Chapter 3

"To me comes a creature": Recognition, Agency, and the Properties of Character in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*

Justin Kolb

In the middle of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1611), the doomed courtier Antigonus stands on the seacoast of Bohemia under grim skies. He tells the exiled infant in his hands about his dream, in which the Sicilian queen Hermione, thought dead, appeared to him. He opens his description with the words, "To me comes a creature" (III.iii.19),[1] naming the apparition with a word that has special resonance in this play, so concerned with artistic illusion and the interplay of art and nature. In the early seventeenth century, *creature* carried a much broader meaning than the animalistic connotations that cluster around it today. Derived from *creatura,* the future-active participle of the Latin verb *creare,* "to create," *creature* denoted anything intentionally made; "a created being, animate or inanimate; a product of creative action" (*OED,* "creature, *n.*").[2] *Creature* straddled the line between the creations of God and man, foregrounding the centrality of *poesis* and design to early modern ideas of nature and artifice. Standing on the Blackfriars stage holding the doll representing the infant Perdita, a letter, and cask of jewels, recalling a ghost who may have been a figment of his guilty imagination, and about to be reduced to a few scraps of physical evidence himself, Antigonus recounts his dream at an important crux in *The Winter's Tale*'s exploration of the vitality and creative power of the made things onstage.

The "creatures" in this single scene range from actor and doll and fateful "character[s]" (III.iii.47) on a scroll to evoked spirit and pursuing bear to Antigonus' letters and shoulder bone. The seacoast of Bohemia is a place where

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[1] All Shakespeare citations are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare,* 2nd ed. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

[2] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980), find the first uses of *creatura* in patristic writings, suggesting that it was a Christian bridge between the related future-active terms *figura* and *natura.* Digging deeper into the etymology of *creature,* Julia Lupton, in "Creature Caliban," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.1 (Spring 2000): 1–23, notes that, "The *creatura* is a thing always in the process of undergoing creation; the creature is actively passive or, better, passionate, perpetually becoming created, subject to transformation at the behest of the arbitrary commands of an Other" (1).

objects have powerful agency. In a play built around the breaking apart and eventual reassembly of Hermione's character, and the parallel assembly of Perdita from a heterogeneous set of components, this is a scene in which the queen has been reduced to mysterious memory and the princess is merely a few objects on the strand. Using this beach as an embarkation point, one can analyze *The Winter's Tale* as a play which dramatizes the centrality of stage properties and other artifacts to early modern dramatic practice and foregrounds the ontological instability of the dramatic character, an instability it shares with the automaton and the other artificial persons who populated the early modern imagination. For most of the play, Hermione and Perdita in particular exist in ontologically unsettled forms. To borrow a term from sociologist of science Bruno Latour, they function as "quasi-objects," more specifically as quasi-*humans,* who mediate between poles of human and nonhuman, nature's creature and man's, life and death, autonomous mediator and passive intermediary for an external authority.[3] Only at the end of the play, through a communal, theatrical, act of recognition, do the two women attain a stable ontological status.

This essay argues that an analysis of the agency of inhuman actors in *The Winter's Tale*, particularly the inhuman forms taken by the play's transformed women, suggests a new understanding of the hybrid nature of dramatic character on the early modern stage. Instead of Hamlet alone on stage constructing subjectivity through soliloquy, or Caliban living a naked life under the reign of tyrannical authority, a better model of dramatic character might be found on the Bohemian beach in *The Winter's Tale*: two women played by prop and dream, and an actor entangled in a crowded network of potent inhuman actors, one cog in a great dramatic device.[4] The figure of the automaton is useful here, less as a robotic artificial human being and more for the way in which it highlights the agency, the "self-moving" qualities, of objects and other nonhuman actors. It is this aspect of the automaton, the complex, inhuman artifact whose parts combine to give it its own agency, which motivates this essay. *The Winter's Tale* tropes the technical and quasi-scientific process of character creation in the period's drama, as text,

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3 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993) 51–5.

4 Dymphna Callaghan offers an appreciation of this social, functional aspect of dramatic characters in "Do Characters Have Souls?" *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006): 41–46. She argues that the "flat" and sometimes indistinguishable nature of the characters in *The Comedy of Errors* "surely speak to a notion of identity in which we come to know our fully individuated souls only through our relationships with one another" (45). Elizabeth Fowler, in *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003), works out a similarly functional definition of literary character, defining it as "a model of a person that has grown out of a social practice—a practice that has its own institutions, behaviors, artifacts, motives, social effects, audiences, and intellectual issues" (28). Literature is thus akin to other verbal arts like law, philosophy, and theology, creating human models for use in particular social transactions.

properties, and actors were combined in theatrical space to create an automaton, a complex, quasi-human artifact that performs humanity. The result is a play that highlights the hybrid nature of dramatic characters and offers a complex, collaborative model of authorship and dramatic production.

