wiser” (1174). Milton takes a rather harsh stance in his De Doctrina. In Paradise Lost, however, Milton must attribute some activities to God. We will explore the significant differences between De Doctrina and Paradise Lost later, but for now, I simply want to note that Milton is more willing to speculate on and expand God’s pre-Creation itinerary in his verse. And though Raphael cautions Adam about asking certain questions, warning, “Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid, / Leave them to God above, him serve and feare,” as a narrative poet, Milton finds himself in the undesirable position of needing to offer some kind of explanation (8.168-9). At the center of this technical/theological problem, and at the beginning of his epic, is the problem of Chaos. As we will see, since Chaos is the foundation of all creation, the prima materia of the universe, the “one first matter all,” and it brings with it problems not as easily dealt with through accommodation or invention (5.472).\footnote{Shortly, we will look at how different scholars view this enigmatic phrase from Raphael’s Book V description of Creation. Needless to say, there is a rich tradition of critical conflict.}
Rather than resign himself to Adam’s ignorance, nothing is, “for [Milton] too high
/ To know,” especially since he must provide his readers with narrative (8.173–4). The
most important question of pre-Creation therefore becomes, what did God use to create
the universe? Milton is not the first to confront this question and there are, traditionally,
two possibilities sometimes masquerading as three: either God spoke matter into
existence out of nothing (creatio ex nihilo), or he created the universe out of pre-existing
material (creatio ex materia), sometimes considered creation out of himself (creatio ex
deo). This question is of utmost importance because it is literally the most fundamental
aspect of Creation. This question shapes the poem’s understanding of the created world,
and if we read Paradise Lost an epic of political philosophy, then it shapes the poem’s
political order because it reveals a persistent and underlying foundation of chaos, not
order, for the world.

Some medieval works, like the aforementioned Plaint of Nature by Alan de Lille,
offer us a version of creatio ex nihilo. In Alan’s version, God wills the world into
existence, “by the command of His deciding will alone, not by the operative aid of any
external factor, not by the help of any pre-existing matter, not at the insistent urgings of
any need” (145). Not only does God will the world out of nothing, he harmonizes the
world into, “peaceable union,” “by agreement from law and order; He imposed laws on
them, He bound them by sanctions” (145). God’s issuing of creation is concomitant with
the establishment of natural laws. Since Alan’s universe comes from nothing, creation
has an inherent perfection. God is explicitly involved in every aspect of the creation
process from calling the materials into existence to single-handedly shaping them.
Therefore, if calamity comes to creation (as it surely will), then there is only the perpetrator to blame.

Milton takes a different approach and is unequivocal on the matter, God created the universe out of chaos. As he writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*, “this original matter was not an evil thing . . . It was a substance, and could only have been derived from the source of all substance. It was in a confused and disordered state at first, but afterwards God made it ordered and beautiful” (1177). However, readers are still divided over whether chaos constitutes its own material existence or whether it is an aspect of God. The former would be creatio ex materia and the latter creatio ex deo. Ostensibly, the issue determines Milton’s dualism or monism, respectively. If a chaotic, disordered entity exists separate from God, then it signifies an existence outside of God’s creation or control, and would therefore reveal an ontological dualism. The most extreme understanding of this dualism equates two opposing forces as dichotomous binaries. Good and Evil, for instance, co-eternally balanced. Either harmonious bitheism or antagonistic ditheism, Milton clearly does not favor a dualism this extreme. However, simply because Milton’s ontology is not dichotomous does not mean he is a strict monist, as *A Milton Encyclopedia* would have it. But while many generally agree with Milton’s monism, there is plenty to discuss regarding its peculiarities. The encyclopedic conclusion that Milton’s philosophy of being is, “creation *ex Deo* instead of *ex nihilo*,” leaves room for nuanced interpretations of the material of God and, more importantly, the material of Chaos (“Metaphysics” 124). The debate is robust.

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138 The entry on Milton’s metaphysics concludes, “Monism has become the normally accepted word for any philosophy that resolves being into one substance, and thereby an appropriate name for Milton’s [ontology],” (“Metaphysics” 123).
Stephen Fallon’s important work, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, contrasts Milton’s poetic cosmos with Descartes’s dualist philosophy and reads Milton’s monism as a rejection of the Cartesian distinction between mind and body (142). For Fallon, this means that God, angels, humans, plants and animals, all have a material substance. Like many others, Fallon points to Raphael’s “one first matter” speech to Adam as, “The central proof text for the materiality of angels in *Paradise Lost*, and one that makes explicit the monist basis of that materiality” (141). Fallon’s Milton is a material monist, which leads him to associate Hobbes and Milton in their shared antithesis to Cartesian dualism. Similarly, B. Dently Hart defines Milton’s monism as, “the oneness of the primary matter underlying the diversity of all its secondary” (22). The underlying primary matter that Hart describes here will be tremendously important. As we begin to see, Hobbes and Milton may have shared more in common than either would admit.

Hobbes’s strict materialism is the foundation for his de facto political philosophy. However, Milton’s need to bring Chaos out of pre-existing matter paints the poet into a monist corner. Hobbes can operate out of this space, but Milton’s de jure republicanism cannot.

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139 As Fallon’s reading suggests, the political implications of Milton’s monism lead the poet closer to Hobbes’s materialism. In *Hunting the Leviathan*, Mintz explains how Hobbes’s materialism generated the most violent criticism of his philosophy because it suggested atheism. “All the critics of Hobbes’s materialism agreed with Bishop Bramhall,” Mintz writes, “that ‘by taking away all incorporeal substance, [Hobbes] taketh away God himself’ (Mintz 67). Descartes and Hobbes were notoriously at odds with each other and though they never directly corresponded with each other, they did converse through the care of Marin Mersenne. In a 1641 letter to Mersenne for Hobbes, Descartes writes, “Although the style in which [Hobbes writes] makes its author look clever and learned, he seems to stray from the truth in every single claim he advances as his own” (Thomas Hobbes: The Correspondence, Vol. I: 1622-1659 p. 57). Thus, Aubrey’s claim that, “Des Cartes and he were acquainted and mutually respected one another,” is only half true (Vol. 1 367).

140 Milton especially would have felt the need to defend God’s spiritual power, especially his verbal pulchritude, which literally speaks the world into existence in Genesis and in part of his creation account. Hobbes would have scoffed at the idea of a creator spiritually hovering over material and simply willing it into existence. As Cees Leijenhorst succinctly explains that for Hobbes, “all natural change required physical impact, ruling out the causal efficacy of incorporeal entities” (86).
The association between Hobbes and Milton leads Phillip J. Donnelly to take issue with Fallon and Hart. For Donnelly, Fallon and Hart fail to distinguish between “first matter” and corporeal matter, a distinction between materia and corpus, which, according to Donnelly, Milton draws (1999 79). Donnelly resolves the problem of Chaos by distinguishing between these entities: materia is original creation, the “one first matter all,” that Raphael references, while corpus is the mutable, corruptible, substance that allows sin to enter the created beings. Donnelly argues for a sort of dual-materialism in Milton, which allows him to conclude, “The mutability of all individual beings then accounts for corruptibility by distinguishing existents from the incorruptible matter that emanates from God” (1999 80). Donnelly’s emphasis on precise terminology helps clarify Milton’s theological approach to the uneasy dualism that emerges when we linger too long on Chaos, but when we go back to the poem, the difference between materia and corpus is less distinct. Donnelly admits as much, and I want to exploit what he calls, “the ambiguity that Milton exploits throughout the poem . . . the biblicist subtlety of Milton’s poetic theodicy,” and open the poem up to different interpretations (1999 81). I want to press Donnelly’s reading and say that Milton’s “subtlety” is a result of this narrative necessity and his desire to obscure some troubling (for him) aspects of his depiction of Creation.

Marjara too argues, “There is one major difference between Milton’s view on spirits and those of Hobbes and More. Milton insisted on the inseparability of the soul from the body” (Marjara 224). It seems to me that Marjara works hard to find a distinction between Hobbes and Milton that does not exist, when it comes to the material of the universe. Marjara writes, “for Hobbes, spirit is an integral part of the body, and its immortality is therefore a miraculous event” (224). Hobbes repeatedly denies the existence of incorporeal substances and even argues for the material corpus of God, angels, Heaven, and the Kingdom of God. Therefore, when it comes to their material ontology, Hobbes and Milton share virtually the same view. According to Marjara, “Milton postulates a universe that is made up of the same matter at all ontological levels” (224). Hobbes’s materialism would absolutely agree.
It seems to me that the problem of evil (corruption, disorder) is as muddled in Milton as it is in all of classical, medieval, and early modern theology. Milton’s own theodicy seems to slightly differ in his various works. So while Hart considers Milton a, “narrative monist,” I would consider Milton more of a “narrative dualist” (Hart 25). The uniform material of creation demonstrates Milton’s ontological monism, but Chaos’s antagonism and persistently combative opposition to God betrays a modicum of dualism that complicates Paradise Lost in many ways. Narrative requirements have forced Milton into granting Chaos a higher degree of omnipresence and maliciousness than his theological works suggest. I do not think the Chaos of Paradise Lost has an equal power with God, but it has more power (and significance) in his epic than it does in De Doctrina Christiana. We should allow Milton the poetic license to differentiate between his theology in De Doctrina Christiana and the theological implications of Paradise Lost. After all, even Donnelly believes, “The relation between [Paradise Lost and De Doctrina Christiana] is not one of direct correspondence” (1999 81). When we study Chaos in Paradise Lost, we study a character (and realm) shaped by the unique constraints of narrative. Sometimes this leads Milton to an unorthodox vision of the universe, but as Marjara explains, “Whenever Milton is unorthodox, it is because he is trying to build up a harmonious vision of the universe. His deviations from orthodoxy are dictated by the need to be consistent within the basic universalizing principles he has adopted” (301-2).

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142 For this reason, some scholars appeal to Milton’s prose as if it were an arbitrating authority. Flannagan, for instance, looks to Milton’s De Doctrina Christiana to help explain the poet’s stance on Chaos. According to Flannagan, “The matter out of which God created the universe was not evil: ‘It was in a confused and disordered state at first, but afterwards God made it ordered and beautiful’ (On Christian Doctrine 1.7)” (381). In the prose of De Doctrina Christiana, Milton provides a pared down narrative of creation, however, Chaos is not so easily glossed in Paradise Lost, and we should be careful of relying too much on Milton’s prose theology to explain his poetics. For more on how depictions of chaos differ in Paradise Lost and De Doctrina Christiana, see John Leonard’s “Milton, Lucretius, and ‘the Void Profound of Unessential Night.”
In sum, for Milton, the epic poet, theological abstractions become narrative particulars and can complicate otherwise sound doctrine. As this entire conversation illustrates, even in *Paradise Lost* the role of Chaos in creation is strained with controversy. My claim, that the anarchy of Chaos finds new existence and expression in man’s free will, supplies an interpretive valve to release some of the pressure surrounding this issue.

My interpretation of Milton’s narrative dualism allows room for a Chaos that is actively hostile to God’s creative power, while not representing a dualism that Milton clearly does not hold. In this way, I agree with Rumrich, who writes, “It is possible . . . to take account of the allegorical character of Chaos and narrative facts concerning chaos without resorting to the claim that Milton in his poetry contradicts fundamental principles of his monistic theology” (1995 1038). The tension in this monist conflict gives rise to readings like Regina Schwartz’s “Milton’s Hostile Chaos: ‘…And the Sea Was No More,’” which seeks to understand, “Milton’s uncompromising monism,” in light of his narrative project (1985 338). “Milton is thrust back again and again to the Beginning,” Schwartz writes, “And for all its disturbing implications, the chaos he finds there is far more hostile than he would ever acknowledge in prose” (1985 339). So how does Milton describe the initial act of creation in *Paradise Lost*?

Though Milton gives us a brief, expurgated version of creation in Book I, we hear a more complete account in Book VII as Raphael tells Adam of the beginning. When Adam asks Raphael, “what cause / Mov’d the Creator in his holy Rest / Through all Eternitie so late to build / In Chaos,” the angel recounts God’s address to the Only Begotten Son prior to Creation, “My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee / I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep / Within appointed bounds be Heav’n and Earth”
(7.91-3; 166-8). Up to this point, Milton is fairly clear. Taking the Apostle John’s typological rendering of Genesis, the Holy Spirit accompanies the Son in the act of creation. Chronologically, for lack of a better term, this is the earliest event of the epic. The Son has his marching orders and he sets off to create. At this point, however, Milton’s language gets increasingly confusing. After the poet ostensibly describes Chaos (‘Boundless the Deep’), we read what appears to be the words of the Son, “because I am who fill / Infinitude, nor vacuous the space, / Though I uncircumscrib’d my self retire, / And put not forth my goodness, which is free” (7.169-72). Essentially, Milton means to suggest that God creates the universe ex materia, specifically, out of Himself, not out of nothing (“vacuous the space”). However, though this creation is of himself, the Son somehow manages to keep certain aspects of himself (his “goodness”) free from the circumscribed universe. When compared to Milton’s almost-telegraphic account in De Doctrina, the particulars of creation in Paradise Lost are almost indecipherable. I would argue that Milton could afford to be clearer in his prose tract than in his narrative verse because he can make claims in prose that do not require the same kind of causal logic that storytelling demands. Milton faces the most contentious moment in cosmic history, and tactically responds with complex syntax, purposefully obfuscating the contentious matter. Comparing Milton’s prose work with his poetic verse illustrates the narrative complexity he must contend with and how that complexity can affect otherwise straightforward theological claims. 

