Counterfeiting and the Economics of Kingship in Milton's Eikonoklastes

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For a coin, the road from the mint is also the path to the melting pot.

—Karl Marx

The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.

—Walter Benjamin

Money is a material memory, a self-duplicating representation, a deferred exchange.

—Michel Foucault

Critics writing about John Milton’s 1649 prose tract *Eikonoklastes* have characterized the polemic as a rhetorically sophisticated attack designed to “break down,” “smash,” “shatter,” “desecrate,” “destroy,” “quash,” and “kill” the popular image of Charles I as portrayed in *Eikon Basilike: The Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitudes and Sufferings.* Most modern commentators focus on the politics and semiotics of Milton’s iconoclastic mission designated by his title and equally evident in his later comment that he intended to oppose “the Iconoclast to [Charles’s] Icon.” As with any battle waged in the realm of the

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symbolic, Milton’s task is formidable. Proclaiming to be a record of Charles I’s meditations in prison, *Eikon Basilike* or the “King’s Book,” was a remarkably successful piece of royalist propaganda.\(^4\) While most critics emphasize the severity of Milton’s iconoclastic attack on Charles’s popular image, I would like to consider a softer though no-less-effective and enduring critique that is embedded within *Eikonoklastes*. Iconoclasm has its limits, especially when it comes to advancing an alternative social vision.\(^5\) In adhering to the Reformation’s distrust of images and following Exodus 20:4’s admonishment of “graven images,” Protestant iconoclasm leaves little room for either the articulation of a utopic social vision or the pursuit of practical politics. As Lana Cable observes, “On a purely practical level, once the iconoclast succeeds in rupturing primitive or naive belief in the icon, no rationale and no substitute icon can be assumed to recapture the same quality of belief.”\(^6\) Yet by viewing Milton’s text primarily in terms of iconoclasm, the vocabulary of many commentators suggests that Milton’s political project in *Eikonoklastes* is an act of destruction, though admittedly one fraught with contradiction. If David Loewenstein is correct when he characterizes Milton’s polemic as “an attempt to undermine an entrenched ideological and historical perspective, so as to bring about a new mode of social vision,” then it is worth looking for additional influences and inflections beyond the discourses and discipline of iconoclasm that might alter our understanding Milton’s social vision.\(^7\) After all, since it was commissioned by Oliver Cromwell’s new government, Milton’s response held the tantalizing possibility of supporting and indeed shaping the new ruling government’s efforts to restructure state and civil society.

By examining Milton’s text from outside the scriptural economy of iconoclasm, this essay explores how *Eikonoklastes* forges a critique parallel to its explicit iconoclastic attack, a critique that engages with the images of Charles I without quite the bludgeoning force given to iconoclastic maneuvers by past descriptions. *Eikonoklastes* takes on the task of rending Charles’s medial and substitutive relationship with the divine, a heretical relationship labeled as the king’s idolatry and inspiring the “civil idolatry” of the king. At the heart of this enterprise and others like it is a debate about the economy of signs and how representations should be valued. At this moment in political and economic history, there was an intense competition to control, to master, and to rewrite the economics of authority.\(^8\) At the risk of substituting a secular economy for scriptural dogma by insisting on the essentially
political nature of the iconoclastic gesture, I shall demonstrate how in its demystifying project *Eikonoklastes* registers and announces the tandem transition of the financial and representational economy in seventeenth-century England. *Eikonoklastes* explicitly operates within and deploys the familiar tactics of classical and Protestant iconoclasm, but the polemic also negotiates these familiar strategies by appropriating the rhetoric of coinage and more specifically the language and logic of the counterfeit to portray the figure of Charles as a counterfeit and a counterfeiter, effectively rewriting how authority and value will be constituted. The connection between contemporaneous economic discourses and religion and politics in the public sphere was very evident to Milton. In particular, by using the organizing logic and language of the counterfeit, Milton is able to make use of the dialectic of claiming something is counterfeit without surrendering the iconoclastic thrust of the polemic. Unlike the binary formulation of iconoclastic discourse, the rhetoric of counterfeiting, I want to suggest, posits a more supple economy of authority and signification. This flexible economy allows Milton to offer a sweeping critique of representational authority that extends beyond the executed king, his memory, and his followers in order to reveal and to rewrite the structures and systems of valuation in early modern England.

**THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF THE COUNTERFEIT AND THE POLITICS OF MONETARY REPRESENTATION**

Money and authority are intimately linked. For monarchs who saw the deployment of royal images as an important factor in maintaining their political hegemony, coinage represented a unique opportunity for the announcement of royal authority in every sphere dependent on exchange. “A coin is both a proposition and a thing,” Marc Shell observes in his groundbreaking study of the intersection of money and language: “it is an inscription and a thing on which the inscription is stamped, to which it refers, and together with which it becomes legal tender.” Shell continues, “a coin is composed of both the thing and the statement; as participants in the same whole, the thing and the statement are homogeneous.” The coin’s embossing then, insofar as it functions as what V. N. Vološinov called an ideological sign, “reflects and refracts another reality” when it circulates in everyday exchanges. As both a semiotic arrangement and a material object, the coin offers up a reality narrated by the inscription where royal
assurances testify to its intrinsic value. As Shell suggests, the minting authority claims to oversee every transaction within the realm, and the authority to make money carries immense power that ultimately controls both the semiotic and material reality of money: “The relationship of propositions about the material properties of a coin to its actual material properties does not affect its status as money . . . What does matter in considering whether a coin is genuine or counterfeited is the issuing authority. A coin as money is counterfeit when the stated place of origin does not correspond to the actual place of origin. A counterfeit coin may claim to have and may actually have the same weight and purity as the legitimate coin of which it is the counterfeit. It is, however, treason for a private citizen to mint coins.”¹³ While clearly the specific stated value of a coin is dependent on the arbitrary decision of the minting authority, less apparent is the political and social ramifications of the counterfeit when the minting authority is indeterminate or when the ability to make the distinction between a “false” and “true” coin is at stake.

The counterfeit opens a space in the determination of value that foregrounds the very system of signification of money, revealing that there is a politics in determining intrinsic value.¹⁴ For this reason, perhaps, counterfeiting has long been considered dangerous whether practiced on money or in everyday life. Plato wrote of the threat counterfeiting sincerity posed to the state in terms of the public menace: “in every society it should always be the endeavor of every citizen, before anything else, to prove himself to all his neighbors no counterfeit, but a man of sterling sincerity, and not to be imposed on by any counterfeiting in others.”¹⁵ Similarly in Aristotle the misrepresentation of character is an evil greater than counterfeiting money: “when he has been deceived by the pretences of the other person, it is just that he should complain against his deceiver—and with more justice than one does against people who counterfeit the currency, inasmuch as the wrongdoing is concerned with something more valuable.”¹⁶ And notably it is precisely this point that John Donne foregrounds in his 1623 “Sermon XVIII”: “A principal reason that makes coining and adulterating of money capital in all states, is not so much because he that usurps the Prince’s authority (for every coiner is not a pretender to the Crown) . . . as because he that coins injures the public: and no man injures the public more than he who defrauds him, who is God’s steward for the public, the King.”¹⁷
The OED glosses “counterfeit” as it applies to material objects, things “made in imitation of something else, ‘imitation,’ not genuine; made of inferior or base materials; spurious, sham, base (esp. of coin),” and for immaterial characteristics which are “pretended, feigned, false, sham.”\textsuperscript{18} As the Latin contra-facere (to make in opposition or contrast, in opposing imitation) suggests, a counterfeit depends upon its comparison with the original or genuine. However, these glosses only hint at the economic and political significance of the term during the early modern period. Monetary histories and numismatic chronicles are more explicit and suggest that English sovereigns took the matter of coinage seriously and understood how important it was for the issuing authority to maintain the truthfulness of their stamp that attested to the homogeneity of the coin.\textsuperscript{19}