The Winter's Tale has long been read as part of Shakespeare's post-1607 turn to the improbable stories and meditations on dramatic art and illusion which distinguish the works variously called romances, tragicomedies, or simply late plays.[5] Recent scholarship has paid closer attention to *The Winter's Tale*'s structural homology between parenting, artistic creation, and technical craft, bridging the gap between analyses of the roles of childhood and artistic practice in the play. Michael Witmore elegantly links these lines of inquiry by noting that "late medieval and early modern discussions of children's diminished powers of discretion, their subjection to animal passions, and incomplete development of their faculties of conscience suggested that children were the human paradigm for automatic action."[6] Categorized by early modern English culture as non-deliberating beings, lacking in reason and moved automatically by animal spirits and mimicry, children like Mamillius and the infant Perdita exist on an ontological level with such non-deliberating agents as animals and automata. The tragicomic objects of concern, childhood, and artifice are thus connected by a larger examination of how agency is distributed among the networks of associated deliberating and non-deliberating objects which compose a play.

These actors, human and nonhuman, conscious and automatic, are what Bruno Latour describes as *mediators,* actors which are "*associated* in such a way that *they make others do things.*" They do this not by acting as passive conduits, "but by generating *transformations* manifested in the many unexpected *events* triggered in the other mediators that *follow* them along the line."[7] Various creatures are linked by elaborate chains of cause and effect, transmitting and transforming myriad forces which are changed by the network they compose. The scene on the Bohemian beach, which transforms Leontes' will through means irrational (the dream) and inadvertent (the storm, the bear) is perhaps the most obvious example of such mediators at work in the play, but far from the only one. *The Winter's Tale* is a play about the creatures of the stage—the human and nonhuman objects and representations essential to constructing dramatic experience—and the potent vitality and agency of these creatures in theatrical performance. Through the

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[5] For a survey of the various explanations given for this turn, and the problems of categorizing these late plays, see Barbara Mowat, "'What's in a Name?' Tragicomedy, Romance, or Late Comedy," *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works,* vol. 4: *The Poems, Problem Plays, Late Plays,* ed. R. Dutton and Jean Howard (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2003) 129–49.

[6] Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007) 72.

[7] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 107.

transformations of Hermione and Perdita in particular, the play tropes the power of inhuman "creatures" onstage, and presents a gracious counter-discourse to the model of possessive authorship, personified by King Leontes.[8]

Surrounded by many other actors who complicate his desire to be the sole parent to his children, Leontes first violently breaks down and marginalizes these other potential authors, destroying his family in the process. The model of possessive authorship Shakespeare portrays in Leontes is not bound up with the idea of the printed book (cf. the model Joseph Loewenstein derives from Ben Jonson's publishing career), but his desire to be the sole agent responsible for his children and to destroy or marginalize other potential parents and influences dramatizes similar problems of authorship arising from theatrical production. Leontes plays the role of the playwright, director, impresario, or some other author who seeks priority over the assembly of actors that combine to make a play. His household is only restored—and partially and belatedly at that—when he renounces this drive for power and accepts a model of authorship that makes room for Paulina's stagecraft, the prophecy of the Delphic oracle, the unreasoning motions of storms and bears, the preserved letters and tokens, and assorted accidents and coincidences.

The Winter's Tale builds this model of authorship by foregrounding the role of stage properties in the creation of dramatic illusion and characters. When she is named, Perdita is played not by an actor, but by a collection of stage properties left on the seacoast of Bohemia. Her mother Hermione, who "dies" only to reappear as a dreamt-of ghost in Act III, makes a miraculous return in Act V by *becoming* a stage property, the Julio Romano statue with which she becomes consubstantial. The play is, to paraphrase Aphorism iv of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*, a tale of bringing natural bodies together and putting them asunder (65), as Hermione and Perdita are broken down into parts, proceed through a series of ontological states, and are reunited and reassembled in the play's final scene.

[8] My concept of possessive authorship is a somewhat looser version of the definition that emerges from Joseph Loewenstein's studies of the "quasi-proprietary claims […] asserted by the possessors of manuscript copies, by printers, by publishers, and by authors" and how "the cumulative effect of such experiences […] transform[ed] authorship into a form of public agency increasingly distinguished by possessiveness," *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 2. This essay is more interested in the desire and attempts of a single author to claim sole responsibility for a creature than in how this desire plays out in specific contexts, like the practice of early modern publishing. Loewenstein's model of possessive authorship builds on the concept of "possessive individualism" that C. B. Macpherson identified as a unifying assumption of English political thought in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. See C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964).