143 John famously begins his Gospel with an explicit reference to Genesis 1:1, writing, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” that is, Christ in his pre-incarnate form (John 1:1).
Since Chaos is indispensable for Milton’s cosmos, we need to examine its qualities. First of all, Milton’s Chaos has no narrative beginning and thus has a sort of eternal essence. Echoing Genesis 1:1, Milton writes in the first book of his epic, “In the Beginning how the Heav’ns and Earth / Rose out of Chaos” (1.10-11). Initially, Chaos preceded Creation. The poet then explains how the Holy Spirit transforms the aquatic abyss into Creation: “Thou from the first / Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread / Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss / And mad’st it pregnant” (1.19-22). As we can see, this version of creation is quite different than Raphael’s fleshed-out, more narrative account in Book VII. Here, Milton can afford to parrot Genesis and remain elliptical. Still, even if Adam is not here to interject, we could ask, “where did the material of Chaos come from?” In “The Argument” of Book I, Milton implies its eternal existence, certainly its existence before the traditional realms of Heaven, Earth, and Hell. He tells us, “the Poem hasts into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his Angels now fallen into Hell, describ’d here, not in the Center (for Heaven and Earth may be suppos’d as yet not made, certainly not yet acurst) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest call’d Chaos” (353). Therefore, unlike the rest of Creation, we cannot pinpoint when Chaos comes into existence through a reading of Paradise Lost. Milton calls Night, “eldest of things,” and reveals that Chaotic night, not the previously mentioned Heavenly alterations of light and dark that pre-exist sunlight and nightfall on Earth, has some kind of cosmic precedent (2.962). Chaotic night is more primeval and primordial. In a moment, we will look at how Chaos’s eternal quality poses problems for God’s ability to

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144 Marjara explains, “To unify his cosmos, Milton extends the material principle eve to his Chaos, which is filled with the same matter in its uncreated state . . . Evidently, it is the primordial, pre-creation matter present in Chaos out of which the earth, the planets, the stars, and apparently everything else, including angels, were created” (224).
completely subdue the anarchic material of the universe, and how, “the void profound / Of unessential Night,” proves to be an unstable, dangerous baseline for the created world (2.438-9). For now, though, I want to emphasize the indestructability of Chaos.

Ethereal matter, like that which makes up the angels, is hard to destroy. When Satan’s battle wound is described, we are told the celestial beings, “Cannot but by annihilating die” (6.347). Surely, the material that makes up those angelic beings must be more adamantine, and if the material itself is difficult to destroy, then what about its essential nature? Explaining the influence of Henry More’s *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659) on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Marjorie Nicolson notes how, “More comments, too, on a fact that Milton uses without comment: ‘No forced thing can last long,’ [More] says, and therefore an evil spirit cannot long retain a borrowed shape” (438). Nicolson uses More’s axiom to investigate Satan’s many shapes in Eden, but when we think of Creation as a sort of “forced thing,” that is, Chaos forced into Creation, then More’s point reveals the tension that permeates Creation, the tension of a coiled spring, ready to return to its natural state of rest. Only in the case of *Paradise Lost*, the natural state is not rest, but anarchy. Indeed, the post-creation remnants of Chaos, “the loud misrule / Of Chaos,” must be kept far away from the created universe, “least fierce extreames / Contiguous might distemper the whole frame” (7.271-2). Milton suggests that Chaos, a foe beaten back but not extinguished, represents a continual threat to Creation. In other words, Chaos has a troubling endurance. When comparing Milton’s Chaos to classical creation myths like Ovid’s, A.B. Chambers remarks how, “Milton’s Chaos, unlike others, continues to exist, in part, even after the creation” (83). Not as easily theologically subdued as Satan, Chaos’s odd place in the cosmos must have given Milton fits.
Sugimura questions the allegorical nature of Chaos and reveals what is at stake if the allegory slips away from Milton:

[I]f allegory falls short of bringing Chaos and Night under control, the coveted epithet ‘Eternal’ – on which so much of the theodicy is based – may attach itself to disturbingly darker entities, which may or may not be associated with God. The suggestion is that Milton’s metaphysics as well as his poetic method counteracts, in complicated ways, the materializing tendencies otherwise attributed to the allegorical figure of Chaos. (234)

My reading of Chaos echoes Sugimura and similarly finds the character of Chaos less stable and manageable than simple allegory. As I see it, Milton’s attachment to an eternal Chaos does indeed destabilize the theodicy which purports to be the poem’s entire basis. Reading Paradise Lost as a poetic interpretation of the genesis of human politics, we can consider these “disturbingly darker entities,” which remain after Chaos has been converted to Creation, as the seeds of anarchic discord sown into the soil of an otherwise ordered world.

One aspect of Milton’s Chaos is its timelessness – its frightening lack of historical beginning and its persistence. Another of its qualities is its violent resistance to God’s will. As we look at how Chaos responds to the act of creation, take note of Chaos’s hostility. “Outrageous as a Sea, dark, wasteful, wilde,” it rises, “Up from the bottom turn’d by furious windes / And surging waves, as Mountains to assault / Heav’ns higth, and with the Center mix the Pole” (7.213-6). Milton’s Chaos is not submissive or passive. It does not go quietly into the dawn of creation. Raphael describes the power of God over

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145 However, Sugimura and I disagree on how, or if, Milton’s God eventually subdues Eternal Chaos. Sugimura reads the conflict as a “Matter of Glorious Trial,” which God wins through a kind of material sanctification. My reading argues for a more creative way that Milton could solve the problem.
Chaos as, “The King of Glorie in his powerful Word / And Spirit coming to create new Worlds” (7.209-10). The Creative, conquest-driven powers arrive, and, “On heav’nly ground they stood, and from the shore / They view’d the vast immeasurable Abyss (7.211-2). Significantly, God does not send Michael or Raphael to subdue Chaos as he does with Lucifer’s rebel army. He appoints his Only Begotten Son to handle this conflict because the angelic host does not have the requisite amount of power to face such a forceful foe. I sympathize with older scholarship that noted the animosity between God and Chaos, scholars like Chambers, who writes, “Chaos and Night are enemies of God, opposed to him only less than hell itself” (69).

In fact, I would press Chambers’s reading even further and argue that Chaos is opposed to God more than hell itself. After the Word commands Chaos’s silence, he moves, like a conquering hero, “on the Winds of Cherubim / Uplifted, in Paternal Glorie,” parading into his newly acquired land, “Far into Chaos, and the World unborn” (7.219-21). “Thus God the Heav’n created, thus the Earth,” we read, “Matter unform’d and void: Darkness profound / Cover’d th’ Abyss: but on the watrie calme / His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspred” (7.233-6). 146 “The rising world of waters dark and deep,” is, “Won from the void and formless infinite,” as in contested lands between two nations (3.11-12). Creation out of Chaos comes through conflict and in order to emphasize the might (and significance) of the divine act, Milton must endow Chaos with a certain amount of puissance. It cannot immediately roll over and bend to God’s creative will. The stronger the antagonist, the more powerful the protagonist.

146 To get a sense of how much pre-Genesis work Milton goes through, he has been describing the act of creation for a few hundred lines of verse at this point. It is not until the two hundredth and thirty third line that he comes to the moment which corresponds with the second verse of Genesis, when, “the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2).
To illustrate Chaos’s antagonism, let us turn to the personified character of Chaos in Satan’s Book II encounter with the figure. When Satan firsts meets Chaos, the anarch is sitting atop a symbol of political power. Satan approaches, “the Throne / Of Chaos, and his dark Pavilion spread / Wide on the wasteful Deep” (2.959-61). Throughout the episode, Milton treats Chaos as a defeated sovereign power, but given the politically subversive nature of Chaos, this is no easy task. Milton needs to describe Chaos as a figure who reigns over the “nethermost Abyss,” but since this is a world without order – natural or political – Milton is in a bit of a bind (2.988; 956). Milton’s response is to utilize poetic license and like the contradictions he favors (“darkness visible”), he expresses the precise sentiment through technically imprecise language. “To whom these most adhere,” he says, meaning the diffuse elements which constitute the anarchic realm, Chaos, “rules a moment” (2.906-7). Here, Milton carefully qualifies the nature of these elements’ adherence as one of degree. They “mostly” adhere to Chaos, but the adverb leaves us with the impression that these elements are barely ruled. Added to that, Chaos can only compel their obedience for a “moment” or two before they presumably fly off and follow their own whims. Over this void and over these elements, “Chaos Umpire sits, / And by decision more imbroiles the fray / By which he Reigns” (2.907-9). In contrast, when Satan gains power in Hell, he oversees a structured political debate. The demons decide on a course of action and then cooperatively work towards that goal. No such logic exists in Chaos’s realm. His decrees are designed to cause more trouble in his world. Nevertheless, Chaos clearly represents the realm’s sovereign leader.

Satan asks the great anti-authority of uncreated Chaos for help navigating the wild terrain, or, “What readiest path leads where your gloomie bounds / Confine with Heav’n”
Earlier, Satan had faltered, lost altitude, and would have descend into annihilation, “had not by ill chance / The strong rebuff of som tumultuous cloud / Instinct with Fire and Nitre hurried him / As many miles aloft” (2.935-8). This could be God’s Providence, but Milton calls it “ill chance” and there is no textual evidence that God has a hand in this rescue. In fact, the text gives us the impression that the occurrence is legitimately an act of chance. Unlike Heaven, obviously, and unlike what we have seen in Hell even, Chaos seems like a world where God’s Providence is conspicuously absent.

Satan wants a way back to Heaven, but he adds, “or if som other place / From your Dominion won, th’ Ethereal King / Possesses lately,” meaning Earth, then he will take directions to that Creation too (2.976-8). As said above, Chaos fights to hold its anarchic property when the Son appropriates it for creation. Satan, perhaps disrespectfully, observes that Chaos’s realm has lost ground to Creation.

Chaos explains how his realm diminishes when Creation, of both Hell and Earth, increases. “I upon my Frontiers here / Keep residence,” he says, having moved his court to the border to take up a strategic military position (2.988-9). Chaos continues, informing Satan of how creation encroaches into his realm and dwindles his anarchy:

That little which is left so to defend,
Encroacht on still through our intestine broiles
Weakening the Scepter of old Night: first Hell
Your dungeon stretching far and wide beneath;
Now lately Heaven and Earth, another World
Hung ore my Realm, link’d in a golden Chain
To that side Heav’n from when your Legions fell. (2.998-1006)
Since creation is a zero sum game, God’s work erodes Chaos’s borders as each new realm carves a new slice out of Chaos. The Great Chain of Being not only links earth to heaven, it penetrates the chaotic void and persistently announces a created world with its presence. Instead of hanging the decapitated heads of Chaos’s minions to visually remind the void of its conquest, God ties “This pendant world,” “fast by hanging in a golden Chain,” for Chaos to see (2.1052; 1051).

Earlier in the poem, Milton describes how the noise from Lucifer’s Civil War in Heaven, “tore Hells Concave, and beyond / Frighted the Reign of Chaos and old Night” (1.542-3). Roy Flannagan glosses “Reign” in these lines as “Realm, Kingdom,” but its meaning as “sovereignty” or “rule” is more important because it impresses upon the sense that Chaos possesses and administers the realm. Later, Raphael describes “Chaos wilde” as reigning “where these Heav’ns now rowl, where Earth now rests” (5.577-78). Chaos not only existed as matter prior to the creation of the universe, it reigned over this space. It was not a mere governor or duke of this world. It held political dominion, until, “Heav’ns great Year [brought] forth, th’ Empyreal Host,” who came together, “Under thir Hierarchs in orders bright” to conquer Chaos (5.583; 587). When the angelic host assembles, “Of Hierarchies, of Orders, and Degrees,” they subdue Chaos like a well-ordered army (5.591).

All of this, of course, has happened before the creation in Genesis 1:1. In *Paradise Lost*, Creation proper begins at the end of Book II in the form of God’s bespoken light, which Choas and Satan see during their parlay. The poet tells us how, “now at last the sacred influence / Of light appears from the walls of Heav’n / Shoots far into the bosom of dim Night / A glimmering dawn; here Nature first begins” (2.1034-7).
Since God makes the world out of the matter of Chaos, Creation and the uncontrolled Chaos cannot coexist. Therefore, this light extends to, “Her fardest verge,” which inevitably causes, “Chaos to retire / As from her outmost works a brok’n foe / With tumult less and with less hostile din” (2.1038-40). Throughout, Milton exaggerates or emphasizes the defeat of Chaos, its shrinking dominion and din. Milton gives us a Chaos who reigns over a crumbling kingdom. Like an exhausted ruler presiding over the demise of this land, Chaos can do nothing against the creative power of God. The material matter of Chaos seems to diminish, but if Milton is a material monist, then Chaos is not destroyed. It is merely transformed. As we will see later in this chapter, the qualities Milton gives to Chaos will remerge when Adam and Eve fall.

Though barely mentioned in Genesis, the initial act of creation in Paradise Lost garners a substantial amount of attention. The angel Uriel describes the Creation as God’s physical might overpowering the unruly matter of Chaos: “I saw when at his Word the formless Mass,” Uriel says, “This worlds material mould, came to a heap: / Confusion heard his voice, and wilde uproar / Stood rul’d, stood vast infinitude confin’d; / Till at his second bidding darkness fled, / Light shon, and order from disorder sprung” (3.708-13). Uriel tells Satan that creation is a structure of material matter. The material already exists, has potentially existed forever, since it is the first matter. Second, this description gives us useful and telling insight into the procedure of creation. Uriel says, “order from disorder sprung,” revealing the primacy of disorder (3.713). Hobbes gives disorder the same primacy and builds his entire political philosophy on its premise.

Uriel goes into greater detail about the nature of this construction, telling Adam that, “The cumbrous Elements, Earth, Flood, Aire, Fire, / And this Ethereal quintessence
of Heav’n / Flew upward, spirited with various forms” (3.715-17). These elements may have flown upward, but they will need a sustaining power to keep them aloft. Creation will require maintenance, which is, of course, why Adam and Eve must tend the Garden of Eden. Nature’s inclination is to transgress order, even in a (literally) Edenic setting. This is one perspective of Creation that will be fleshed out in Raphael’s account to Adam and Eve in Book VII (lines 163-242). Raphael explains that he was on guard duty during Creation to keep evil out of the creation process, “To see that none thence issu’d forth a spie, / Or enemie, while God was in his work, / Least hee incenst at such eruption bold, / Destruction with Creation might have mixed” (8.233-6). What Raphael seems to misunderstand is that “destruction” is inherent in the matter of creation. Destruction with creation is mixed. As the (Holy) Spirit speaks creation into being, Chaos is not passively accepting the alteration to its being. The moment is described, however briefly, as one of fierce antagonism and conflict. It is hard to accept, as many readers have, that Chaos is “good” but irascible. There is conflict with God and God’s desire to create. We may call this resistance “evil” since it is at cross purposes with God’s will.

Ultimately, Chaos represents anarchy, social upheaval, and political disorder. It is the anarchic will on a cosmic level, the mythological beast of anarchy for Christian creation, as Milton writes it. It is also the material of creation, and, as we have seen, intimately bound up with the aquatic. This last quality may seem trivial, but water has important associations with anarchy and creation. As was said in chapter three when discussing Hamlet’s encounter with the pirates, the sea serves as an anarchic, apolitical space, ideal for nation-less and lawless parties to exist. More than just a metaphor for the apolitical, however, many ancient thinkers believed water held all the potential for life.
For instance, in his *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle writes, “in water *pneuma* is present, and in all *pneuma* soul-beat is present, so that in all things [made of water] are charged with soul” (1979 357). The seventeenth-century physician and cabbalist, Van Helmont also, “reached the conclusion that water was the first matter because the Bible speaks of God’s act of separating the waters even before the elements were created as such,” according to Marjara (9). In Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, water represents the prima materia of creation and it also serves as a useful elemental referent for his famous epigram, “Omnia mutantur, nihil interit” (“everything changes, nothing perishes”). In fact, when we look at other creation myths, we see the significance of Chaos’s marine nature. Let us briefly look at what one scholar calls, “the ultimate mythological source of Milton’s material representation of chaos,” to see how another story of Creation mirrors Milton’s in its handling of pre-Creation Chaos in significant ways (Rumrich 1995 1039).