Since the sovereign is the legitimizing referent to which the coin’s embossing speaks, by compromising the oneness of the coin, the counterfeit endangers the monarchical promise of value as articulated on the coin’s inscription. From Elizabeth I onward, English sovereigns took great efforts to ensure that the signifying system of and represented by the coin remained intact. While ordinary debasement could be controlled through fiscal responsibility—that is, by avoiding the persistent temptation to produce coinage lighter than the stamped value in order to maintain a stable standard of price and garner a profit from the activity of minting—counterfeiting and other “abuses of the coin” had to be addressed differently. As early as the reign of Edward III, the counterfeiting of money was considered high treason and ranked alongside attacks against the person of the king and rightful succession. Throughout the later part of the sixteenth century, these statutes were revised and extended to include, among other offenses, the counterfeiting of foreign coin within England.\textsuperscript{20}

By reasserting that counterfeiting should stand among the highest forms of treason, Tudor proclamations, beginning with Henry VII, indicate that controlling counterfeiting was an important element in overall strategies aimed at curtailing the effects of debasement and instilling public confidence in coinage.\textsuperscript{21} The severity with which the crime of counterfeiting was treated recalls Foucault’s memorable claim that “besides its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign.”\textsuperscript{22} Foucault’s assertion that every transgression represented an attack on the sovereign “personally” and “physically” takes on greater significance with Tudor coinage, which was the first English money to bear lifelike representa-
tions of the monarchs who underwrote and participated in the constitution of the coin’s value. Yet, as Malcolm Gaskill suggests, the history of counterfeiting is difficult to narrate because “unlike other horror crimes for which European states reserved their highest condemnation, coining [i.e., clipping, counterfeiting, etc.] offended no principal tenet of Christian morality, nor were there any immediately obvious biblical justifications for its proscription—particularly for its definition as an act of treason.”

Consequently, the punishment of the apparently victimless crime of counterfeiting forged new territory in symbolic and economic terms. Although disciplining counterfeiters opened a space for the deployment of power that directly defended royal imagery, neither the metonymic significance of the sovereign’s inscription nor the weighty punishment reinforcing it necessarily stopped abuses of coinage.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, efforts to control counterfeiting dovetailed with her efforts to standardize weights and measures. To stabilize the radical devaluation that English money suffered at the hands of her father, Elizabeth attempted to stop the circulation of counterfeit coins by emphasizing the severity of the transgression, publishing an unprecedented number of proclamations that touch on the subject. Elizabeth’s success is celebrated in Sir Robert Cotton’s 1626 retrospective account of her struggle to standardize coinage. In *A Speech Made by Sir Robert Cotton, Kt. and Baronet, before the Lords of His Majesty’s Most Honourable Privy Council, At the Council-Table: Being Thither Called to Deliver His Opinion. Touching the Alteration of Coin*, Cotton passionately narrates the great standardizer’s labors in heroic terms:

> When his daughter Q. Elizabeth came to the Crown, she was happy in Council to Amend that Error of her Father . . . [She] began to reduce the Monies to their elder goodness, stiling that Work in her first Proclamation *Anno 3. A Famous Act*. The next Year following, having perfected it as it after stood; she tells her People by another *Edict*, that she had conquered now that Monster that had so long devoured them, meaning the Variation of the Standard . . . To avoid the Trick of Permutation, *Coin* was devised as a Rate and Measure of Merchandize and Manufactures; which if mutable, no Man can tell either what Justice he hath, or what he oweth; no Contract can be certain; and so all Commerce, both publick and private, destroyed; and Men again enforced to Permutation with things not subject to Wit or Fraud.
Framed as a contest wherein royal authority swoops in from above to engage with everyday life and secure the common subject’s exchanges, Cotton evaluates Elizabeth’s program of standardization in terms of general social order. Cotton’s remarks demonstrate precisely what was at stake when it came to counterfeiting in the early modern period: the destabilizing threat of widespread “abuses of the coin” and the fear that these abuses could unravel the fabric that made social and economic exchange possible.28

By the time Charles I took the throne in 1625, what I will call the cultural logic of the counterfeit had been well-established by his predecessors: a logic of licit and illicit representations that depended on the affirmation of the homogeneity of the two parts of the coin—in Shell’s terms, the proposition and the thing. As such, the issuing authority of the sovereign is the controlling mechanism of this signifying system. As Simon Wortham observes in his study of James I’s monetary strategies, “[T]he King maintained the inherent authority of the sign by ensuring that the face value of gold coins was equal to their intrinsic worth. The authority of the sign was therefore a sign of authority, bearing testimony to the commanding presence of the sovereign whose image it bore, whose likeness it reflected.”29 However, royal authority was not the only element threatened by the proliferation of counterfeits, nor was it the only cultural authority undergirding the monetary sign. While ultimate authority rested with the minting power of the state, the value of a coin is also reaffirmed by its circulation, a point Marx explores at length in part 1 of the first volume of *Capital*: “Since [money] is a transiently objectified reflection of the prices of commodities, it serves only as a symbol of itself, and can therefore be replaced by another symbol.”30 If a coin’s “functional existence . . . absorbs its material existence” through its circulation, as Marx insists, then the value of money is constituted by both the issuing authority and through its “objective social validity.”31

Since value is constituted by the collective belief in the intrinsic substantive value of the object and the inscription testifying its value, as well as by what Marx called the *perpetuum mobile* of circulation, the counterfeit could always potentially act like real money. As Jacques Derrida has provocatively remarked of valuation in a monetary economy, “Counterfeit money can become true capital. Is not the truth of capital, then, inasmuch as it produces interest without labor, by *working all by itself* as we say, counterfeit money? Is there a real difference here between real and counterfeit money once there is capital? And credit?.”32 In this context,
it is important to note Foucault’s emphasis on the importance of circulation as a physiological metaphor in the signifying system of money, “at all events it is the state’s authority alone that can give [metal] currency; and redistributed among private persons (in the form of pensions, salaries, or remuneration for provisions bought by the state), it will stimulate, in its second, arterial circuit, exchanges of wealth, manufactures, and agriculture.” When Marx urges us to consider the mutable value of money, he does so by way of the counterfeit: “Money as the measure of value is not expressed in amounts of bullion, but rather in accounting money, arbitrary names for fractional parts of a specific amount of the money-substance. These names can be changed, the relation of the coin to its metallic substance can be changed, while the name remains the same. Hence counterfeiting, which plays a great role in the history of states.” Counterfeiting, in this sense, is only possible because, as Marx suggests above, money’s “functional existence . . . absorbs its material existence,” allowing the unrecognized counterfeit to circulate and to sustain unquestioned social validity. In the logic of the common biopolitical trope of money as blood circulating and sustaining the life of the nation, the counterfeit threatened to poison the realm of exchanges well beyond the sovereign’s administration of symbols.