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"Inanimate and trivial objects": Criticism and the Life of Early Modern Stage Properties

> [Discovery] may in a sense occur in relation to inanimate and trivial objects, or one may discover whether one has done something or not. (Aristotle, *Poetics* xi.6)[9]

Shakespeare's stage was a space swarming with performing objects, and human actors composed only a minority of them. *Shakespeare's Speaking Properties,* Frances Teague's catalog of the hand props used in Shakespeare's plays, estimates that the average Shakespeare play used 34 significant properties, and, depending on doubling and the occasional cutting of minor roles, maybe a dozen actors.[10] Teague counts twenty-seven properties in *The Winter's Tale*, or one per 125 lines (197). In his *Diary*, theatrical impresario Philip Henslowe places more value on the sumptuous costumes he acquired as a pawnbroker than the scripts he commissioned or the actors he employed.[11] This ranking of properties is consistent with a broader European cultural context in which playmaking was considered more technology than art, a practical enterprise more akin to carpentry than rhetoric. William Bavande's 1559 English translation of Johannes Ferrarius' *De Republica Bene Instituenda* (1556), a defense of the social necessity of artisans and mechanical arts, listed "stage-playing" among the seven mechanical sciences, after husbandry, wool-working, carpentry, navigation, hunting, and surgery.[12]

The Elizabethan and Jacobean theater was as concerned with the effective combination and display of costumes and other stage properties—Yorick's skull from *Hamlet* and Desdemona's handkerchief from *Othello* are two of the most famous examples—as it was with poetic language. The English commercial stage was "a theater of easily held things," and was recognized as such from its beginning.[13] In his 1582 pamphlet *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, the anti-theatrical critic Stephen Gosson complained that:

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9 Aristotle, "The Poetics," *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (1941), ed. Richard Peter McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

10 Frances N. Teague, *Shakespeare's Speaking Properties* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1991) 197.

11 Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. W. W. Greg (London: A. H. Bullen, 1908). See Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 175–206, on the commercial theater as "a new and spectacular development of the clothing trade" (176).

12 Henry Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical, Spatial Arts 1580–1630* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006) 25.

13 Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 95.

> Sometime you shall see nothing but the aduentures of an amorous knight, passing from countrie to countrie for the loue of his lady, encountring many a terible monster made of broune paper, & at his retorne, is so wonderfully changed, that he can not be knowne but by some posie in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkircher, or a piece of a cockle shell, what learne you by that?[14]

Gosson's objections, and the life of stage properties and character in performance, were bound up with the Aristotelian definition of *anagnorisis*, discovery or recognition, defined in *The Poetics* as a transition from ignorance to knowledge that resulted in either friendship or enmity (41). For Aristotle and his interpreters, recognition that arrives through a reversal of fortune, as in *Oedipus,* is the highest form of *anagnorisis*, while recognition through material signs and coincidence is the lowest form. Characterization through inanimate objects was one of the most significant breaks the early modern English theater made with Aristotelian conventions, with costumes and hand-held properties playing an integral role in both characterization and plot. Shakespeare's late tragicomedies are especially guilty of this transgression, with agency freely distributed among such inanimate things as Imogen's ring in *Cymbeline*, the suit of armor in *Pericles* and Prospero's staff and books in *The Tempest*.

Gosson's account of the importance of outward trappings is further borne out by the inventories of theatrical property in Henslowe's *Diary*. Costumes and hand props both become the properties of the characters they construct and exist on a level plane with the other material components of the play:

> *Item,* j crosers stafe; Kentes woden legge.
> *Item,* Ierosses head, & raynebowe; j littel alter.
> *Item,* viij viserides; Tamberlyne brydell; j wooden matook.
> *Item,* Cupedes bowe & quiver; the clothe of the Sone and Mone […]
> *Item,* Mercures wings; Tasso picter; j helmet with a dragon; j shelde, with iij lyonesl j eleme bowle.
> *Item,* j chayne of dragons; j gylte speare.
> *Item,* ij coffenes; j bulles head; and j vylter.
> *Item,* iij tymbrells, j dragon in fostes. (Henslowe 320)

In a single list of the Lord Admiral's Men's properties from March 1598, the dragon which frightens Faustus, Cupid's bow and arrow, and the bridle Tamburlaine forces into the mouth of a captive king sit alongside generic arms, armor, hand props, and housewares. Such properties were essential to both the recognition of characters on stage and to the larger project of creating dramatic illusion. Contemporary playgoers' accounts testify to the attention spectators paid to stage properties; playgoer Simon Forman took note of the bracelet and chest

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14 "Playes confuted in fiue actions prouing that they are not to be suffred in a Christian common weale …" (London: Printed for Thomas Gosson, 1582) 27.

in *Cymbeline* and Autolycus' peddler's pack in *The Winter's Tale*.[15] Thanks to the high value placed on these tokens, and their centrality to the definition of character and plot, these stage properties become powerfully vital. The boundary between living and non-living, animate and inert things drawn by both moderns and Aristotle—who described material tokens as *apsychos*, "lifeless"— becomes indistinct on the early modern stage.