The *Enuma Elish* (ca. 1600 BCE) is a Babylonian creation myth which describes the rise of the god, Marduk, from his role as a subordinate deity to the most esteemed position in the pantheon. In this myth, the water of chaos, deified in the goddess Tiamat, torments the gods with her incessant disorder. The distraught gods turn to Marduk, most physically powerful of the gods, to subdue her, and he agrees to intervene on one condition. “If I should become your avenger, / If I should bind Tiamat and preserve you,” he offers, “Convene an assembly, and proclaim for me an exalted destiny . . . And let me, with my utterances, decree destinies instead of you. / Whatever I instigate must not be changed” (Tablet II, lines 156-8; 160-1). The gods agree, and when Marduk captures Tiamat, who has taken the form of a dragon, in his net, “He split[s] her into two like a

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147 “a conclusion that he confirmed by growing a willow in a determined quantity of soil for five years and weighing the soil at the end of that period, only to find that the soil had decreased in quantity by no more than two ounces, whereas the willow, feeding on water, had grown into a sizeable tree” (Marjara 9).
dried fish: / One half of her he set up and stretched out as the heavens,” the other half he sets up as the earth (Tablet VI, lines 137-8). The gods hold up their end of the covenant and, we read, “They granted him the right to exercise kingship over the gods, / They confirmed him as lord of the gods of heaven and netherworld” (Tablet VI, lines 100-1).

I recount this creation myth for a few reasons. One, it features a mythical, aquatic beast to represent Chaos, one that Job would call, “Leviathan,” and that Hobbes would use as his commonwealth’s namesake.148 Two, like Hobbes’s theory of government, it also has a leader who emerges because he can physically over-awe the beast of disorder and compel obedience from others. Though Marduk forces his peers to “elect” him sovereign, he does so on the merits of his ability to physically control the beast of anarchy. Marduk’s physical dominance is the ballast of a steady realm, not his righteousness, heritage, or legal claim. Conceptually, therefore, though Hobbes never uses this myth to support his de facto theory of government, he could have, because Marduk is a prime, poetic example of Hobbes’s sovereign leader. He owes his authority to his ability to physically command disorder, but he only holds that power as long as he can provide safety for his fellow gods.

Others have noted the political implications in this Babylonian myth. In Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence, Jon D. Levenson observes that in the Enuma Elish, “the supremacy of Marduk is not seen as primordial, self-evident, and self-sufficient, but as dependent upon the consent of other gods” (132).

148 The reason for Hobbes’s choice is debatable. According to Johan Tralau, “Hobbes would want to conjure up an image of the state and the sovereign as a terrifying, indeterminate mythological creature: the sovereign is supposed to be different, he is supposed to be other, and he is supposed to be a source of fear” (74). Seemingly, Hobbes himself wants us to associate “the great power of his governor” with the monster, whom God calls, “King of the Proud” (L 210). Hobbes’s interpretation of the book of Job simply says, “the book itself seemeth not to be a history, but a treatise concerning a question in ancient times much disputed, why wicked men have often prospered in this world, and good men have been afflicted” (L 254). Hobbes zeroes in on Job’s theodicy, Milton’s stated reason for writing Paradise Lost.
Levenson uses the creation myth to illustrate how supreme deities earn their authority through conquest and consent. Though he does not draw a link to Hobbes’s de facto theory of political authority, Levenson describes Marduk’s authority as one given through consent and maintained through protection. Read in this light, both the Babylonian and Hebrew accounts of creation sound more like Hobbes's covenant theory, a theory which ultimately argues for the physical, but not necessarily moral, superiority of the sovereign.¹⁴⁹

Even though the biblical Leviathan is important for his reading, Levenson never connects the Hobbesian dots. When we read Leviathan as the, “aquatic chaos-monster,” as Levenson calls it, the creature that God never vanquishes but merely subdues, then we see how, “The concern of the creation theology is not creatio ex nihilo,” as Levenson writes, “but the establishment of a benevolent and life sustaining order, founded upon the demonstrated authority of the God who is triumphant over all rivals” (47). In other words, life-creating power does not give God supreme, divine authority. Wrangling chaos into order does. “Primordial chaos...does not disappear, but rather is transformed during the act of creation,” Levenson deftly observes (122). Significantly, the Psalms also give God sovereignty because of his ability to physically control the turbulent sea and compel the obedience of its sea beasts. In Psalm 74: 12-14, we read, “But God is our king before

¹⁴⁹ Most interpretations of Old Testament covenant breaking emphasize Israel's breach of contract. Levenson, however, suggests that God is merely good (or perfect) at keeping His word. In other words, honoring the agreement is not necessarily always what He wants to do, but it is what He does. The covenant keeps the sovereign in check. Anthony Ascham, the seventeenth-century Parliamentarian who resembles Hobbes in many ways, poses a question: “Whether God before the Law of the Gospel did not the same thing [break covenant] which is here objected as unjust?” He answers, God obviously slays infants of “stubborn nations” and “David pronounces blessing on them who shall take the young children of Babylon, and dash their brains against the stones. Wherefore out of that which God de facto hath done, we may falsely conclude, that though God had slaine those in Ninevie who knew not the right hand from the left, yet he would not have been unjust for that” (167). In this bizarre logic, even if God went back on his word, it is not unjust because God is righteous and God did it, therefore God’s actions are always righteous. His actions, de facto, do not supersede his by righteous being.
ages: he hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou by thy strength didst make
the sea firm,” but note that the Psalmist does not credit God with creating the sea, an
entity that requires God’s “firm” hand (Psalm 74:12-13). The psalm continues, “thou
didst crush the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou hast broken the heads of the
dragon,” emphasizing that God’s power to subdue the chaotic monsters grants the
kingship given to him at the beginning of verse 12 (Psalm 74:14).\footnote{A later psalmist presents a different relationship between God and the creatures that inhabit the sea, “wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein” (Psalm 104: 25-6). Of the different iterations of leviathan, Kugel explains, “Its frightening, half-mythic, character may be its salient feature elsewhere in the Bible. But here, all the air has been let out of it, it is just a divine plaything” (1999 37-8).}

Milton’s material monism endows the prima materia with the same kind of permanency. The material of
the world, in the Enuma Elish, Psalm 74, and Milton’s creation, differ in degree but not in
kind from the Chaos out of which it emerges. One of the arguments of this chapter is that
Milton’s Chaos does not disappear either, but is rather transformed into free will and
lodged inside humanity. When we consider Paradise Lost as a political foundation myth,
then we can see how it begins to resemble Hobbes’s theory. The assembly of Hobbes's
Leviathan, the cobbled together of multiple, individual, chaotic, anarchic wills into one
ordered body, also becomes a new version of Genesis creation. Or, as Hobbes says,
“resembles that Fiat or the ‘let us make man,’ pronounced by God in the creation” (L 4).

Marduk physically subdues and controls the beast of disorder, but it is not a completed
action. Marduk’s responsibility is perpetual because this beast cannot be destroyed or
defeated once-and-for-all. For the political order of these Babylonian gods to exist,
Marduk must keep this beast in check. The threat of disorder looms because, powerful as
he is, Marduk could still fail in his duty. If he does, disorder runs amok and he loses his
de facto sovereignty. Similarly, Chaos threatens God’s sovereignty and anarchy threatens any earthly political power.

I am not the only one to use the *Enuma Elish* to enlighten aspects of Milton’s epic. In *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in Paradise Lost*, Regina M. Schwartz considers the primary and continued battle between creation and Chaos as the most important conflict of the epic (7). Like the *Enuma Elish*, the struggle between order and Chaos is perpetual, and Schwartz reads, “the unstable visage of the Anarch, Chaos,” as one who, “may well pose a greater threat in Milton’s moral universe than the Satanic one of a definite willed disobedience” (18). I want to remove her qualifications and agree superlatively that Chaos, and its eventual incarnation in mankind’s free will, threatens Creation more than Satan ever could. Like Levenson, she compares Genesis to the *Enuma Elish*, and argues, “The war in heaven is only the beginning, not the end, of the battle against Chaos” (38). Schwartz considers each aberration from God’s order, from the murder of Abel to the hubris of Babel, as the surges of Chaotic potential (38). Schwartz insists on an eternal struggle similar to the Babylonian text. My reading takes this perpetual struggle as a Hobbesian model for political society. Order is imposed through force by the de facto sovereign, *and then* laws (which reflect the sovereign’s will and predate justice) are established.

Some see Milton’s cosmos as a place of God’s established de jure sovereignty. Robert Adams, for instance, points to God’s “Eternal Justice,” and writes, “this reminds us that God rules the whole cosmos, from top to bottom, from beginning to end” (72). My

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151 So too, does Rumrich, who explains, “For Hobbes rebellion against the sovereign returns society to a state of chaotic violence. In a moment worthy of Marduk he maintains that the ‘natural punishment’ for such rebellion is ‘slaughter’” (Rumrich 1995 1040). Rumrich casually mentions the Hobbesian implications of Marduk’s de factoism for Milton’s Chaos. I want to fully explore these implications.
reading of Chaos obviously works against interpretations like Adams’s, and I would note that Milton also describes Chaos as an immense place of “Eternal Anarchie,” implying that it has existed forever and cannot be destroyed, only temporarily subdued (2.895). It is a place that clearly lacks God’s organizing grace and presence. When David Quint describes Chaos as a, “nature from which God has withdrawn his creative hand,” he mischaracterizes it (9). Quint’s creation chronology is off. God has not withdrawn his hand from Chaos in Book II. He has just not contacted it yet. This is a significant difference. To say he has withdrawn his hand is to imply he had a hand in there at some point. Clearly, this is not the case because if he had, then it would not be Chaos. Chaos is therefore more antithetical to God’s “Eternal Justice” than Satan’s contrary will. Chaos is a place of eternal war and confusion, “a universal hubbub wilde, / Of stunning sounds and voices all confus’d” (2.951-2). Milton specifically describes the elemental confusion that thrives here:

For hot, cold, moist, and dry, four Champions fierce

Strive here for Maistrie, and to Battel bring

Their embryon Atoms; they around the flag

Of each his Faction, in thir several Clanns. (2. 897-900)

The Galenic humors strive for supremacy, like factions around a flag. Remember that Hell is a place without faction, and, “no strife can grow up there / From Faction; for none

152 Satan finally crosses the threshold of Hell and sees the realm of Chaos:

... a dark
Illimitable Ocean without bound,
Without dimension, where length, breadth, & highth,
And time and place are lost; where eldest Night
And Chaos, Ancestors of Nature, hold
Eternal Anarchie, amidst the noise
Of endless Warrs, and by confusion stand (2. 890-6).

153 In fact, as mentioned earlier, we see what happens to Chaos when God extends his creative force into the disordered realm at the end of Book II.
sure will claim in Hell / Precedence” (2.31-3). Chaos is different. Here a constant struggle for supremacy exists, which leads to utter, eternal conflict. Significantly, the resultant confusion is described in political terms (“they around the flag / Of each his Faction”). This sounds remarkably like Hobbes’s State of Nature, a state of constant war, a place where no industry can exist. This is a pre-Socratic understanding of Nature, a Heraclitian expression of the world as a constant state of flux in, where “the shock / Of fighting Elements,” is palpable (2.1014-5). Whenever structure coheres out of these conflicting elements, the atoms’ fundamental nature, which is disarray, always threatens to reassert itself.

With what I have called his “narrative dualism,” Milton can utilize a material monism and still rely on sleight theological dualism, thus allowing for a unique representation of Chaos which has important political implications. In *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton*, John Rogers argues that *Paradise Lost*’s Chaos differs from *De Doctrina Christiana* because the two texts serve different purposes, the epic serving a political, not theological ends (141). Rogers explains, “Milton appears to indicate that there remained a portion of the deep for which the process of spiritualization simply did not take: ‘the black tartareous Infernal dregs,’” (134). For Rogers, this represents, “a residual trace of dualism,” a trace, I would argue, that stems from Milton’s narrative requirements (134). These tartarous remains help reveal the political nature of Milton’s epic because, according to Rogers, they have, “established themselves as permanent and untransformable members of the body politic” (142). Recently, there has been some scholarly pushback against Rogers’s reading. For

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154 For more on Milton and Lucretius, see John Leonard’s “Milton, Lucretius, and ‘the Void of Profound of Unessential Night.”
instance, instead of finding Chaos antagonistic to Milton’s project, Malabika Sarkar, argues that its constant restlessness reflects the new enlightenment discoveries published in the seventeenth century, and that, “Milton’s poetry appropriates the strength of this new enlightenment – the belief in fluidity, change, and reform,” and “provided him with a vibrant intellectual resource” (19). Some scholars find Milton’s Chaos to be amoral, or beyond normative notions of good and evil. Eric B. Song’s recent work, *Dominion Undeserved: Milton and the Perils of Creation*, suggests we read Milton’s Chaos as, “abject in the sense that Julia Kristeva has theorized,” and give it a primacy of existence before all other binaries like good and evil, right and wrong (5). Most recently, David Quint’s *Inside Paradise Lost* argues, along with Rumrich, that Chaos is less Manichean than Rogers would have it and that Chaos, “may be more morally and politically neutral than Rogers suggests” (258). Quint also considers the tartarean leftovers, so important for Rogers, to be merely the materials God uses to construct the eternal confines of Hell, and therefore distinguishes himself from Sugimura who says these infernal dregs are incorporated into Night (258). Here and elsewhere, Quint and I disagree. My reading of Chaos, as a political threat to de facto power, is hardly politically neutral, as Quint would have it. Instead, Chaos in its persistent antagonism to God’s will represents an essential threat to God’s political order. As an eternal antagonist to God and Satan, Chaos symbolizes the anarchic will on a cosmic scale.

For Milton, pre-Creation is Chaos. For Hobbes, the pre-political world is Chaos.