MINTING THE KING’S IMAGE: CHARLES I ON COINAGE

Charles was presented with a unique set of circumstances under which he had to forge monetary policy. Like his predecessors, Charles’s treatment of coinage reflects the growing pressure to make the mint profitable by minting an attenuated or debased currency; and yet, like his father, Charles largely resisted recommendations to degrade the coinage in order to resolve his mounting financial difficulties. Demonstrating his dedication to a stable and intrinsically sound currency, in a series of proclamations Charles renewed the focus on various “abuses” of the coin including counterfeiting and clipping. The 1627 “A Proclamation for the Better Execution of the Office of His Majesties Exchanger, and Reformation of Sundry Abuses and Fraudes Practiced on His Majesties Coynes” outlines the factors contributing to the debasement of the currency, including clipping, counterfeiting, melting, and foreign transport. Largely addressed to practices specific to goldsmiths and other metal workers for whom abuses of the coinage were opportunistic crimes that became more attractive when the condition of the currency fluctuated, the proclamation
reiterates the statutes of James I and Elizabeth I concerning foreign transport of precious metals and illicit melting. Additional the proclamation reasserts the sovereign’s authority to determine counterfeit from genuine in spheres of production adjacent to coinage:

Forasmuch as it is impossible, but that the rates and prices of Gold and Silver in Our Mint, or Exchanges will bee exceeded, and the same not to bee prevented, so long as we shall or may be given for the bringing in, selling or venting of any false, deceitfull or counterfeit Golde or Silver, Plate, Vessel, Wier, spangles, Oaes Gold or Silver threed, Lace, Rings, Spoones, Bodkins, or other Manufacturies, being not made, wrought, or sold according to the Standard of Our Mynt, or the Gold-smiths Hall, contrary to divers Lawes and Proclamations heretofore enacted and published for redresse of the same; Wee doe therefore will and command, That no such false, deceitfull or counterfeit Stuffe, or Manufacturie whatsoever, of Gold or Silver, lesse in fineness, or standard then Our Moneys of Gold or Silver be made, wrought, vented, sold, or imported within, or into Our said Realme of England, or any other our Dominions.

As monetary and minting policymakers developed more sophisticated measures for standardizing or alternately manipulating the value of coinage, it became more and more important that the valuation of precious metals came under the sway of royal determinations. In light of these centripetal determinations of value, counterfeiting becomes what is “not made, wrought, or sold according to the Standard of Our Mynt, or the Gold-smiths Hall.”

Contemporary discourses on money echo the proclamation’s concern over the space of authority in relation to a wide array of material representations of value. One such example is Rice Vaughan’s *A Discourse of Coin and Coinage: The First Invention, Use, Matter, Forms, Proportions and Differences, Ancient and Modern: With the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Rise and Fall Thereof, in Our Own or Neighboring Nations: And the Reasons*, composed between 1630 and 1635 and often cited as the earliest extended treatise on money. In his recommendations, Vaughan articulates his concerns about counterfeiting through an examination of various methods of minting coins (hammer-
ing, molding, and milling) that might help avoid the practice of counterfeiting. Vaughan points to France’s minting techniques where the milling process had been implemented and argues for the advantages of milled edges: “the [counterfeit] piece will instantly be discovered, because the Moneys made in the Mill will always be equal and of like volume . . . which cannot be the case with Moneys made with the Hammer.” Though milling did not become a common minting practice until the second half of the seventeenth century, Vaughan’s argument for the adoption of French milling techniques stresses the metaphorical value of the inscription on the coin over its material substance and ties the coin’s appearance to its social validity through circulation. He continues, “Neither can [milled coins] be clipped, but that the exposer thereof will be discovered, taken and punished . . . [In France [with milled coins], the perfect representation of the King’s Image seems] to have been retained, and terrified the Clippers.” A stronger inscription, Vaughan implies, would serve to enlarge royal authority, striking fear into those manipulating sovereign declarations of value through a more lifelike representation which would in turn terrify would-be counterfeiters.

Whether or not Charles sought to strike fear into those who might abuse the coin through the deployment of his own image, we cannot know. His monetary policies, however, are dominated by a remarkably refined concern with his own representation on coinage. Consequently, Charles was extremely dissatisfied when the first coinage that carried his portrait in 1625 turned out to be less than flattering. One numismatist has described this first set of coins wrought by the mint’s chief engravers, John Gilbert and Edward Greene, in the following terms: “the facial angle is unpleasant, and the composition set awkwardly . . . [T]he king is riding on a long-bodied and short-legged horse, much caparisoned, with a ridiculous plume of ostrich feathers above its rump. Charles is brandishing a sword in an ungainly way, so as to make one fear for the charger’s ears, and his big ruff looks inappropriate above his armour.” Lois Potter’s contention that “it is important to realize how completely, until his death, Charles I was a king of images rather than words” who actively “internalised the symbols of royalty” helps explain why he sought to quickly make a better impression.

Charles first responded by appointing Abraham Vanderdort in 1625 and later Nicholas Briot in 1626 as the “Keeper of the King’s Image.” Although Vanderdort’s embossing earned Charles’s approval, its high relief was impractical and made “a general
production run out of the question,” according to C. E. Challis, the renowned historian of the Royal Mint.44 Charles apparently looked to Briot not only for his artistic talent but also for his minting credentials.45 Dubbed the Anthony Van Dyck of medallic art, Briot served as chief engineer of the Paris Mint and was hired to oversee the design and production of Charles’s image on coins and special medals.46 In his charge to Briot, Charles associates the problem of counterfeiting with his lackluster representation on the recent issues: “Whereas the king found by experience that the graver of his moneys was not at all times and places provided with such good and proportionable forms and patterns of his effigy as were necessary to frame imitate and conform his irons and stamps for all coins, and that the imperfection and inequalities that appeared in the fabrication of the said moneys, besides their deformity, caused and offered facility and boldness unto false minters to counterfeit all sorts of money.”47