Costume, prop, text, and more quotidian necessities like bolts of cloth and half-penny nails all sit together, waiting to be combined into a play. This flat ontological plain, shared by hand props, furniture, play-books, and costumes, is the basis for this chapter's working definition of stage property: a stage property is any material object which is used in the course of a play production. Henslowe and his contemporaries understood that timber and nails were no less important than swords and gowns and playbooks to putting on a production. By taking the playing company inventories as a perch, one can observe the technical, practical aspects of early modern dramatic praxis and watch as ideas of plot, character, authorship, and agency arise from the practical and technological modes of thought. One can also begin to describe the changeable ontological status of things on stage, the means by which playwrights like Shakespeare assembled these creatures into characters, and the transformations of the properties of the stage into dramatic illusion, the metamorphosis that turns a statue into Hermione.

This highly complex and contingent network of human and nonhuman actors on stage has proved challenging for both early modern and contemporary critics to negotiate. Like Gosson before him, Thomas Rymer reacted against the indecorum and irrationality of defining human relationships through trifles, famously dismissing *Othello* for "So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about an Handkerchief!" (160). Many modern critics have followed Aristotle, Gosson, and Rymer in recoiling from the indecorous power of objects. The result has been several modes of criticism which recast stage properties in semiotic, rather than material terms. One approach focuses on what Alan Downer in 1949 called "the language of props" and reads hand-held objects as "the realization of the verbal image in dramatic terms" (28).[16] Downer's analysis dovetailed with various semiotic and structuralist analyses of the theater, particularly the influential work of the Prague School.[17] The objects of these analyses are "the semantic processes which objects from the historical world undergo when they are placed within a fictive-aesthetic framework and then again returned to the historical contexts" (Rokem 277), which assumes a dialectic

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[15] Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002) 10.

[16] Alan Seymour Downer, *The Life of Our Design: The Function of Imagery in Our Poetic Drama* (New York: Hudson, 1949).

[17] Keir Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama,* Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2002) is perhaps the most important contemporary representative of this semiotic approach.

between the historical existence of objects and the ahistorical fictive realm where they function as signs.[18] The agency which can be imbedded in object *as object*—whether in creating the material conditions of play, or performing within the fictive frame—tends to be elided.

Another critical genre, arising from Marxist and New Historicist analyses, has used props as touchstones to describe the social relations in the dramatic world of the play that illustrate or resonate with aspects of the play's cultural moment and larger discourses of power, class, gender, sexuality, race, etc. These approaches tend to make use of the essentially semiotic "thick description" method that the New Historicism borrowed from anthropologist Clifford Geertz. This approach saw "man as an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" and argued that the work of the social scientist was essentially interpretive.[19] Critics working in this mode would connect a particular object, textual or otherwise, to a dense impasto of discourses and power structures, paying special attention to repression, disruption, paradox, and variety in the text.

Thick description can connect stage objects to broader discourses and phenomena, but it can also make it difficult for a critic to closely analyze the relationships of stage properties to each other as objects, or make broader claims about their function within the enterprise of dramatic illusion. Nevertheless, recent scholarship has been distinguished by critical attempts to analyze stage properties in their immediate context. Setting his essay apart from a myriad of other analyses of *Othello*'s handkerchief, Paul Yachnin promises to "focus on the handkerchief as a prop first, and only then … consider how it speaks about something beyond itself, and at that, not as a symbol, but rather as an object involved in a complex series of exchanges" (316). This mission statement, found in the 2002 collection *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, is a nice *précis* for the quite recent turn the study of early modern stage practice has taken. Turning away from semiotic or epistemological readings of stage things, critics are increasingly looking at the *ontology* of stage objects, examining just what sort of *things* they are and how they combine and interact and participate in dramatic performance. For example, Alan Sofer's *The Stage Life of Props* examines the use of common hand props across a variety of plays, tracking the evolving use of handkerchiefs in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Othello*, and skulls in *Hamlet* and other Jacobean plays.[20] This newer mode finds the context for stage properties not in external hegemonic or repressed discourses, or even purely in the text of the play, but rather in the complex economic and technical transactions of early modern dramatic praxis.

[18] Freddie Rokem, "A chair is a Chair is a CHAIR: The Object as Sign in Theatrical Performance," *The Prague School and its Legacy in Linguistics, Literature, Semiotics, Folklore, and the Arts*, ed. Yishai Tobin (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1988) 275–288.

[19] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science,* eds. Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994) 213–231, 214.

[20] Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2003).