When we read *Paradise Lost* as a poem with political implications, then we see that

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155 For Song, Kristeva’s abjection reveals Chaos’s “more elemental nature,” which “threatens basic divisions . . . that make moral distinctions possible” (5). Naturally, Song’s work challenges Milton’s patriarchy, but his whole project offers much more than a feminist challenge through the imposing figure of Chaos. Song’s main objective is to read Milton’s poetry as political expressions and situate the poet “within an international matrix” (15)
Milton’s creation story mirrors Hobbes’s understanding of the State of Nature. In other words, there is a parallel between Milton’s universe, which has order coming out of chaos, and Hobbes’s political theory, which has political order coming out of disorder.

For Milton, Chaos is the source of nature, the source of ordered creation:

Into this wilde Abyss,

The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,

Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,

But all these in thir pregnant casues mixt

Confus’dly, and which thus must ever fight. (2.909-913)

God creates out of the material of Chaos, this “pregnant” material, which is always fighting in confusion. How could such material be completely tamed and subdued by God’s creative power?

Like others, I think we should consider *Paradise Lost* as a poem in conversation with Hobbes. Writing of the, “violent collision of the warring elements,” described by Milton, Rogers concludes they, “evoke nothing so much as the atomical structure of the originary Hobbesian polity, the state of the war of every man against every man” (131).

While he begins with the parallel that I have also stressed, Rogers eventually works towards distinguishing authority in Milton and Hobbes. “Milton’s chaos, like Hobbes’s,

156 Sakar resolves the problem of Chaos by locating a possible source of Milton’s depiction of essential night in Robert Fludd’s *History of the Macrocosm and Microcosm* (1617). Fludd’s hermetic philosophy, “provided Milton with an explanation of chaos and creation that acknowledges chaos as the matter of creation, even as it admits the undeniable hostility of chaos” (Sakar 48). Milton’s solution, according to Sakar, is to draw a distinction, the same distinction that Fludd makes, between Chaos and Night (50). Out of this distinction, Milton can relegate the abysmal void of uncreation to Night, while simultaneously giving character to Chaos and rendering him, “combative and threatening, but in the end ineffectual” (46).

157 Graham Hammill has recently located Hobbesian echoes in Milton’s *Paradise Regained*, writing that in the subsequent epic, “Milton takes up a Hobbesian ‘vocabulary’ to develop a poetics of the state of nation. He portrays the wilderness in which Jesus roams as an analogue of the State of Nature produced by God withdrawing his protection and ‘expos[ing]’ Jesus to Satan’s ‘subtlety’ (*PR* 1.142, 144)” (270-1).
functions to demonstrate the importance of the assertion of a sovereign authority,” Rogers writes, “But the nature of this sovereign differs tremendously for the two writers, and it is through his remarkable representation of Creation that Milton is able most fully to correct Hobbes’s political premise” (132). Rogers explains that Hobbes’s chaos is corrected with “direct and ongoing intervention of a powerful sovereign,” while Milton’s chaos is subsumed, ordered “through a single, nonrepeatable act of divine infusion” (132). However, what would happen if we read Creation, not as this “single, nonrepeatable act of divine infusion,” but as a continual, ongoing containment of chaos? If Creation is not one, complete Chaos-subduing moment, but rather a divinely sustained action, then what is the effect on Milton’s cosmos?

We see a powerful instance of Chaos’s persistence even in prelapsarian Eden. Adam and Eve’s daily orison reveals an interesting version of the once-chaotic elements of material life. Adam and Eve sing praises to God for the stars, “that move / In mystic Dance,” and praise God, “who out of Darkness call’d up Light” (5.178-9). They continue, “Aire, and ye Elements the eldest birth / Of Natures Womb, that in quaternion run / Perpetual Circle, multiform; and mix / And nourish all things, let your ceaseless change / Varie to our great Maker still new praise” (5.180-4). The material of creation, the chaotic matter, has seemingly been made tame. The elements that previously, “In mutinie had from her Axle torn / The stedfast Earth,” now dance in, “ceaseless change,” to the metronome of order (2.925-6). Rather than cacophony, it moves in measured polyrhythm. God has corralled these elements into creation, but everything we have seen up to this point, and everything we will hear about the chaotic elements of creation afterwards, all characterize the matter of the universe as hostile, violent, wild, and unruly. Even Adam
and Eve’s prayer here illustrates that the components of creation are not stagnant or static. Therefore, instead of reading this prayer as a straightforward song of praise, we could see it as a prayer of divine request. Even though the natural world should adhere to God’s creative order, its nature to consistently vary slightly seems to trouble Adam and Eve. They acknowledge the dark source of the material that surrounds and runs through them, and they admit that it is a mystery to them. They do, however, understand that the matter of life moves and vibrates with powerful energy, “multiform; and mix.” I would argue, then, that this prayer (a prayer that is to the material of creation) is a request for mutable nature to stay in line with God’s will, to, “Varie to our great Maker still new praise,” as they say (5.184).

At its core, therefore, in its, “utter darkness,” Milton’s method of Creation has Hobbesian implications (1.353). On Milton’s earth, as described in Paradise Lost, the perpetual threat of anarchy hangs over society, just as it does in Hobbes’s model. Creation is not made up of Justice; it is not built on a foundation of Law or Order. Disorder and anarchy composes its constituent parts. Any order that exists, therefore, is an imposed order, and can be considered virtuous only in its ability to control (and maintain) that order. This, of course, is Hobbes’s explanation for how civilizations rise, and while it sounds potentially atheistic, Hobbes’s de facto political philosophy actually extended to God’s sovereignty over creation as well. Hobbes understood the Kingdom of God to be a material, not metaphorical, reality. From this premise, Hobbes interprets the Lord’s Prayer as an oral social contract granting God power through covenantal consent. “When we say ‘For thine is the kingdom, the power, and glory’ [Matt. 6:13],” Hobbes writes, “it is to be understood of God’s kingdom by force of our covenant, not by the
right of God’s power” (L 276). In this way, Milton’s God’s power over Chaos sounds remarkably, and for Milton, disturbingly, Hobbesian.

Like the history of political order that constitutes Hobbes’s de facto theory, Chaos’s pre-existing condition precludes order’s authority, as well as anything that a sovereign can base its authority on, be it the legal, the regal, or the just. In the most extreme de jure theories of government, justice exists before all else. We, in turn, derive laws from this natural sense of justice. Order flows from these laws and our sovereigns have a right to rule based on the legality of their claim or the inherent righteousness of their person. That is what Milton wants to suggest when he attributes the construction of Hell to “Eternal Justice.” As the previous Shakespearean examples have shown, a de facto ruler may use the rhetoric of de jurism but authentic authority is something that comes before order, laws, and justice. In political terms, Milton would rather have God’s authority reflect de jurism. Indeed, Milton would rather God be the supreme authority de jure, from which all other rights to power are derived. Milton would prefer to say the universe, and man’s nature as political animal, begins with justice, which establishes laws, which establishes order. Milton would rather have a more Bractonian or Buchanian version of the State of Nature, but he cannot. He must instead resign himself to Hobbes’s view of political creation, which says Anarchy is the natural state and that whoever physically over-awes Chaos earns de facto sovereignty. My reading takes this perpetual struggle as Hobbesian model for political society. Order is imposed through force by the de facto sovereign and then laws, which predate justice, are established.

Ultimately, therefore, Milton’s attempt to transform the Genesis account of creation into an epic episode has forced the poet into the undesirable position of
substantiating Hobbes’s basic political premise, even to the point of Edenic order. Law of Edenic Nature is different because of the material elements of Eden. Milton provides a practical “reason” why Adam and Eve can no longer occupy their earthly Paradise. “But longer in that Paradise to dwell,” God tells them, “The Law I gave to Nature him forbids: / Those pure immortal Elements that know / No gross, no unharmonious mixture of foule, / Eject him tainted now, and purge him off” (11.48-52). God forms chaotic matter with Law. In other words, God takes disorder and gives it law, which circumscribes chaos and forces it into structure. Order follows law, just as Hobbes informs us. This bears a striking resemblance to Hobbes’s explanation of de facto political order. Milton and Hobbes do not only share a kind of monism, therefore, in *Paradise Lost*, they share a de facto theory of political authority. If Chaos is the archetype of the anarchic will, then his opposition to God leads us to conclude that God is a de facto power, *the* de facto power, of *Paradise Lost*. Chaos’s presence reminds readers of this fact, so Milton must do something with Chaos. How does Milton solve the problem of Chaos?

Milton’s solution is twofold. First, he misdirects our attention away from Chaos, the more formidable antagonist, to Satan, the more manageable foe. Second, Milton transforms the lingering potential of Chaos’s anarchic will into the more theologically sound notion of Free Will. As to the first strategy, Chaos’s presence is problematic for the poet because it challenges Milton’s politics, but since Milton cannot create the universe without it, he cannot dismiss the complicated figure. Milton’s ingenious solution is to turn our attention towards a figure that can support Milton’s political and theological worldview. Satan, we are told, “seemd / Alone th’ Antagonist of Heav’n” (2.508-9). Some strategic enjambment gives the impression that Satan’s antagonism to Heaven is
more singular than it truly is. Dangling the “seemd” before the line of verse it qualifies lets Milton acknowledge the fact that Satan is not the only antagonist of Heaven, while slightly suggesting that he is the only antagonist of God. This is an example, at the level of verse, of Milton’s poetic sleight of hand when reckoning with Chaos. Milton calls Satan, “the Adversary of God and Man,” which is a biblical appellation – “satan” means “the adversary” in Hebrew and occurs periodically in the Old Testament with this meaning – but the application is less appropriate in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Stanley Fish’s famous reader-response to *Paradise Lost* is to see the poem as an entangling. Fish writes, “Milton’s method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem’s scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam’s troubled clarity” (195). I would call Milton’s use of Satan not so much an entangling as a distraction. If, like Adam, we fall for Satan’s temptation, then we miss Chaos’s diabolical role in the cosmos and in our own free will. In other words, readers like Rumrich, who believes, “Satan lives only as the eternal adversary” to God, have been fooled by Milton’s epic misdirection (1987 171). Satan’s charisma, his appeal in every aspect, from his physically impressive size to role as tragic hero to his influential rhetoric and genius with temptation, all ultimately serve Milton’s purpose (as they serve God’s) – to mistake him for the true antagonist.

Satan’s immense size and the way the poet vividly describes his physique is meant to impress us. “[I]n bulk as huge,” the fallen Lucifer is, “whom the Fables name of monstrous size” (1.197-8). We are meant to mistake Satan’s size as something else, like the Norwegian sailors who mistake his bulk for a land mass, “So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay” (1.204-10). This is not an elaborate warning to stay away from
Satan. It is not that the poet, aware of his awesome depiction of Satan, feels compelled to warn his readers of the fiend. Nor is it a moment of “enfolded sublime,” as William Kerrigan suggests. Milton wants his readers to have a sublime encounter with Satan so that we divert our attention away from Chaos. This is a powerful, highly imaginative metaphor that lodges in readers’ minds, like Satan’s “ponderous shield,” which Milton notably describes as, “Of Ethereal temper, massy, large and round, / Behind him cast; the broad circumference / Hung on his shoulders like the Moon” (1.284-7). This is another epic simile, this time to Homer’s Iliad, but it is also another way to leave a powerful impression of Satan in our mind. It takes up a lot of the mental space readers devote to the poem, and especially, in this case, to the poem’s antagonists. The poet impressively describes Satan to impress us. This keeps our attention away from a more complicated figure (and realm), Chaos. Satan is contained, taken care of. In fact, his immensity and power ultimately work to make God more powerful. The poet always reminds us that Satan, as imposing as he is, is just a pawn in God’s ultimate plan. The being that can corral this monster must be truly indomitable.

However powerful and antagonistic to God Satan may appear, his anti-will to God is not an anarchic will. It is, in fact, ultimately God’s will. At some level, Satan must realize that his defeat in Heaven means the extinguishing of his own free will. He says as much about his defeat when he realizes that losing the battle did not mean the loss of his physical being. Since the rebellious forces are not destroyed, they conclude that God has

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158 See Kerrigan’s “‘One First Matter All’: Spirit as Energy,” in which he locates moments of the “enfolded sublime” among sections of Paradise Lost (92). These moments afford us a break from the “hermeneutic circle” of reading and allow the poet a chance to directly address his complex aesthetic (92). According to Kerrigan, Milton offers us moments of the enfolded sublime at key passages, which then “prompt us to complete our sense of the entirety” of Milton’s poetic project, but also, more importantly, they are “unique in also representing a genesis” (95).
sent his might, “and judg’d / Sufficient to subdue us to his will” (6. 427-8). Like Hotspur in the Henriad, Satan’s contrary will is not necessarily anarchic. “To do ought good never will be our task,” Satan explains to his fallen compatriots, “But ever to do ill our sole delight, / As being the contrary to his high will / Whom we resist” (1.159-62). In an overstated attempt to console us, the poet reassures us, “the will / And high permission of all-ruling Heaven / Left him at large to his dark designs,” because, “thir spite still serves / His glory to augment,” but we hardly need this comfort (1.212-14; 2.385-6). As we see, and no doubt as God knows, Satan’s antithetical position to God, his diametrically opposed stance thwarts the demon’s own free will. Satan actually brings about good and does God’s will, which is ultimately a part of his punishment, so that, “enrag’d [he] might see / How all his malice serv’d but to bring forth / Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn / On Man by him seduc’t, but on himself / Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour’d” (1.217-21). Satan’s is, “A mind not to be chang’d by Place or Time,” which makes “The mind its own place, and in it self / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (1.253-5). In other words, Satan’s consistent obstinacy might as well be obedience. God can simply use Satan’s predictable, “unconquerable” will to do his good works. If the outcome of all those willful decisions fit into God’s plan, then their wills are hardly their own.

In a similar attempt to downplay the power of Satan, C.S. Lewis reminds us, that in Paradise Lost, “there is no war between Satan and Christ. There is a war between Satan and Michael; and it is not so much won as stopped, by Divine intervention” (131). Lewis wants to situate Satan outside of an equal opposition to God. Since Satan is an angel and not a god, his binary would be Michael, not God. Indeed, despite Satan’s
claims to the contrary, he is not God’s fiercest or most powerful antagonist. As I have argued, Chaos holds that title. Furthermore, Satan’s rhetoric of willfulness, though persuasive to some, does not convince everyone.\(^{159}\) Beelzebub expresses the (correct) fear that they are just pawns in God’s grand scheme. He worries that they, “do him mightier service as his thralls / By right of War, what e’re his business be / Here in the heart of Hell to work in Fire, / Or do his Errands in the gloomy Deep” (1.149-52). Satan and the fallen angels have less freedom than human beings and the unfallen angels. All of the infernal creatures unknowingly or begrudgingly do God’s bidding.