The status of the minting authority, like the complexity of the ideological signs its sends into circulation as representations of value, rapidly came into crisis during the first days of the Civil War. Parliament moved very early in the hostilities—nearly two weeks before Charles raised his forces at Nottingham—to seize the Tower Mint on 10 August 1642 and continued to hammer the king’s coins.48 Charles, who by chance had already established provincial mints in Oxford, Aberystwyth, York, and elsewhere, reestablished his mint at Oxford where most royalist coinage was hammered during the war.49 After the regicide, Parliament immediately called for new coinage. “An Act touching on the Moneys and Coyns of England” was issued in July 1649: “Whereas the Ordering of Moneys and Coyns, and setting the same at such valuations and prizes as shal be thought convenient and necessary, is appropriate and of right belonging to the Soveraign and Suprem Authority of this Commonwealth; And the Parliament having Resolved to change and alter the former Stamps, Arms, Pictures, with the Motto’s, Words, Stiles and Inscriptions in and about the same, and to cause new Coyns of Gold and Silver to be made of several Stamps, Weights and Values, but of one uniform Standard and Allay.”50 Significantly, the new Commonwealth coinage did not depict any person; instead the coins were “stamped on one side with the Cross, and a Palm and Lawrel” with the inscription, “The Commonwealth of England.” The reverse side depicted “the Cross and Harp” with the inscription “God with us.” Nicknamed “breeches money,” Commonwealth coinage was so plainly drawn that one historian characterized the coins “as plain a set of coins as ever appeared.”51
Royalist sympathizers were less kind in their reaction to the new issue, playing on the metaphorical status of the king’s portrait and its removal to remind people of the violent literalism in the case of Charles. For example, in the tract “A Hue and Crie after Cromwell or, The Cities Lamentation for the Losse of their Coyne and Conscience,” Royalists associate liberty with the symbolic repression of their now-beheaded king on the coin. In a Royalist poem from 1654, Cromwell, whose image never actually appeared on coins in circulation though patterns were made, is compared to a brass farthing, a coin common during the Civil War period and essentially worthless even as a promissory marker:

What’s a Protector he’s a stately thing  
That Apes it in the non-age of a King.  
A Tragic Actor, Caesar in a Clowne  
He’s a brass farthing, stamped with a Crowne.

A counterfeited piece like on it shows  
Charles his Effigies with a Copper nose.52

Here the coin’s image operates to both signify value as well as cultural memory. The register of coinage and in particular the accusation of counterfeiting presents an opportunity to interrupt the manufacturing of official memory and the determination of value, derailing what Foucault called the “deferred exchange” at the heart of monetary representation.53

**THE KING’S COUNTERFEIT:**  
**AUTHORITY RECAST IN EIKONOKLASTES**

The popular circulation of Charles I’s image after the January 1649 execution could not be interrupted as easily or as effectively as his likeness and inscription were removed from the Commonwealth coins. As Laura Knoppers and others have shown, after the regicide a resilient “cult of royal martyrdom” developed around the fallen king, his trial, and his last days in prison before the execution.54 The circulation of Royalist texts mourning, defending, and celebrating the martyr-king cultivated this response and represented a significant threat to the Commonwealth government who had, by all accounts, “seriously miscalculated the effects of the public execution.”55 Claiming to manifest the meditations of the fallen king from his solitary prison cell, *Eikon Basilike* rep-
resents a preemptive attempt to control the symbolic economy of kingship. Recording what were supposed to be the king’s thoughts on the civil turmoil that characterized his reign and his final meditations upon death, *Eikon Basilike* offers a portrait of Charles I that would dominate cultural discourses and inform the prevailing cultural memory of the king. As a textual monument to a pious martyr-king, the “King’s Book” presents Charles as a victim of unauthorized and illegal persecution at the hands of a factious Parliament controlled by religious zealots and mercenary politicians. Charles positions himself as a king who, notwithstanding these extraordinary circumstances, not only possesses the ability to rule but also has been instilled with the authority from the Divine to do so. Echoing Charles’s astonishment and famous disavowal of the Westminster High Court’s authority, *Eikon Basilike* repeatedly demonstrates similar dismay that actions could be taken “before they are stamped with the authority of lawes, which they cannot well have without my consent.”56

*Eikon Basilike* was the most influential piece of Royalist propaganda published immediately following the execution. It owes its success to both its propitious timing—it probably began circulating at the execution at Whitehall-Gate—and its textual hybridity. Richard Helgerson observes that while the print condition of *Eikon Basilike* facilitated its unprecedented distribution, the text is “more a performance, though a very private (even internal) performance, than a printed book.”57 The influence of the text is beyond question. However, I would like to qualify Helgerson’s suggestion that “never before had the words of an English monarch reached so many people,” in order to note that money had long offered a space for the articulation of the sovereign’s authority.58 Coinage represented an important space that registered shifts in political power, and its tropes tend to become common currency in engagements with and in the deployment of authority. The ideological debates spawned by the “King’s Book” adopt a structure similar to the symbolic economy at work in money. Considering what was at stake during the early days of the Commonwealth—the authority to determine value, the circulation of representations and narratives, the production and distribution of images and texts—it comes as no surprise that arguments on both sides of the ideological rift are shot through with the language of money.

This vocabulary is abundantly clear in the first printed refutation of *Eikon Basilike*: the “King’s Book” is a counterfeit. Published in August 1649, the anonymous author of *Eikon Alethine* (the
“Truthful Image”) aims to “undeceive the World” of the “Truths most sacred Majesty truly suffering, though not solely” by asserting that Charles I did not write *Eikon Basilike*. In her study of royalist literature of the period, Potter explains that *Eikon Alethine* “depicts the discovery of the *true* author in dramatic terms,” a point clearly illustrated by its frontispiece, which features “an unseen hand lifting a curtain to reveal a Doctor of Divinity.” She remarks, “[T]he book is simply a performance by a bad actor impersonating a king.” Accordingly, the complete title of *Eikon Alethine* reveals the book’s aim: to expose “THE POURTRAITURE of Truths most sacred Majesty truly suffering, though not solely. Where in the false colours are washed off, wherewith the Painter-steiener had bedawbed truth, the late king and the Parliaments, in his counterfeit Piece entitled *Eikon Basilike*.” Clearly drawing on the cultural status of illicit representations of royalty, the preface compares the author of the “King’s Book” to the counterfeiter whose conduct, consequently, should be deemed traitorous:

and that he might with his counterfeit colours set off a deformed cause, hath been bold to traduce his dead . . . dread Soveraign, and represent him to all, who have but the least knowledge of addairs under the notion of a notorious Forger, and Superlatively cunning Hypocrite. But if he that counterfeits the Stamp, or debases the Coin be accounted a Traytor amongst most if not all Nations? What better Title is due to this counterfeiter of the Person of a Prince, and debaser of the reputation of a Parilament, to cheat the world? Give me leave therefore to present to your view the Author, before the Treatise; one both presumptuous and crafty, cunning in his presumption, and bold in his craft.

The author of *Eikon Alethine* explicitly relies on the rhetoric of coinage to classify the book as a counterfeit. As counterfeiter, the author of the “King’s Book” should be held accountable. Like the counterfeiter of coins, the “notorious Forger” has injured the reader, the authentic issuing authority, and consequently the “world.” But the strength of the fervid assertion that *Eikon Basili- like* is the product of a counterfeiter impersonating the voice of the dead king also represents the denunciation’s weakness. Potter has suggested that since the text was “unable to give a real name or face to the Divine he was attacking,” its own “Truthful’ Image was no truer than the one it attempted to replace.” Indeed, the
origin of the word “counterfeit” foregrounds the need to compare the false copy with the genuine or original. But what is even more questionable about the force of *Eikon Alethine*’s accusation is the fact that even if Charles was not the author of *Eikon Basilike*, the book still held value to royalist supporters whose sentimental attachment to the idea of the king as a martyr could endure questions about the text’s production history.