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The implication of stage materials in these transactions is part of the larger early modern intellectual homology that made dramatic *poesis* "essentially compatible with ethical, poetic, and technical modes of reasoning."[21] Dramatic terms like *plot* (or *plat*) could simultaneously mean the ground-plan of a house, the lay of the land on a battlefield, a surveyor's measurements, any sort of plan or diagram, a sketch of a literary work, a design or device, an intrigue or scheme (*OED,* "plot, *n.*").[22] The theater occupied a social matrix alongside practical and quasi-scientific forms of *techne*, ranging from soldiery to surveying to construction. The new critical emphasis on the technical and material agents of cultural life—"inhumanism" (203), to use Jessica Wolfe's term—allows us to see the drama of the period as a sort of elaborate self-moving machine in which a variety of causes combine and are transformed. Dramatic characters are an important set of sub-automata within this larger device, as the theater combines its components to create artificial human beings and sets them to run within the play.[23]

In this context, dramatic characters are automata, self-moving assemblies of various components who perform life. If life is likened to the crafting of an artifact, death in *The Winter's Tale* and elsewhere becomes consubstantial with the breaking apart of the artifact, as once unified quasi-humans are reduced to their constituent components, and also with proliferation, as the pieces are scattered and recombined into new things. (Re)birth is figured as (re)assembly, the combination of elements to create an entity endowed with a narrative of personhood, an automatic subject-machine. The human-made webs that compose society are still present, but they may be less semiotic webs of significance than they are networks of material circulation and transformation. The result is a social topography which is both populous—crowded with a variety of deliberating and nondeliberating actors in complex combinations—and flat, with all creatures great and small sitting on the same ontological plane (Latour, *Reassembling* 165–172). It is a landscape which looks very much like the seacoast of Bohemia.

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21 Henry Turner, "Plotting Early Modernity." *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, ed. Henry Turner (New York: Routledge, 2002) 85–127, 105.

22 See Martin Bruckner and Kristen Poole, "The Plot Thickens: Surveying Manuals, Drama and the Materiality of Narrative Form in Early Modern England," *English Literary History* 69.3 (Fall 2002): 617–48.

23 Some of the most interesting examples of this approach can be found in the work of Julian Yates, particularly *Error, Misuse, Failure: Object Lessons from the English Renaissance* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003) and "Accidental Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006): 90–122.

"There lie, and there thy character. There these": The Properties of Character in *The Winter's Tale*

The plot of *The Winter's Tale* moves forward in fits and starts, a series of dispersals and gatherings as the assemblies that compose the characters are broken up, and then, tentatively, reconvened through the actions—both deliberate and accidental—of various agents within the text. This complex agency runs counter to the ideal of possessive authorship espoused by Leontes, who demands full authority over his children and fears the presence of other authors and parents in their development. In the Jacobean era, authors were those agents that "originate or give existence to anything … the inventors, instructors or founders … of things material … who authorize or instigate … who beget, or father" (*OED,* "author, *n.*"). These definitions are contemporaneous with *The Winter's Tale* and linked by their definition of the author as a point of origin or impetus, the agent who begins the process of creation, but does not necessarily control it once it starts. They highlight the fact that this was, as Jeffrey Masten observes, "an era in English culture, extending well into the seventeenth century, when *author* carried with it several strands of meaning only beginning to separate—or rather, only beginning to form *as strands*."[24] In his suspicions of his wife, Leontes succeeds in being the author—that is, the instigator—of the play's action, but his creative power is continually redirected by multiplying mediators, the creatures of various kinds who transform his impetus into something new.

These transformations are primarily performed upon Hermione and Perdita, whose shifting ontological status highlights the networks of objects and representations which allow them life and agency. Their experience illustrates Latour's "Modern Settlement," a powerful but paradoxical state of affairs that consists of a world that is, partly, structured around ontologically distinct and pure dichotomies of human/nonhuman, living/nonliving, nature/culture, mind/body, art/technology. On the other hand, the space between these dichotomies is swarming with "quasi-objects," defined as "hybrids of nature and culture" which mediate the division between dichotomies and allow technological and epistemological mastery of the world (Latour, *Modern* 51–55). Hermione and Perdita are such hybrids, quasi-humans whose transformations perform the uneasy ontological states of both women in renaissance cosmology, considered only marginally human or rational and passively subject to men, their internal passions, and irrational natural forces[25]—and also dramatic character, an artificial creature forever in the process of emerging from its many components. The women in the

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[24] Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 66.

[25] The Galenic commonplace was that women's humors were colder and more spongy than those of men, making woman less rational and less capable of individual action or expression. Women were seen as both more prone to passion and less capable of harnessing those passions into a consistent and distinct self-presentation, a character. See Gail Kern

play become examples of "how objects construct the subject" (Latour, *Modern* 82) as assemblages of objects, both conscientious and contingent, metamorphose into queen and princess. In the process, the play creates a homology between the conception and rearing of children, the creation of dramatic characters, and the practice of diverse forms of art and technology. All of these processes are linked by barely differentiated forms of making, and their products are defined as various artifacts and assemblies. The newborn and unnamed Perdita is described in these terms at her first appearance, when Paulina shows her to Leontes in a desperate attempt to steer his deranged affections:

> … Behold my lords,
> Although the print be little, the whole matter
> And copy of the father—eye, nose, lip,
> The trick of 's frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,
> The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,
> The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger. (II.iii.98–103)

The "good goddess Nature" (II.iii.104), whom Paulina credits with shaping the baby into a picture of her father, works like a craftswoman here, putting the child together like a printed page or house frame. This new life is a new artifact, a new construction, shaped by the various forces under nature's sway. Because it runs so counter to his tyrannical desire for sole authorship, this heterogeneous origin prompts Leontes to banish his new daughter.[26]

The homology between paternity and authorship was the location where many of the anxieties about the limits of authority and the accidental, automatic

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Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004) 77–80.