Even Sin, Satan’s daughter and the mother of their child, Death, explains to Satan how God, “sits above and laughs the while, / At thee ordain’d his drudge, to execute / What e’re his wrath, which he calls Justice, bids, / His wrath which one day will destroy ye both” (2.731-4). Not only does God laugh at the foreknowledge of Satan’s fate, he laughs at the futility of Satan’s enterprise.\(^{160}\) As much as he tries to work against God’s will, Satan only ends up enforcing it. Robert Adams argues that God sets Satan up as a cosmic scapegoat, pointing out that, “Symbolically, we hate the scapegoat,” but he adds that Satan is not merely the totem of our ire (79). Hell and Satan balance the universe, according to Adams, by providing an evil depth and gravity to the universe. “Satan, by falling,” Adams writes, “gives the cosmos a bottom and a sense of moral and physical distance” (77). For Adams, Satan, “structures the cosmos” (76).

\(^{159}\) The demons do not realize that when they lost the physical battle in Heaven, they lost the course-altering power of their decision making. Satan reveals his ignorance of this when he mistakenly tells Beelzebub, “All is not lost,” because they have, “unconquerable Will, / And study revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield” (1.106-8). As far as Beelzebub knows, this is true, but what he does not realize is that this is all part of God’s plan.

\(^{160}\) Lest we think Sin misrepresents God’s derisive laughter, when Michael tells Adam about God’s destruction of the Tower of Babel, he describes God’s response to the destruction as a perverse pleasure, telling Adam, “great laughter was in Heav’n / And looking down, to see the hubbub strange / And hear the din” (12.58-60).
However, because Chaos is the cosmos, it poses a more problematic challenge to Milton’s God and to the poet. Milton has been forced into granting anarchic chaos a competing primacy with eternal justice. This means that God’s authority, like Marduk’s, is only sustained through continual material control. Were God to lose his grasp on creation and let Chaos loose, then God would lose the only legitimate claim he has to sovereignty. As a believer in the supremacy of political rights to power over material realities of power, Milton obviously bristles at the political implications of his epic. In an effort to correct this potentially dangerous development, Milton not only tries to redirect our attention to a more malleable antagonist, Satan, he then presents us with the fiend’s rise to power in the divinely sanctioned realm of Hell. Instead of attempting to glorify the divinity of de facto rule, Milton depicts the rise of a diabolical de facto power. With the impressive, charismatic, enticing figure of Satan taking on the mantle of infernal sovereignty, Milton would have us associate de facto authority with the fallen angels.

After the fiends shake off their concussions and regroup, the demons enact their own Parliament of Fouls. They convene, “To peaceful Counsels, and the settl’d State / Of order,” and calmly debate their next course of action (2.279-80). Their disagreements do not regress to snarling physical altercations and they do not snap each other like untamed dragons. Instead, they civilly hear each other out and even participate in an electoral process. Thus, Satan can rise to power, as we read he does, “and in his rising seem’d / A Pillar of State” (2.300-1). Milton takes pains to describe Satan as a powerful, majestic creature; one who can capably take on the mantle and responsibility of rule. An uncanny power of the visual, Milton’s description of Satan’s political power is quite awesome:

depth on his Front engraven
Deliberation sat and public care;
And Princely counsel in his face yet shon,
Majestic though in ruin: sage he stood
With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear

The weight of mightest Monarchies (2.301-6)

Milton does not undercut the description with a reminder that Satan is evil. Some have read this moment as a condemnation of all monarchies, a verse companion to the prose of Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* or *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. Those who read this scene as a condemnation of monarchy correctly observe that Satan is another monarch. However, what most scholars fail to note is that he is *not* another anarch. Therefore, Hell’s construction, physical and political, is rather ordered.

Not everyone reads the construction of Pandemonium as ordered, though. David Quint, for example, writes, “The hell constructed by the devils – what civilization looks like in the absence of God – is matched in book 2 by the Chaos through which Satan travels. This is a nature from which God has withdrawn his creative hand” (9). As we have seen, however, Pandemonium is as ordered as Heaven. Its physical and social architecture resemble Heaven because they come from Heaven. Pandemonium, and the Hell it stands in, is not matched by the realm of Chaos that Satan traverses. “Rumor,” “Chance,” “Tumult,” “Confusion,” and “Discord” are all qualities or essences that exist in Chaos, not Hell (2.965-7).

As Milton describes it, the rise of Pandemonium is an industrious, ordered project. Mammon, the gold-obsessed demon, who, even in Heaven was less erect than the others because he stooped to admire the streets of gold, begins excavating Hell for raw
materials, while Mulciber, the demon called Vulcan by the ancients, sets to work the construction of Pandemonium, “With his industrious crew to build in hell” (1.679-82; 751). The demons, in other words, instead of reveling in anarchy, start to build a society. They engage in industry, mining, and architecture.

When the fallen enter the newly constructed capital building, they admire the structure because it reminds them of Heavenly architecture. This is because Mulciber, the angelic being who was in charge of celestial construction before their fall, built Pandemonium too, “his hand was known / In Heav’n by many a Towred structure high, / Where Scepter’d Angels held thir residence” (1.732-4). Like the physical hall of government that Mulciber builds, their system of government also looks like Heaven’s. We read how the demons follow their innate instincts, “And sat as Princes, whom the supreme King / Exalted to such power, and gave to rule, / Each in his Hierarchie, the Oders bright” (1.735-7). God’s order in Heaven has been transported to Hell. Again, this gives credence to Adams’s reading that Hell is a realm necessary to establishing cosmic order. Though it is in a different location and now has a different purpose, the structure, hierarchy, and order remains the same. When the demons gather, it is, “by command / Of Sovran power,” that, “A solemn Councel forthwith [is] held” (1.751-2; 754). Memorably, the demons swarm to their “high Capital,” “As Bees / In spring time” (1.756; 768-9). This is yet another epic simile (to Aeneid’s Book I description of the construction of Carthage). Some scholars see the melittological allusion as evidence of Pandemonium’s doomed fate. Quint, for instance, argues that Milton could simultaneously be referencing Book II of The Iliad and Virgil’s description of the founding of Carthage, which would conflate Rome and its civic rival into the same walls (21). Like Quint, Karen Edwards
finds in *Paradise Lost*, “The most thorough and subtle demolishing of the royalist beehive . . . when Milton likens the fallen angels to bees” (223). Some of the subtlety Edwards locates is in Milton’s undermining of Virgil’s *Georgics*, and the more explicit challenge to the royalist bee, according to Edwards, is how Milton strips, “from these infernal bees most of the qualities for which classical antiquity praised the bee: productivity, chastity, industry, cleanliness, and order” (223-24). However, while their chastity and cleanliness may be in question, the productivity, industry, and order of Milton’s Pandemonium are fairly straightforward. As said above, these are productive, industrious, and ordered demons who waste little time before constructing the internal and physical structure of their parliament.

In fact, apiary has a long tradition outside of epic allusion, and Milton’s is a loaded reference, specifically in the early modern period. At least since Pliny, “the great Naturalist,” bees had been seen as proof from the natural world that humans were social animals (Butler). Charles Butler’s *The feminine monarckie: or The historie of bees* (1623) does not simply present an idealized model of government through apiary example, he actually crafts a complete picture of bee political life and praises his insect models, writing, “In their valour and magnaimity they surpasse all creatures” (Butler). Significantly, Butler’s bees offer support of Hobbes’s theory from the natural world. “Bees endure no government, but a monarkie,” Butler writes, and relates what happens when two different hives interact. At first, they buzz with distress, “but knowing wel that this more the merrier, the safer, the warmer, yea, and the better provided; they were quickly made friends. And having agreed which Queene should reigne, and which should die, three or four bees brought one of them downe between them, pulling and haling her
as if they were leading her to execution” (Butler). Butler saves the doomed queen, and when the hive settles down, he reinserts her. The hive immediately bursts into political riot and tears the doomed queen apart. Butler does not intervene in this etymological regicide. I am not equipped to locate Butler’s work in Milton’s library. I simply want to use Butler as an example of how bees, and Milton’s reference to the demons’ bee-like state, could be read as an example of orderly political structure, and not the droning, swarming mayhem Quint associates them with.161

The demons may have intentions of planning ill-will, but they significantly have intentions and an ordered plan to carry them out. Book I concludes with a glimpse of what Book II holds, “After short silence then / And summons read, the great consult began” (1.797-8). The demons, far from being anarchic or disorderly creatures who induce havoc in everything they do, have an incredibly powerful sense of order about their proceedings. Our modern sense of “pandemonium” is used when describing a cacophonous din. In Milton’s use, it is not a place of ear-ringing disarray. On the contrary, it is a place explicitly described as quiet and orderly. The demons’ parliament is called to order and the process is observed, and “with full assent / They [will] vote” in the next book’s election (2.388-9).

Not everyone finds Hell as subordinate to God’s purposes. Schwartz argues, “Hell and Chaos are allied in the common purpose of havoc, spoil, and ruin” (352). But What Schwartz fails to note is that Hell has an architect. “Eternal Justice” designs it. Furthermore, Satan does not want the destruction of mankind, he wants their allegiance.

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161 In his Education of a Christian Prince, Erasmus too, uses bees as a natural example of social government, though he changes the gender of royal insect, citing “The king bee” and his lack of sting as, “an important example for powerful kings” (29).
He does not use the language of witchcraft or astrology to describe his cosmic faction, he uses the language of politics, saying he desires to, “Seduce them to our Party” (2.368). The fallen angels are called, “The Atheist crew,” not “anarchists” (6. 370). They are not against order. They simply want their own order, and since there are no factions in Hell, “for none sure will claim in Hell / Precedence,” it seems like they might get their wish (2.32-3).

The demons’ desire for political order makes Satan easier to defeat than Chaos. Milton can construe the rise of Pandemonium as the grand architecture of the Anti-Christ, and subtly take our attention away from the de facto underpinnings of God’s sovereign authority over the Chaos-infused creation. The fallen angel serves a political understanding of the cosmos (and Creation) that fits Milton’s Christian, and republican, worldview. Satan, as opposed to Chaos, is the one entity that appears to have more liberty to be at cross purposes to God. Milton’s uneasy depiction of Chaos is as close as the poet comes to dualism because it embodies a persistent disorder and represents an anarchic threat to God. However, as we have seen, Chaos is not obliterated in Milton’s universal structure. So what becomes of Chaos, our anarchic demigod?

Taking the only two instances of “Umpire” in all of Milton’s poetry as a starting point, I would like to suggest that Chaos, rather than ceasing to exist, is internalized, incorporated (or incarnated) into Adam and Eve as conscience. For as, “Chaos Umpire sits,” so too does God, bestow humans with, “[his] Umpire Conscience” as a “guide” for our free will (2.907; 3.195). According to Flannagan, Milton’s use of “umpire” in these instances is, “ironic because Chaos is not a good umpire” (407). However, as I hope to show, the associations between Chaos and conscience are much more important and
complex. Richard Arnold associates Adam and Eve’s “umpire conscience” with their
“prime wisdom” and “better knowledge,” Milton’s poetic terms, according to Arnold, for
“right reason” (ix). Right reason, as Arnold describes it, is their cognitive faculty that,
“simultaneously unites the intellectual or ratiocinative faculty,” which is called “pure
reason,” “and the moral or spiritual sense,” which is “animated and sustained by . . . the
holy spirit” (ix). For Arnold, this distinction between “right reason” and “pure reason” is
central to what he calls, “The Logic of the Fall,” and while his work serves as an
important reference for the long philosophic tradition of right and pure reason, I think
trying to distinguish between the two in Milton’s version of the Fall confuses more than it
clarifies.162 Milton is not just engaging in some poetic irony here, as Flannagan suggests,
his is trying to draw some parallels between the world of embattled confusion and
mankind’s post-lapsarian state. True, Adam and Eve ostensibly have an active conscience
before the fall, but as long as their wills align lock-step with God’s, how free can they
be?

To be sure, this question accompanies any discussion of free will. In the same
way that Chaos’s presence problematizes God’s Creation, theological pitfalls surround
the existence of man’s free will in a universe with an omniscient, -potent, and –present
God. How can God create independent, free thinking individuals and still be the binding
agent of the universe? How can humans have free will and still be a part of God’s

162 Arnold on the Fall: “Satan here is not tempting Even’s will, passion, or pride, as is usually believed;
rather, he is simply tempting her into the labyrinth of pure reason. Satan knows it Eve were to hold firmly
to right reason, she would follow Abdiel, but if she shifts into pure reason, the alleys of the maze all lead to
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anarchic realms, then we can challenge the strength, the morality of right reason. After all, if right reason is
supported by the Holy Spirit, the way the universe is supported by God’s continued guidance, then does not
it call into question the efficacy of that support? Either right reason keeps Eve from sin and makes her an
automaton, or it permits her to follow her own will and thus signifies her freedom. Milton may not collapse
right reason and pure reason into one category, but he certainly brings an indictment of right reason in his
depiction of the Fall.
providential plan? Are we automatons or autonomous? These are the questions that lead to demonic insanity, but they are also the questions that lie at the heart of Milton’s theodicy. Milton makes his point rather explicitly in Book III, as God explains how the fall is man’s fault:

I made him just and right,

Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

Such I created all th’ Ethereal Powers

And Spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;

Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell. (3.97-101)

Free will explains the poem’s central purpose and places the blame (and the freedom) squarely on mankind. Evil exists in the world and all of God’s actions are just because man’s disobedience directly led to evil’s existence in Creation. Therefore, since all of the blame is on man’s freedom to fall, we should give our attention to the moment when Adam and Eve most radically depart from God’s will and disobey his divine edict, the eponymous moment when Paradise is lost.