Unlike *Eikon Alethine*, Milton’s answer to the “King’s Book,” published early in October 1649, does not offer an extended consideration of *Eikon Basilike* as a forgery. Instead, in *Eikonoklastes*, it is Charles who is the counterfeit and the counterfeiter. Commissioned by Cromwell’s Council of State in the days surrounding the Parliament’s passage of “An Act for the Abolishing the Kingly Office in England and Ireland, and the Dominions,” Milton’s mandate in writing *Eikonoklastes* is clear: blot out the image of Charles I as martyr-king by offering what amounts to a line by line refutation of *Eikon Basilike*. Interestingly, in the polemic Milton uses the word “counterfeit” five times—more often than in any other text he wrote. Milton had already associated Charles’s crimes with those of the counterfeiter when he defended the regicide in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) by quoting the Eclogue, “And Constantinus Leo, another Emperor, in the Byzantine Laws saith, *that the end of a King is for the general good, which he not performing is but the counterfeit of a King.*”64 But more significant than the use of the word is the underlying argument of Milton’s polemic, an argument that draws Charles’s authority into question by way of the counterfeit and recasts notions of how authority might be constituted through a reworking of the symbolic economy underwriting state authority over representations.

As Milton explains throughout the prose tract, the “King’s Book” had been widely used as a tool of deception “to corrupt and disorder the mindes of weaker men, by new suggestions and narrations, either falsely or fallaciously representing the state of things, to the dishonour of this present Government, and the retarding of a generall peace.”65 Milton emphasizes the falseness of Charles’s image—not the book itself—in order to unfold its counterfeit construction and thus undercut the “aw and rever-ence to his Person” (p. 394). Throughout the polemic Milton’s analysis of *Eikon Basilike* is couched in the rhetoric of counterfeiting, marshaling the various meanings of the word glossed above. The “missaying[sl]” of the “King’s Book” will be clear, Milton contends, once his readers can see the distinction between Charles I’s words and deeds: “But if these his fair spok’n words shall be
heer fairly confronted and laid parallel to his own farr differing deeds, manifest and visible to the whole Nation, then surely we may look on them who notwithstanding shall persist to give to bare words more credit then to op’n deeds, as men whose judgement was not evinc’d and perswaded, but fatally stupifi’d and bewitch’d, into such a binde and obstinate beleef" (pp. 346–7). Like one revealing the staging supporting a “Masking Scene,” Milton associates Charles’s book with the implements of theatrical disguise: his book is clothed in “a new Protestant guise, and trimmly garnish’d over,” and the king “dresses out for him[self]” a shrine (pp. 342, 339, 343). The deviousness of the king’s “Art” resonates in his “cunning fetches to undermine our Liberties” (p. 344). Beyond the obvious ornamentation of the king, Charles is seen as a supremely bad actor performing the role of king with the “general voice of the people almost hissing him and his ill-acted regality off the Stage” (p. 355). Likewise, the king’s supporters are regarded as actors “whose chief study was to finde out which way the King inclin’d, and to imitate him exactly” (pp. 350–1). For Milton, the inadequacy of the performance is abundantly clear: “quaint Emblems and devices begg’d from the old Pageantry of some Twelf-nights entertainment at Whitehall, will doe but ill to make a Saint or Martyr” (p. 343).

Charles’s greatest scene, depicted in the frontispiece image of the king praying, comes under the greatest scrutiny. According to Milton, this act along with the prayers reproduced within the “King’s Book” are examples of counterfeiting. The outward appearance of devotion and charity does not correspond to the materials of “Tyranny” and “Hypocrisy” that really lie behind the image. The “device of the Kings Picture” and his “cunning” words seduce the reader into believing in the substantive value of the “thing” that the image is said to represent. Moreover, Charles’s praying is regarded as false piety: “But he who from such a kind of Psalmistry, or any other verbal Devotion, without the pledge and earnest of suitable deeds, can be perswaded of a zeale, and true righteousness in the person, hath much yet to learn; and knows not that the deepest policy of a Tyrant hath bin ever to counterfet Religious” (pp. 360–1). The contents of Charles’s prayers come under scrutiny on these grounds: “In praying therfore, and in the outward work of Devotion, this King wee see hath not at all exceeded the worst of Kings before him. But herein the worst of Kings, professing Christianism, have far exceed him. They, for ought we know, have still pray’d thir own, or least borrow’d from fitt Authors” (p. 362). The suggestion that Charles cannot
even pray honestly figures as an accusation of plagiarism; yet, it is Charles’s false representation of knowledge of the Divine that provokes the accusation of counterfeiting. Milton declares that in pretending to have access to such knowledge, Charles counterfeits his proximity to God: “But his reading declares it well to be a fals copy which he uses; dispensing oft’n to his own bad deeds and sucesses the testimony of Divine favour, and to the good deeds and successes of other men, Divine wrath and vengeance. But to counterfeit the hand of God is the boldest of all Forgery” (p. 564).

The king’s counterfeit piety is a crime against God, but Milton frames this occurrence of the word “counterfet” within the categorical indictment of all tyrants. By shaping public opinion through such falsity, Milton suggests that Charles attempted to arrange a signifyng system like that of coinage. Try as he might, “the King by his leave cannot coine English as he could Money, to be current” (p. 393). Charles, asserting to possess divine enlightenment, imitates the devout and faithful who do possess such an understanding. Milton, comparing himself with Zorobabel, the deliverer of truth and freedom for Jerusalem, positions Charles along with other “wicked Kings and Tyrants [who] counterfeit” the sword of justice and who “shall be found the highest transgres-sor” of justice (pp. 584–5).66

Charting such rhetorical coordinates allows Milton to call out the image of Charles in *Eikon Basilike* as a counterfeit, a tactic that interrogates valuation in a manner unlike more traditional iconoclastic gestures. While Milton perspicuously describes a rather ridiculously outfitted Charles so “drest up” and “trimmly garnish’d over” that only the blind and foolish should be convinced, the preceding nine months during the height of *Eikon Basilike*’s popularity evinced otherwise (p. 339). Because the “King’s Book” had engendered “a civil kinde of Idolatry,” the reader and the king are the subject of Milton’s polemic (p. 343). Accordingly, in Charles’s writing of *Eikon Basilike* Milton suggests that it is “no marvel that he goes on building many faire and pious conclusions upon false and wicked premises, which deceive the common Reader not well discerning the antipathy of such connexions” (p. 373). Milton would later describe his intentions in *The Second Defence* as ceasing the circulation of a counterfeit for the good of the public: “there appeared a book attributed to the King, and plainly written with great malice against Parliament. Bidden to reply to this, I opposed to the *Eikon* the *Eikonklastes*, not, I am falsely charged, ‘insulting the departed spirit of the
King,’ but thinking that Queen Truth should be preferred to King Charles.”67 It is important to recognize that by opposing “Queen Truth . . . to King Charles,” Milton makes a greater intervention in contemporary debates about representation and authority than his iconoclastic gesture of “Eikonklast” versus “Eikon.”