[26] As a performing object, the doll-Perdita of these early scenes has a family resemblance to puppets. Examining puppets in the modernist theater, W. B. Worthen's "Of Actors and Automata: Hieroglyphics of Modernism," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 9.1 (1994): 3–19, argues that, "puppets are also understood instrumentally as well as mimetically, for their rhetorical rather than representational work" (4). The quasi-objects that perform the roles of the lost women in *The Winter's Tale* perform this work, serving less as representations of the women than as tokens that preserve their connection to Sicilia, laying the groundwork for their return and the poetic substitution that will restore Hermione. In *Puppets and "Popular" Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995), Scott Cutler Shershow argues that the puppets in plays like *Bartholomew Faire* emerge from "a habit of thought that links the puppet, the woman, the servant, and the effeminate social climber within a master system of representation and being which also privileges the author over the actor, and the masculine, mastering 'spirit' over the supposedly passive, feminized flesh" (90). *The Winter's Tale* rearranges these links, connecting women and objects, but investing performing objects with an agency that undoes, rather than privileges, masculine authorship. The actors are constantly slipping out of the author's control in this play, and it is the collaborative artistry of Paulina, which adjusts to contingency, that ultimately prevails.

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aspects of *poesis* played out. John Florio's 1603 translation of Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* addresses these tensions in "Of the Affection of Fathers to their Children" (II.8):

> I believe, that in that, which *Herodotus* reporteth of a certaine province of *Libia,* there often followeth much error and mistaking. He saith, that men doe indifferently use, and as it were in common frequent women; And that the child as soone as he is able to goe, comming to any solemne meetings and great assemblies, led by a natural instinct, findeth out his owne father: where being turned loose in the middest of the multitude, looke what man the childe doth first address his steps unto, and then goe to him, the same is ever afterward reputed to be his right father.[27]

Here is male anxiety about cuckoldry and bastardry, but also anxiety about the larger problem of distributing authority and responsibility over creatures, be they children or artifacts. A man can sire a child, can begin his existence, but the child, being an irrational creature led by "natural instinct," may wander to another father, and be recognized as that man's child by the crowd. Fatherhood becomes a product of chance and automatic action—which works especially directly on the porous natures of women and children. Paternity is decided not by a possessive father, but by the movements of a wandering creature in a crowd.

Leontes' suspicion of his wife arises from this anxiety. The Old English word for Florio's "solemne meetings and great assemblies" is "thing" (*OED,* "Thing, *n2.*"), which makes paranoid Leontes' exclamation of "O thou thing!" (II.i.82) a particularly evocative epithet for Hermione. The word *thing* was a term in transition in Shakespeare's time. Shades of its old Anglo-Saxon meaning, "a public assembly, meeting, parliament, council … a deliberative or judicial meeting, a court," persisted. In the Jacobean period "thing" hovered between being "That with which one is concerned (in action, speech, or thought)," an object of concern or inquiry, and the contemporary sense of "That which exists individually … a being, an entity," a settled fact (*OED*, "thing, *n1*"). The thing was becoming the object being judged, not the assembly doing the judging, but its status as a matter of fact or concern remained unsettled.

Leontes' suspicion forces Hermione from one sense of "thing" to another, taking the fact of Hermione and turning her into the question of Hermione. In this, Shakespeare reverses the etymological development of "thing," taking it back toward its original sense of collective deliberation, as the solemn assembly no longer recognizes Hermione as herself. Hermione's trial enacts the process described by Michel Serres in his accounts of early modern scientific demonstrations, serving as a "tribunal [that] stages the very identity of cause and thing, of word and object, or the passage of one to the other by substitution … A

[27] Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio (New York: The Modern Library, 1933) 353.

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thing emerges there."[28] Leontes, acting as author and king, identifies Hermione with his accusations of infidelity. He takes her apart, reducing her to a pile of observations and inferences:[29]

> Is whispering nothing?
> Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?
> Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career
> Of laughter with a sigh (a note infallible
> Of breaking honesty)? horsing foot on foot?
> Skulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift?
> Hours minutes? noon midnight? And all eyes
> Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
> That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
> Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing,
> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
> If this be nothing. (I.ii.283–96)

In the king's dreams, Hermione has become an object of concern, the undefined nexus of the connections and influences that intrude upon his desire for absolute authority.[30] Her nurturing bond with Mamillius, her courtly friendship with Polixenes, her separate realm among Paulina and her attendant women, all of these mediators need to be reigned in to impose a unitary authority over the Sicilian court.