God tells the Only Begotten Son about mankind’s freedom in Book III, and he later describes Adam as, “Left to his own free Will, his Will though free, / Yet mutable” (5.236-7). Mutability and freedom are therefore linked by God, and the potential for turmoil, for disobedience and the resultant disorder exists in mankind’s freedom of choice. Satan’s plan is to urge Adam and Eve to choose the path of “personal freedom,” the path that subverts the political order of Eden, and Satan mistakenly thinks their

163 After the election of Satan in Book II, they occupy themselves with various activities, and some try to think about Providence and free will: “In thoughts more elevate, and reason’d high / Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate, / Fist Fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute, / And found no end, in wandring mazes lost” (2.558-61).
disobedience will make them loyal to him. However, as we will see, it leads to anarchy. Before he begins his scheme in earnest, however, Satan goes through a sort of trial run and tests Eve’s resolve in a dream. Eve tells Adam of the dream the following morning. “Close at mine ear one call’d me forth to walk,” she recounts, detailing how Satan called, “With gentle voice, I thought it thine” (5.36-37). Following the sound of what she thinks is her husband’s voice, she then tells Adam how the tempter coaxed her out into the moonlight, “In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment / Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze” (5.47-48). Satan provokes Eve’s passions here by sounding like her Edenic lover in voice and by insinuating quite an erotic sexual encounter. Flannagan points out that Satan’s use of, “A word like ‘ravishment’ gives away the violent sexuality that Satan is suggesting” (477). Eve falls for the temptation here, but her consumption of the forbidden fruit only has its most sexualized stigma in the dream. When Eve tells Adam about her Satanic nightmare, Adam not only tells her she is innocent when she dreams, but he goes on to explain the psychosomatic hierarchy of our internal faculties. “[K]now that in the Soule,” he says:

Are many lesser Faculties that serve
Reason as chief; among these Fansie next
Her office holds; of all external things,
Which the five watchful Senses represent,
She form Imaginations, Aerie shapes,
Which Reason joyning or disjoining, frames
All what we affirm or what deny, and call
Our knowledge or opinion; then retires

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Into her private Cell when Nature rests. (5.101-10)

According to Adam, Fancy is an entity that sort of works like Chaos. He tells Eve, “Oft in [Nature’s] absence mimic Fansie wakes / To imitate her; but misjoyning shapes, / Wilde work produces oft, and most in dreams, / Ill matching words and deeds long past or late” (5.111-4). In other words, the creatures of our fanciful imaginations are not created through spontaneous generation. When our minds are away from the Natural world, as in dream, then our imaginations, in their Chaos-like, “Wilde work,” disjoin the material reality we have experienced and rejoin those realities into different creatures which do not exist in nature.

Eve’s brief episode of somnambular anarchy does not corrupt mankind or the created world, but it does offer us a glimpse of how Chaos persists even into God’s Paradise. Satan, however, determined to wreak havoc, alters his temptation plan. Rather than exploit Eve’s amorous or sensual desire, he changes tactics and assaults her reason. At first, it appears as if Eve’s reasonable conscience will hold out. When Satan, enmeshed in the serpent’s scales, leads her to the Tree of Knowledge, Eve, rather casually, dismisses the excursion. “Serpent, we might have spar’d our coming hither,” she immediately informs Satan, “Fruitless to mee, though Fruit be here to excess” (9.647-8). Aside from their one rule against eating the forbidden fruit, Eve tells the serpent that they live by a, “Law to our selves, our Reason is our Law” (9.654). According to God, “Reason also is choice,” a choice, not so subtly implied, to follow one’s own will or God’s divine will (3.108). As long as Adam and Eve follow God’s, “great authentic will,” then Creation remains Edenic and perfect (3.656). Indeed, the very first time Eve actually deploys her conscience, it fails her. With Eve’s fall, Milton tries to reveal the
insufficiency of reason, Hobbes’s key Law of Nature, which he calls, “qualities that dispose men to peace and to obedience,” and which, “dependeth not on the books of moral philosophy” (L 174; 180). For Milton, a crisis of conscience is not the psychomachia, a debate between shoulder-trotting angels and demons. A personal battle of “good” and “evil” vying for control of your actions signifies a spiritual dualism to which Milton does not subscribe. Instead, since our free consciousness is chaos, our options are to follow our will, which will lead to anarchy, or to follow God’s, which will maintain order. This is why Satan tempts Eve with political independence and self-sovereignty. “Wonder not, Sovran Mistress,” he initially addresses her, later calling her, “Empress of this fair World (9.531; 568). He repeatedly flatters her sense of a higher political status. Like Bates in Henry V or York in Richard II, as the subject of a de facto power, she has no autonomy, only the choice between following sovereign law or political exile. She has the choice, in other words, to follow her conscience, chaos, and claim that self-sovereignty that Satan tempts her with. And though he exaggerates the authority she will have, telling her that all will, “worship thee of right declar’d / Sovran of Creature, universal Dame,” and “Queen of this Universe,” he does not lie about the personal freedom she will have once she exerts it for the first time (9.611-12; 685).

Indeed, Satan knows from experience (an important distinction between Eve and the fiend) about the power of autonomy. God has explained that reason is choice, choice between your will and God’s. In other words, the potential of free will is not a sin, but the exercise of their free will is necessarily sinful because it disobey’s God’s will. Adam and Eve only have the potential of free will until they disobey God’s will. When they exploit the one opportunity they have to exercise their own will, once they break God’s law, they
become free agents. In some sense, they become auto-archs, but because God only reigns with de facto authority, their willfulness translates into politically threatening anarchy. To help illustrate this distinction, we should look again to the demons of *Paradise Lost*.

Milton’s demons do not have the choice of reason. Their minds are fixed, so they have no control over their actions. This is the condemnation of their psychological hell and why they can physically roam free. As with any depiction of an infernal afterlife, the easiest comparison to draw between Milton’s Satan, and other literary representations, is with Dante. The biggest difference, of course, is that Dante’s diabolical figurehead remains fixed, immobile and mute at the center of Inferno, furiously beating his wings in a futile attempt at movement. Milton does not meet out any such *contrapasso* to his Satan. Instead, like Marlowe’s Mephistopheles, the real punishment for Satan is that his hell is internalized, psychological. As Milton describes him, “The Hell within him, for within him Hell / He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell / One step no more then from himself can fly / By change of place: Now conscience wakes despair” (4.20-3). As the eternal contrary to God’s will, God’s de facto power, Satan has no freedom, no power to choose Chaos. Every “choice” he makes merely fulfills God’s will.

After the lengthy build-up to Eve’s decision, Milton rather quickly describes her inaugural exercise of will, telling us, without pause for effect, “she pluck’d, she eat” (9.791). This is the cataclysmic moment of Milton’s entire epic, and Eve’s conscience, her free will thwarted her obligation to God’s order and allowed her to fall. As Eve demonstrates, free will has a disobedient, disorderly, and chaotic potential. Reason, free

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164 Dante tells us, “The emperor of the woeful kingdom / rose from the ice below his breast,” and how Satan’s wings, “were featherless and fashioned / like a bat’s wings. When he flapped them, he sent forth three separate wings, / the sources of the ice upon Cocytus” (34.28-9; 49-52).
165 When Faustus asks how Mephistopheles can simultaneously be damned and on earth, the demon famously replies, “Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it” (Marlowe 1.3 78).
will, conscience, and law intertwine in *Paradise Lost*. Law is shown to be ineffective in keeping order, and Eve’s reason utterly fails her when she tries to apply it to Satan’s rhetoric. The not-yet-fallen Eve cannot discern reason from rhetoric; Satan’s words, “yet rung of his perswasive words, impregn’d / With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth” (9.737-8). Though “reason” is Adam and Eve’s “law,” it is not eternal or just.  

For God to guarantee his de facto authority, he would have to revoke Adam and Eve’s free will, fundamentally altering the composition of their makeup. As it stands, their reason – their law – is susceptible to the mutability of free agents. Chaos can always subvert this law (and the “order” it implies as a hendiadys).  

When we remember that all creation is made up of the same materials, and that these, “Ancestors of Nature,” came from “Eternal Anarchie,” that is, “endless Warrs,” and “confusion,” then we begin to see the inevitability of mankind’s fall (2. 895-6). Since they are made from the same matter as Chaos, Adam and Eve necessarily contain anarchy, it is a foundational aspect of their being. In another linguistic parallel, Eve and Chaos are both referred to as “wombs.” Chaos is called, “The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,” the “Elements [of] eldest birth” are said to issue, “Of Natures Womb,” and Raphael greets Eve, “Haile Mother of Mankind, whose fruitful Womb /  

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166 According to Richard Arnold, “Satan here is not tempting Even’s will, passion, or pride, as is usually believed; rather, he is simply tempting her into the labyrinth of pure reason. Satan knows it Eve were to hold firmly to right reason, she would follow Abdiel, but if she shifts into pure reason, the alleys of the maze all lead to the Fruit” (66). But when we go back to that association between chaos and conscience, both umpires in anarchic realms, then we can challenge the strength, the morality of right reason. After all, if right reason is supported by the holy spirit, the way the universe is supported by God’s continued guidance, then does not it call into question the efficacy of that support? Either right reason keeps Eve from sin and makes her an automaton, or it permits her to follow her own will and thus signifies her freedom. Milton may not collapse right reason and pure reason into one category, but he certainly brings an indictment of right reason in his depiction of the Fall.  

167 See Kermode’s *Shakespeare’s Language* (especially pp. 100-25) for more on Shakespeare’s strategic use of hendiadys, the rhetorical device, “where the meaning of the whole depends upon a kind of unnaturalness in the doubling, a sort of pathological intensification of the device” (102).  

168 See Sarkar, pages 55-58, for a compelling gendered reading of Night out of this parallel.
Shall fill the World more numerous with thy Sons,” sons, who we should remember, will cause all sorts of trouble from Cain’s murder of Abel to everyone who is not part of Noah’s immediate family (2.910; 5.181; 5.388-9). In other words, if the dormant anarchy of Chaos is to revivify itself in the world, it will come through mankind. Rogers calls this, “possibility of a chaotic resurgence,” an, “expression [of] Milton’s fear, perhaps not so unsound, of an ever-encroaching political chaos” (142). Donnelly reads Chaos as a force that exerts unrule on matter, not as matter itself, “Much like the way that subjects of a corrupt monarch can remain virtuous themselves,” he explains (2009 90). For Donnelly, the “one first matter all” is God (2009 92-3). From this standpoint, Milton’s monism can support creatio ex Deo, but Donnelly still has to figure out why chaos is so antagonistic. “Although some matter may initially be subjected to chaos, in a state of potentia, matter still derives ultimately ‘from God’ rather than from chaos,” Donnelly concludes, “in such a condition of disorder, the goodness of matter remains a potential which is actualized only by its peaceable union with form” (2009 93). The notion of potential is important here because this same potential exists in man’s choice to follow God’s will or his own. Just as matter has potential for good (and conversely for evil), so too do humans, expressed in their free will, have potential for good or potential for evil.169

169 In her recent work, Milton and the Poetics of Freedom, Susanne Woods claim, “is that Milton seeks to engage his reader in asserting and affirming the realities Milton presents, but never from the mere assumption of authority and always with a sense that alternative positions should be a part of one’s consideration” (7). In other words, Milton teaches readers how to locate truth, or choose wisely. He does not want readers to base their worldviews on his writing alone, but for his writings to spark each reader’s Right Reason and cause them to recognize the writings’ inimical Truth. Woods continues, “God gave humankind genuine free will, with reason and the light of conscience to enable choice, with true freedom coming from one who is, formed and asserted by the choices one makes. This is true for the reader as well as the author, Milton believed, and the result is invitational poetics” (9). My reading works against her view and finds in Milton a poet constrained by the parameters of poetry.
Both Hobbes and Milton share this fundamental fear of political anarchy. Milton has faith that man will choose to be governed and continually make the choice to be subservient. In contrast, Hobbes, who rarely mentions Genesis in his account of the State of Nature, does not. Hobbes’s 1668 Latin translation of *Leviathan*, usually regarded as his attempt to reinsert Trinity doctrine back into the text and thus ameliorate his critics who accused him of atheism, actually has one the more blasphemous moments in all of his work. When Hobbes lays out his State of Nature in the English *Leviathan* he does not cite Genesis as support for his explanation of pre-social mankind. However, the Latin text does cite Cain’s murder of Abel as evidence to support his theory. “But someone may say: there never was a war of all against all,” Hobbes posits, “What! Did not Cain out of envy kill his brother Abel, a crime so great he would not have dared it if there had at that time been a common power which could have punished him?” (*L* 77). As Ionnais Evrigenis points out, “the assertion that there was no common power over Cain and Abel that could have punished the fratricide is both puzzling and downright blasphemous” (161). Evrigenis does not explore the political implications of this blasphemy, but I would argue that it is particularly blasphemous because it reveals the de facto foundation for God’s authority over mankind.

Though Hobbes rarely associates Genesis with his account of man’s beginning, he does write extensively about the biblical book elsewhere in *Leviathan*. Still, we can draw out some important political implications of his reading of Genesis. For instance, as

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170 Evrigenis on Hobbes tactical references to Genesis in his account of the State of Nature: “By using the vocabulary of Genesis, but steering clear of biblical exegesis, Hobbes as able to signal that his account of the state of nature was far from irrelevant to his readers’ conceptions of their origins. At the same time, he was able to avoid becoming entangled in theological debates that would have diverted him from his goal” (Evrigenis 177). Milton does not have this luxury, or he does not choose to distance himself from Genesis. He dives into the deep end of biblical exegesis.
Evrigenis notes, Hobbes considered Adam free until the first commandment was issued, in Gen. 2:17, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it” (167). Up to this point, Adam had lived in pure liberty, and according to Hobbes, “absolute liberty,” is, “anarchy” (L 119). When God issues his first command, he asserts sovereignty over Adam. Just as God physically circumscribes Chaos into order, so too does he impose material control over Adam’s liberty with the injunction. Therefore, according to Hobbes, God’s authority does not pre-exist law and God’s justice does not pre-exist the first commandment. Only after God issues his commandment does Adam become a subject of the Edenic commonwealth, his will subsumed into God’s. According to Evrigenis, “From his earliest political writings, Hobbes had made it clear that where the sovereign determines what is good and evil; private judgment has no place. The suggestions that it does is the fundamental cause of the demise of commonwealths, and a relapse into a state of nature” (175). Therefore, Hobbes could have used the Genesis account of the Fall in his political work to illustrate the premier lapse into rebellion. However, this example would have rendered God’s morality as arbitrary as any sovereign power on earth.

Thus, while they share a common understanding of Chaos as first matter, Hobbes has no illusions about the perfectibility of man, either in the beginning or after. As Martinich writes, Hobbes’s, “doctrine was Calvinism without original sin” (1999 180). According to Fallon, Hobbes argues that, “our wills are moved by nature, not by God’s immediate intervention. Hobbes does not bother himself with arguments about original sin or the universal meriting of damnation – his interests are metaphysical, physical, and political rather than theological” (38). More than the mere epicurean materialism, which

171 See Evrigenis, chapter 6, “Lapse and Relapse or the First Rebellion,” especially, p. 166-168.
some critics found in Hobbes’s work, the lack of Original Sin in his work speaks volumes about his de facto political philosophy. Without Original Sin, God has no right to sovereignty over mankind. Milton’s epic similarly argues for the total depravity of man, but its Calvinist doctrine of Original Sin serves to frame God’s de facto power in de jure terms.