Scholars have long pondered the difficulties inherent in iconoclastic discourses.68 As W. J. T. Mitchell makes clear in his excellent study, “[O]ne might argue that iconoclasm is simply the obverse of idolatry, that it is nothing more than idolatry turned outward toward the image of a rival, threatening tribe. The iconoclast prefers to think that he worships no images of any sort.”69 The typical maneuvers of iconoclasm involve what Mitchell describes as “a rhetoric of exclusion and domination,” which in Milton’s case, as Helgerson points out, positions him in “something of [a] sovereign office.”70 This assumption of a privileged position in the act of setting the terms of what should and should not be worshiped, valued, or even recognized is part of the logic of iconoclasm. In the typical scheme, the iconoclast draws “a caricature of the other as one who is involved in irrational, obscene behavior from which (fortunately) we are exempt.”71 Yet in the narrow reading of Exodus 20:4’s forbiddance of “any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth,” language itself becomes part of the problem.72 As Mitchell notes, “[T]he prohibition against graven images can, of course, be extended to the word insofar as it is a representation. Thus, the name of God cannot be spoken or, even more to the point, written down.”73 Moreover, to relocate or replace the icon under interrogation with a new icon or a new source of authority other than God would make the iconoclast equally susceptible to charges of idolatry.74

By blending the rhetoric of an iconoclastic regime with the economy of the counterfeit, Milton’s text demonstrates the shrewd understanding that the iconoclast is always working in the realm of the reception of icons. Whether it is Charles’s image in the Eikon Basilike or a Buddhist statue, the iconoclastic gesture of violently attacking the object to diminish its influence over the viewer implicitly elevates the icon. A different logic governs the act of calling out the counterfeit. To recognize a counterfeit, to attempt to stop its circulation as an object of substantive value, involves examining the entire signifying system. As Walter Benjamin notes in a different, though not entirely unrelated, context, “[T]he authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.”75 The chal-
lengi is to rip the historical testimony from the narrative control of the sovereign. So far as Charles is a counterfeit of a king, his historical testimony is fraudulent. Thus, following Benjamin for a moment, in its very reproduction, this historical testimony of the king’s image is “jeopardized by reproduction.”

It is from this understanding of how images circulate and gain authority that Milton unfolds a critique that extends well beyond the dead king in order to stop the circulation of Charles’s image and to inaugurate a new regime of signs. Speaking directly to Charles’s self-presentation as a martyr, Milton interrogates the idea in terms of its representation: “But Martyrs bear witness to the truth, not to themselves. If I beare witness of my self, saith Christ, my witness is not true. He who writes himself Martyr by his own inscription, is like an ill Painter, who, by writing on the shapeless Picture which he hath drawn, is fain to tell passengers what shape it is: which els no man could imagin: no more then how a Martyrdom can belong to him, who therfore dyes for his Religion because it is establisht” (p. 575). Like the disfigured coins Charles rejected on sight, Milton dismisses the king’s final saintly portrait. Yet unlike the coins, which were held to standards of realistic representation, Milton insists that the rules for drawing a martyrdom stem from a long history of religious examples. It is the perspective that is most important here: illustrations of martyrdom are never self-portraits.

By drawing on the logic of the counterfeit, by preferring “Queen Truth . . . to King Charles,” Milton is able to recast larger notions of valuation, economic, social, and religious. The shattering of Charles as idol is hard to miss in the caustic polemic, but Milton’s attack had even greater ramifications insofar as he was attacking the very issuing authority. The vocabulary of money further concentrates this critique on the corrupt source of that image and the king’s authority itself. More specifically, the focus on coinage draws attention to Charles’s keen interest in determining value, his narcissistic fascination with coinage, and his embattled reign over economic representation. The accusation of counterfeiting had the distinct advantage over iconoclasm alone, which, like efforts to devalue the “King’s Book” by calling it a counterfeit or forgery, place only a single instance of Charles’s authority into question. His book is false. His prayers are plagiarized. These accusations would have had the effect of merely drawing the individual speech act into suspicion as a counterfeit, while leaving the language of Royal authority intact. The singularity that usually characterizes the regime of iconoclasm means that the iconoclastic maneuver must be repeated again and again—to the
delight as well as distress of the iconoclast whose job is never complete.

By drawing attention to the function of the counterfeit in *Eikonoklastes*, I do not mean to suggest that the accusation of counterfeiting supplants the iconoclastic thrust of the text. In fact, in their confrontation with systems of signification and valuation, iconoclasm and calling out a counterfeit are mutually reinforcing strategies. The religious dimension of idolatry gives the transgression of counterfeiting a moral exigency that, according to Gaskill, the term and practice lacked. I am, however, suggesting that the rhetoric and logic of the counterfeit that pervades and indeed structures Milton’s polemic opens a creative space for revaluation that is particularly important in a postrevolutionary context. To call the king a poor actor and to accuse him of manufacturing a counterfeit parliament is one thing, and it quite clearly facilitates an iconoclastic attack within the context of Protestant ideology. But it also quite unexpectedly restructures the terms in which performance, historical testimony, and representation are rendered.

The counterfeit intervenes here with democratizing effects, and the determination of value emerges from outside the realm of the sovereign. The act of calling out a counterfeit taps into a system of valuation established by the king himself while at once overturning previous notions of who had the power to determine value. The logic of the counterfeit is distinct from the structure of iconoclasm because it relies on the dialectical constitution of value from both “intrinsic” determination of value and the value garnered through circulation or exchange. Royal authority, like the social character of a coin, depended on the circulation of its constituted representations as much as its ground-level administration of power. To recognize the counterfeiting of the king, then, is to recognize that the power of Royalist imagery was found in its circulation. Calling something a counterfeit is distinct from branding something an idol worthy of destruction, because the designation of something as counterfeit entails both the devaluation or destruction and the subsequent reallocation of authority through a gesture to the noncounterfeit. Unlike iconoclasm, calling something a counterfeit permits the relocation of authority, allowing the author of the accusation to reposition or reassert a specific source of authority by which the counterfeit is compared and valuated as “counterfeit” and “false.” Calling something a counterfeit is not prefigured by the ideology of iconoclasm that must relocate authority in God. The first half of the dialectic of claiming the king counterfeit involves this dismissal and destruc-
tion of the deceitful misrepresentation. The second half of the dialectic becomes clear when Milton posits the false image against the authority of the people.

In *Eikonoklastes* it is the authority of the people to underwrite the crown. Milton argues that Charles took an oath promising he would “be as liable and obedient to suffer right, as others of his people” (p. 592). Milton further describes the people’s relationship to the king:

> all Laws both of God and Man are made without exemption of any person whomsoever; and that if Kings presume to overtopp the Law by which they raigne for the public good, they are by Law to be reduc’d into order: and that can no way be more justly, then by those who exalted them to that high place. For who should better understand thir own Laws, and when they are transgrest, then they who are govern’d by them, and whose consent first made them: and who can have more right to take knowledge of things don within a free Nation, then they within themselves? (p. 592)

Milton clearly claims that the king’s authority is predicated on the will and authority of the people. Charles’s counterfeiting is seen in terms of a crime against the people: “As for the truth and sinceritie which he praies may be alwaies found in those his Declarations to the people, the contrariety of his own actions will bear eternal witness how little carefull or sollicitous he was, what he promis’d, or what he uttered there” (p. 469). Milton playfully deploys the word “utter,” indicating both speech and putting into circulation, as one would currency. When the king himself transgresses this authority, when he should appear to seem as he is not, when his rule becomes “a fals counterfet of that impartial and Godlike virtue” as Charles’s had, it is the responsibility of the people to punish the transgression of their authority (p. 346).