Ultimately, Leontes succeeds in being the author of his own tragedy. The "mere conceit and fear / Of the Queen's speed" (III.ii.144–45) is sufficient to slay his son offstage; minus his mother, Mamillius cannot function as an extension

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28 Michel Serres, *Statues: le Second Livre des Fondations* (Paris: F. Bourin, 1987) 111.

29 This disassembly recalls the dismembering effect of the Petrarchan blaison, described by Nancy J. Vickers in "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8.2, *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Winter 1981): 265–279. In this case, Hermione is broken down into a series of behaviors and intentions rather than physical traits, but the dissection before a male gaze is similar.

30 The disintegration through interrogation parallels the theatrical mechanism Joseph Roach's *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993) identified in eighteenth-century acting. In an era when mechanical psycho-physiological models predominated, "the human body [could] be viewed as a machine, and its external emotional expressions analyzed as the mechanical effects of internal physical causes" (60). Leontes attempts something like this, but his inferences are wrong, the products of passion rather than observation. It takes years of chastening and Paulina's guidance for Leontes to become sufficiently humble and receptive to correctly read the woman before him. *The Winter's Tale* is of its pre-Cartesian time in that it uses mechanical and quasi-scientific modes of thought not to reproduce nature, but to move characters and audience to a virtuous disposition toward the inherent contingency and mutability of the world.

of his father's will.[31] Hermione collapses in front of her husband, and Paulina immediately declares that, "This news is mortal to the Queen. Look down / And see what death is doing" (III.ii.148–49). Leontes has broken the plot, scattering its pieces and characters far and wide, and setting in motion their reassembly in new forms at the hands of more authors and parents than in even his most paranoid imaginings.

One reassembly begins in Sicilia, the moment Hermione swoons and Paulina pronounces her dead. Another takes place on the seacoast of Bohemia, where Antigonus stands with the infant. By this point, Leontes' exclusive authority is thoroughly shattered and disseminated, as it is now his courtier who authors the future by identifying Hermione with *his* dreams. He tells the child (or, physically, the doll or bundle of rags in his arms on stage) that "thy mother / Appear'd to me last night; for ne'er was dream so like a waking" (III.ii.18–19). The apparition, clad in white "Like very sanctity" (III.iii.23), bows, gasps, weeps, and finally orders Antigonus to name the child Perdita, warning him that he will never see his wife again before she vanishes, shrieking, into the air.

It remains unclear exactly what this "creature" (III.iii.19) is.[32] Hermione's eventual resurrection has traditionally led critics, assuming a more stable ontological status for Shakespearean characters than the play warrants, to conclude that she is alive all along and to categorize her appearance here as simply a dream, an emanation of Antigonus' guilty conscience. I tend to agree with Stephen Greenblatt that, "though the audience is amply warned not to credit the ghost of Hermione, it is at the same time strongly induced to do so."[33] The vividness of the ghost's apparition and its orders' consequences for the rest of the play make it as real and consequential an agent as any other in the play. Antigonus did indeed dream Hermione back into being, but this dream existence is what she has been reduced to. Detached from the network in which she acted, Hermione can, for now, be only memory and dream, a shade "gasping to begin some speech" (III. iii.25) and enter the world again. Antigonus, consorting with this furious muse, engages in an act of authorship more productive than Leontes' abortive attempt. He becomes Perdita's second father, giving her a name and, more importantly, placing

[31] See Chapter 4 of Michael Witmore's *Pretty Creatures* for an examination of Mamillius' role and the identification of children with fiction.

[32] Focusing on the line "her eyes / Became two spouts" (III.iii.25–26) and the ghost's mechanical bowing, Scott Maisano draws an analogy between Perdita's not-quite-human state, her function as a reminder of guilt, and early modern automata, particularly the hydraulic figures in Stuart and Bohemian gardens. For Maisano, the automatic aspects of Hermione's ghost, and other action in the play, serve as a form of inhumanly perfect repetitive action against which the human can be defined. Scott Maisano, "Infinite Gesture: Automata and the Emotions in Descartes and Shakespeare," *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life,* ed. Jessica Riskin (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007) 63–84.

[33] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) 202.

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on the strand the material artifacts, the "immutable mobiles"[34] that will preserve her connection to Sicilia and allow her eventual return. Saying, "Blossom, speed thee well!" (III.iii.46), he plants the real seeds of her eventual flourishing. He sets the infant down alongside a letter and a casket of jewels, saying, "There lie, and there thy character; there these, / Which may breed thee, pretty, / And still rest thine" (III.iii.47–49). Alongside the baby he sets the objects which encode her identity and will preserve her to be recognized as the Princess of Sicilia sixteen years later.