This is a key difference since it serves as the foundation for Milton’s justification of God’s ways. For Milton’s theodicy and political philosophy to work, he needs a preexisting, holy Justice, one that God’s laws can be based on. Following those justice-based laws leads to political order, but so does breaking those laws. Because man fell and failed to honor his half of the covenant, God has no choice but to terminate the lease on Eden and expel Adam and Eve from Paradise, but he can do this justifiably. As God repeatedly tells the Only Begotten Son, Justice has God’s hands tied. “Dye [Adam] or Justice must;” God shrugs, “unless for him / Som other able, and as willing, pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death” (3.210-12). As, “th’ Eternal Father,” who is responsible for fulfilling, “All Justice,” God cannot afford to alter jurisprudence (5.246-7). The Son achieves his “right” to rule mankind through Justice. After God commands him to descend and judge Adam and Eve, and thus mankind, the Son explains that whatever their sentence, “the worst on mee must light” (10.73). In this way, “this obtaine / Of right,” he claims, “that I may mitigate thir doom / On me deriv’d” (10.75-8). This is the Only Begotten Son’s difficult position. He must judge Adam and Eve, which means he must judge himself. This peculiar scenario is the requirement for his sovereignty de jure. “So onely can high Justice rest appaid. / The Law of God exact he shall fulfill / Both by obedience and by love, though love / Alone fulfill the Law” (12.401-4).
“[I]nexplicable / Thy Justice seems,” Adam says (10.754-5). Adam wonders why, if his punishment was same-day-death, he still lives. “Why comes not Death,” he says, “with one thrice acceptable stroke / To end me? / Shall Truth fail to keep her word, / Justice Divine not hast’n to be just? (10.854-7). This is what Milton, as a political thinker, wants. It suits his politics because it lets justice, which is symbolized in the commandment not to eat the fruit, serve as the foundation for human society.

As we have seen, conscience or “right reason” fails Eve the very first time it is tested. Free will, freedom of choice, is a choice between God’s will or her own. God “gives” Adam and Eve this choice because, like Henry V, he does not want to be a de facto power. Erasmus explains the origin of free will as an expression of God’s majesty: “To avoid ruling over subjects who are under duress, God himself bestowed free will upon both angels and men so as to make his power more splendid and majestic” (41). In Areopagitica, Milton explains how important our free will is to our human makeup: “when God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall Adam,” that is, a creature with no dynamic animus (1010). In Hobbes’s schema, human reason is useful, necessary even, for our exodus out of the state of nature, but afterwards, once the social contract is signed with our de facto powers, we lose that free will. Hobbes says subjects under sovereignty do not have free will. “If a man should talk to me of a round Quadrangle;” Hobbes writes, “or accidents of Bread in Cheese; or Immaterial Substances; or of A free Subject; A free-Will; or any Free, but free from being hindred by opposition, I should not say he were in an Errour; but that his words were without meaning; that is to say, Absurd” (L 24).

Milton’s emphasis on free will, on the other hand, speaks volumes about his
understanding of political liberty. As Norbrook explains, “religious liberty,” for Milton, “was an essential precondition for civil liberty” (109). Milton’s God does not want to admit it, but automatons are the ideal subjects.

If God wants free creatures, and he does, then Adam and Eve will have to thwart his will in their expression of it. Of course, for Milton, this all works to solve his problem of Chaos and justify the ways of God to man. When mankind falls, it ostensibly reveals some kind of underlying justice purporting to support the political relationship between man and God. Although God’s knowledge does not mean he ordains or forces it, God’s omniscience means he knows Adam and Eve will fall. If the fall was final and there was no way for mankind’s redemption, then God would be a sadistic creator. However, God knows the Only Begotten Son will rise to the challenge and enact the grandest gesture of divine retribution through self-sacrifice, thus satisfying the impossible justice that God’s law establishes (not the other way around). 172 According to Adams, God uses Satan’s disobedience to generate his divine justice, noting that the function of Satan, “is to remove from God responsibility for the evil in the world by assuming that responsibility himself” (79). This makes God’s ability to extend grace to mankind, and man’s ability to accept that grace, easier: “It is relatively easy to obtain mercy when someone else has provoked and established the rigorous process of justice” (80). Adams, again, misses the point. It is not Satan who generates justice through disobedience but rather Adam and Eve who, through the exercise of free will, force God to create the normative notion of justice that establishes his supreme de jure authority.

172 See Harry Berger Jr.’s, “Marriage and Mercifixion in The Merchant of Venice: The Casket Scene Revisited,” for an example of how Antonio performs a similar act of aggrandizing self-sacrifice.
In order to recalibrate the chaos-based material world into a justice-based system, Milton needs to blame the Fall of Man on free will not the anarchic will. When Adam and Eve follow their free wills instead of God’s will by breaking God’s commandment, then they transgress against divine justice. For Milton, their sin is an offense to divine justice, not the breaking of an arbitrary rule that merely establishes authority. Because how does abstinence from fruit maintain order? The first commandment is a symbol, an outward sign of inward obedience to God. It is not morally wrong to eat the fruit until God proclaims it sinful. In other words, it is not the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,” but the “Tree of the Knowledge of What Determines Good and Evil.” Just as Hobbes turns moral problems into political problems, Milton turns political problems into moral ones. Milton can now draw on the rich history of free will’s theological paradoxes and its status as a Christian mystery to obfuscate the political problems that anarchic wills pose. Furthermore, Milton can rely on his faith in man’s ability to navigate the wilderness of the State of Nature peaceably. Even though our conscience and reason have been proven ineffectual throughout Book IX, Milton still ends his epic on a hopeful note.

When man-as-political-animal troubles society, it is through a perverted de jure sense of God’s order. Their own personal desire for glory or disorder is a brief expression of Chaos, not Satan’s disorder, but true, that is to say anarchic, rebellion. According to C.S. Lewis, “Since the Fall consisted in man’s disobedience to his superior, it was punished by man’s loss of Authority over his interiors; that is, chiefly, over his passions and his physical organism. Man has called for anarchy: God lets him have it” (69-70). I agree with Lewis that the Fall is ultimately an importunity for anarchy, but I want to extend the point a bit further and ask what prompted this call? Perhaps more to the point,
how could Adam make this call for anarchy in the first place? The answer lies in the chaotic nature of his free will. In a sense, anarchy, always desiring its natural state of disorder, prompted the call for itself. This is an instance of how, as Adams says, the world “could be jolted back, with relative ease, into Chaos again” (74). Hobbes has no nostalgia for the past and can therefore read moral problems as political problems.

Milton’s response is to emphasize the moral element of Adam and Eve’s political disobedience. With the initiation of Free Will, that is the first time it is used to disobey God’s Law, the external world of Chaos is internalized into humanity’s Anarchic Will.

We see this internalization in Adam and Eve’s mental state after the Fall, when the two arise in a groggy, post-coital fog, “destitute and bare / Of all thir vertue: silent, and in face / Confounded long they sate” (9.1063-5). Now their external countenance reflects their inner state of confusion. Having followed the anarchic impulse of their free will, they suffer the consequences of turmoil. The poet continues, “worse within / Began to rise, high Passions, Anger, Hate, / Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore / Thir inward State of Mind” (9.1122-5). These extreme emotions, which have been unearthed from the constitutive material of their bodies, have usurped the order which previously ruled their “State of Mind.” Previously, the political state of Eden, like the state of their mind, was “calm Region once / And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent: / For Understanding rul’d not, and the Will / Heard not her lore, both in subjections now / To sensual Appetite, who from beneath / Usurping over sovran Reason claimd / Superior sway” (9.1125-31). Milton’s extended metaphor of the Fall as usurpation should be read as symbolic of political disorder. Repeatedly, the poet reminds us of the political state and its destruction. Considered in terms of the mytho-political, this is the incarnation of
the anarchic will. If the God-incarnate-Christ is a “second Adam,” then the Chaos-incarnate-Adam and Eve are a “second Chaos.”173 While Adam castigates Eve for her role in their lapse, he derides her, “will / Of wandring,” for urging her to leave his side and tend the garden on her own (9.1146-7). The first expression of her free will, in other words, is the penultimate action that leads to her fall, the first expression of her anarchic will.

In his narrative of the fall, Milton internalizes Chaos as free will and makes anarchic wills of us all. So too does Milton internalize Chaos as free will, and make anarchic wills of us all.174 And though Milton’s De Doctrina attests that the Holy Spirit occupies the faithful, like Adam and Eve, as I have argued, the Holy Spirit in Paradise Lost, as it is associated with right reason or conscience, is compromised in the chaotic material of mankind. Also, as I have suggested, Milton’s De Doctrina Christiana, a prose tract, has the luxury of making theological assertions without the complications of narrative. When Milton turns to the same phenomenon of internalization in his epic, he gives us another dimension of what lies at the heart of Christian liberty. At the heart of

173 As in the teleological reading of Genesis that Milton favors. For instance, in Book III, God proclaims, “As in him [Adam] perish all men, so in thee / As from a second root shall be restor’d,” and in Book XI, the poet refers directly to Christ as, “Our second Adam (3.287-8; 11.383).

174 Andrew Shifflett explains Milton’s complex reconciliation of prophecy into the burgeoning Age of Reason. “Milton does not dispute the prophetic as a category for true knowledge,” Shifflett points out, “Indeed, he revivifies and historicizes prophetic discourse by placing what had been its most plainly historical manifestation – oracles – quite literally inside his readers’ ‘pious Hearts’” (141). Shifflett reads “inward oracles” as Milton’s attempt to incorporate an external phenomenon which is traditionally at odds with Christian theology into Christian life and liberty. Shifflett, quoting and commenting on De Doctrina Christiana, writes, “‘all true believers either prophesy or have within them the Holy Spirit, which is as good as having the gift of prophecy and dreams and visions’ (CPW VI, 523-24). Such imagery lies at the heart of Milton’s understanding of Christian liberty” (Shifflett 142).
Milton’s Christian liberty, at least in his epic of the fall, beats the irregular heart of Chaos. In Kenneth Borris’s allegorical reading of Chaos, he says the figure represents, “the environment of the mind averse to God . . . a bewildering morass of confusion, meaningless vacuity, and overwhelming, unorganized potential” (113). This chaotic disorder is internalized into Adam and Eve’s inner chaos and they begin to resemble earlier examples of the anarchic will. Adam, “worse felt within, / And in a troubl’d Sea of passion tost,” which has echoes of Hamlet’s turbulent, sea-tossed experience with his own anarchic will (10.717-8). Adam tries to understand his culpability and his condemnation, before concluding, “as my Will / Concurd not to my being, it were but right / And equal to reduce me to my dust” (10.746-8). Adam considers his willful action discordant with his material, physical “being.” This contrariness justifies his death sentence. Adam understands, like Hamlet, that physical bodies will resort to their initial state prior to creation. The particles of dust that make up Adam will once again become dust, and could potentially serve some pedestrian function, like the earthen plug for a beer barrel that Hamlet describes. Here again is the sense that everything, creation included, returns to what it once was. Elemental chaos can only be contained for so long.

Adam explains his frantic state of mind as, “all my evasions vain, / And reasonings, though through Mazes” (10.830). In mankind’s post-lapsarian mental state of confusion, Chaos has found another existential outlet in Creation. “O Conscious,” Adam apostrophizes, “into what Abyss of fears / And horrors hast thou driv’n me; out of which / I find no way, from deep to deeper plung’d (10.842-5). Adam describes Conscious with

175 See also Marjara, who writes, “The truth of the Bible, according to Milton, needs to be interpreted in the light of the ‘internal’ scripture of the Holy Spirit, which is ‘written in the hearts of believers,’ and ‘the Spirit which is given to us is a more certain guide than Scripture’” (Milton in Marjara 10-11).
the same language used to describe Chaos: abysmal, fearful, horrific, and perpetually deep. This is not hell on earth, but rather chaos on earth. The potential for this Chaos existed in Eden because it existed in Adam and Eve’s free will. As Raphael explains free will to Adam he emphasizes the mutability of free will:

God made thee perfect, not immutable;
And good he made thee, but to persevere
He left it in thy power, ordained thy will
By nature free, not over-rul’d by Fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity;
Our voluntarie service he requires,
Not our necessitated. (5.524-30)

This reveals more of Milton’s theodicy and God’s justice in the universe. The fact that we have free will makes God’s justice (and mercy) necessary. Since justice is an ordering principle, and since God wants to have authority de jure, God needs our un-coerced obedience. He rules Chaos by conquest, and like Henry V, this makes him a de facto ruler over Creation.

Hobbes relegates religion, like the armed forces, to the control of the state because he blames religious freedom for the sectarianism that disrupted civil peace during the seventeenth century. Milton, on the other hand, champions religious liberty because of his faith in human conscience to strive towards peace independent of the state. Simon Kow explains, “As pamphleteer, secretary to Cromwell, and revolutionary poet, Milton recommended the separation of church and state as conducive to the protection and even flourishing of Christian liberty, i.e., the freedom of the Christian to follow his or
her conscience in matters of faith as well as politics” (37). As he reveals in Aeropagetica, Milton has a certain amount of faith in an individual’s ability to interpret their textual world, the world of print that carried so many ideas and caused so much political strife. I agree with Kow’s claim and am using it to draw a distinction between Hobbes’s and Milton’s view of humanity. However, I would like to qualify it a bit. While Milton had faith in man’s ability to choose the right course of action for civil peace, he did not think it was always a foregone conclusion. As Paradise Lost reveals, when man turns to his conscience, he engages with an essential, chaotic aspect of his material makeup. He has the ability to choose against his God-given conscience and embark on the path to chaos.