Just as the coin is minted and stamped with the authoritative mark of the sovereign that signifies the value of the coin, the kingship is minted by the people, and they stamp the value of the king through their decree. Milton delineates the authority of the people in the following passage: “Thos objected Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy we swore, not to his Person, but as it was invested with his Autority; and his autority was by the People first giv’n him conditionally, in Law and under Law, and under Oath also for Kingdoms good, and not otherwise . . . which he hath
every way brok’n; and having broken, the ancient Crown-Oath of 
Alfred [articulating the status of the kingship as ‘above the law’] 
. . . conceals not his penalty” (pp. 592–3). Charles, however, has 
taken it upon himself to counterfeit the image that the people 
have crafted of kingship. In creating his own image, an image that 
fails to correspond to the image shaped under the authority of 
the people, Charles has counterfeited kingship itself. The people’s 
conditional approval, Milton’s logic implies, can be renounced in 
a similar manner to the way coinage can be demonetized once it 
fails to signify for the current regime.

NOTES

in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 

2 In her work on the spectacle of Charles’s martyrdom, Laura Lunger 
Knoppers asserts that “John Milton set out to break down the image of the 
martyr-king, to replace false spectacle with true martyrdom as witness to 
God alone” (*Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration 
England* [Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994], p. 14). Locating the crux of 
Milton’s response to the *Eikon Basilike* in his assault on the king’s representa-
tion of “the Foxean tradition of martyrdom,” she suggests that “[t]o Charles’s 
false, theatrical martyrdom. Milton opposes his own witness to the truth, 
a revised and reconstituted kind of martyrdom” (p. 27). Similarly, Florence 
Sandler traces Milton’s iconoclasm and Charles’s alleged idolatry through 
*Eikonoklastes* to offer a reading that reveals the complexity of iconoclastic 
projects (“Icon and Iconoclast,” in *Achievements of the Left Hand*, ed. Mi-
chael Lieb and John T. Shawcross [Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 
1974], pp. 160–84). Additionally, Achsah Guibbory offers an inquiry into the 
spectacle of Charles to imagine the aesthetic consequences of Milton’s 
participation in the Protestant ideology of iconoclasm; she contends that the 
devastating polemic demonstrates “Milton struggling with . . . questions about 
artistic creation” (“Charles’s Prayers, Idolatrous Images, and True Creation in 
Milton’s *Eikonoklastes*,” in *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and 
His World*, ed. P. G. Stanwood [Binghamton NY: Medieval and Renaissance 
Texts and Studies, 1995], pp. 283–94, 285). Guibbory further claims that 
Milton “exposes Charles as an idolater . . . and as a bad artist, incapable 
of originality” (p. 288). Pressing this question of originality, Elisabeth M. 
Magnus directs attention to Milton’s engagement with the Protestant “ethic 
of originality” and positions the polemicist’s attack in terms of plagiarism 
and imitation. Part of this attack on imitation, she suggests, might have 
precluded Milton from using some of the rhetorical techniques employed by 
his contemporaries who condemned the regicide (“Originality and Plagiarism 
Blair McKnight interestingly regards Milton’s failure in *Eikonoklastes* as a


4 As Thomas Corns has suggested, “the size of [Eikon Basilike’s] readership and the vigour with which the new ascendancy both answered and suppressed it indicate its potent impact on the consciousness of the political nation” (Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640–1660 [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], p. 81).

5 Scholars who recognize the importance of Milton’s iconoclastic argument still debate the effectiveness of Milton’s multifaceted attack on the “King’s Book.” David Loewenstein places Samson Agonistes and Eikonoklastes in conversation in order to understand the nuances of Milton’s project. My argument builds most directly upon Loewenstein’s assertion that Milton “refashions” the image of Charles to suggest that Milton’s method of prescribing the “new mode of social vision” is predicated on a restructuring of authority in Eikonoklastes (“‘Casting Down Imaginations’: Milton as Iconoclast.” Criticism 31, 3 [Summer 1989]: 253–70, 253).

6 Lana Cable, “Milton’s Iconoclastic Truth,” in Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose, ed. Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 135–51, 135. See Cable for an exceptional argument that urges scholars to consider iconoclasm beyond its reactionary appearance. My argument follows her suggestion that Milton’s iconoclasm takes creative and destructive forms.

7 Loewenstein, p. 253. Not all commentators agree with such a broadly understood significance. See, for example, Corns who contends, “Kingship as such is not the issue: this king and the punishment of this king are” (p. 208).


9 Hoxby rightly asserts, “[E]conomic discourse could place pressure on traditional categories of thought and established genres precisely because it was associated with a powerful new way of seeing and describing the world,
one whose ramifications stretched far beyond narrow questions of commerce” (p. 5). Furthermore, Hoxby makes a convincing argument that Milton was not only fascinated by the “new economic discourse” of the seventeenth century but also “could be more creative and radical in his use of economic principles than were some of his fellow republicans, even if they are better known for their emphasis on trade and productivity” (p. 13).


14 Despite the coin’s potentially unstable relationship to actual value, coinage, or more specifically representation of authority through coinage, held a considerable advantage over representation of authority in print. As Richard Helgerson rightly observes of print’s ascendancy to authority in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, “though print served to represent a transcendentally stable (and thus presumably authoritative) self, it at the same time made that self liable to hostile interpretation and even rejection. Print thus endangered the very claims to power that it was being used to make” (“Milton Reads the King’s Book: Print, Performance, and the Making of a Bourgeois Idol,” Criticism 29, 1 [Winter 1987]: 1–25, 6). By its very nature the coin’s success or failure as a coin depends on limiting possible interpretations.


18 OED, 2d edn., s.v. “counterfeit,” adj. 1, 2.

19 Will Fisher has shown how counterfeiting operates within a sexual economy as well (“Queer Money,” ELH 66, 1 [Spring 1999]: 1–24).

20 See Sir Robert Chambers, A Course of Lectures on the English Law: Delivered at the University of Oxford, 1767–1773, ed. Thomas M. Curley, 2 vols. (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 2:349–66. See also W. S. Holdsworth, A History of English Law, 2d edn., 12 vols. (London: Methuen, 1938), 2:496–8. These statutes were significantly extended in 1696–97 when “making, mending, concealing, or having in one’s possession tools for coining, taking such tools from the Mint, and colouring or guilding coin resembling the current coin, were declared to be treason” (Holdsworth, 6:400).
Shakespeare draws on the language of counterfeiting in order to underscore the sovereign’s power. The word “counterfeit,” in one form or another, appears some seventy-four other times in Shakespeare’s corpus, most frequently (ten times) in the fifth act of *Henry IV Part I*. Famously, Douglas, approaching Henry, thinks he has found another “counterfeit” King: “What art thou / That counterfeit’st the person of a King” (V.iv.27–8). Later, Falstaff admits feigning his own death, exclaiming, “‘Sblood, ‘twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me, scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man” (V.iv.113–7).