Criticism has tended to only note these items in passing, if at all. Frances Teague's otherwise exhaustive inventory of onstage properties here counts one document, "Perdita's character," and one token of identity, "Perdita's tokens" (193), but misses one crucial property: Perdita herself. The doll or swaddled bundle is playing the part, and the scene does not function without it. Doll, scroll, and chest of jewels lay arranged on the beach, and the prop-infant, earlier described as a printed text, is homologous to the artifacts on either side of it. The items Antigonus leaves are the initial and material components of "what to her adheres" (IV.i.28) in the Shepherd's household, of the assembly that will come into being as Perdita. The courtier's deposits open a path for numerous other parents to contribute to Perdita's invention. Realizing that his role is played and he is "gone forever," the Sicilian "*Exit*[*s*] *pursued by a bear*" (III.iii.58). Perdita begins existence as a scanty array of artifacts, and Antigonus ends in the same fashion, the bear disassembling him into bones and "letters … which they know to be his character" (V.ii.34–35), just enough to confirm his fate in Sicilia sixteen years later. At this point, the "things dying" and "things new-born" (III.iii.114) on the beach have the same status. Each is merely a collection of pieces, waiting to be discovered.

The pieces of Perdita begin to reassemble at the sheep-sheering festival, where Polixenes' suspicions prompt her flight to Sicilia with her lover, Polixenes' son Florizel. When Leontes asks the fugitive Florizel where his wife is from, the prince offers a riddling evasion, telling him "she came from Libya" (V.i.157) and is the child of "him whose daughter / His tears proclaimed his" (V.i.159–60). This line foreshadows the approaching denouement and highlights the centrality of *anagnorisis* through exterior signs and chance. This sort of recognition is not the discovery of a hidden truth, but the recognition of a creature as fitting into a given network. Perdita, the product of at least three fathers (four, if one counts "warlike Smalus" (V.i.157) of Libya, whom Leontes recognizes in Florizel's words) and two manifestations of her mother, as well as various accidents and unthinking things, is a Libyan in Montaigne's sense as well as Florizel's, a child wandering among an assembly of possible parents, drawn by circumstance toward the mother and father whom events will conspire to recognize as hers. She is identified through a quasi-scientific "unity in the proofs" (V.ii.32), the scroll and

[34] Bruno Latour, "Drawing Things Together," *Representation in Scientific Practice*, eds. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar (Cambridge MA: MIT P, 1990) 126.

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jewels Antigonus left and the Shepherd kept, but she is no more Leontes' daughter than she is Antigonus' or the Shepherd's. The immutable mobiles of the scroll and jewelry, the prophecy of Apollo, and her physical resemblance to Hermione combine for her to be recognized as Leontes' daughter, but he cannot claim sole authorship of her.

Fortunately for all involved, the chastened king has accepted a more distributed model of authority, ceding to Paulina the task of memorializing his departed wife. This new embrace of collaboration, and the partial renewal it brings, comes to fruition in the discovery space of Paulina's temple, where the fantastic statue of Hermione is unveiled. As with the ghost, the ontological status of the statue is ambiguous. While a modern, unitary idea of the human pushes one toward seeing Hermione as simply in hiding all this time, the spectator is nevertheless strongly urged to see Hermione's return as a miraculous metamorphosis. She is now a thing animated by the recognition of the audience and made to "pertain to life" (V.iii.113). She is an assembly of Julio Romano's statue, the carefully constructed alcove, music, stagecraft, the king's humbling, the gathered witnesses, and the fulfilled prophecy of the watching gods. Regardless of where Hermione has been, the play insists that she become the statue, and that her resurrection be the product of a harmonious unity of all the properties of the stage.

Through his recognition of her skill and the wondrous verisimilitude of the statue, the king concedes authority to Paulina and the never-present Romano. He believes "The fixture of her eye has motion in't, / As we are mock'd with art" (V.iii.67–68). When the statue comes to life, even this sense of imitation is displaced, as Hermione becomes consubstantial with the artifact that portrayed her. This scene has been read as Shakespeare's defense of the unitary dramatic author's art, a magic "Lawful as eating" (V.iii.111), but the very complexity of Paulina's tableau and the various human and artificial instruments it requires, undercuts any reading which credits only the author's imagination. Paulina the dramatist creates nothing new (even the statue is actually Hermione herself) but rather manages and assembles various objects—her audience positioned as carefully as her props—into an assembly that will animate the statue.

Inside a carefully crafted dramatic machine, Hermione is not resurrected so much as she is rebuilt, and the dramatic author is less a poet with creations springing whole from his forehead than a cunning technician who combines her given materials into ingenious new devices. In an earlier critical age, Northrop Frye wrote that "something gets born at the end of comedy, and the watcher of birth is a member of a busy society."[35] Present for a rebirth, the Sicilian watchers are members of an especially busy society, an association of performing objects, of stage creatures, within which Hermione can live again.

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[35] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 170.