“[T]he deepest issue between Hobbes and Milton,” according to Don Wolfe, is, “their contradictory estimate of man’s capacity for subordinating his fears, his hatreds, his hunger and warmth, to an enlightened concern for virtuous action and the welfare of his fellow-men” (422). As we have seen, the inability to subordinate this destructive, interpersonal force leads to chaos, anarchy. For Milton, when we align our free will with God’s Providence, we subordinate the threat of both personal and political chaos. Hobbes has less faith in our individual ability to keep those fears at bay. For him, a strong sovereign who holds up its end of the social contract and compels us to honor our end maintains the peace. Hobbes’s image of the perfect sovereign looks more and more like Milton’s God. The only problem with that, for Milton, is that Hobbes’s ideal sovereign is a de facto authority figure. Of course, not everyone agrees with my Hobbesian reading of Milton’s God. C.S. Lewis, for instance, argues, “Many of those who say they dislike Milton’s God only mean that they dislike Milton’s God only mean that they dislike God: infinite sovereignty de jure, combined with infinite power de facto, and love which, by its very nature, includes wrath also”
(130). I disagree with Lewis’s depiction of Milton’s God as one with “infinite sovereignty de jure,” and instead would argue that Milton, despite his best intentions, must give his epic a God who reigns de facto over a Creation that continually teeters on cosmic chaos.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

“The British civil wars of the seventeenth century are Janus-like,” Trevor Royle writes in his history of the conflict, “They look back to an older world of the absolute power of kings and queens, to the Middle Ages and the old certainties of land and aristocratic wealth; at the same time they heralded a new beginning in the political life of Britain’s nations” (813). Shakespeare’s drama, Hobbes’s philosophy, and Milton’s epic poetry are similarly two-faced, at once looking an older world of absolute sovereignty, while facing our modern world of individual freedom. This dissertation has drawn parallels between the political philosophy of the early modern period and the imaginative literature of the era to help elucidate this pivotal moment.

Beginning with the story of how de facto theories of political legitimacy emerged out of their de jure predecessors, I outlined how the idealist political philosophy of the sixteenth century, like that of Elyot, Coke, and Merbury were de jure reactions to Machiavelli’s de facto realism. As texts like Cardinal Pole’s Apologia ad Carolum Quintum (1536) and Innocent Gentillet’s Discours contra Machievel (1576) indicate, political thinkers of the 1500s were more interested in refuting the Florentine’s claims than building upon them. It would take the better part of a century for his ideas to find

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176 See Thomas F. Mayer’s Reginald Pole: Prince & Prophet, especially p. 78-91, for how Pole’s response to Machiavelli was more an attack on Henry VIII than the Italian philosopher. Gentillet’s work was translated from the French into English by Simon Patricke and printed in London in 1602.
greater purchase as epistemological models. Most notably, Montaigne, Grotius, and Bacon would attempt to consider the world on its terms and not through the prescriptive lenses of non-material forces. Thus began the project of large scale skepticism towards earlier modes of thought which characterized the 1600s. The wisdom of previously revered, ancient sources was challenged, and even Biblical authority, which enjoyed unchallengeable prestige in the middle ages, was to be examined with the critical eye of seventeenth-century empiricism as historical inquiry challenged the legitimacy of the Pentateuch. These forces were previously so intertwined and absolute that some thinkers had difficulty understanding the assaults on their status. Filmer expresses anxiety that his time has witnessed the emergent belief that, “Mankind is naturally endowed and born with freedom from all subjugation, and at liberty to choose what form of government it please, and that the power which any one man hath over others was at the first by human right bestowed according to the discretion of the multitude” (53). His incredulous attitude indicates the extent and severity of the period’s shifting thought in political philosophy.

Thus, inter-subjective forces like religious belief and cultural norms, which once commanded so much authority, lost their ability to hold the social order together. Earlier de jure theorists, like Elyot, would argue that divine guidance prompts individuals to fall into political order, so where Hobbes finds the potential for anarchy in everyone, Elyot finds divinely inscribed subjugation, writing, “Behold also the order that God hath put generally in all His creature” (3). After Charles’s trial and execution, Elyot’s reading of

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177 Hobbes logically challenges Moses’s authorship, noting, “it were a strange interpretation to say Moses spake of his own sepulcher (though by prophecy) that it was not found that that day wherein he was yet living” (L 252). Instances like this lead J.A Mazzeo to conclude, “Thus Hobbes deprived traditional metaphysics and theology of any meaningful content” (254).
those English hearts looks dyslexic. In the aftermath of the Reformation, political philosophers, and the English populace, started questioning the veracity and authority of non-material reality. According to Skinner, Hobbes’s novelty, his real contribution to the field, comes not from his political ideas, but from, “the reasons he gave for holding his political beliefs,” that is, their empirical foundations (98). The epistemological shift away from de jure considerations and the effect of this shift on political legitimacy is most clearly expressed in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, “the greatest tract in [the de facto] genre” (Aylmer 141).

One of the claims of this dissertation is that Shakespeare, as well as other dramatists and poets, explored this weakened inter-subjectivity and its effects on political thought before England’s men of letters wrote prose on the same subject. Poets have been intimately integrated into the English court since Chaucer, and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were no different. Poetry and politics once overlapped much more than they do today. Wyatt, Surrey, and Raleigh were all accomplished in verse and statecraft, and monarchs who, at one time, were enamored with them, eventually decided the fates of all three. Dramatists, however, had a unique ability to explore more complex, pertinent avenues of political inquiry via their stage craft. This is especially in the history plays, when political subject matter is combined with the vibrant, centrifugal energy of drama, new ideas can live and thrive in the polyglot of dialogue.178

At least since Plato’s dialogues, ideas about the political state were framed in conversations. More’s *Utopia* is one notable example from the sixteenth century, and

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178 Bahktin would call this heteroglossic force, a “force dispersing us outward into an ever greater variety of ‘voices,’ outward into a seeming chaos that presumably only a God could encompass,” as Wayne Booth explains (xxi). Booth goes on to explain, “the quality pursued by Bahktin is a kind of ‘sublimity of freed perspectives,’” a quality, I would argue, Shakespeare especially exhibits (xx).
Doleman’s *Conference about the Next Succession*, from the end of the 1500s, uses the same conversational framing device.\(^{179}\) Even Hobbes’s final work of political writing, his history of the English Civil War, *Behemoth*, takes the form of a conversational back and forth.\(^{180}\) These writers all found a greater freedom of expression through dialogue, but drama, a form where multiple voices share the stage, has more opportunity to give voice to new ideas. Furthermore, the audience’s proximity to these ideas has a uniquely powerful effect. When Thomas Heywood defended the power of theater in his *Apology for Actors* (1612), he expressed the conviction that “plays do things to spectators,” to use Jean Howard’s expression (2012 123). Specifically, they do political things to people.\(^{181}\)

In the turbulent political climate of the 1590s the effects of these plays could be incredibly volatile.

Of course, drama could be used to support the political status quo, and some playwrights, like Heywood, expressed their political ideologies onstage. According to Eric Nelson, “The political writers who furnished the intellectual background of Shakespeare’s age were in fundamental agreement that there was best regime for any given community, and that it was a matter of moral urgency to identify and institute it” (256). Certainly, early modern dramatists were not immune to writing political propaganda. Shakespeare, however, never seems to conclusively identify on the best regime, and therefore never reaches the moral conclusion of other political

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\(^{179}\) Though its debate form did not protect its printer who was drawn and quartered, nor owners of the text, who were considered, by order of Elizabeth, traitors.

\(^{180}\) Written in 1668, though, like Doleman’s work, nevertheless caused controversy. Charles II initially prevented its publication, and its first authorized edition was printed in 1682 (Curley liii).

\(^{181}\) In his *Apology* Heywood argues, “playes have made the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discovery of all our English chronicles . . . because playes are writ with this ayme, and caried with this method, to teach their subjects obedience to their king, to shew the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to allegiance, dehorting them from all trayterous and fellowious stratagems” (52-3).
philosophers. Drama allows for a more fluid exchange of ideas, an exchange that leaves behind an inevitable residue of ideas no matter how clearly, effectively, or soundly a character “wins” a theatrical disputation. As they challenge de facto political authority – the only legitimate political authority, according to Hobbes - anarchic wills leave the residue of social chaos in their wake.

By drawing attention to the role of imaginative literature in this story I do not mean to suggest that Hobbes took notes for *Leviathan* while attending a production of *King Lear* or that his conversations with Jonson at meetings of the Great Tew Circle sparked his contributions to political philosophy. I simply want to suggest that when we read Shakespeare in light of *Leviathan*, and other works of political philosophy, we can illuminate new corners of the dramas and see the comments on political legitimacy that lurk there. Similarly, when we read Milton with Hobbes in mind we come to new understandings about the threat of social chaos in the poet’s epic.

According to Armitage, Condren, and Fitzmaurice, “When early modern writers on politics asked which was the best state of a commonwealth that goal determined their answers” (15). As said above, Shakespeare’s political goal is simply unknowable. Either he took a completely apolitical stance throughout his career, or his feeling about monarchy, republicanism, sovereignty and political legitimacy changed over time. This is

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182 Not all scholars find such “negative capability” in Shakespeare. After admitting the near impossibility of discerning his political preference, David Armitage attempts to indirectly suss out Shakespeare’s political leanings by focusing on the playwright’s “conceptions of property,” concluding, “It was in the English history plays, above all, that questions of property rights became most obviously political, a turn Shakespeare signaled by metaphors linking property with sovereignty” (26; 40). For more on the difficulty of determining Shakespeare’s political leanings, see Jean Howard’s “Dramatic Traditions and Shakespeare’s Political Thought.”

183 This informal gathering of the intellectually curious met at Lucius Cary’s home near Oxford. Membership into the group was casual and only required attendance, but Hobbes was involved with the intellectual cadre and, according to Martinich was, “intellectually . . . at home there” (1999 118). For more on how the Great Tew could have influenced Hobbes’s thought (and vice versa) see Martinich 1999, pages 102-118.
not to say his political thought *evolved* or maintained a consistent trajectory simply that his attitude towards what constituted the “best” state strikes me as rather fluid. Milton, on the other hand, has a much more rigid goal, a more ascertainable political agenda, and as we saw in chapter four, this agenda was de jure republicanism, completely antithetical to Hobbes.

However, when Milton attempts to write the great English epic with the book of Genesis as his source material he faces new political challenges, narrative obstacles, and theological dilemmas. All three of these frustrations combine in Milton’s cosmic Chaos. Thus, the problem of Chaos becomes Milton’s most insurmountable issue because of the poem’s epic genre, its religious subject matter, and its political agenda. According to Damrosch, theology, “discourages narrative expression” (74). Milton’s theological prose can elide narrative considerations, but his epic cannot. As the poet relates his version of creation he faces a confounding conundrum: benevolent monotheism implies cosmic order, but has no room for evil, while dualism can explain evil, but precludes divine order. The former justifies righteous political rule, the latter complicates the theodicy Milton claims is the theme of his poem. The epic narrative of creation forces Milton into a corner where he cannot present God as a de jure authority. Instead, he reaches Hobbes’s conclusion – power justifies power. Milton’s solution is to transform the anarchic will, an unsolvable political problem, into Adam and Eve’s “free will,” a more manageable theological quandary, a theologically sanctioned paradox.

Like Harry Berger Jr.’s work, I want to give readers new ways of reading characters and plays that have been studied for four centuries. I want my work to raise questions about, and draw attention to, the rich, robust, and complex political issues
running throughout early modern. Specifically, I hope my work highlights these works’ complicated representation of de facto political legitimacy. Ultimately, my work humbly suggests that there is more to political figures in stage dramas than what can be summed up in the “stage machiavel” type.

I also want to give an understudied aspect of *Paradise Lost* the spotlight. As my last chapter has shown, great work has been done of the character of Chaos, but it is still a character and realm that receives considerably less attention than Milton’s Satan. As I have shown, the fallen angel is much less dangerous to Milton’s social and political order than Chaos or the newly “free” Adam and Eve. Scholars have no issue with reading Milton’s prose to understand his poetry, but if we work in the opposite direction, if we read his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* through the lens of *Paradise Lost*’s Book II, then we might have to reconsider aspects of Milton’s politics heretofore taken for granted.

In some ways, the anarchic will entered the world along with the modern individual. The character type represents a powerful, radically new sense of place in the world for the individual, a new realization of the individual’s relationship to authority. This is the modern individual’s birth into the world, full of the labor pains and neonatal stress. Instead of liberation, the anarchic will feels disorientation. Donne expresses the dread of the anarchic will in “An Anatomy of the World – The First Anniversary:”

‘Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;

All just supply, and all Relation:

Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,

For every man alone thinkes he hath got
To be a Phoenix, and that there can bee

None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee. (213-18)

“This is the worlds condition now,” he concludes (219). As Donne implies, the severed relationship between authority and subject, “Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne,” leaves the individual in a state of anxious isolation, unmoored, but not necessarily unfettered from political power. In his study of Donne’s “Satire III,” Strier successfully argues that Donne’s “focus remains the individual’s relation to authority” (1993 307). While many of his poems, like his *Holy Sonnets*, feature struggles with a divine authority, Donne also expresses contention with political authority as well.

In some ways, the individual agency that Adam and Eve get at the end of *Paradise Lost* reflects our modern political agency. Writing of anarchy as a viable political position in the twentieth century, Richard Taylor explains how what was once considered anarchic could now be construed as “autoarchic,” writing, “One is not sovereign by virtue of his goodness, wisdom, or glory, but only by his will” (7). In his *Defense of Anarchism*, also written in the last half of the twentieth century, Robert Paul Wolff defines, “the responsible man,” as one who attempts, “to ascertain what is right,” who, “is not capricious or anarchic, for he does acknowledge himself bound by moral constraints. But he insists that he alone is the judge of those constraints” (13). As these two examples illustrate, the issue of political sovereignty and individual autonomy would be quite unrecognizable to most citizens of early modern England. As this dissertation has shown, however, the seeds for our modern notions of willfulness were sown long ago, in the dramas and epics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
Of Shakespeare’s political milieu, Susan James writes, “Standing behind his many excluded or inadequate rulers is an implicit understanding of political sovereignty as a form of authority that is extremely fragile, threatened from inside and out by the vices of those who hold power, the ambition or lethargy of their subjects and the exigencies of circumstance” (80-1). I agree that Shakespeare dramatizes the fragility of political sovereignty, but it is not threatened by the immorality of those who have a right to the throne or necessarily by ambitious upstarts, as James suggests. Rather, I think the fragility she notes and the threat to authority she alludes to can be better understood with a focus on the difference between authority de jure and power de facto, and with a new understanding of the threat to that power.

This dissertation began with Charles I on trial. As was said before, his defeat in the courthouse and his execution on the scaffolding did little to solve the problem of political legitimacy. Even after the smoke of the English civil war cleared, after the Restoration of the Stuart line, and even after the Glorious Revolution ended Stuart rule and installed William of Orange as sovereign, the questioned remained, “was William a de facto or a de jure king?” (Ashcroft 164). As Hobbes theorized, this question hangs, unacknowledged, over every sovereign since society’s emergence from the State of Nature. Renaissance literature illustrates how this central question on the nature of sovereign authority starts to unsettle sovereign and subject alike. No longer a philosophical abstraction this particular crisis of authority became a political reality.
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