Gaskill’s comments are made within his argument that what he calls “coining” (that is, “offences against the coinage”) was considerably widespread in the early modern period. Gaskill contends that “there were simply too many ordinary people in England whose attitudes towards the laws against coining were as ambivalent as their attachment to the new religious settlement” and that there was little incentive for the public to abide by laws against abuses of the coin because coining “was forbidden solely because the law had declared it so” (pp. 126, 128). He further points out that the punishments of coiners were “not seen as occasions when ordinary people could participate in any obvious victory over Satan. The vital moral and dramatic elements were absent” (p. 128). By grouping all “offenses against the coinage,” Gaskill’s suggestion that “coining” was widespread is probably accurate. But in terms of the specific abuse of counterfeiting, a great number of barriers, including tools and difficulty of passing a counterfeit (which Gaskill himself points to), contribute to the possibility that of all “abuses” to the coin, counterfeiting was rare.

Gaskill’s conclusions should be considered in the context of debates among historians regarding precisely how pervasive the counterfeiting of coins was during the early modern period. According to R. W. Heinze, as early as Edward VI’s and Mary’s respective reigns, “Henry VIII’s debasement had significantly lowered the bullion content of coins, but it had only slightly reduced their weight. Because the coins were valued at a rate considerably exceeding the actual value of the bullion in the coins, counterfeiting became profitable and widespread” (*The Proclamations of the Tudor Kings* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976], pp. 212–3). Sir Albert Feavearyear argues that when Elizabeth took the throne in 1558, “there was an uncertain quantity of counterfeit money which could not be distinguished from good” (*The Pound Sterling: A History of English Money*, 2d edn., [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963], p. 76). He also suggests that Elizabeth “had not found a method of defeating the clipper and counterfeiter, and in spite of the various Acts of Parliament [5 Eliz, c. 11; 14 Eliz., c. 3; 18 Eliz., c. 1] which made their offences treason, they continued as active as ever. By the end of the century they had once more driven down the value of money below the value of the standard weight of silver, and the Mint has again lapsed into inactivity” (p. 86). In his excellent history of Tudor coinage, Challis is dubious of the claim that counterfeiting
was “widespread” during the Tudor period. Instead, Challis suggests that the scarcity of coins in circulation would make a counterfeit readily apparent: “as coins passed from hand to hand they were given fairly close scrutiny, particularly as, even without resorting to the balance or the assay, a good deal could be ascertained about the genuineness of a coin by consideration of its size, thickness, design and colour” (Challis, *The Tudor Coinage*, p. 293). Challis also cites the hermetic nature of Tudor communities and argues that a man who suddenly appeared to possess a great amount of wealth was often suspected of counterfeiting.


28 Cotton’s rhetoric takes what has become known as Gresham’s Law—that is, “bad” money will “drive out” “good” money, or in Edwin Seligman’s words, “whenever a coin is worth appreciably more as bullion than as money it will disappear from circulation”—into the realm of social and political order (Edwin Robert Anderson Seligman, *Principles of Economics: With Special Reference to American Conditions*, 7th edn. [New York: Longmans, 1916], p. 474).


31 Ibid.


33 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 179.


35 As J. D. Gould notes, “[B]esides providing the Realm with an adequate coinage, the Mint had to act as a source of revenue.” Furthermore, Gould makes the point that “in no single year between 1599 and 1641 did the Mint make a loss, and there was always a surplus in hand after all expenses had been met” (“The Royal Mint in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *Economic History Review* n. s., 5, 2 [1952]: 240–8, 244).

36 See Gaskill, p. 143.

Kevin Sharpe places the financial matters and the aftermath of the 1620 economic depression at the center of the “war years” preceding the personal rule of Charles I. This further emphasizes that the proclamation of 1627 was of consequence in terms of economics and the ideology of kinship (The Personal Rule of Charles I [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992], pp. 3–52).

Milled coins were slowly introduced in England with more traditional elements of the mint resisting and preferring hammered coins, though machined edges were being experimented with in the 1550s (Daniel W. Hollis III, “Coinage and Monetary Policy,” in Historical Dictionary of Stuart England, 1603–1689, ed. Ronald H. Fritze and William B. Robison [Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1996], pp. 106–8).

Rice Vaughan, A Discourse of Coin and Coinage: The First Invention, Use, Matter, Forms, Proportions and Differences, Ancient and Modern: With the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Rise and Fall Thereof, in Our Own or Neighboring Nations: And the Reasons, in A Select Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts on Money, pp. 1–119, 55.


Patent Roll, 4 Charles I, part 11, m. 5, dated 16 December 1628, rpt. in Symonds, p. 364.


Brooke suspects that some of the provincial mints were established to experiment with debasing the coinage for the increasingly insolvent crown (Brooke, pp. 205–11). See also Oman, pp. 308–25.

52 Anonymous, in Thomason Tracts E.743(2), June 1654? and in manuscript, Rawl. MS poet. 26, fo. 148v. For more on Oliver Cromwell’s government and its brass farthings, see Oman, p. 324.
54 Knoppers, p. 25.
55 Ibid. For a study of the figuration of Charles I a martyr in which *Eikon Basilike* participated, see Andrew Lacey, *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr* (Rochester NY: Boydell Press, 2003).
58 Helgerson, p. 8. Helgerson counts sixty-nine separate printings of *Eikon Basilike* in its first year.
59 *Eikon Alethine, The Pourtraiture of Truths Most Sacred Majesty Truly Suffering, though Not Solely. Wherein the False Colours Are Washed off, wherewith the Painter-steiner Had Bedawbed Truth, the Late King and the Parliament, in His Counterfeit Piece Entitled EIKON BASILIKE* (London: Thomas Paine, 1649). It is widely believed that John Guaden authored the text of *Eikon Basilike*. For that discussion, see Francis F. Madan, *A New Bibliography of the Eikon Basilike of King Charles the First*, n. s., 3 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1949).
60 Potter, pp. 179–81, emphasis mine.
61 *Eikon Alethine*.
62 Ibid.
63 Potter, p. 181.
66 The association of tyranny and minting practices is not new, as Shell notes, pointing to Peter Ure’s *The Origin of Tyranny*, that tyranny and minting “may be mutually reinforcing and interdependent” (Shell, *The Economy of Literature* [Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978], p. 13).
68 As Corns suggests, “it is the image of the king—the hagiographer’s image—that he destroys, not the king himself” (p. 208).
70 Mitchell, p. 113; Helgerson, p. 12.
71 Mitchell, p. 113.
72 Exodus 20:4, AV.
73 Mitchell, p. 130.
74 As Guibbory suggests, Milton had to be prudent in any restructuring of authority that did not directly and explicitly refer to the Divine so as not to be accused of idolatry (p. 284).
75 Benjamin, p. 221.
76 Ibid.